

Safe Church Guidelines
Ellington Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

I. General Background

Mission Statement:

The covenants between persons seeking employment or authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity and truthfulness for the health of individuals participating and for the church as a whole. Our goal is to pursue love, safety, peace and security for all who participate in our programs, wherever they are held, as well as for those who use our facilities. We recognize that all persons are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). Both the Old and New Testaments instruct the faithful to do justice and to care for all persons, including the young. To that end, the *Ellington Congregational Church* is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment in which infants, children, youth and adults can learn about and experience God's love. We have a moral responsibility to provide the highest quality and safest care and programming possible in all areas of our ministry programs.

Definitions:

Child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct, as understood in this document, always involve a relationship in which both parties do not have equal power. Any sexual contact must, if it is to be ethical and life-giving, take place between two mutually consenting adult participants. Such mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of power, for example, between pastor and congregant, church school teacher or youth leader and child, choir director and choir member.

For the purposes of these guidelines we are using the following definitions:

Minister:

A person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers as well as authorized ministers.

Authorized Minister:

A person who has been ordained, commissioned, licensed or granted in care status by an Association of the United Church of Christ

Pastor:

An authorized minister duly called by a congregation to serve a professional, ministerial function.

Ministerial Relationship:

The relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry

Child Sexual Abuse:

Any sexual activity with a child in which a minor is used for the sexual gratification of another to include, but not be limited to: fondling, penetration, inappropriate touching, verbal comments, pornographic materials, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism or any behavior that violates applicable law

Adult:

Any individual eighteen (18) years of age and older

Minor:

Any individual under the age of eighteen

Child:

Any individual under the age of sixteen

Youth:

Any individual sixteen (16) to eighteen (18) years of age

Sexual Misconduct

Sexual harassment (verbal and/or physical), sexual advances and or sexual contact between an ordained, licensed, commissioned minister, or any person, ordained or lay who has an assigned role with children and/or youth in the church and the employees, members, youth, children, and counselees of his/her church

Sexual Exploitation:

Sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a minister engaged in the work of the church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister

Sexual Harassment:

Repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. Sexual harassment includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity;
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church. For example, it is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Teacher:

An adult over the age of 18 who has responsibility for a church school classroom and has attended teacher training.

Classroom Helper:

An adult **or responsible youth** who assists a teacher.

Unmonitored Contact:

Anyone involved in overnight events with minors, transportation of minors, youth ministry events and field trips.

Inappropriate Behavior:

Any suggestive language, suggestive behavior or profanity to or around children or youth.

Confidentiality:

When investigating an allegation, those involved shall maintain complete confidentiality with respect to names and events. The guiding rule of confidentiality is to share information only with those who need to know and only what they need to know. This rule of confidentiality shall be followed by all involved.

II. Ministerial Conduct

All persons engaged in the ministry of the *Ellington Congregational Church* including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteer and authorized ministers are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority. Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioners or other individuals by someone engaged in the ministry of the *Ellington Congregational Church* is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Because ministers often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry of this church maintain their own psychological, emotional and spiritual health and that they have adequate education for helping those individuals they serve in ministry. *Ellington Congregational Church* encourages its leaders, authorized ministers, employees and volunteers, to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

III. Safe Church Policies

Recruiting Church Workers

Selection and Screening Process

All people in the *Ellington Congregational Church* who work with minors shall complete a screening form. These screening forms shall be kept in a locked, confidential file, in the Senior Pastor's office. Completed forms will only be accessible to *Ellington Congregational Church's* paid, professional staff.

The *Ellington Congregational Church* welcomes members who have been regular attendees for six months and friends who have been regular attendees for a year or more to become involved with the church school and youth ministry programs at various levels of commitment. The Senior Pastor in conjunction with the Board of Christian Education or the Music Committee, as appropriate, shall be primarily responsible for screening applicants for volunteer and staff positions with children and youth. It is expected that all employees or volunteers who work with minors will complete and submit a screening form (see Appendix A).

All screening forms will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. Prior to serving, each volunteer or staff shall meet with the Senior Pastor in order to review the statements on the screening forms and the guidelines regarding safe and nurturing church environment.

