



# The United Church of Pittsford

## Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

### Prologue

The United Church of Pittsford has adopted a prevention program designed to reduce the possibility of child abuse occurring within our community of faith. The procedures outlined in this document are intended to protect our young people, our volunteers, our church leaders; and the integrity, reputation, and resources of our church.

The terms child, children or youth are meant to indicate any person who is under the age of 18. The term parent is meant to indicate any person who has legal custody of a child or children. Male and female pronouns are used interchangeably throughout this document.

### Policy

The United Church of Pittsford will do all that it can to provide a safe environment free of any and all forms of physical and emotional abuse. The church will respond appropriately to all alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse, and deal compassionately with the alleged victim and his/her family; the accused and his/her family; and members of the church family.

What do we mean by child abuse?

Abuse refers to any non-accidental injury; any sexual activity or sexual exploitation; or any neglectful treatment or maltreatment that harms the health, welfare, or safety of a child or youth.

### Procedures

#### SELECTION AND SCREENING OF VOLUNTEERS

In an effort to create a safe environment within our community of faith, each volunteer who participates in our ministry with children, either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church property, will:

1. be an active and familiar member or friend of the church (a recognized participant in the life of the church community) for at least six months;
2. complete and sign an *Application Form* (to be reviewed annually by the Director of Christian Education if the person continues to serve). Those persons involved in the on-going supervision or custody of our children shall fill out a *Long Application Form*. These include, but are not limited to, teachers, discipleship sponsors and AGAPE leaders. Those involved in the occasional supervision or custody of our children shall fill out a *Short Application Form*. These include, but are not limited to, creative time volunteers, substitute teachers, second adults, tiny tots volunteers and cribbery volunteers. Those under the age of 21 must submit a *Youth Volunteer Application Form* signed by a parent.
3. and some will participate as requested in an interview with a person designated by the Board of Christian Education;

4. read, understand and agree to abide by the Policy and Procedures stated in this document; and;
5. if completing a long form, consent to have a background check completed by the church. This is to be done by the Director of Christian Education.

To secure background information:

Caller requirement: To request information you must be at least 18 years old and must provide your name, address and telephone number.

Sex Offender Registry hotline staff number: 1-900-288-3838.

Hours: The Information Line is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; it is not open on State holidays.

Necessary information: To learn the status of an individual, a caller must have the individual's name and at least one of the following identifiers: the individual's street and apartment number, driver's license number, social security number, or birth date. Additional information (i.e., eye color, ethnicity, height, weight and distinctive markings) may be helpful but is not required.

Fee: for a fee of \$.50 (fifty cents), which will appear on your telephone bill, you can inquire about up to five individuals.

What information will be provided by the 900 staff: The Sex Offender Registry hotline staff will search the database to determine whether an individual is listed in the Registry. For offenders who committed an act prior to enactment of the law (January 21, 1996) and had a risk level assigned prior to January 1, 2000, callers will be told only that the offender has registered but that no other information can be provided at this time due to a Federal court injunction. If an offender's name is listed on the Registry and the offender committed an offense on or after January 21, 1996 or the risk level assigned after January 1, 2000, the caller will be told the level of risk of offense by the offender in question.

*The Application Forms* pertaining to service with our children shall be reviewed and the references checked by the Board of Christian Education, and remain completely confidential and be secured in a locked file indefinitely.

## **REASONS FOR DISQUALIFICATION**

The falsification of any information on the *Application Form* will disqualify the applicant from any form of volunteer service involving our children. The applicant will provide valid identification by means of a driver's license, a picture ID, etc.

If a person has had a criminal charge or lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation or sexual misconduct, physical abuse or child abuse filed against him/her which has resulted in a judgment entered against him/her, or was settled out of court, or was dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired, this would exclude that person from any form of volunteer service involving our children.

All paid staff must likewise complete and sign an *Application Form*; read, understand, and agree to abide by the Policy and Procedures stated in this document; and submit to a background check. This shall all be administered by the appropriate Boards and Committees.

## **SUPERVISION**

**On the Church Premises:** Christian Education Registration Forms must be completed by a parent and returned to the teacher/leader of the child's Church School Class and/or class or activity that meets during the Sunday worship service. The parent will be requested to complete a registration form the second time a child participates in Sunday School.

**Two Adult Rule:** It is our intention to have a least two adults (21 years of age or older) present for all activities involving children.

During regular Sunday church service, the Cribbery and Creative Time rooms must be staffed by two adults. If a volunteer is unable to be present on their scheduled Sunday, the volunteer is to find a replacement following the procedures as outlined by the Cribbery and Creative Time coordinator. Once a replacement has been found, the volunteer is to contact the proper coordinator and notify her of the change. If there is not a second adult present:

1. The volunteer may not accept any children to supervise and should contact the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent or Head Usher (whomever is easiest to locate) and advise the person of the situation. Parents should remain with the child until a second adult is present.
2. The Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent should contact the Head Usher.
3. The Head Usher is to consult the list of volunteers that is provided by the Superintendent at the beginning of the school year, locate an adult in the congregation from that list, and escort that person to the room that is in need of a second adult.

