

New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ “Safer Spaces” Policy

The New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ is committed to creating and maintaining a worship and work community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Specifically, all persons associated with this Conference and/or utilizing Conference facilities should be aware that the Conference is opposed to sexual, spiritual, emotional and physical exploitation and harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by Conference Policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the Conference to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior which is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

The policies and procedures set forth in this document apply to all activities which take place within the buildings and properties of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ as well as any programs, activities or events scheduled as part of the ministry of the conference which take place off the properties of the conference.

All persons engaged in the ministry of this Conference (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, designated volunteers, 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. Harassment or exploitation of individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of the Conference is unethical and unprofessional behavior that will not be tolerated within this Conference.

It is the policy of the Conference to encourage its elected or appointed leaders, authorized ministers, employees and designated volunteers to nurture safety within all relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

It is also expected that those engaged in providing ministry, i.e. Staff hired and compensated by the NHCUCC on a part-time, full-time, temporary or permanent basis and Authorized Volunteers who have been recruited, screened and endorsed by the appropriate conference Council, Commission, Board or Committee, will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form that is inclusive, but not

limited to, the one accompanying this policy. The Conference will contact the agencies and personal references listed on the disclosure document to determine if those agencies or references have any concern about the person. Results of the contacts shall be noted on the form and the form retained in confidential Conference files. The Conference shall request a criminal background check on persons who are providing ministry in its name or a certified copy of a current background check.

It is required that all people who work with minors will have been members and/or actively involved with a member church of the Conference for at least six months, or with another faith community for at least one year.

It is the policy of the Conference to provide adequate supervision for all youth activities. There shall be at least one adult for every six minors, with a minimum of two adults present at all times. The gender diversity of adults should match that of the group. One-on-one situations between an adult and a minor must be avoided. Activities with minors shall be interruptible and observable by others at all times.

It is expected that those Councils, Commissions, Boards and Committees are responsible for seeing that this policy is implemented in all programs under their charge. Practices and procedures will be submitted to the appropriate body designated by the council for annual review.

Adults ministering under this policy shall, except in cases of extreme emergency, receive training in 'safer spaces' by their sponsoring group before the start of the program or event in which they are ministering. In these emergency situations, training should be received within 24 hours.

In addition to personnel, 'Safer Spaces' policies apply to the environment in which activities take place. The physical space, when reasonable, shall meet life and safety codes and be free from barriers and objects that put the participants at risk.

For minors, permission slips and health forms shall be received prior to any program or event and state clearly any restrictions a participant may have and list persons to be contacted if needed.

Any persons having knowledge or suspicion of a violation of this policy, especially in regards to abuse of minors, elderly or handicapped persons, shall immediately

and directly notify a member of the NH Conference Ministry team and follow the New Hampshire legal mandate.¹

This policy shall be phased in beginning September 1, 2003 and shall be fully implemented by December 31, 2003. This policy shall be placed in the hands of every parent every time they place a child in our care.

Addenda:

We encourage Association Church and Ministry Committees and local churches to develop and implement “safer spaces” policies that hold all ministers (including elected and appointed leaders, employees and volunteers) and congregations to the same standards of accountability as ministers with standing.

The Conference and individuals are encouraged to seek God’s guidance as they implement this policy.

¹ MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS

RSA 169-C:29-30 New Hampshire Law requires that any person who has reason to suspect that a child under the age of 18 has been abused or neglected must report the case to: **New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families - Central Intake 1-800-894-5533.**

RSA 161-F:46 Reports of Adult Abuse; – Any person, including, but not limited to, physicians, other health care professionals, social workers, clergy, and law enforcement officials, suspecting or believing in good faith that any adult who is or who is suspected to be incapacitated has been subjected to abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation or is living in hazardous conditions shall report or cause a report to be made as follows:

I. An oral report, by telephone or otherwise, shall be made immediately, followed by a written report, if so requested, to the commissioner or his authorized representative. When oral reports are made after working hours of the department, or on weekends or holidays, such reports shall be made to the police department of the appropriate political subdivision, or to the sheriff of the county, in which the alleged abuse, neglect or exploitation occurred. Law enforcement officials receiving reports under this paragraph shall notify the commissioner within 72 hours of receipt of such reports.

II. Within 72 hours following receipt by the commissioner or his authorized representative of such oral reports, an investigation shall be initiated by the commissioner or his authorized representative.

III. Investigations shall not be made if the commissioner or his authorized representative determines that the report is frivolous or without a factual basis.

Source. 1989, 7:1. 1995, 310:175, 183, eff. Nov. 1, 1995. 2002, 36:3, eff. July 1, 2002.