In order to ensure safety for all persons involved, the following guidelines will be followed when inviting individuals to service in ministries with minors:

1. An individual with an undeclared criminal history shall not be considered.
2. An individual with a felony conviction involving child abuse will not be considered.
3. An individual who has any criminal history that may impair or disable their ability to effectively perform the functions of the ministry position, including those which involve the abuse or neglect of a minor shall not be considered.
4. An individual with any criminal conviction for a crime of violence shall be considered on a case by case basis.
5. The Pastor reserves the right to guide someone to another area of ministry should they feel they are not suited for working with children or youth.

Supervision

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor in conjunction with the Board of Christian Education or the Music Committee, as appropriate, to supervise all staff and volunteers including the Youth Advisors who have contact with minors involved in Christian Education within the *Ellington Congregational Church*.
2. Supervisors will ensure that all staff and volunteers have received the training to perform their ministries with competence and ensure that all church policies are being administered adequately. See the Safe Church Guidelines in attached appendices.
3. Any adult who will supervise overnight stays of children or youth in the church must complete the primary screening procedure outlined above to participate in the overnight activity. In addition, these forms must be reviewed and a record check completed prior to participation in the overnight event.
4. If any minor is to participate in a chaperoned or supervised church activity away from the church, a signed parental consent form which includes a medical form disclosing all and dosages to be taken while on the trip must be submitted prior to such activity.

Mandated Reporters

CT State law (Public Acts 02-106 and 02-138) mandates that any person paid to care for a child in any public or private facility is mandated *promptly* to report suspected child abuse or neglect to DCF or a law enforcement agency.¹ By that definition the Pastors are mandated reporters and thus the *Ellington Congregational Church* is a mandated reporter. If any volunteer or paid staff suspects that a child is being abused or neglected, **whether they believe the abuse or neglect has happened/is happening at the church or a church function or not**, they are to notify a pastor immediately. The pastor will notify the proper authorities and will then follow the procedures listed below for the reporting of incidents.

Reporting of Incidents:

¹ The Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 319a, Sec 17A-101b states that "An oral report shall be made by a mandated reporter as soon as practicable but not later than twelve hours after the mandated reporter has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child has been abused or neglected or placed in imminent risk of serious harm, by telephone or in person to the Commissioner of Children and Families or a law enforcement agency."

A subcommittee of the Prudential Board with no less than two (2) members, one male and one female, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee hereinafter referred to as “The Response Team,” will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

All staff, teachers, aides, and volunteers of the *Ellington Congregational Church* shall follow the following reporting procedures in order to promote accountability among all members of the church.

1. Any and all incidents involving questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual misconduct or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse shall be immediately reported to the Senior Pastor and the Response Team.
2. The incident shall be documented in writing by the staff member who receives the report. The report shall contain the date, time, persons involved, full explanation of the incident. See attached appendix
3. The Senior Pastor and the Response Team shall meet to discuss and implement an appropriate response.
4. All staff, teachers, aides, and volunteers shall be informed and trained in this reporting responsibility.

Response:

The staff of the *Ellington Congregational Church* shall treat every allegation of sexual abuse, misconduct and inappropriate behavior very seriously and shall thoroughly investigate every allegation in a prompt, professional and confidential manner.

1. When questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual abuse or inappropriate behavior is observed and reported, responses may include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a. Document the incident and closely monitor the accused.
 - b. Discussion with the accused to ensure he/she understands and respects appropriate limits of behavior;
 - c. Immediately place the accused on leave from the position of authority pending completion of the investigation.
 - d. Overall evaluation of the incident, to include interviews with the alleged victim and the accused, and counseling referrals if necessary. If the nature of the incident does not require legal intervention and all parties agree that counseling will suffice, such a recommendation may be made and reviewed by counsel to church for legal sufficiency.
 - e. A formal report may be filed at which time professional intervention shall be requested through the Department of Children and Families and the Ellington Police Department.
2. The Pastor shall notify and discuss all allegations with counsel to the church to ensure that all legal requirements are met in the response process. In the event that the

