

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST-CONGREGATIONAL, AMES
CHILD, YOUTH AND ADULT PROTECTION POLICY
2006 Revision**

Adopted and approved by the Executive Council August 15, 2006

The people of the United Church of Christ-Congregational in Ames, Iowa, believe it is in the best interests of the church and the children and youth of the church, and in the advancement of our Christian beliefs, to adopt policies, procedures and screening tools to assist us in protecting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all persons who participate in church sponsored activities.

Purpose of Child, Youth and Adult Protection Policy

The purpose for policies and procedures for persons working with children and youth in the church is to protect the children and youth from abuse and also protect Volunteers and church Staff from being unfairly accused of abusing any child or youth in any manner.

Churches may be liable for incidents and injuries that result from negligent supervision, and the failure to exercise reasonable care in the training of volunteers and paid staff. These policies also apply to the clergy, recognizing special situations involving confidentiality in performing their duties. Administration of the Child and Youth Protection policies and procedures will be handled through the church moderator, Director of Christian Education, and pastor. The following policies and procedures will be in effect at the United Church of Christ-Congregational, Ames, Iowa:

Screening Process Policies

There are two levels of screening for persons interested in working with children and youth at Ames United Church of Christ-Congregational. These levels are based on the amount of contact the individual will have with the children and youth who are involved in Ames UCC programs.

Primary Screening: Extensive Contact

This level of screening is required for all persons of any age, involving supervision or custody of children or youth and includes:

- All paid staff
- Youth workers
- Nursery child care providers
- Children and youth choir directors and accompanists
- Christian education teachers, regular substitutes and assistants who are youth
- Confirmation mentors
- Supervisors/chaperons of extended programs (overnight, day long, weekend or longer)
- Positions involving driving or transporting the children/youth off the church property.
- Vacation Bible School volunteers
- Christian Education Board Members

Secondary Screening: Occasional Contact

This level of screening is conducted in one-time situations when little or no advance notice is given, for example:

- Last minute substitute teachers
- Additional helpers for a high turnout program
- Drivers to church sponsored events

Each level requires completion of the appropriate screening form. The Director of Christian Education, the Pastor or a person designated by the Church Council is responsible for administering the application and reference-check process.

General Policies

For purposes of this policy, youth is defined as a person who is under the age of 18 or someone who is still in high school.

1. Prior Record.

Persons who have been convicted of either child sexual or physical abuse cannot provide service in any church-sponsored activity or program for children and youth.

2. Six Month

All volunteers working with youth or children must have participated in United Church of Christ-Congregational activities for six months or longer or have suitable references from other churches in which they have participated.

3. Leadership requirements.

Two or more unrelated adults shall be present during any church activity that involves children and youth. One of the adults should be at least five years older than the maximum age of the participants. Adult Leadership should be gender balanced particularly for overnight activities.

Exceptions may be made. Such exceptions should be handled either by:

- a. Obtaining parental permission.
- b. Notifying appropriate church leaders.

4. Youth as Volunteers

Those Volunteers under the age of 18 must present a signed Parental Permission form before they can be authorized to be with children and should meet the requirements outlined in this document.

5. Adequate Staffing

Programs and activities that involve children and youth shall include adequate supervision of approximately one adult to every 4 infants and or toddler, one adult to every 6 preschool to 5th grade children and one adult for every 8- 10 youth with the minimum of two unrelated adult required.

6. Open Door

All doors to rooms where there are youth/children activities will have a clear pane of glass or be left open when children/youth are present.

7. Nursery

All children being cared for in the nursery will only be released to their parent or guardian or someone who has been authorized by the parent, guardian, and/or person delivering the child to the nursery.

Only screened workers may work in the nursery.

No one under the age of 15 may be alone with children in the Nursery.

Any use of the Nursery for childcare during any church activities/meetings needs to be done with approved staff present and authorized by the Christian Education Board designated contact. No private arrangements can be made.

8. Reporting Suspicious Behavior

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a worker and child/youth shall be reported to a pastor or the Director of Christian Education immediately and investigated by using the procedures outlined in the "Child and Youth Protection Response Plan."

9. Training in Child and Youth Protection

Workers with children and youth will be informed of the Child and Youth Protection policies and procedures under which the church operates through printed materials and/or training sessions. They will be made aware of the legal penalties of misconduct, especially sexual relationships with minors.

The parents of children/youth involved in United Church of Christ-Congregational activities will be informed of the Child and Youth protection policies and procedures under which the church operates with emphasis on the safety and well-being of their children/youth.

10. Medicine Policy

Medicine is dispensed by church personnel only when absolutely necessary. When such need arises, parents shall fill out an authorization for medication form. All medications will be dispensed by an adult as per parent instructions. The medicines will be kept in a locked box in the possession of the adult responsible for dispensing the medication. Parents may give prior approval for children/youth to receive over the counter medication if the need arises on longer trips.

