

CHURCH OF THE COVENANT, BOSTON, MA

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

The Church of the Covenant is blessed with the children and adolescents who are a part of this community. We consider their safety and growth to be among this congregation's highest priorities. It is our responsibility to ensure that while participating in the activities of this congregation, every possible step is taken to ensure the safety and well being of our children. In so doing we protect adults who care for the children as well as the church itself.

The following policies and protocols are to be followed by all those who participate in activities, Christian Education and childcare with the children and adolescents of our congregation.

I. IN CHURCH AND OFF-SITE PROTECTIONS

A. Classroom and Nursery Protocol

1. Do not release any child with a person other than his or her parent or guardian unless that parent has given you specific permission to do so.
2. Be sure that all parents of children age three and younger check in with a nursery teacher before they leave and indicate where they will be sitting in church.
3. All classroom doors are to remain unlocked whenever children are in the room.
4. Classrooms will be chosen for their proximity to high traffic areas, such as Bates Hall, whenever possible.
5. There will be at least two adults in each classroom and nursery whenever possible. If that is not possible, but the classroom door has a window, there may be one adult in the room with the door closed. If the door does not have a window, the door must remain open.
6. Children and adolescents are not allowed behind closed doors without an adult present.
7. Efforts shall be made to avoid situations in which an adult worker is alone with a minor.
8. All diapering shall be done on the changing table in the Nursery. There should always be two adults present when a child is being changed by someone other than the parent or guardian.
9. During Christian Education, someone from the CE Committee will periodically check all classrooms and the nursery.

B. Bathroom Policy

1. Children age six and under who are in need of help when going to the bathroom shall be accompanied by an adult.
2. During the worship service, any child in nursery care regardless of age shall be escorted to the bathroom by an adult.
3. The door to the bathroom shall remain open at all times. When able, a child should take care of her or his own clothes. When a child needs help with her or his clothing, the adult will have the child step outside the stall.
4. Any adult who is helping a child go to the bathroom shall inform the other adult when leaving the classroom.

C. Overnight Protections

1. At least two adults must accompany any group that is going for an overnight retreat. If the group is of mixed gender, the adults will include at least one adult of each gender.
2. Written consent must be obtained from the parents or guardians of children and adolescents prior to participation in activities away from the church in which the parents are not present (see Appendix A for Permission Form). It is the responsibility of the leaders to confirm that permission has been obtained.
3. The consent form shall indicate who is in charge of the group, where they are going, what transportation arrangements have been made, and the expected return time. Emergency contact information will be included, along with information about the child or adolescent, such as allergies and medications.

D. Transportation Requirements

Anyone transporting children and adolescents must possess a valid driver's license and have adequate car insurance (adequate means meets state mandated minimum) and shall present a copy of such.

MVRs (Motor Vehicle Records) are required for paid staff who have any chance of transporting children and adolescents.

II. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ADULTS AND MINORS

A. General Policy

1. Under no circumstances shall an adult leader, teacher, or mentor become inappropriately involved with anyone under 18. This includes inappropriate sexual and non-sexual behaviors.
2. Dating is forbidden between any adult and a minor.

3. Adults must use discretion in dealing with all minors, especially regarding physical contact. Innocent behavior can be misinterpreted. Overt displays of affection should only be made in public settings.
4. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior by an adult toward a minor is inappropriate.
5. Sexual gestures or overtures by a minor toward an adult shall be reported to the Pastor immediately.
6. All staff and volunteers with children are to hold one another accountable by offering and accepting feedback concerning questionable behavior that could lead to a violation of the Child Safety Policy.

B. Discipline

1. The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain safety and order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, and cooperation.
2. No child shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.
3. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults or shouting.

C. Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Weapons

1. Alcohol, drugs, and tobacco are prohibited at any youth function, whether held at the Church or a place outside of the church.
2. Weapons of any kind are not allowed at church functions.

III. HIRING PROCEDURES: VOLUNTEERS AND PAID STAFF

A. Volunteers

1. All volunteers who work with children and adolescents must have attended COTC for at least six months before working with children.
2. All volunteers who work with children and adolescents must agree to have Criminal Offender and Record Information.(CORI) background checks:

B. Paid Staff

1. For all paid positions, the applicant must submit a Resume and a completed COTC employment application form.
2. Before a decision to hire is made, a COTC representative will check all references and former employers. All conversations for reference checks shall be documented and notes about them will be kept in a secure file.

C. CORI Background check

1. All volunteers with children and all paid staff are required to have a CORI check, which will reveal any criminal history.
2. Refusal to undergo a CORI and complete background check will automatically disqualify a person from working with children or youth, but not from participating in any other church activity.
3. The CORI report will be received by state approved CORI reviewers, usually a member of the COTC Personnel Committee and a member of the Christian Ed Committee. The CE Committee will follow the recommendation of the CORI reviewers
4. If the CORI report includes any history of sexual misconduct or crimes involving violence to others, the individual will not be eligible for work with children.
5. Other disqualifications include: crime in which a child was a victim, in which violence was threatened or perpetrated against another human, in which there was public exposure, crimes involving physical abuse or neglect or in which a firearm or other potentially lethal weapon was involved.
6. If the CORI reveals a conviction for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs or any other reckless driving, the person shall be disqualified from transporting children.
7. If an applicant considers the CORI report to be in error, the applicant may contact the Criminal History Systems Board, a state agency.