**During Retreats, Overnight Events and/or Off-site Events:** It is our intention to have a least two adults present for all retreats, overnight events and/or off-site events involving children sponsored by the church. It is our intention that there will be an adult of each gender present at overnight events involving both male and female children. Exceptions to the two adult rule would require a signed permission slip by the parent and an exemption from the board of Christian Ed. Reducing the Risk Coordinator. There must be at least two adults present for every gathering up to fourteen children. Another adult is required for groups of fifteen to twenty-one; a fourth for groups of twenty-two to twenty-nine, and so forth.

**Permission Slips:** Signed permission forms are required for any off-site event, retreat, or overnight event.

**Information for Parent:** Information shall be given to the parent/s prior to an event/retreat stating the time, location, telephone number, names of all adult Chaperones, and the time and location of departure and pick-up.

**Transportation:** All transportation of children must be provided by an adult (25 years of age or older) who is an active and familiar member or friend of the church and has completed and signed an Application Form.

## **VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES**

**The Cribbery and the Tiny Tots Room:** Volunteers are expected to provide and maintain a safe environment. This includes, but is not limited to, monitoring individual and group play, supervising use of toys and equipment, and general care of each child. Volunteers are not to change any diapers or clothing. Should this become necessary, volunteers must page the parent of the child in need and the parent is to change any diapers or clothing. Volunteers are expected to arrive by 9:30 a.m. and stay until all children are picked up, which could be after adult Sunday school is concluded. All toys are expected to be returned to their original places and any food or drink is to be cleaned up.

As parents drop off the children, the volunteers will make sure each child is signed in by a parent. The parent is to be given a pager, which has been turned on. The volunteer will record which pager was taken by which parent. As the children are picked up, the pagers are to be turned off and returned to the charger box.

Volunteer is to make use of the pager system if a child is inconsolable after several minutes, is behaving inappropriately, and/or if the child is in need of a diaper or clothing change. If a child is seriously injured or becomes ill, the parent should also be contacted via the pager system.

If volunteering in the Tiny Tots room, prior to the arrival of children, a volunteer should prepare drink and snack for the children. Supplies are found in the white cabinet in the kitchen. Two adults must remain in the room at all times once children have arrived. After all children have been picked up, drink and snack supplies are to be washed and returned to the white cabinet in the kitchen.

**Parent responsibilities for Cribbery and Tiny Tots:** A parent shall sign-in their child upon arrival and sign-out their child when removing them from the room. A Christian Education Registration form must be completed and returned to the person in charge before the child may remain in the room. (These forms are usually completed during general registration in September. However, visiting parents must complete a form before leaving their child in our care.) Pagers are available in the event a parent needs to be contacted during the service.

**Sunday School Teacher Responsibilities:** Teachers will provide a safe environment for all students. Teachers will prepare lessons in support of the chosen curriculum. Attendance will be taken each week with final attendance information given to the Superintendent at the conclusion of the Sunday School year. If a student attends class, but is not registered, teachers will have student and parent complete a registration form that same day. Two adults must be in each room at all times, so if a teacher needs to leave the room, that teacher will locate the hall monitor and have the hall monitor remain in the room until the teacher returns. If a teacher is unable to attend Sunday school, he is expected to locate a replacement from the list given to him by the Superintendent at the beginning of the school year. The teacher is expected to prepare the lesson and inform the substitute. It is generally understood that if the "lead" teacher is absent, the "supporting" teacher will fill in as the lead teacher, and the substitute will be the supporting teacher. Teachers are expected to attend periodic meetings as organized by the Sunday School administration.

**Volunteers Supervising One Another:** All volunteers are responsible for confronting what they believe to be improper, irresponsible, or inappropriate behavior by other volunteers with whom they happen to be serving. This should be done privately and discreetly as soon as the opportunity arises. If the behavior is abusive, it must be confronted immediately! The behavior must also be reported to the Pastor as soon as possible.

**Accident/Injury Reports:** If a serious accident or injury occurs during any church sponsored class, event, or activity, an adult volunteer must complete an Accident Report within 24 hours. The report must be submitted to the Pastor who will forward a copy to the appropriate Church Board or Committee and file the original copy for an indefinite period of time. The parents will be contacted by the Pastor and given a copy of the report. A serious accident or injury is one that would most likely require professional medical attention.

**Hall Monitors:** From the time the doors are unlocked and the building is in use for any church related program, event or activity, until that program, event or activity has concluded, the building emptied, and the doors locked, a person or persons arranged by the sponsor of the event shall monitor the building.

While church school classes are in session, there shall be a Hall Monitor present in the hallways of the Education Wing of the Church. If a teacher must leave a classroom for any reason, the Hall Monitor will take her place until she returns.