11. Overnight Activities

Parents will need to fill out release of liability forms that include multiple contact numbers, health insurance information, and health information before overnight trips. Two adult leaders will keep this information with them on the trip. Another copy will be left in the church office.

In hotels and dormitories, youth will stay in rooms with youth, adults will stay with adults. It is recommended that adult rooms be between youth rooms. Adults will arrange among themselves to check on the youth rooms using a random schedule during the night. No boys will be allowed in girls' rooms and vice versa. Youth must stay with the group.

Parent Meetings will be held before overnight trips to explain safety policies and behavior expectations. Emergency contact information should be shared. Parents will be informed that if their youth misbehaves, they will be responsible for picking them up immediately.

12. Use of illegal substances

Use of drugs or drinking of alcohol will not be permitted by any participant in church sponsored activities.

13. Driver Policy

Drivers must have a valid Iowa driver's license and proof of a good driving record, and must adhere to applicable laws. Volunteers who wish to drive will make copies of their driver's license and insurance card to be kept on file in the office. Driving records will be checked when they first apply. Drivers shall provide proof that their insurance would cover any claims that occur as a result of driving for the church and that they are insured to at least minimum State of Iowa ownership requirements.

Without exception all drivers must be at least 21 years old to drive anyone but themselves. To the extent reasonably possible, in vehicles carrying more than four children or youth, there should be an adult in addition to the driver in the vehicle.

Passengers are required to wear seatbelts and to use child safety seat as required by Iowa law. Children under the age of 12 may not ride in the front seat of a vehicle.

No smoking while in the vehicle or consumption of alcohol or drugs at any time by a driver or adult passenger while traveling to, from, or during an event. Driver of the vehicle shall refrain from cell phone usage while driving.

Behavioral Policies

The following behavioral policies shall also be the guidelines for expected behavior between children and Youth and their peers

Prohibited behaviors for all children/youth, church staff or Volunteers includes, but are not limited to:

- ☐ Physical striking, hitting, spanking of a child/youth Touching, fondling, kissing a child/youth in an inappropriate way or sexual manner Placing yourself in a position where you are alone/unsupervised with a child, without proper parental authority and reason to do so.
- Verbally or emotionally abusive language or behavior including sexually implicit or explicit or derogatory actions or remarks
- Body language that is intimidating or inappropriate
- Any conduct prohibited by the Iowa Criminal Code.

Incident Reporting

All allegations of incidents prohibited by this policy will be verbally reported to either the Church Moderator, Director of Christian Education, or Pastor, who will complete a written report and notify the appropriate personnel.

The written report will include the following information:

- ☐ Name of alleged child or youth involved.
- ☐ Name of the alleged worker/adult/other individual involved.
- ☐ Specific statement of the allegations of misconduct.
- ☐ Date, time, and location that the incident is alleged to have occurred.
- ☐ Witnesses or other individuals with knowledge or information about the allegation.

Notification of all appropriate parental, legal, social welfare, insurance or other authorities will be made. The written report will be distributed to the Moderator, Pastor, and Christian Education Director.

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Response Plan

It will be the policy of the United Church of Christ-Congregational to deal with all allegations of improper conduct with respect and dignity for all parties involved. Opportunities for spiritual and emotional support will be offered to all parties involved. Ames UCC will remain unbiased and supportive of all parties involved, recognizing that incidents of abuse allegations are devastating to both the accuser and the accused, and therefore the above policies or reporting will be carried out tactfully, discreetly and without bias on the part of the reporting agent.

Maintenance of Records

All reports of allegations of misconduct will be confidential, and reporting agents will maintain the confidentiality of all parties, to the extent allowed by law, with the exception of required reporting to parental, legal, and social authorities, and the church's insurance and legal counsel. All completed screening forms, incident reports, and related materials will be kept in a locked confidential file in the church office.

Spokesperson(s)

Only the Pastor, the Director of Christian Education or the appointed attorney shall speak to the media concerning a specific case. The following prepared statement shall be used initially:

We are aware of the alleged incident of abuse involving a child or youth of the United Church of Christ-Congregational of Ames. The appropriate authorities have been contacted and are investigating the allegation. The church has a safety policy in place to screen all people working with children and youth in our programming. This policy was implemented _____. For the protection of all involved, I cannot disclose any further information at this time. Thank you.

This procedure will be included in all staff and volunteer training.

Reporting Obligation

1. A verbal report of suspected abuse will be filed immediately with the Iowa Department of Human Services if the suspected abuser is the child's or youth's parent or caretaker.
2. If the suspected abuser is a church staff or volunteer, a written report will be made within 24 hours of a suspected child/youth abuse incident using the Ames UCC Child and Youth Protection Policy Incident report form. Unfounded reports will be destroyed after the investigation process is completed.

