

Child Abuse Reporting Procedure

Dated: March 19, 2018

Obligation to Report

Massachusetts law requires ministers and directors of religious education to report any suspected child abuse. Under this policy, all volunteers who work with children and youth are obligated to notify the Minister or DRE of suspected child abuse, including behaviors witnessed during programmed church religious education activities which seem abusive or inappropriate.

Response to Reports of Suspected Abuse

Statutory report: The Minister or DRE shall report the incident to the Department of Child and Family Services of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (DCF), in accordance with relevant statutory provisions. This involves verbal notification and follow up with a written report. Reports shall be handled with the highest ethical regard for the best interests of any child involved, as well as for the welfare, dignity and civil rights of the person whose behavior is the subject of the report. In the event the charges involve the minister, the incident should be reported to the Chair of the Board and to the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety or district executive of the New England Region District.

Safe Congregation Task Force Responsibilities: The Minister or DRE shall report the incident to the Safe Congregation Task Force chair. The Task Force shall be responsible for the following:

1. Report the incident to the church's insurance company, Church Mutual Insurance Company.
2. Notify the Board that an incident has been reported and that the church's insurance company has been notified.
3. Inform the parents of the child involved, if they are not otherwise aware of the incident.
4. Contact the person whose behavior is the subject of a report to discuss entering a limited access agreement if the individual is part of the church community. No details of the incident or the identity of the child involved should be shared with such person.
5. Assign members to be responsible for monitoring the subject of a limited access agreement when present at church activities.

Limited Access Agreement

Pending resolution of the incident, a member of the Task Force should inform the person whose behavior is the subject of a report of the allegations in general terms and shall require the

person to enter into a limited access agreement. The agreement will allow the person to continue to participate in adult activities at the church provided that an individual with knowledge of the circumstances is present. The agreement will require that the person have no involvement with religious education activities or make any contact with children. The purpose of the agreement is to protect all parties. It is not an admission to any of the allegations.

A person whose behavior is the subject of the report may not attend or participate in church activities until a limited access agreement has been agreed to and executed by the person and the Chair of the Task Force. The limited access agreement may be revised as appropriate and shall remain in place until the Task Force authorizes its termination.

Contact with Parties Involved

The Minister, DRE and/or a Task Force member should reach out to the subject of the alleged abuse and his or her family. It is appropriate to provide pastoral resources, as needed. The care and support of the subject of the report is the first priority. Resources available from the church's insurance provider, such as counselling, should be offered.

The person whose behavior is the subject of a report should be treated with dignity and support. If such person is a church worker, either paid or volunteer, he or she should be relieved temporarily of any duties until the investigation is completed. Salary may or may not be suspended as circumstances warrant and as the Task Force recommends. Pastoral resources to such person should be provided as appropriate and needed.

Keeping Records

The Task Force shall:

1. Collect and review all pertinent facts regarding the incident or charges
2. Review any application and reference forms kept on the person
3. Carefully document all meetings, conversations, etc. regarding the matter
4. Keep all information as confidential as circumstances warrant.

Communications within the Congregation

The Board should be informed in general of the incident. The identities of the persons involved should not be disclosed. Generally, no announcement of an incident to the congregation is appropriate. Those charged with monitoring a person under a limited access agreement may know the identity of the person subject to the limited access agreement.

Awareness of Policy

This policy and the identity of the Task Force Members shall be shared with the congregation. It shall be posted on the web page and conveyed at the Annual Meeting. Notice of the number of persons under any limited access agreement shall be included in the annual report to the

congregation. All procedures shall be reviewed and updated annually by the Task Force and shared with all RE volunteers.

Persons with prior convictions or history of child abuse.

In the event it becomes known that a person convicted of child abuse or of a sexual offense or with a history of known sexual offenses is a member or attendee of the church, the individual should be placed on a limited access agreement without prejudice. The Task Force will be convened within 10 days of such a person being made known to the Minister, the DRE or any Task Force member in order to develop the limited access agreement. This will be done in consultation with the person's parole officer and/or treatment provider so it may be determined that the person can safely participate in the adult life of the congregation.

Contact Information and Additional Sources of Guidance:

Mass Gov. How to Report Child Abuse

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/report-child-abuse-or-neglect>

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Otherwise, call the Child-At-Risk-Hotline: 1 (800) 792-5200.

During regular office hours (8:45 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. M-F) call the DCF office that serves the city or town where the child lives. Nearby DCF offices are:

DCF Malden 781-641-8500

DCF Arlington 781-641-8500

DCF Cambridge/Somerville 617-520-8700

UUA Office of Ethics and Safety

Website: www.uua.org/safe/misconduct

UUA Safe Congregations

Website: www.uua.org/safe

Draft Limited Access Agreement

<https://www.uua.org/safe/children/appendices/23512.shtml>

UUA New England Region District

Phone: (617) 948-6415

Website: www.newengland@uua.org

Insurance Policy.

Our current policy is with Church Mutual Insurance Company.

Phone: (800) 554-2642

Email: www.churchmutual.com