

Caring Community Policy & Procedures

Adopted 8/26/14

Introduction

Statement of Christian Purpose

Jesus provides us this invitation:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is gentle and my burden is light” Matthew 11:28-30

As members of the body of Christ, the United Church of Hinesburg responds to this invitation in part by establishing this Caring Community Policy & Procedures. To follow Jesus’ example is to respect the integrity and dignity of all persons within the reaches of our ministries.

Mission Statement

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and that the Scriptures instruct the faithful to do justice and to care for one another. The United Church of Hinesburg is an Open, Welcoming and Affirming Church and a Reconciling Congregation dedicated to providing a safe and nurturing environment free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, intimidation and violence.

Conduct of Ministry

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all clergy, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers are ministers of the congregation. It is important that all ministers of the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve, and understand the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Regardless of the ways in which ministries and relationships are developed, whether through face-to-face interactions, written correspondence, electronic communications, online interactions, etc., it remains the policy of the United Church of Hinesburg to create a safe and healthy environment for all persons.

Requirements for Ministry with All Groups

All staff and volunteers are expected to establish and maintain healthy boundaries within their relationships including particular concern for the vulnerability of some parties and the possible abuse of power by others. Vulnerable populations include anyone who is unable to care for or protect him or herself because of physical or mental disability, age or emotional illness.

All members of the United Church of Hinesburg are encouraged to become and remain aware of this Caring Community Policy & Procedures. All prospective staff and volunteers who will be directly involved in group activities, visitations, field trips and pastoral care visitations with other members of the church will be given access to the Caring Community Policy & Procedures and encouraged to attend

training. The Caring Community Policy & Procedures and any associated forms are located in the church office.

Additional Requirements for Ministry with Children and Youth

The United Church of Hinesburg provides supervision for all activities and programs involving children and youth and employs practices that provide for the safety of children, youth and those who care for them.

Communicating the Caring Community Policy & Procedures

A copy of this Caring Community Policy & Procedures is provided for their review to each new employee and all volunteers who work with children and youth. The Caring Community Policy & Procedures and any associated forms are located in the church office.

Training

Purpose: Training and education about our Caring Community Policy & Procedures will be provided to all staff members, volunteers, and leaders who work with children and youth with the purpose of providing a safe environment for young people to learn and grow, while also providing the support that staff and volunteers need to be effective in their leadership roles with children and youth.

Frequency: Training sessions will be offered prior to the start of the Sunday School year and, if needed, again at the beginning of the Spring semester. In addition, training may be provided on an individualized basis as needed by the Christian Education Coordinator or Pastor.

Participants will be given a copy of the Caring Community Policy & Procedures and will sign a Participation Covenant that will be kept on file in the church office.

Procedures

Two teacher policy: There will be no fewer than two adults readily available or present in each classroom on Sunday morning and for all activities involving children and youth under the age of 18. The second adult may be a “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms whose doors have been left open.

Age requirement: A mature youth under the age of 18 may assist an adult in supervising children and youth activities as long as the youth is at least five years older than the supervisees.

Transportation: Any adult who provides transportation to minors for the Church will be at least 21 years of age, fully insured, and hold a current and valid driver’s license.

Field trips and overnights: There will be no fewer than two non-married, non-related adults present for all offsite or overnight activities involving children or youth. Children and youth participating in church-sponsored activities of this nature will be required to submit a signed Permission Form and Medical Release Form to the church office prior to departure or the start of the event.

Screening

All volunteers who will work regularly with children and youth must be members or regularly and frequently associated with the United Church of Hinesburg.

All paid staff, committee chairs and volunteers working regularly with children, youth or other vulnerable populations will consent to undergo a Vermont State background check and complete the Background Check Authorization Form available in the church office.

Background checks will be initiated by the church office prior to the first instance of volunteering and every three years thereafter, or more frequently at the Pastor's discretion. Completed forms will be kept in a locked file in the church office for at least 3 years, access to which is restricted to the Pastor and office staff, except as required by law.

Funds for required background checks (if necessary) will be provided for in the United Church of Hinesburg's annual budget.

An individual who has a criminal history that may impair or disable their ability to effectively perform the functions of the ministry position, including those which involve the abuse or neglect of a child, youth or vulnerable adult, shall not be considered.

Reporting

Through implementation of our Caring Community Policy & Procedures, we seek to prevent abuse occurring at United Church of Hinesburg. Allegations or reasonable suspicions of abuse will be responded to seriously and reported to appropriate church and state authorities. In the case of reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child, or if there is a substantial risk of child abuse or neglect, those aware of the situation must report this information in accordance with Vermont State Law. This pertains to instances that occur on church property or church sponsored events, or suspected abuse or neglect that is happening outside of the church.

Reporting Abuse of Children and Youth

Anyone can make a report. If you are concerned about your role in making a report or need assistance or advice, consult with the Pastor, Christian Education Chair or Christian Education Coordinator. Mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to DCF within 24 hours. Mandated reporters include but are not limited to child care workers, clergy members, and various health care and school employees.