- accused is a Pastor, the Church Moderator, in consultation with the Response Team and the Prudential Board shall follow this course of action on behalf of the church.
3. The Pastor and/or the Moderator shall notify the *Ellington Congregational Church's* insurance carrier.
 4. Every effort shall be made to comfort and protect the victim of the alleged abuse to ensure that the victim's needs are being met.
 5. If an alleged incident involves a minor, the parent or guardian shall be notified immediately.
 6. The accused shall be treated with respect and dignity during the investigation process. The church will not tolerate any retaliation against a victim (or family) for filing a complaint, no matter how it is resolved.
 7. The complaint will be investigated immediately and thoroughly.
 8. Notification to the congregation will be handled on a case by case basis at the discretion of Prudential Board.

Training

All staff, teachers, aides, and volunteers who work with the children and youth of the congregation shall be given access to a copy of these guidelines and shall be oriented regarding what his/her responsibility is in preventing and reporting allegations.

1. Training of staff and volunteers include:
 - a. A basic orientation to the facts about child abuse.
 - b. A description of what to look for in order to prevent sexual abuse.
 - c. An explanation of church guidelines and the reporting procedure.
 - d. A commitment from staff to follow conduct guidelines and these prevention and reporting procedures.
 - e. Provision of in depth training around issues surrounding youth offered to all youth leaders and confirmation mentors. .
2. The pastor shall be responsible for reviewing the church's volunteer policies with all new members of the church during new member orientation.
3. The Senior Pastor and Board of Christian Education shall be responsible for educating the congregation on the need for such guidelines and shall offer an annual workshop or annual newsletter article to discuss these issues with interested members of the church community.
4. Youth shall be informed frequently especially before overnight events who are the safe individuals to approach should they feel concerned for their safety, security or well-being. This will be the responsibility of the in-charge staff individual.

Appendix A

VOLUNTEER/STAFF SCREENING FORM

Confidential

Ellington Congregational Church

This form is to be filled out by anyone in any compensated or volunteer position involving the supervision and custody of minors.

The covenants between persons seeking employment or authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the individuals participating and of the church as a whole.

Beginning such relationships with an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for a continuing and healthy covenant between employees or volunteers and the church they seek to serve.

The *Ellington Congregational Church* is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment in which infants, children and youth can learn about and experience God's love. We have a moral responsibility to provide the highest quality and safest care and programming possible in all areas of our ministry programs. In order to ensure this, all employees and volunteers who provide care for minors are expected to complete this screening form.

Date

Personal Information

Name

Address

Business Phone

Home Phone

Cell Phone

Date of Birth

Medical Training Information

Are you CPR certified or do you have any medical training?

____ infant/child certification

____ adult CPR

____ community CPR

____ day care CPR

Expiration Date of medical certification

Church Relationship and References

What is your relationship with the church (select one)?

Member

Friend

Youth

Other (Explain: _____)

If you have been participating with *Ellington Congregational Church* for less than 1 year, list the name and address of other churches you have attended regularly during the past five (5) years:

Describe any previous church work involving children and/or youth:

References (two people other than *Ellington Congregational Church* staff members and not related to you who know you well)

1. Name

Address

Telephone

2. Name

Address

Telephone

Have you ever been arrested and convicted?

If yes, please give a short explanation of the circumstances:

Has any civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct; physical abuse, child abuse, or financial misconduct ever resulted in a judgment being entered against you, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired?

If yes, please give a short explanation of the circumstances.

Has your employment or service in a volunteer position ever been terminated, or has any employment or authorization to hold a volunteer position been terminated, for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; or child abuse?

If yes, please give a short explanation. (Please indicate the date of termination, name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor, and nature and place of incident(s) leading to your termination.)

Covenant Agreement

The covenants between persons seeking employment and authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the individuals participating and of the church as a whole.

To that end, I attest the information set forth in this screening form is true and complete. I understand any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the position I am seeking to fill.

Beginning such relationships with an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for a continuing and healthy covenant between employees and volunteers and the church they seek to serve.