**Restroom Procedure:** If a small child needs to use the restroom, an adult will accompany him to the restroom. The adult will check the restroom to make sure it is empty before allowing the child to enter. The adult should not enter the restroom with the child unless the child requests it or needs assistance. It is our intent that older children should go to the restroom in pairs.

## **TRAINING AND REVIEW**

**Education and Training:** All persons recruited to work with our children shall be required to attend a seminar designed to explain and interpret our Policy and Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse. These seminars are open to anyone, and new members and friends of the church are encouraged to attend one of the seminars whether they intend to work with our children or not. In addition, our AGAPE leaders will be required to attend an annual training session specific to their unique responsibilities.

**Annual Review:** The Policy and Procedures for *Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse* shall be reviewed annually by the Board of Christian Education (BCE) at their November Board Meeting. Prior to this session, the BCE must elicit input from the other church boards and the community of faith at large. Recommendations for changes shall be brought to the Church Council for appropriate action.

## **RESPONDING TO AN ALLEGATION OF ABUSE**

If an incident of abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer, paid staff person, or any member of the church, that person shall immediately contact the Pastor. If the incident is perpetrated by the Pastor, the person should immediately contact the Moderator. If the person chooses, he/she may also report the incident to the proper authorities by calling:

### **The State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment**

Toll Free State Register number 1-800-635-1522

or the Monroe County number 858-461-5690.

It should be stated that the law protects all persons who report abuse or neglect from the threat of civil or criminal lawsuit, and reports of abuse or neglect are always confidential.

After being contacted, the Pastor will speak with the victim's parents/guardians as soon as possible with or without the victim present.

The Pastor will record on an *Incident Report* form all pertinent information, to include: names of all people involved (including the age of the child), all witnesses (if any), the time and date of the incident, the particular event in which the incident occurred, the nature of the incident, and the name and signature of the person making the allegation.

If the accused is the Pastor, the Moderator will speak with the victim's parents/guardians as soon as possible with or without the victim present and complete an *Incident Report*.

The next step is for the Pastor (or the Moderator, if the accused is the Pastor) to talk with the accused. The accused will be treated with care, dignity, and support. If the accused is a volunteer or staff person, he/she will be temporarily relieved of all duties and responsibilities (with pay, if applicable) related to work with children until the incident is resolved.

A report of the interview with the accused stating date and time of the interview, detailed notes of the interview, names of any witnesses, and detailed notes of subsequent interviews with those witnesses, including time and date, signed by all present, must be compiled by the Pastor (or Moderator, if the accused is the Pastor), and attached to the *Incident Report*.

All reports must be compiled either in ink or typed to prevent later alternations.

The interviews with the victim's parents/guardians and the accused, conducted by the Pastor or the Moderator, are church matters and not civil or criminal proceedings, so legal counsel will not be permitted to attend.

If the Pastor (or the Moderator, if the accused is the Pastor) discovers that the alleged incident was actually a misunderstanding, or a harmless error in judgment, and all involved agree that it was not an incident of abuse, the complaint will be dropped, all reports destroyed, and the accused will be immediately reinstated.

If the allegation appears to be valid following the interviews with both the victim's parents/guardians and the accused, the Pastor (or the Moderator, if the accused is the Pastor) shall immediately report the incident to the State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment. If the accused is the Pastor, or another ordained person, the Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Rochester – Genesee Region and the District Superintendent of the Western New York Conference of the United Methodist Church must be notified.

If a report is filed with the State, their personnel will carry out the investigation. After reporting the incident to the State, the insurance carrier for the church also should be contacted by the Pastor (or the Moderator, if the accused is the Pastor) along with the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. In the event that an incident becomes public knowledge, any contact with the media shall be handled solely by a person designated by the Church Council. Other persons associated with the church are encouraged to refer the media to the designated spokesperson if asked about the incident or any of the individuals involved.

Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The designated spokesperson will state our policy, outline the appropriate procedures being followed, and generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature. Any further comments will be discussed and agreed upon with the Church Council. The spokesperson will share the same information with the congregation in a timely fashion to avoid rumors.

All paperwork pertaining to a reported incident will be kept in a locked file indefinitely. Only the Pastor will have access to those files. If the Pastor is the perpetrator, or if the church is without a pastor, the Church Council will decide who, if anyone, may have access to those files.

If it is discovered, following a full legal investigation, that the alleged perpetrator was actually innocent, not only will the Pastor acknowledge this through personal contact with that person, but the Church Council will also acknowledge it through a formal letter sent to that person on behalf of the church.

**Any question and/or comments pertaining to this document should be directed to the Board of Christian Education.** You may reach them through the Church Office at:

The United Church of Pittsford	Phone:	585 586-6870
123 South Main Street	Fax:	585 586-0782
Pittsford, NY 14534		

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**Forms are available on-line at: [www.unitedchurchofpittsford.org](http://www.unitedchurchofpittsford.org)**

**Click on the “Education” menu link.**

**Click on the “Read More” link under "[Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse](#)"**