IV. REPORTING SUSPECTED OR ACTUAL ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Any adult who serves in a caretaking role with children or adolescents is mandated to notify the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) when he/she has reasonable cause to suspect the abuse or neglect of a child or adolescent under the age of 18. This mandate includes “Clergy members, ordained or licensed ministers, leaders of any church or religious body...or a person employed by a church or religious body to supervise, coach, train or counsel a child in a regular basis”. (*Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 119, sections 51A-E*). COTC volunteers, while not included in DCF listing of mandated reporters, will follow the same guidelines for reporting.

A. Guidelines for reporting a concern of abuse or neglect

1. If a caretaker believes that an incident of abuse or neglect has occurred, he/she shall report it to a member of the COTC Response Team immediately.
2. The Response Team member will obtain details of the allegations from the reporter in a written report form. (Report of an Unusual Incident, Appendix A)
3. The reporter will keep this information confidential unless specifically instructed otherwise by the Response Team.

B. Guidelines for the Response Team

1. Within 24 hours (and sooner if necessary) the Response Team will meet or confer in a telephone conference call to determine if the incident should be reported to DCF. If yes, a member of the team will work with the reporter to notify DCF by telephone and to follow

with a written report within 48 hours. If no, the Team will determine the appropriate course of action or intervention to address the issue.

2. Possible actions of the Response Team to a Report of an Unusual Incident (the team may use one or more of these options):
 - i. File a 51-A report with DCF
 - ii. Seek consultation from DCF or outside consultant to determine the appropriate response
 - iii. Inform the police
 - iv. Obtain consultation from the Boston Presbytery or the Metropolitan Boston Association of the United Church of Christ.
 - v. Recommend the temporary removal of a person from the role of teacher or mentor
 - vi. Recommend counseling or pastoral care for any or all parties involved in the allegation.
 - vii. Inform Council of the report and any recommendations of discipline of the alleged perpetrator
3. The Response Team will keep complete and confidential written records of all proceedings.
4. The Response Team will meet near the beginning of each term year to review its mandate and ensure a good working relationship among members.

C. Composition of the Response team

1. The Response Team shall include one member from Council, one member from the Deacons, one member from the congregation, and the Pastor.
2. There will be at least one female and one male member on the Team
3. There will be one alternate designated, in case a member of the Response Team is directly involved in an allegation of abuse or neglect or is unavailable to participate on the Response Team for other reasons.
4. Members of the Response Team will be appointed by Council and will serve for two years, with staggered terms. The Christian Education Committee will work with Council, Deacons and the congregation to bring names to the Council for appointment.

V. Training

COTC will conduct a required training on an annual basis for all paid staff members, teachers, members of the Response Team, and volunteers who work regularly with children. Training will include a review of the Child Safety Policy, an overview of the Mass. Department of Children and Families' policies on mandated reporting requirements, and a review of the function of the Response Team.

APPENDIX A
 Church of the Covenant Child Safety Program
Permission Form
 for
Away from Church or Overnight Activities

Nature of Activity:	
Date(s):	
Person(s) in Charge:	
Destination:	
Time of Departure:	
Mode of Transportation:	
Expected Time of Return:	
Place of Return	

Special items of interest to know about your child such as allergies, needed medicines, or limitations, etc.

I understand that **participating in this activity may result in injury** and **do not** hold the Church of the Covenant or the chaperones liable for any injury that my child may receive due to his/her participation in this activity including, but not limited to: travel, attending the activity, and use of facilities.

I understand that by signing this form, I **cannot** hold the Church of the Covenant or the chaperones liable for any injury that my child may incur from this activity/trip including, but not limited to: travel, attending the activity, and use of facilities.

I give permission for _____
(Name of child)
 to participate in this activity.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

APPENDIX B
Church of the Covenant
Child Safety Program
Report of Unusual Incident
Confidential

This form is to be filled out by a witness, child representative, or other accuser of any allegation of abuse or neglect. Please complete form within 24 hours and return to a member of the Response Team.

Date: _____

Name of Child or Youth: _____

Name of Reporter: _____

1. What is the nature and extent of the alleged incident? Please include specifics such as name(s) of the accused, date, time, and location.

2. What are the circumstances under which the reporter became aware of the alleged incident? Include names of witnesses if any.

3. Please give other information which you think might be helpful in establishing the cause of the alleged incident and/or person responsible for it. Please provide the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s).

4. What action has been taken thus far by those involved?

Signature of Reporter: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Receiver: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
Church of the Covenant
Child Safety Program
Findings of the Response Team

This form is to be filled out by a member of the Response Team and kept separate from the "Report of Unusual Incident" so that the latter may remain confidential. This form or a separate sheet of paper may be used to detail the information asked for below.

1. Finding of the Response Team:

2. Action(s) recommended:

3. Follow up monitoring to ensure actions completed: