

SAFE CHURCH POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
First Congregational Church of Bellingham

"Welcoming all, growing in faith, living God's love, justice, compassion . . ."

First Congregational Church of Bellingham is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment where young people can learn about and experience God's love. These practices are designed to provide a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities.

- Background Check. All volunteers and teachers who work with children and youth in the church school programs, mission trips, youth groups and Journey Together will submit a completed disclosure form and be cleared by the Washington State Patrol "WatchPass" program. A federal background check will be authorized for individuals who have not been in state the past five years. Families new to the church and the state who want to be involved with children must also submit to a federal background check.
- WAC 388-113-0020. Criminal convictions and pending charges automatically disqualify an individual from having unsupervised access to adults and minors.
- Rule of Three. All adults working with children and youth will adhere to the "Rule of Three." The rule ensures that an adult is not alone with a child or youth. Where possible, the Rule of Three will include two adults. If this is not feasible, the adult must have more than one child present with him or her.
- Five-Year Age Difference. A volunteer or paid staff person should be at least five years older than the children/youth he or she is supervising. At his/her discretion, the Minister of Christian Education may waive this recommendation.
- Open Door Counseling. Doors should be kept open at all times during one-on-one counseling or while advising any children or youth in church or church settings. If privacy is a concern and the child/youth feels more comfortable with a closed door, the counseling session must be accessible to viewing at all times.
- Child Drop-Off and Pick-Up Policy. Children in fifth grade and younger are escorted to class by the Minister of Christian Education and church school teachers. The Nursery operates a special sign-in/sign-out system. Children will be picked up by parents following church school. (With parental approval, children in fifth grade may leave unaccompanied at the end of class.)
- Child Supervision. Children in fourth grade and younger must be accompanied by an adult if leaving the classroom.

- Communication. Teachers are given parent/guardian names and contact information for communication purposes and in case of an emergency. This information is also available on the church school registration forms. When texting/e-mailing youth younger than 18 years of age, staff or volunteers shall send copies of the messages to parents.
- Report Suspicion of Child Abuse. Should an adult paid staff or volunteer suspect that a child in his/her care has been abused, the adult will report this suspicion to the Minister of Christian Education or one of the pastors. A written record of the incident and resolution will be kept on file. The Safe Church Committee will be notified of the incident resolution.
- Photo Privacy and Protection. Parents must indicate whether or not they give permission to have their child's photo displayed on the church web site, in weekly and monthly church communications, or on bulletin boards within the church facility or in the newspaper. Written permission is expressed through the registration paperwork associated with the church school programs. The written permission is valid from September through August of the program year but can be changed at anytime by notifying the Minister of Christian Education. Permission must be given each year at the time of registration.
- Building Security. The outside entrance near the stairs by the church offices shall be secured by the head usher after church begins to ensure that people do not wander in unnoticed.
- Distribution of Keys. The office manager shall maintain a current list of all people who have keys (access to the building, rooms, etc.). Keys will be recalled from those who no longer need them.
- Diapering. Parents of children in the Nursery may sign a form that allows the nursery attendant to change the child's diaper. The Nursery Attendant will contact the parents or the Minister of Christian Education via text message if necessary.
- Safe Church Committee. FCCB will establish a Safe Church Committee with a representative from Christian Education, Trustees, Diaconate, Church Council, and staff.
- Posting of Safe Church Notification. The following notice should be posted on the church website, outside each classroom, and in other prominent locations: "First Congregational Church of Bellingham is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment where young people can learn about and experience God's love."
- Education and Refresher Training. Education and refresher training regarding safe church practices shall occur annually for church staff, church school staff, and nursery attendant.

This Safe Church Policy document should be reviewed annually and be updated as necessary.