



**NORTH SHORE UNITARIAN CHURCH  
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

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PREAMBLE

We, the members of North Shore Unitarian Church, recognize with sadness the reality that our children and young people are vulnerable to the outrage of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. We acknowledge that when abuse occurs, it is a tragedy not only for the abused, but for their families, our congregation, and our wider community as well.

We are aware that abusers exist in all strata of society and in all kinds of situations. We know that religious communities such as NSUC are not immune. Because we seek to create a welcoming environment and to carry out our religious and communal activities with a high degree of personal responsibility and trust, we unwittingly open our communities to abusers who would take advantage. And, because we seek to discover and respect the inherent worth of each individual, we want to affirm everyone without regard to the possibility that they might violate our trust and hurt our young people.

We therefore recognize the importance of creating reasonable precautions in order to balance our urge to welcome with our need to protect. It is in this spirit that we now publish this Child and Youth Protection Policy and implement it within our Church.

This Policy requires us to sacrifice two things that are precious to our religious community. First, we must give up our desire to take people at face value and to imagine that we would surely recognize anyone who would do us (or our children) any harm. Second, we must sacrifice the convenience of a heedless existence. When these procedures are properly carried out, they will require us to stop when we want to go, to look when we prefer not to, and to listen not only to the loud cry but also to the merest whimper.

In doing so, we will change the voices of denial that proclaim “It can’t happen here!” to voices of affirmation that pledge, “We will do all we can to see that it won’t happen here!”

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This policy will apply to all North Shore Unitarian Church programs, services, activities and events, including all Religious Education and Youth Programs, youth/adult activities, events for which child care is provided, field trips and conferences.

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**I. DEFINITIONS**

“Abuse” is an injury of a child by an adult or older child that might not be intentional, but is not accidental. It is usually classified as physical abuse, emotional abuse or sexual abuse. Harm caused by withholding life’s necessities – food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education – is called “neglect.”

A “Child” is a person under the age of 18 years.

A “Group” is defined as those children or youth under the age of 18 who have been assigned to a nursery, preschool, RE class or any planned, organized program or activity.

“Mandatory reporters” are persons who are under a legal duty to report abuse to designated civil authorities. In Illinois, mandatory reporters must report both actual and reasonably suspected cases of child abuse. At NSUC, our minister and DRE are mandatory reporters who must report to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) whenever there is “reasonable cause” to believe that a child may have been abused. (325 ILCS 5/1 *et seq.*)

“Safe Church Oversight Committee” is the established body within NSUC that is entrusted with the implementation of this policy. It is attached administratively to the NSUC Church Board.

“Supervision” is defined as the reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and responsibility by adults working with an assigned group, realizing that what constitutes appropriate supervision will vary with the ages of those in the group and the context of the activity.

“Workers” are persons who are engaged with NSUC children and youth, whether they are paid or unpaid, permanently assigned or occasional.

**II. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Those who provide direct care or supervision for children at NSUC must meet the following criteria:

- All workers must be active participants at NSUC, as a church member or contributing friend, for at least six months prior to taking on any assigned group, committee, activity or event.
- Those working with children junior high school and younger must be at least 18 years of age. Workers below the age of 18 must be approved by the DRE.
- Those working with high school groups must be at least 21 years of age. Workers below the age of 21 must be approved by the DRE.
- All workers must complete the Application Form included in this booklet, must consent to such reference and/or background checks as NSUC, in its discretion, deems necessary, and must agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth in this booklet. It is assumed that any person applying to work with NSUC children or youth, in any capacity, has given NSUC consent to do a criminal background check as it deems necessary.
- All workers must be trained by the Safe Church Oversight Committee in the issues presented in this booklet prior to being assigned duties with any group or program.

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III. SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

All workers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the DRE and operate under the authority of the NSUC RE Council. All workers are required to comply with the following policies to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth:

- Whenever feasible, each group should have at least two workers present at all times with at least one worker being an adult. For infants and toddlers, the desirable ratio is one worker for each three children. The DRE shall determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group and activity, and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis.
- The window coverings will be open and/or the door to any classroom must remain open at all times.
- The DRE and/or designee shall circulate the RE classroom area and monitor classroom activities randomly during regular RE classes.
- When taking children to the restroom, the worker should stay out of the restroom until the child is finished. Children need as much privacy as possible when using bathroom facilities, and workers are to enter and assist only when necessary.
- If an adult (other than a parent or guardian) has a private on-site, one-on-one meeting with a child, the DRE should be immediately notified of the meeting and its purpose. Such meetings are strongly discouraged and must be conducted in a room with a window or open door.
- No private off-site meetings are allowed other than with a parent or guardian without prior parent arrangement approved by the DRE.
- All outings must be pre-approved by the DRE. Participating children must have a signed permission slip from parent or guardian.
- All drivers shall be a minimum age of 21 and a maximum age of 65. All drivers must complete a Driver Form and submit a current, valid driver's license and proof of insurance before being assigned driving responsibilities.
- Drivers are to have two or more children in the car when transporting children/youth to and from activities. The only exception is when the driver is transporting a child with prior parent arrangement and notification of the DRE.
- NOTE: Affirmation mentors, Secret Pals, and other adults who are recruited and approved by the DRE for the express purpose of establishing supportive relationships with a specific child are exempt from prohibitions against private meetings and car rides with that child. Outings with that child are deemed to be pre-approved.
- Children second grade and younger must be picked up by a parent or guardian unless prior arrangements have been made with the DRE.
- Should disciplinary issues arise, there must be two adults present during all disciplinary meetings between the worker and the child involved. The parents shall be informed of any such meeting and its contents as soon as possible.
- Corporal punishment or abusive language may not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- Behavior must both *be* and *appear to be* above reproach. Period.

