

Child and Youth Safe Church Policies and Procedures

Approved by Parish Committee, February 24, 2016

The First Parish in Lincoln is a special place, an open, welcoming church seeking to nurture and support all its parishioners from the youngest to the oldest. This community is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment, free of all forms of harassment, discrimination and sexual exploitation. It is the intention and responsibility of our church to proactively adopt policies and procedures that protect children and youth from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

Hiring Requirements for paid Religious Education staff:

- A. All applicants for paid positions that involve working with children need to be a minimum of 21 years or older. Applicants for paid position that involve working with youth need to be a minimum of 25 years or older.
- B. All applicants for positions that involve working with children or youth need to fill out a screening application form and provide three pertinent references.
- C. All applicants agree to a criminal background check.
Criminal background checks may include Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), National Criminal Background, National Sex Offender Public Registry and Massachusetts Sexual Offender Board. Criminal background checks are made for staff, and volunteers working with children, youth, and teenagers. The checks are performed to ensure that people do not have a history of inappropriate behavior for the position they are to hold. National and Massachusetts criminal background checks will be performed for all paid staff prior to their date of hire.
- D. Failure to give permission for a background check will mean the retraction of any potential job offer.
- E. Criminal background checks for all paid and volunteer RE teachers, members of the Youth Program Committee and Religious Education program staff will be performed every three years for active volunteers and staff. Criminal background checks may also be performed for other volunteers working with children, youth and teenagers on a random or selective confidential basis.
All who are to have criminal background checks made (including staff, church members, and others), must be notified in advance and give written permission for the checks to be performed. The DRE will determine if someone is ineligible for a volunteer position working with children and youth. The results from the all National Criminal Background and CORI checks must be kept in a secure location in the church administrator's office. They will not be made available to members of the congregation.
- F. All Religious Education staff and volunteers will be required to review these policies and sign both a *Code of Conduct*, and *Agreement to Teach* form. (Appendix A & B)

Requirements for non-paid Religious Education volunteers:

Volunteers in the Religious Education (RE) programs at First Parish in Lincoln must meet the following criteria:

- A. Be a minimum of 21 years of age to volunteer with children or a minimum of 25 years to volunteer with youth and known in the First Parish community.
- B. Prior to participating in RE and Youth Group programs, all volunteers will agree to a yearly background check which includes a satisfactory reference and a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information). *Criminal background checks may include Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), National Criminal Background, National Sex Offender Public Registry and Massachusetts Sexual Offender Board. Criminal background checks are made for staff, and volunteers working with children, youth, and teenagers. The checks are performed to ensure that people do not have a history of inappropriate behavior for the position they are to hold.*
- C. All Religious Education staff and volunteers will be required to review these policies, and sign both the *Code of Conduct*, and *Agreement to Teach* form. (Appendix A & B)

Standards of Conduct:

It is the policy of The First Parish in Lincoln that all adult/youth Religious education volunteers and paid Religious Education leaders must adhere to the following guidelines when working with minors.

- A. Paid or volunteer adults/youth shall not touch or interact with children or youth in any way that is sexually stimulating, emotionally demeaning or exploitative. Common expressions of affection and affirmation (hugs and pats on the back, with permission) or physical care (diaper changes or first aid) are appropriate.
- B. Paid and volunteer adults and youth working with children and youth are also tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and to be aware of signs indicating neglect of the child's well-being
- C. All paid and volunteer RE staff agree to sign a *Code of Conduct* (See appendix A)

Sunday Morning RE Policies:

- A. A parent or guardian needs to be present, either on the church or Parish House property, while their child(ren) are participating in RE classes.
- B. Parents are responsible for picking their children and youth up from their classes at the end of the RE program (11:30 a.m.) and following the sign-out procedure.
- C. Parents must sign their children out of RE classes each Sunday unless there is a signed *Parental Release of Liability* form. (Appendix C)

- D. Visiting children or youth who attend RE classes with a FPL family are the responsibility of that family while the child/youth are on FPL property and must abide by the RE Sunday morning policies.
- E. The DRE or designate will do a walkthrough of RE spaces to check in on the Sunday morning activities.
- F. All classrooms must have either internal windows or open doors.
- G. All classes and nursery need a minimum of two adults at all times. At least one of the adults should be screened (criminal background check) Classes will be combined in the event there are not two adults in a particular age group.

RE Fieldtrip policy:

- A. Qualified drivers must be a minimum of 25 years old to transport minors.
- B. At a minimum, 2 adults are required per car for children and youth. No child or youth will ride alone with an unrelated adult.
- C. A signed permission slip is required for all offsite visits/events. (Appendix D)
- D. Leaders will have emergency information for each minor and will be responsible for the minors assigned to them.
- E. The DRE will determine if additional, special rules are required for the trip and all drivers will be trained on any applicable rules.

Sleepover: Youth Lock-In

- A. A ratio of one adult per five youth with a minimum of two adults present in the same room as youth during sleeping hours.
- B. Chaperones will be screened as required by policy.
- C. Adult supervisors will maintain a list of attendees.
- D. All external doors will be locked as soon as possible after all participants have arrived.
- E. Youth are required to stay in the building during sleeping hours.
- F. No alcohol, drugs or tobacco will be allowed during a sleepover.
- G. Youth and their parent(s) will need to sign a Youth Code of Conduct. (Appendix E)

Other church sponsored activities involving children and youth

All First Parish in Lincoln church sponsored events require a minimum of two adults. At other church sponsored activities involving both children and adults, parents/guardians are ultimately responsible for the oversight of their children.

Guidelines for Relationship between Adult and Youth

Relationships with screened adults' servings either as mentor or youth adviser are important to the faith development of youth. However, friendships between advisers and youth should be discouraged. An unhealthy relationship initiated by a sex offender may masquerade as a mentor or friend relationship, therefore any relationship developed with a youth by volunteer adviser or mentor, outside of First Parish in Lincoln events, must be with the full knowledge and consent of parent or guardian.

To ensure the safety of the adult and youth, certain guidelines will be in place. If one of these guidelines has been violated it must be reported immediately to the Minister or Director of Religious Education.

- A. Both adult and youth will maintain appropriate physical, mental and verbal boundaries.
- B. Parents will be kept informed of all appointments made between a youth and mentor.
- C. Confidentiality will be maintained between the adult and youth.
- D. Confidentiality does not include any information indicating that a youth is being hurt by someone, is hurting him/herself, or is going to hurt (or has hurt) someone else
- E. Adult must alert the DRE/Lead Minister in the event that a child or youth is either being harmed/ abused/ neglected or is responsible for harming/ abusing/ neglecting him/her self or others.

Appendix A

First Parish Lincoln Agreement to Teach

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Cell phone:

Email:

I have read and understand our congregation's policies on keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe. These include: Code of Conduct for Working with Children and Youth, I agree to uphold these principles in my work with First Parish in Lincoln children, youth, adults, and families.

I have signed the Code of Conduct statement.

I affirm that I have never been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty to any sexual crime. I also have not pled guilty to a lesser charge after having been charged with a sexual crime. I have never engaged in any form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. I have never been determined to have engaged in any sexual offenses in any civil, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum or other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, I have met to review this information confidentially with the Minister and Director of Religious Educator.

Further, I agree to notify the Minister and the Director of Religious Educator immediately should I be accused of sexual abuse, sexual offenses, sexual harassment, or other sexual improprieties in the time that I am working or volunteering with children and youth in this congregation.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B

Code of Conduct for Working with Children and Youth

The First Parish in Lincoln is a special place, an open, welcoming church seeking to nurture and support all its parishioners from the youngest to the oldest. This community is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment, free of all forms of harassment, discrimination and sexual exploitation. It is the intention and responsibility of our church to proactively adopt policies and procedures that protect children and youth from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

Adults and older youth that are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and community. Few areas of growth are more important than those of self-worth and the development of a health identify. Children and youth suffer damaging effect when leaders become sexually involved with or place inappropriate emotional burdens on young persons in their care.

As a leader and role model in the religious education program of The First Parish in Lincoln I will strive to:

- Nurture spiritual growth in myself and others;
- Be consciously gentle and non-threatening;
- Exercise sound judgment in assessing my emotional state and its influence on my ability to function in my role as leader;
- Remain mindful that much is communicated through non-verbal means including tone of voice, facial expression and body language, and strive to communicate in a manner that is affirming and positive.

In addition, I will avoid the following specific behaviors. I will refrain from:

- Engaging in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and youth;
- Harassing verbally or physically abusing children and youth;
- Using tobacco products or being under the influence of alcohol, or illegal drugs, while engaging in activities with children and youth;
- Discriminating against or harassing children and youth, based on race, color, ethnicity, religious, national origin, age, ability, gender, or sexual/affectional orientation;

In addition, I will take appropriate action to ensure that other adults, children and youth adhere to this code of conduct.

I hereby agree to affirm that I will abide by this Code of Conduct for Working with Children and Youth. If I violate the code, I understand that appropriate action will be taken.

Date:

Name (Print)

Signature:

Appendix C

The First Parish in Lincoln Parental Release of Liability

The First Parish in Lincoln requires the presence on church property of a parent or guardian of all children and youth attending First Parish in Lincoln Religious Education classes on Sunday mornings while classes are in session. No child will be released when classes are over at 11:30 a.m. without a parent/guardian present and initialing them out with their teachers.

