

Conduct with Children Policy

Purpose

We recognize that interaction between our youth and adults is a valuable part of the UU experience, not only for the youth, but also for the adults. However, we want to ensure that all such interactions and relationships protect the inherent worth and dignity of our children and that they are protected against improper interactions and relationships.

Adult/Child Relationships

1. Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for friendship is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. A “friendship” is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This definition is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. Therefore, it is the adult volunteer or compensated worker’s responsibility to avoid or discourage inappropriate friendships.
2. Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These relationships can be healthy and transformative for both. However, it is our concern that someone who might not have the best interest of the youth at heart could try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if an adult wishes to be in contact with a youth outside of the normal channels of congregational events, it is imperative that his or her behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any relationship developed between an adult and a youth outside of congregational activities must be with the knowledge and consent of the youth’s parents. This policy is for the protection of the youth and the adult. Adults will best protect themselves from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the parents informed of their actions.
3. Adults who work with children and youth of the congregation are responsible first to the children and youth, and to the congregation as well. Sometimes an adult will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. It is the congregation’s policy that information be communicated to the minister or DRE immediately. For this reason, please try never to give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. Confidentiality is not secret keeping. For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when the information is of a major, crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. Consult with a person of greater authority in the congregation, the minister or the DRE, about an appropriate course of action.
4. It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This policy refers to both explicitly sexual behavior, and also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for instance, or to make double entendres. Physical expressions of

affection such as hugs certainly have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate such expressions, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.

5. Ask permission of a child before giving them a hug or a kiss, or holding their hand. This permission gives them the opportunity to say no if they are uncomfortable.
6. Corporal punishment or abusive language will not be permitted under any circumstances and may result in immediate removal from the teaching/mentoring position.

Implementation/Enforcement

It is expected that all members are aware of this policy and shall report, as soon as possible, any violation to the Minister or a member of the Board of Trustees, who will then take appropriate action, including implementation of the Policy on Disruptive Behavior.