

Working with Children and Youth Policy

Purpose

- To nurture a positive, supportive experience for children and youth at UCE, by ensuring safe and caring conditions exist for working with them.

Definitions

- Child or Youth: a person who is under 18 years of age. For this policy, a child is defined as one who is 12 years old and under, and youth as 13-18 years old.
- Abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, mental, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours, including words, that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, injure or wound someone. *See Appendix A.*
- Neglect: involves failing to provide what a child needs for physical, psychological or emotional development and wellbeing. Neglect is often chronic and usually involves repeated incidents.
- Volunteer: a person who provides services or carries out activities without remuneration to further the mission of the church. For this policy, a volunteer is one who is in direct contact with children or youth, usually in a position of authority relative to them.

Guiding Principles

Adults and older youth working in leadership roles are in positions of power and authority over other youth and children, and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and the community. It is therefore important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. *(Canadian Unitarian Council)*

Policy

1. Screening and Training Employees and Volunteers

- a) All employees and volunteers who work with children and youth are subject to a careful screening and selection process that includes a *Police Information Check with Vulnerable Sector Screening*, to be renewed every three years. (Cross reference: *Safe and Caring Conditions Policy, Sections 1 and 2*)
- b) Employees and program volunteers will receive an orientation, including a discussion of abuse, how to recognize signs of abuse, and the requirements outlined in this policy.

Attendance at orientation sessions will be recorded and noted in each employee or direct service volunteer file. (Cross reference: *Safe and Caring Conditions Policy, Section 3*)

2. Spending Time Alone with Children

- a) Adults (ages 16+) will not spend extended time alone with a child without the consent of the child's guardian and the knowledge of the program supervisor.
- b) All classroom doors will either have an unobstructed window or remain open during program operation and in other circumstances when children are present.
- c) Staff or senior program volunteers may be assigned to monitor volunteer and staff behaviour in classrooms to ensure child safety.
- d) Adults who form a relationship with children through church activities will not seek opportunities to spend time with the child away from church property without permission of parent/guardian and/or program supervisor.
- e) An adult who finds themselves alone with a child for any length of time, or in a situation of emotional intensity with a child, will make every effort to find another adult to be present, or at least inform the child's parent or guardian as quickly as possible under the circumstances.

3. Physical Contact with Children

- a) Any physical contact between adults and children should occur in public only and be sanctioned by the parent/guardian and program supervisor and with the consent of the child. For example, hugs and kisses for younger children or physical "rough housing" with older children should occur only under these circumstances.
- b) A touch can convey a multitude of positive messages and communicate care, comfort and love; however, it is important to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touching. It is also important to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in interpretation to touching based on gender, culture or personal experience. *See Appendix B.*
- c) Wherever possible, the parent/guardian will give permission for staff or volunteers to assist young children requiring help with toileting or changing of clothing.
- d) Corporal punishment is strictly prohibited.

4. Outings and Activities

- a) Program staff will obtain written authorization from the parent/guardian before allowing children on social outings.
- b) Church staff and volunteers will not transport children in a vehicle without prior written permission of the parent/guardian and the knowledge of program supervisors. On trips where a driver is needed, two adult drivers (over age 18), both of whom have police checks

and copies of their automobile insurance on file with the church office showing a \$2 million liability, should be available to take turns driving and be available if one of the drivers becomes sick/injured.

- c) Two or more adults will be present at any overnight event for children or youth. Places for individual children and adults to change will be provided. For groups where the number does not exceed 12, every effort will be made to ensure that people are sleeping in one room. Adults will sleep in an area that is in the same room in a place that is not in close proximity to the children/youth. For groups where numbers exceed 12, gender specific (girls, boys, gender neutral) will be created. In youth group settings where some youth are 18, the church is still responsible for their wellbeing as they are registered in a church program.
- d) No child will be dropped off for an activity without a leader present. Children under the age of 12 will be picked up from the classroom or activity room by their parent/guardian or by the person who has the parent's written permission to pick up the child. Youth, age 12 and up, may leave from class on their own.

5. Parent/Child Communication

- a) Parents of children and youth enrolled in church programs should be encouraged to ask questions and stay current on the nature of the adult/child interactions in the program.
- b) Parents should be encouraged to talk with their children about church programs and the volunteers and staff they encounter.
- c) Photos or videos of children or youth will not be taken, publicized or shared without explicit parental consent.

6. Procedures for Allegations or Discovery of Abuse

- a) Promptly notify any disclosed, witnessed, alleged or suspected case of neglect or abuse to the minister, their designated staff person or the board president.
Under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, anyone who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe a child is being sexually, physically, emotionally abused or neglected has a legal obligation to file a report with police.
- b) The minister and board president will help the complainant or witness to determine if the incident can be characterized as abuse or neglect under the *Act*, and will support the complainant or witness in reporting such abuse or neglect to police.
- c) Confidentiality will be maintained unless pastoral support, safety and/or healing require disclosure or if the actions require reporting to an outside authority. Documentation of the alleged incident will be kept confidential and will be kept on file in a secure location.

- d) The alleged perpetrator will be suspended from all duties involving children and/or youth pending the outcome of the investigation, if the alleged perpetrator is an employee or volunteer.
- e) The church will refrain from admitting liability or from making public statements (e.g., to the media or from the pulpit) without obtaining formal legal counsel.
- f) The incident must be reported to UCE's insurance agent.

Refer to the Safe and Caring Conditions Policy, Section 4 through 8, for additional information.

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APPENDIX A

Understanding Child/Youth Abuse

The term “child abuse” refers to the violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian. Abuse may take place anywhere and may occur, for example, within the child’s home or that of someone known to the child. There are many different forms of abuse, and a child may be subjected to more than one form:

- Physical abuse may consist of just one incident or it may happen repeatedly. It involves deliberately using force against a child in such a way that the child is either injured or at risk of being injured. Physical abuse includes beating, hitting, shaking, pushing, choking, biting, burning, kicking or assaulting a child with a weapon. It also includes holding a child under water, or any other dangerous or harmful use of force or restraint.
- Sexual abuse and exploitation involve using a child for sexual purposes. Examples of child sexual abuse include fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, or involving a child in prostitution or pornography.
- Neglect is often chronic, and it usually involves repeated incidents. It involves failing to provide what a child needs for his or her physical, psychological or emotional development and wellbeing. For example, neglect includes failing to provide a dependent child with food, clothing, shelter, cleanliness, medical care or protection from harm.
- Emotional abuse involves harming a child’s sense of self-worth. It includes acts (or omissions) that result in, or place a child at risk of, serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental health problems. For example, emotional abuse may include aggressive verbal threats, social isolation, intimidation, exploitation, or routinely making unreasonable demands. It also includes terrorizing a child or exposing them to family violence.

An abuser may use several different tactics to gain access to a child, exert power and control over them, and prevent them from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support. A child who is being abused is usually in a position of dependence on the person who is abusing them. Abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust. The abuse may happen once, or it may occur in a repeated and escalating pattern over a period of months or years. The abuse may change from over time.

APPENDIX B

Appropriate and Inappropriate Touching

Examples of appropriate touch:

Love and care can usually be expressed in the following common-sense ways:

- Holding or rocking an infant who is crying
- Affirming a participant with a pat on the hand, shoulder or back
- Bending down to the child's eye level and placing a hand gently on the child's hand or forearm
- Putting your arm around the shoulder of a person who needs comfort
- Taking a child's hand and leading them to an activity
- Holding hands for safety when changing locations
- Shaking a hand in greeting
- Holding a child gently by the hand or shoulder to keep their attention as you redirect behaviour
- Providing comfort with a wet, warm cloth

Examples of inappropriate touch:

- Kissing a child/youth or coaxing them into kissing you
- Extended cuddling
- Tickling
- Piggyback rides
- Having other sit on your lap (except for babies/young toddlers)
- Touching anyone in an area normally covered by a bathing suit (except changing an infant's diapers)
- Hand holding, except for the examples listed above
- Stroking a child's/youth's hair

Hugging is a special case. Hugs are a part of youth culture and are sometimes appropriate for children in particular situations, but not for all. Written guidelines on what constitutes appropriate consensual hugging will be developed by the minister or designate.