Any parent/guardian desiring to authorize the release of their child without arriving to sign them out must sign this form of release. Signature by the parent/guardian shall release The First Parish in Lincoln and its employees and volunteers from any and all liability, claims or demands for personal injury of any nature whatsoever, or loss of property, which may be suffered by the undersigned or their child/youth after leaving the Religious Education classes unsupervised.

Date:

Name of Child

Parent name: (print)

Parent Signature:

In the case of emergency what is the best number to reach you at while your youth is on First Parish in Lincoln property. Please be accessible during that time period.

Contact phone number:

Appendix D

Permission Form for Children and Youth Activities and Photo Release

First Parish in Lincoln 2015-16

(Name of child/youth) _____

Has my permission as her/his parent or legal guardian to participate in any and all events and activities sponsored or endorsed by The First Parish in Lincoln.

I acknowledge that by participating in church sponsored events my child may be involved in activities occurring both on and off church property, taking place during both day and evening hours, occasionally involving overnight stays, requiring transportation by motorized vehicles, involving the preparations and consumption of food and involving the use of tools, chemicals, fire or other materials and objects. I further acknowledge that by participating in church sponsored events, my child may become involved in recreational and sporting activities including, but not limited to hiking, climbing, swimming, skiing, basketball, volleyball, baseball and frisbee. Accordingly, I acknowledge that participation in church sponsored events involves certain dangers and risks, may expose my child to hazards of bodily injury or property damage.

In recognition of these risks and realities and in consideration of my child being offered the opportunity to participate in and benefit from these church sponsored events, I agree on behalf of myself and my child to release, waive and disclaim any and all liabilities of or claims against The First Parish in Lincoln, its officers, board members, supervisors, agents, servants, employees and all private persons or organizations volunteering services without charge to transport, supervise or chaperone my child while participating in such church sponsored activities including, but not limited to, any or all liabilities or claims for personal injury, property damage, court costs, attorneys fees and interest, however caused or accrued, as a result of my child participation in the church sponsored events.

In the event my child requires emergency medical attention, and I cannot be reached immediately, I give permission for the First Parish youth leaders to authorize medical attention.

I agree that The First Parish in Lincoln, its officers, board members, supervisors, agents, servants and/or employees have the right to terminate the participation of my child in any or all church sponsored activities for failure to behave and act in accordance with the church's regulations on conduct, for failure to follow the instructions and directions of the activity supervisors) and/or chaperone(s), or for any conduct of my child deemed by the church, its officers, board members, supervisors, agents, servants and/or employees, in their sole discretion to be detrimental to or incompatible with the interest, harmony, comfort or welfare of others or the activity as a whole.

I further agree to indemnify The First Parish in Lincoln, its officers, board members, supervisors, agents, servants and/or employees for any and all damage or injury my child may cause to others as a result of his/her participation in the church sponsored event.

Parent or Legal Guardian / Date _____

Photo Release: I agree that First Parish in Lincoln may use photographs of my minor without name identification for any lawful purpose, including such purposes as publicity, illustration and web content related to First Parish in Lincoln.

Parent or Legal Guardian/Date _____

Appendix E

Youth Event Code of Conduct

PRINT YOUTH'S NAME

I am attending (***NAME OF EVENT**) _____

I understand this event is coordinated by (***NAMES OF ADULT RESPONSIBLE**) _____

I understand my behavior will affect the youth community of First Parish in Lincoln (and any other congregations, organizations, etc.).

While attending this event:

I will act in ways that encourage the well-being, safety, and best interests of everyone attending this event.

I will follow all federal, state, and local laws.

I will stay on the premises during the entire event (*unless stated below by parent).

I will work out a system of communication with the coordinators and chaperones during the event.

I understand that I am encouraged to express myself in healthy ways and to respect others' boundaries.

I understand that behavior that breaks down the community, including sexual activity and sexual harassment, is inappropriate and therefore not permitted in this setting.

I will not consume any alcohol or illegal drugs.

I understand that coordinators, youth advisors and chaperones have also agreed to refrain from any use of alcohol or illegal drugs during this event.

YOUTH:

I have read and understand the Youth Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by these guidelines for the duration of the event. I understand that if I break this agreement, my parents/guardians will be contacted and that I may be prohibited from attending any future events sponsored by First Parish in Bedford.

YOUTH SIGNATURE

Date

**PARENT/LEGAL
GUARDIAN:** _____

I have read and discussed this Youth Code of Conduct with my child who has agreed to abide by these guidelines for the duration of the event. I understand that if my child breaks this agreement, I will be contacted and he/she may be prohibited from attending any future events sponsored by First Parish in Lincoln.

PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN: _____