Vermont law provides reporters with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith. The reporter's identity will not be divulged unless permission is given, the report leads to a court proceeding, the court find probable cause the report was not made in good faith, or the person substantiated for abuse requests a review of the decision and it is determined that the identity of the reporter can be provided without compromising their safety.

How to make a report: Place a phone call to the Department for Children and Families (DCF) **1-800-649-5285 (24/7)**. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police first. Then, call DCF to make a report. A social worker will ask questions about your concerns and ask for any details you know about the child (name, birth date, home address, school/child care provider, parents' names). The

information will be recorded, a written incident report will be requested and in some cases the reporter may be asked to gather more information.

DCF Response: DCF evaluates each report to determine whether assessment or investigation is warranted. Investigation or evaluation of concerns of abuse is the role and obligation of Department for Children and Families.

Reporting Abuse of Vulnerable Adults

Anyone can make a report. Mandated reporters are legally required to report abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult. Mandated reporters include but are not limited to physicians, nurses, EMTs or licensed health care providers, mental health professionals or social workers, caregivers employed by the vulnerable adult, and law enforcement officers.

The reporter does not have to prove or be certain that a vulnerable adult has been abused, exploited or neglected in order to make a report; you only need to have reason to believe that abuse may have occurred or is still occurring.

How to make a report: Contact APS directly and promptly if you suspect that a vulnerable adult has been harmed: **Toll Free 1-800-564-1612 or (802) 871-3317.**

APS response: It is the responsibility of Adult Protective Services (APS) to investigate whether or not abuse, neglect or exploitation has occurred. It is also the job of the APS team to determine whether or not an individual is “vulnerable” as defined by relative law.

Definitions

Child Abuse and Neglect: Vermont Law defines an abused or neglected child as one whose physical health, psychological health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm* (significant danger) by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child’s welfare. An abused or neglected child also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

***Harm** can occur by: abandonment, emotional maltreatment, neglect, physical injury, or sexual abuse.

- **Person Responsible for a Child’s Welfare:** Includes the child’s parent, guardian, foster parent, or any other adult residing in the child’s home who serves as a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child’s welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.
- **Emotional Maltreatment:** A pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.
- **Neglect:** Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.
- **Physical Injury:** Death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse and sexual misconduct always involve a relationship in which both parties do not have equal power. Any intimate contact must, if it is to be ethical and life-giving, take place between two mutually consenting participants. Such mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of power, for example, between minister and congregant, church school teacher or youth leader and child, choir director and choir member, and contact between two or more minors.

Vulnerable Adults (Vermont State Law Title 33):

1. Age 18 and older; and
2. Resides in a nursing home or community care home, is a patient in a psychiatric unit or hospital, has received personal care services for longer than one month; or
3. Regardless of residence or whether any type of service is received, is impaired due to brain damage, infirmities of aging, or a physical, mental or developmental disability

Abuse:

1. Any treatment of a vulnerable adult which places his or her life, health, or welfare in jeopardy or which results in impairment of health
2. Any conduct committed with intent to cause or reckless disregard of unnecessary pain, harm, or suffering; unnecessary or unlawful confinement or restraint of a vulnerable adult
3. Intentionally subjecting a vulnerable adult to behavior which results in intimidation, fear, humiliation, degradation, agitation, disorientation, or other forms of serious emotional distress
4. Any sexual activity with a vulnerable adult by a caregiver who volunteers for or is paid by a care-giving facility or program (this definition does not apply to a consensual relationship such as spouse or caregiver directed by the vulnerable adult)
5. Administration of a drug, substance or preparation to a vulnerable adult for a purpose other than legitimate and lawful medical or therapeutic treatment

Neglect*:

1. Failing to provide care or arrange for goods or services necessary to maintain the health or safety of a vulnerable adult, including food, clothing, medicine, shelter, supervision, and medical services
2. Not protecting a vulnerable adult from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others
3. Failure to carry out a plan of care for a vulnerable adult when such failure results in physical or psychological harm or a substantial risk of death to the vulnerable adult
4. Not reporting significant changes in the health status of a vulnerable adult to a physician, nurse, or immediate supervisor, when the caregiver is employed by an organization that offers, provides or arranges for personal care

*Neglect may be a single incident or repeated conduct which results in physical or psychological harm.

Exploitation:

1. Willfully using, withholding, transferring or disposing of funds or property of a vulnerable adult for the wrongful profit or advantage of another
2. Acquiring possession, control or an interest in funds or property of a vulnerable adult through undue harassment or fraud
3. Forcing a vulnerable adult against his or her will to perform services for the profit or advantage of another
4. Any sexual activity with a vulnerable adult when the vulnerable adult does not consent or is incapable of resisting due to age, disability or fear of retribution or hardship

Forms

Copies of all forms associated with this Caring Community Policy & Procedures are available in the church office, including but not limited to:

Children & Youth

Registration Form

Permission Form

Medical Release Form

Leaders

Participation Covenant

Background Check Authorization Form

Incident Report Form