### General Purpose Statement

Peace United Church of Christ seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Peace United Church of Christ from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

### Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

### Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1. **Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Peace United Church of Christ for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

1. **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the Peace UCC office.

1. **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

1. **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicant’s references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Peace UCC.

1. **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

* Those who will be in involved in overnight activities with children;
* Those counseling or teaching children;
* Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children; and
* Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children (such as, church- sponsored activity leaders and vehicle drivers).

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Faith Formation committee and the Pastor on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Peace UCC and information not needed after the background check is completed will be destroyed.

### Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation. Even in these situations, another adult will be in the building within earshot of raised voices and able to view the participants through a window or from a distance. Public meetings at a coffee shop, etc., are also acceptable if each participant provides her/his own transportation to the meeting spot and the interaction occurs in view of other adults.

### Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

* **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
* **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
* **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
* **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

More in-depth definitions specific to the state of Minnesota are available at http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Faith Formation leader AND the Pastor for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and the church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The pastor will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

### Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. Parents should be encouraged to drop in as appropriate.

### Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

* Must be at least age 14
* Must be screened as specified above.
* Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

### Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below third grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be dropped off by a parent or guardian, who will let the teacher/activity leader know the plan for picking up the child. The parent or guardian must pick up the child at the room or arrange to meet the teacher/activity leader in another place, such as the sanctuary. The teacher/activity leader will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the circumstances with the parent or guardian.

### Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Peace UCC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

* Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
* Green or yellow runny nose
* Eye or skin infections
* Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

### Medications Policy

It is the policy of Peace United Church of Christ not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the teacher/activity leader to develop a plan of action.

### Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Peace United Church of Christ not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Faith Formation Committee chairperson or the Pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

### Interactions

Interactions with children are intended to affirm their place in the church and reflect God’s love. We want to show affection to children in ways meaningful to them. Therefore, most physical forms of contact with children should be child initiated and permission sought first. In addition, the following guidelines should be followed:

Appropriate displays of affection include hugs with upper body contact (A-frame hugs); pats on the shoulder or back; high-fives, hand slapping, and hand-shakes; verbal praise; touching hands, face, shoulders, or arms; arms around shoulders; holding hands with a person during prayer or when someone is upset; holding hands while walking with small children; kneeling or bending to hug small children; holding or picking up children three years old or younger.

Inappropriate displays of affection include any forms of unwanted or protested affection; full frontal or “bear hugs” with contact of hips or pelvis; touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas; lying down or sleeping beside children; massages; patting or holding on the thigh, knee, or leg; wrestling; touching or hugging from behind; games involving inappropriate touching; kisses on the mouth; compliments relating to physique or body development; showing affection in isolated areas away from others’ supervision and eye contact.

As a general rule, use no forms of affection you would not use if the parents were present.

Behaviors to avoid and to report if you observe them with others:

* Meeting alone in isolated places, including cars – use the Two Adult rule or make sure others are within eye line and earshot
* Showing favoritism
* Wearing provocative or revealing attire
* Meeting in a home or bedroom without other adults present the entire time
* Being nude in front of children or asking children to be nude in front of you (exceptions include diapering infants and toddlers, assisting in the restroom if needed – see restroom policy, etc.)
* Sleeping in bed with children
* Giving special or secret gifts
* Graphically discussing sexual activities or encouraging others to do so (outside of any human sexuality courses which may be church sponsored with approved curriculum and parental notice)
* Keeping “secrets” about relationships
* Showing affection when no one else is around
* Staring while others are dressing
* Commenting on particular aspects of children’s bodies
* Taking pictures when children are dressing or showering
* Shaming, belittling, or bullying an individual

### Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use the single-stall, accessible bathroom if available. If the accessible bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the multi-stall bathroom. One adult should never escort a child to the bathroom alone if they will be out of visual or earshot of the rest of the group. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. Ensure that the hallway is empty of observers. It is best if parents are available.

For children over the age of five, the child can use the restroom independently if it is within visual and earshot of the classroom. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the child inside. The worker should then keep an eye on the bathroom door and watch the child walk back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

### Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child’s parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker’s supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

### Training

**Peace United Church of Christ** will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events or make alternate arrangements to discuss the content. In some cases, workers will not be allowed to begin without having some discussion of these topics with the Faith Formation committee or designee thereof.