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IV. MAINTAINING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

A. Friendships

NSUC seeks to create an environment in which children can explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives. We actively encourage mentoring relationships between youngsters and adults with our Secret Pal and Affirmation programs, and know that when these relationships are genuine and healthy, they can be transformative for both the adult and the child involved.

Workers are expected to nurture the child's physical, emotional and spiritual growth by treating him/her with kindness, trust, respect and good humor. Interactions must be genuine and not manipulative of the child's needs or vulnerabilities. They must always be engaged in with the best interests of the child as the foremost goal.

Although we hope that children and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to a child for peer-to-peer friendship is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. Friendship is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the friendship than the other. This is antithetical to the healthy adult/youth relationship, where the adult assumes responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries in order to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust.

The age of the child makes no difference in this matter. A teen-aged child is no more responsible to maintain healthy boundaries than is a three year old. In fact, teens may have more confusion about appropriate boundaries and should be treated appropriately.

B. Physical Affection

Physical expressions of affection such as hugs are acceptable, but it is best to allow the child to initiate the contact, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to become too frequent or prolonged.

C. Sexualized Behavior

It is *never* appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but to sexually provocative, seductive or erotic behavior or language as well. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, connotations, or "double entendres".

D. Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol

Children should be prohibited from using tobacco, drugs or alcohol, and should be barred from exhibiting illegal behavior while engaged in church-sanctioned activities. Workers should at all times be aware that their own behavior is a powerful statement to children as to what is acceptable and responsible use of these agents. Therefore, any such use by adults while acting in a supervisory capacity should be legal, moderate and discreet.

E. Confidentiality v. Secrets

If a child discloses incidents of abuse or neglect, the worker should listen carefully to the report but ask limited questions. Should the disclosure raise a suspicion that abuse has occurred or that the child is in imminent danger, the worker should report it immediately to the minister or DRE.

While you can assure a child that you will respect the information and use it confidentially, never give the child the impression that you will keep secrets. *Confidentiality is not secret keeping.*

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V. REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES

NSUC has established a Safe Church Oversight Committee that will be responsible for helping the minister or DRE with questions relating to abuse reporting.

If a worker has reason to believe that abuse has occurred during an NSUC program or event, the adult must immediately report it to the minister or DRE. If the worker ascertains that the child is in a situation of imminent risk, he/she (or another responsible person) should immediately remove the abusive adult or vulnerable child from the situation and take steps necessary to protect the child.

The minister or DRE will alert the President of the Church Board that an abuse situation has been reported, and shall report it to DCFS and the church's insurer as the matter requires. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution of the offender, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.

If the reported abuse involves an NSUC worker, the DRE should immediately relieve that person of further duties involving the supervision, care or teaching of children until the matter is resolved.

The DRE shall keep a written record of all suspected cases of abuse including who reported the incident, the investigation conducted, any findings and conclusions, and what action was taken.

Should the media contact NSUC about an alleged incident of abuse, the President of the Church Board shall represent the Church to the public. In general, while no identifying information should ever be disclosed, the President may disclose steps taken to prevent such incidents, investigate this incident, and to guard against abusive situations in the future.

VI. AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The NSUC Church Board approved this policy on August 20, 2003. It is to be communicated to the congregation and implemented as follows:

1. A copy of the *Policy* will be mailed to anyone identified by the DRE as being within its definition of "worker." All new and existing workers will be required to sign a form indicating that they have read the *Policy* and agree to be bound by it.
2. A copy of the *Policy* will be distributed to the parents of all children currently enrolled in the RE program, and thereafter a copy shall be provided to the parents of children enrolling for the first time.
3. References to the *Policy* will be a standard part of every application interview and training of new workers. "Occasional" workers will be required to read the *Policy* and sign a form agreeing to be bound by it before being assigned duties of any sort involving children.
4. Mandatory teacher training on the *Policy* and on child sexual abuse awareness and prevention will be conducted annually.
5. At least one time each year, the DRE will compare a current list of approved workers with lists generated by municipal, county and/or state units of government under the State of Illinois Sex Offender and Child Murderer Community Notification Law, 730 ILCS 152/101. Criminal background checks will be made for all new and existing workers, as the DRE, in consultation with the Safe Church Oversight Committee, deems necessary and appropriate.
6. The DRE shall store all application forms, signed consents and background check reports in a locked file in the RE office.
7. The Safe Church Oversight Committee will include information about the *Policy* and its implementation as part of its annual report to the NSUC Church Board.



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APPLICATION FORM -- CHILD AND YOUTH WORKERS**

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Please describe the reasons you are interested in this position:

Have you ever been charged or convicted of a criminal offense related to actual or attempted sexual misconduct or molestation of a minor, or of child abuse? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, please explain:

Has any civil judgment ever been made against you for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, please explain:

Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer because you were accused of sexual misconduct or child abuse? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, please explain:

Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children and youth?

( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, please explain:

**Applicant's Statement:**

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that the information I have provided may be verified, by contacting persons or organizations named in this application, or by contacting any person or organization that may have information concerning me. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children or youth. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides such information. I also agree to hold harmless NSUC, the board, the employees and the volunteers thereof in their implementation of this Policy.

I have read and agree to be bound by the Child and Youth Protection Policy of NSUC. I understand that any information obtained about me through this application process will be kept in the strictest confidentiality among staff members of NSUC who will be screening applicants for compensated or volunteer positions. Any information obtained through this process which indicates that I may not have, in their opinion, the maturity or temperament to work with children or youth, will be sufficient grounds for denying this application.

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

For Church Use Only:

Application Reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_