To that end, I authorize the *Ellington Congregational Church* and its agents to make inquiries regarding all statements I have set forth above. I also authorize all entities, persons, former employers, supervisors, courts, law enforcement, and other public agencies to respond to inquiries concerning me, to supply verification of the statements I have made and to comment on and state opinions regarding my background and character.

To encourage such persons and entities to speak freely, I hereby release them from all liability and responsibility arising from their responses, comments, and statements made in good faith and without malice.

The hiring and authorized volunteer recruitment process at *Ellington Congregational Church* involves the distribution of information of public record regarding applicants to those persons in a position to recruit, secure and supervise this position I am seeking to fill. I, therefore, authorize *Ellington Congregational Church* to circulate, distribute, and otherwise share such information gathered in connection with this application to such persons for these stated purposes. I understand that *Ellington Congregational Church* will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

Applicant Signature

Date

Privacy of Information

Completed screening forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Senior Pastor's office. Completed forms will only be accessible to *Ellington Congregational Church's* paid, professional staff.

Appendix B
SAFE CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR WORKERS WITH YOUTH
Ellington Congregational Church

Because we desire to be faithful in responding to the biblical mandate to “let the children come unto me,” because we want to provide the safest program for youth, and because we want to protect those persons working with youth, we will follow the guidelines below:

1. We will touch youth only in appropriate ways and places:
 - a. On the hand, shoulder or upper back
 - b. Never against a child’s/youth’s will (unless in the case of clear and present danger of the child/youth or another child/youth)
 - c. Never causing a child’s/ youth’s discomfort
 - d. Never when it would have the effect of over-stimulating a child or youth
 - e. Never in a place on a child’s/youth’s body that could be covered by a bathing suit, unless for clear medical necessity or when changing a diaper or helping a young or handicapped child/youth use the toilet.

2. The purpose of discipline with youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, and cooperation.
 - a. No youth shall be disciplined by the use of hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.
 - b. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults, or shouting.
 - c. When we encounter a particularly difficult youth or situation, we will seek assistance from the person in charge (Pastor, Director of Music, Youth Advisor).
 - d. We will respect youth with both our actions and words.
 - e. We will not use profane, abusive or derogatory language or actions.
 - f. All physical contact such as wrestling, horseplay, etc. or any other high contact games are not appropriate recreational activities in a church setting. As such, no youth advisor, or volunteer should encourage or initiate such contact.
 - g. Allowing children to roam the church building or grounds unsupervised shall also be discouraged.

3. All youth group participants shall remain with the group throughout the times of the activity. Under no circumstances shall youth be allowed to separate from the group activity and roam from adult supervision.

4. A youth advisor or volunteer shall not remain with youth alone in the building at any time.
 - a. If a youth has not been picked up on time by parents two adults shall remain with the youth to wait.
 - b. Youth should not be driven home by a volunteer or youth advisor alone in a vehicle. Instead parents should be notified or two volunteers or youth advisors shall bring the youth home with parental consent.

5. Any adults who will be providing transportation throughout the program year to youth events off the premises shall complete a Transporting Children and Youth in a Motor Vehicle form (see Appendix D). Completed forms will be kept on file in a secure place and updated regularly. Training shall include telling transport people that all vehicles must have enough gas to travel to and from the event before coming to drive. Persons in charge will check with drivers. Cars will stay together while traveling as much as is safely possible. Some form of communication between cars is mandatory (i.e.: cell phones or walkie talkies).
6. A complete First Aid Kit shall be brought by the leader of each event off the premises of the church.