Reporting Procedure

1. All allegations shall be taken seriously.
2. The suspected abuser should not be confronted until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
3. Any suspected abuse committed by church staff or a volunteer on church property or at a church sponsored event shall be reported first to the Pastor and/or Director of Christian Education (DCE) by the adult closest to the situation. Examples would be first adult told by the child or youth, eyewitness, or the child/youth's parent.
4. If the Pastor or DCE are not on the site or available by phone, the reporter shall fill out a written incident report form and contact the pastor or DCE as soon as possible. Forms will be located in the church office.

5. A Pastor or the DCE shall begin documenting in writing all the efforts in handling the situation from the time it was first reported. This documentation should continue throughout the investigating process.
6. A pastor or DCE shall notify the child/youth's parent(s) or guardian(s), church attorney, insurance company, the Iowa Conference Office of the United Church of Christ.
7. The Pastor or the DCE shall contact the Department of Human Services or the police, whichever is appropriate according to the Reporting Obligations section of the Response Plan.
8. The prepared public statement shall be using to answer questions from the press and congregation. Care shall be used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
9. Pastoral care shall be extended to the victim and the family.
10. The suspected abuser shall be afforded full due process in handling of any complaint. Pastoral care shall be made available to the suspected abuser and the family. The suspected abuser shall immediately be relieved of his/her responsibilities.

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Training Paid and Volunteer Workers

Target

All workers with children and youth, full time or occasional (Sunday School teachers/assistants, Vacation Bible School teachers/assistants, youth group volunteers, nursery care givers, organist, youth & children's choir directors and accompanists, confirmation mentors, secretaries, custodians).

Person responsible

Director of Christian Education

Resources

- "Reducing the Risk" video
- Iowa Department of Human Services
- Ames United Church of Christ Child, Youth and Adult Safety Policies and Procedures statement
- Guest speakers

Session objectives

- Provide a basic orientation to facts about child abuse
- Present a rationale for emphasis on protecting young people from abuse in the church
- Describe church policies governing ministry to children/youth/adults
- Encourage worker/volunteer commitment to following church policies

Session content

- Nature of child abuse
- Reduction of Risk - Necessity for the church to respond
- Symptoms of child abuse
- Reducing the risk of child abuse
- Church policies
- Procedures for reporting

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Training Leaders of Children and Youth Ministries and Education

Target

All paid/volunteer ministry leaders who oversee children/youth activities. (Pastors, Director of Christian Education, nursery coordinator, etc.)

Person responsible

Director of Christian Education

Suggested resources

- "Reducing the Risk" video
- Ames United Church of Christ Child, Youth and Adult Protection Policies and Procedures statement
- Guest speakers
- Community resources
- Department of Human Services personnel

Session objectives

- Provide a basic orientation to facts about child abuse
- Present a rationale for emphasis on protecting young people from abuse in the church
- Describe church policies governing ministry to children/youth
- Encourage worker/volunteer commitment to following church policies
- Provide information so that leaders can effectively monitor those who work with youth and children

Suggested content

- I. Understanding the problem of child abuse
 - A. The problem of child abuse
 1. Definition
 2. Behavioral parameters
 3. Statistics
 - B. Understanding the abuser
 1. Various profiles
 2. New groups emerging (women, adolescents, children)
 3. The myth of "stranger danger"
 - C. The effects on the victim
 1. Short-term effects
 2. Long-term effects
 3. Mediating factors
 - D. Identifying abuse
 1. Physical signs
 2. Behavioral signs

- 3. Verbal signs
- 4. Abuser behaviors
- II. The church's need to respond
 - A. Focus on church's vulnerability to child abuse
 - B. Provide basis for understanding why a church should respond
 - C. What is a "risk reduction program"?

- III. Worker selection
 - A. Policy areas
 - 1. Worker selection
 - 2. Worker supervision
 - 3. Reporting an allegation
 - 4. Responding to an allegation
 - B. Screening procedures
 - 1. Screening procedures
 - 2. Screening forms
 - 3. Requirements for workers
 - 4. Disqualified applicants
 - 5. Interviewing
 - 6. Reference checks
 - 7. Criminal records checks

- IV. Supervising workers
 - A. Supervision
 - 1. Prior-record rule
 - 2. Six-month rule
 - 3. Two-adult rule
 - 4. Parental/guardian permission
 - 5. Overnight rule
 - 6. Nursery identification procedure
 - 7. Discuss suspicious behavior immediately
 - B. Reporting
 - 1. State reporting requirements
 - 2. Mandatory reports
 - 3. Line of reporting
 - 4. Occasions for reports
- 5. Guidelines for appropriate worker behavior

