

**Safe Church Guidelines For Children and Youth
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Janesville, Wisconsin**

Statement Of Purpose:

First Congregational United Church of Christ is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which all young people can learn and experience God's love. We are an Open and Affirming church. All children and youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, family structure, physical, cognitive, and/or mental ability, race, ethnic background are welcome here. We strive to make our church/congregation a safe and healthy place that is free of sexual misconduct, harassment, physical harm, bullying, or inappropriate interactions.

Basic Guidelines:

A. Approved Volunteers for Children's and Youth Church Sponsored Activities:

1. Need Background Checks

All volunteers will fill out "Authorized Children and Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form". Background checks will be done every 3 years. The Safe Church Coordinator(s) and/or Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry will conduct these background checks. The background checks will be kept in a secure and confidential location within the church premises. Individuals with access to background checks are: Safe Church Coordinator(s), Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry, and Pastor.

2. Participate in Safe Church Orientation

A mandatory Safe Church orientation must be attended every two years by all volunteers. This orientation will cover Safe Church Guidelines, recognizing and reporting abuse, inappropriate behavior and language, and emergencies.

3. Follow The "Five Years Older" Guidelines

It is desirable that all **Approved Volunteers** with children and youth must be at least 18 years old and at least five years older than the children and youth they are leading. If there is a young adult or another youth who wishes to volunteer with the Children and Youth Ministry who is less than five years older than the age of the children or youth in this ministry, such volunteers will be paired with an Approved Volunteer whenever possible.

4. Follow The "Six Month" Guideline

An adult may be eligible to become an Approved Volunteer after he/she has been an active participant in our congregation for at least six months.

B. The Two-Adult Guideline

The Two-Adult Guideline states that there should always be two Approved Volunteers present when supervising one or more children. The two Approved Volunteers should not be a married couple. If a married couple is teaching/supervising together, a third Approved Volunteer must be in attendance. The purpose of the Two-Adult Guideline is to make sure the actions of any one leader are known to at least one other leader.

This role is for any church-sponsored program and event involving children and youth. This guideline is designed for the safety of children as well as adults. Planning ahead will help avoid the potential of being alone with one or more children.

It is understood that Sunday School classrooms may not always be staffed with two unrelated adults. All Sunday School classrooms will have unobstructed windows facing the hallway or open doors between classrooms/hallways. When classrooms are not staffed with two unrelated adults, a monitor will be used who will move in and out of the classrooms during the programs or event.

Exception to the Two-Adult Guideline

The purpose of the Two-Adult Guideline is to make sure the actions of any one Approved Volunteer are known to at least one other Approved Volunteer and to encourage adult volunteers to communicate with each other. Guidelines for exceptions to the Two-Adult Guideline follows the idea that even when only one Approved Volunteer is present, their actions are known to others.

C. Activities Away From Church With or Without Overnight

Activities away from our church, with or without overnight, will strive to create a safe environment by following our Safe Church Guidelines as closely as possible. For off-site events, the Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry will verify that the site has completed satisfactory background checks for their staff and that their guidelines are compatible with our expectations for adult chaperones.

UCC camp staff are considered Approved Volunteers for our children and youth. UCC Safe Church Guidelines will be reviewed and placed on file to insure compatibility with our Safe Church Guidelines.

National UCC, WI UCC Conference, and Southwest WI UCC Association staff are considered Approved Volunteers for our children and youth activities as long as staff is following UCC Safe Church Guidelines including background checks.

D. Check In and Out

Parents/Guardians are responsible for their children or youth until the time the activity is scheduled to begin and after the activity's scheduled ending time. It is the parent/guardians responsibility that their children/youth arrive safely at church sponsored activities. Children may not leave the program/activity early without a parent's permission.

E. Behavior Expectations

It is our belief that everyone will grow in their faith when children and volunteers exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit when attending any First Congregational Church activities: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* -Galatians 5:22

Our church remains a place of welcome and understanding of children...

In accordance with this expectations, we encourage children to:

1. Be in the right place at the right time doing the right thing.

2. Respect themselves, others, and property.
3. Make safe and responsible choices.

In the event that a child is having difficulty with these expectations, Approved Volunteers should:

1. Try to redirect the child.
2. A positive verbal reminder will be given to encourage the child to make a different choice.
3. If the behavior issue continues, the child will take a break from the activity and the Coordinator of Children's and Youth Ministry or another Approved Volunteer may talk with the child to support them in making a better choice.
4. If the issue is not resolved, staff or Approved Volunteer(s) will ask the parent or guardian for advice and support.

Our goal is to help children work through issues in a loving, Christ-centered way, ensuring that each child's experience at First Congregational Church is a positive and safe one.

F. Transportation

Preference is for two unrelated adults in a vehicle with children and youth. However, if only one adult is available, there must be at least two children in the vehicle. Both car and driver must be insured, and proof of driver's license and insurance must be on file. Texting while driving is strictly prohibited and cellphone use should be restricted to essential communication relating to the event at hand. Drivers are expected to follow all all vehicle laws. Parents are expected to provide approved carseats/boosters for their children.

G. Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco

Alcohol, recreational drugs, tobacco, and e-cigarettes use are prohibited on any church-sponsored programs, events, or activities involving children and youth.

H. Communication

As often as possible, communication for Children and Youth Ministry activities should be communicated through the parents, and if appropriate with the youth as well.

Social Media: Facebook, e-mail, Instant Messaging, Skype, Youtube, Snap are just a few of the technologies used by youth for communication. To safeguard against misuse, Adult Volunteers and staff who work with youth should follow these guidelines:

A. Consider the content of any post that will be visible to youth. Remember that this is a public forum; not a personal journal, therapy or private conversation. Utilize appropriate content in your posts. Avoid innuendo and off-color humor.

B. Adjust security settings so that only church participants have access to youth related church postings and groups.

C. Refrain from posting any inappropriate content on your profile. If in doubt as to appropriateness, use privacy setting to shield youth from this content.

D. Youth should never be pressured to “friend” adults from the church.

E. Keep messages transparent. When feasible, copy messages to at least one unrelated youth volunteer/staff.

I. **Handing Complaints of Inappropriate Behaviors**

*****All suspected child abuse (sexual, physical, neglect, drug endangerment, human trafficking, etc.) must be reported immediately to child protected services (phone #) or law enforcement (phone #). If you do not feel comfortable doing this, immediately contact the church’s Safe Church Coordinator, Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry, or Pastor to assist you.**

Anyone who suspects and/or witnesses careless or problematic behaviors towards a child/youth should report their concerns immediately to the church’s Safe Church Coordinator(s), Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry, and/or Pastor.

The Safe Church Coordinator(s) will convene a Response Team consisting of at least 3 trusted church members and may include the Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry, and/or Pastor.

Response Team will:

- Take all allegations seriously.
- Response to allegations must be handled with due respect for everyone’s privacy and confidentiality.
- All steps will be taken to insure the integrity of any investigations.
- The WI UCC Conference and/or WI UCC Southwest Association will be contacted for guidance when needed.

J. **Safe Church Coordinator Responsibilities**

- The Safe Church Coordinator,(s) along with the Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministry, will be responsible for doing the background checks on volunteers and keeping them in a safe, private location within the church.
- The Safe Church Coordinator(s) will convene a Response Team when necessary.
- The Safe Church Coordinator(s) will convene a committee of 3 church members to review the Safe Church Guidelines For Children and Youth once a year.