Appendix C
SAFE CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN
Ellington Congregational Church

Because we desire to be faithful in responding to the biblical mandate to “let the children come unto me,” because we want to provide the safest program for children, and because we want to protect those persons working with children, we will follow these guidelines:

1. We will respect children with both our actions and words. We will not use profane, abusive or derogatory language or actions.
2. We will touch children only in appropriate ways and places:
 - a. On the hand, shoulder or upper back
 - b. Never against a child’s/youth’s will (unless in the case of clear and present danger of the child/youth or another child/youth)
 - c. Never causing a child’s/youth’s discomfort
 - d. Never when it would have the effect of over-stimulating a child or youth
 - e. Never in a place on a child’s/youth’s body that could be covered by a bathing suit, unless for clear medical necessity or when changing a diaper or helping a young or handicapped child/youth use the toilet.
3. The purpose of discipline with children is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, and cooperation.
 - a. No child shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.
 - b. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults, or shouting.
 - c. When we encounter a particularly difficult child or situation, we will seek assistance from the person in charge (Pastor, Director of Music)
4. To the fullest extent possible, a teacher shall not be alone with children or youth.
 - a. We will carry out activities in open areas, not in private offices or spaces.
 - b. Doors without windows will be left open when sessions with children/youth are taking place.
 - c. All teachers, youth advisors, aides or anyone else working with children and youth shall strive to not place themselves in a compromising situation by being alone with a child or youth out of sight of other teachers, youth advisors, aides, or parents.
5. Toileting young children:
 - a. All teachers, advisors, or aides will wait outside the bathroom door for children while they are performing personal sanitary functions.
 - b. When able, a child should take care of his/her own clothes after toileting.
 - c. When a child needs help with his/her clothing the adult should have the child step out of the stall and into an open area.
 - d. Any adult who is helping a child go to the bathroom should inform the other adult in the that this is what they are doing.

- e. When helping children to clean up from crafts and wash hands, the door to the bathroom should be left completely open.
6. All volunteers who work with children and youth shall participate in a yearly training event focusing on issues of child sexual abuse and the church's current policies and procedures.
7. Any adults who will be providing transportation throughout the program year to youth events off the premises shall complete a Transporting Children and Youth in a Motor Vehicle form (see appendix E) Completed forms will be kept on file in a secure place and updated. Training shall include telling transport people that all vehicles must have enough gas to travel to and from the event before coming to drive. Persons in charge will check with drivers. Cars will stay together while traveling as much as is safely possible. Some form of between cars is mandatory (ie: cell phones walkie talkies).
8. A complete First Aid Kit shall be brought by the leader of each event off the premises of the church

Appendix D

TRANSPORTING CHILDREN & YOUTH IN A MOTOR VEHICLE

Ellington Congregational Church

All people who will transport children/youth within the scope of a church program are to complete this form. Completed forms should be kept on file in a secure place and shall be updated regularly.

Attached to this form shall be copies of:

Current Driver's License

Proof of Insurance

Current Vehicle Registration

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

(Home)

(Work)

(Cell)

Your Vehicle:

Make and Model

Year

Color

Is your vehicle in good repair, and equipped with safety restraints (including those for infants and young children if you will be transporting them)?

Have you ever had a Driver's License revoked or suspended? If so, give details

Have you ever been convicted or cited for DWI (driving while impaired)?

If yes, give details as to where and when each such charge was made, and describe the outcome:

In transporting children/youth, I agree to:

- Obey all traffic regulations including speed limits and safety restraint requirements,
- Transport only the number of persons my vehicle is equipped to carry,
- Drive only when I am not under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicating drugs.

Signed

Date

Attest Statement

Under penalty of perjury, I swear or affirm that the information given above is true, complete and correct. I understand and agree that a complete background investigation may be conducted with respect to me, and this information may be verified by contacting persons and organizations with whom I have had contact or which may have information concerning me. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides such information. I also agree to release and hold harmless the *Ellington Congregational Church*, its officers, employees, agents, and volunteers.

Applicant's Signature

Date

Witness

Person receiving/reviewing this form

Appendix E

REPORT OF SUSPECTED ABUSE

Ellington Congregational Church

Reported by:

Name and Title

Address

Telephone (including area code)

Date of Report:

Person suspected of misconduct:

Name and Title

Address

Telephone (including area code)

**Other person(s) involved
(witnesses or victims):**

Names

Age and Sex

Address

Telephone (including area code)

Describe incident(s) of suspected abuse, including date(s), time(s), and location(s):

Identify eyewitnesses to the incident, including names, addresses, and telephone numbers, where available:

Other information which may be helpful to the investigation: