



# Safe Church Policy

First Congregational Church  
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**Purpose:** The First Congregational Church of Houston (FCC) commits itself to providing a safe place for its children and young people (up to 18 years of age).

**Scope:** This policy is meant to govern the activities supervised, managed, and sponsored by FCC, which includes, but is not limited to, Sunday school classes, vacation Bible schools, overnight activities, children and youth events, nursery care, work/mission trips, and other FCC activities involving children and youth. This Safe Church Policy will be overseen by the Safety Committee of the Board of Christian Education (CE), made up of three members of the CE Board: The CE Board Chair person, the CE Board President *ex officio*, and an FCC staff member. There should be at least one person of each gender on the committee.

## General Policies Pertaining to ALL CE Programs and Events Involving Children and Youth

- 1) **Two-Adult Rule:** A minimum of two adult volunteers should be present during a CE event or class. This rule includes such events and programs as the nursery, Sunday school, and youth activities (on-site and off-site activities and overnight activities). If two adults are not present during a CE event or class, participants should follow Open Door/Window policy noted below.
- 2) **“Five Years Older” Rule:** Any adult volunteers (18 years and over) should be at least five years older than the youth they are supervising/sponsoring.
- 3) **No Volunteer Under 18 Years:** All adult volunteers should be over 18 years of age.
- 4) **Open Door/Window Contact:** In the event that a child or youth requires individual counseling to preserve confidentiality, the volunteer should inform another adult of the time and place of the meeting. The volunteer should open a door or window coverings whenever he or she is spending time alone with a child or youth.
- 5) **Parental/Legal Guardian Release Forms:** Medical and liability release forms will be collected for children or youth who participate in CE events at the church. This may be done at the semi-annual Volunteer Safety Orientation, or by appointment with the Safety Committee and/or the staff person charged with the CE programs for Children and Youth.

- 6) Overnight Activities:** There must be one adult for every 6 children or youth for any overnight activities, and a minimum of two adults regardless of the number of children or youth. In addition, an adult volunteer of each gender should be present.

### **General Policies Pertaining to Transportation of Children and Youth**

- 1) Registration:** Children and youth will be welcomed at overnight or off-site CE activities upon completion of registration forms. These forms will include contact, medical, and release information. It is the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian to update the form as needed.
- 2) Transportation Only by Adult Volunteers:** Only adult volunteers may transport children or youth to and from CE activities. Youth may not transport fellow youth to CE events. Exceptions may only be made to this policy when a parent/legal guardian gives permission for their children to be taken home by fellow youth. (In emergency situations, verbal permission may be given to the adult in charge of the event.). There must be enough seatbelts in the car to accommodate every passenger. Children under the age of 12 must sit in a back seat.
- 3) Minimum Transportation Requirements for Volunteers:** Drivers to and from events must be at least 21 years of age or over, have a valid driver's license, proof of automobile insurance, and be approved as a volunteer by the Safety Committee of the CE Board.
- 4) More Than One Child or Youth per Vehicle:** In cases where a volunteer is transporting a single youth, the volunteer should obtain parental/legal guardian consent
- 5) [Insurance Waiver:** Drivers must sign insurance waivers before they can transport children to and from church activities.

### **General Policies Pertaining to the Training and Screening of CE Volunteers**

- 1) Volunteer Orientation:** A Volunteer Safety Orientation will take place semi-annually, in August and January of each year. The staff person charged with overseeing the CE program and/or the Safety Committee of the CE Board will conduct this orientation. This orientation training will include the following:
  - Overview of abuse issues
  - Basic CE safety policies
  - Explanation of Criminal Background Screening policy
  - CPR/First Aid Training

- 2) **Criminal Background Screenings:** Anyone working with FCC children or youth, and all CE Board members, will be required to undergo a criminal background screening. All information will be kept confidential. Records of all completed background checks will be kept locked up in the office.
- 3) **Six-Month Rule:** No new member or friend of FCC can volunteer with children and youth until he or she has been a member for at least six months or a regularly attending friend for one year.

### **General Policies for Registration and Release Procedures from Sunday School and Children's Activities**

- 1) **Release upon Exit from Children's Programs:** Children (infants through 5<sup>th</sup> grade) need to be "signed out" by a parent/legal guardian or a responsible adult (approved by the parent/legal guardian) after each CE activity, including Sunday school. Children will not be released to other children or youth, including siblings, unless the parent/legal guardian gives written or verbal permission to a volunteer.
- 2) **Attendance Records of Junior and Senior High:** Junior and senior high youth (grades 6 through 12) must sign in at the start of each CE activity for attendance purposes.
- 3) **Exceptions:** The Board of Christian Education must approve all exceptions to the policies listed above. If a policy is violated, this must be reported to the Safety Committee of the Board of Christian Education. This Committee will determine if any action should be taken to correct or remedy the circumstances that gave rise to the violation.

*A current copy of this Safe Church Policy will remain posted on the bulletin board in the Assembly room*

*Approved by the CE Board on August 16, 2009. Policy as amended was "endorsed" by the Church Council on August 17, 2009*

*Policy to become effective on August 30, 2009*

Note: This policy supersedes the "Child Care Safety Policy" (1992) in the FCC Policy Manual.