

First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

In 2003, First Church entered into a process to provide a safe and secure environment for those who participate in our programs and use our facilities. Recommendations and procedures were developed by the initial Safe Church Task Force, the Board of Christian Formation, and the Executive Council of First Church in 2005.. Revisions took place since and were reviewed and endorsed by the Christian Formation for Children & Youth Committee and the Executive Council in 2012. The latest revisions have been made by the Christian Formation Committee in 2019.

“Covenant for a Welcoming and Safe Community”: First developed in 2005 over a series of meetings held on Sunday mornings and open to all church members, the “Covenant for a Welcoming and Safe Community” received a careful and thorough update in 2019. The new Covenant is a document for ALL members of the First Church community, with suggestions and guidance on a variety of interactions between and among us. is a document that articulates guidelines for safe and respectful behavior for children at First Church. All First Church adults are encouraged to speak with any child (or their caregivers when the child is disregarding this communal covenant. The Covenant is made available for viewing and downloading on our website, and hard copies of the Covenant may be requested from the church office. Every Regathering Sunday, the Covenant is highlighted in announcements and made available in hard copy.

"Two Adult Rule": During FCC-sponsored programs for minor children, such as church school, scheduled child care by nursery staff or volunteers, youth group outings, and other formation programs, it is the church's recommendation that two unrelated adults supervise each group as much as possible. At all other times, including fellowship hour after church school and nursery care have ended, the supervision of children is the responsibility of their caregivers. Caregivers should be aware that First Church does not own or maintain the play equipment in Sage Hall, nor does it maintain the outdoor play equipment. It is the church's recommendation that children not be permitted to play in these areas or other parts of the church unattended. Caregivers are welcome to supervise their own children in these spaces, or to arrange for two unrelated adults to be with a group of children while they are playing.

Digital and Social Media Guidelines: The digital and social media guidelines of First Church have been developed to follow the same principles of conduct as expressed in other sections of our Safe Church Policy, including the Covenant. These principles should be applied when church staff members use digital and social media on behalf of the congregation and when volunteers use social media in relation to their volunteer service with minors in the congregation.

An additional principle applies specifically to digital and social media: the way staff present themselves online in forums where congregation members engage should be in keeping with

the way staff members present themselves in person at church functions. If your online presence specifies your affiliation with First Church, you are seen as a representative of First Church.

First Church's "Two Adult Rule" applies to digital and social media communication between adults and minors. Digital and social media should not be used for one-to-one extended communication between an adult (staff member, church school teacher, or youth leader) and a minor. Any communication that is sent via digital means (e.g. email, social networking notes or posts, instant messages, texts, etc.) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others. Weighty or emotional matters are best discussed in person rather than by email or other digital means.

First Church follows a Privacy Policy with regard to personal information shared with the church via our website and computer database. You can find the full text of the policy on our website, both in the public domain and in the password-protected Members Area. Hard copies of the Privacy Policy may be requested from the church office.

Examples of First Church's Safe Church Policy in action in the digital world:

- A staff member would not engage in extended texting conversations with an individual youth. Generally, when texts are sent to youth, they should be sent to a group of youth plus other group leaders and/or parents.
- Staff members who accept Facebook Friend requests from members of the congregation, including minors, should keep in mind that even on Facebook, church staff members are perceived as representatives of the church.
- The FCC Facebook page and the FCC website are maintained for the purpose of publicizing events endorsed by the congregation or a committee of the congregation. Exceptions to this guideline are the Blog and Prayer Request sections of the website. However, administrators of the church's website and Facebook page may delete any inappropriate content from these venues.

CORI and SORI Checks: First Church has been certified by the Criminal History Systems Board of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for access to criminal offender record information (CORI), including conviction and pending criminal case data. First Church has also decided to access the national public database of sexual offender record information (SORI). Volunteers working with minors are required to sign a form acknowledging that First Church will check for a criminal history before allowing involvement in the leadership of our children and youth programs. CORI and SORI checks are completed at the beginning of the church program year (September) or at the time when a volunteer begins their service. Volunteers working directly with minors are required to complete acknowledgement forms once per year, for as long as they continue to serve the church in this capacity. The church reserves the right to do additional CORI and SORI checks should there ever be a serious concern about a volunteer.

For information on CORI and SORI checks of employees, please refer to the Employee Handbook.

Incident Report Forms: If something suspicious and/or unsafe occurs while volunteers or employees are caring for minors, teachers and leaders are asked to complete a Safe Church Incident Report Form. Completed forms are submitted to a Minister or the Director of Creative Worship & Arts and copies are provided to the parents/guardians of the injured child, as well as to the reporter of the incident.

Medical Information: Basic medical information is collected as part of the Children & Youth Program Registration. The Director of Creative Worship & Arts reads all registrations and the forms are filed in a locked drawer in the director's office. If there is pertinent information about a student that the classroom teachers need to know, the Director will make sure that information is given to the teachers in writing. Emergency information from the child's caregivers will also be given to teachers (as in the case of a severe allergy to peanuts, the use of an Epi-pen, etc.). Guardians will be reminded to update medical information as needed.

First Aid Kits: In case of emergency, there are first aid kits in each Church School classroom, in the church office, and in FCC kitchen (next to the microwave).

Security Doors and Cameras: In 2005, and at the request of the Newtowne School, a cooperative nursery school that rents space at First Church, a security door and camera system was installed at First Church. These cameras and doors are engaged 24-7, offering an added layer of protection and awareness of who is coming and going from our building. The Building & Grounds Committee worked with Newtowne School in 2011 to augment and upgrade the system, including purchasing new security cameras. The installation was completed in January 2012. The number of people who have access to the recorded images is extremely limited. The most recent update to the camera system was done post-renovation in 2017.

First Church Emergency Preparedness Policies and Procedures: In 2010, First Church adopted explicit policies and procedures for evacuating the building in an emergency. The Church staged its first fire drill under the new policy in August 2010. Future fire drills will take place on a regular basis. In 2019, the church initiated a process of self-evaluation regarding safety awareness, and from this work has come new Emergency Preparedness guidelines, including laminated instructions posted throughout the building regarding fire/evacuation procedures, medical emergencies, weather/natural disaster emergencies, disruptive person procedures, and security emergency procedures.