

**SOUTHMINSTER-STEINHAUER  
UNITED CHURCH**

**Policy and Code of Conduct for  
the Protection  
Of Vulnerable Individuals**

**February 2015**

# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why Have a Policy and Code of Conduct?	3
SSUC Commitment to Safety	4
When does the Policy and Code Apply?	4
Understanding Abuse	5
Some Indicators of Possible Abuse	5
The Profile of an Abuser	6
Grooming	6
Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals	7
Supporting Policies for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals	9
When a Child or Youth Discloses Abuse	9
Reporting Requirements	10
Further Incident Reporting Procedures	10
Internal Reporting Steps	11
Volunteer Process	12
Washroom Guidelines	15
Supervision Guidelines	16
8Specific Program Area Guidelines	17
Sources	17
Acknowledgement and Commitment	18

## Introduction

Southminster-Steinhauer United Church (SSUC) seeks to provide a safe environment for spiritual gatherings, social events, learning events and any and all activities it sponsors. We seek to ensure that all staff, volunteers and ministry personnel who work with vulnerable individuals share this commitment. This commitment will be demonstrated by showing respect for personal boundaries, protecting others from harm and abuse and enabling those in our care to learn and to grow without fear of exploitation.

SSUC recognizes that we have a legal, ethical and spiritual duty to care for and protect all who participate in our programs. We affirm that we have a duty of care and a commitment to act with due diligence to provide a safe space especially for our most vulnerable participants. Therefore, SSUC has developed the following Code to guide our employees/participants/volunteers in their interactions with and as vulnerable individuals. We nurture supportive relationships with vulnerable individuals while balancing and encouraging appropriate boundaries.

A vulnerable individual is defined as, but not limited to, any individual defined by culture, socio-economic status, geography, gender, age, disability status, risk status related to sexuality and gender, and or who for any reason may be at risk for economic, emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual abuse, or due to economic or health disparities. Examples include children, youth, seniors, persons that are physically disabled, persons with learning disabilities, mental health issues, and all persons who deliver services to or care for the above in at-risk situations.

## Why Have a Policy and Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals?

Southminster-Steinhauer United Church is committed to ensuring that all vulnerable individuals are protected and safe. The Code is an important part of creating safe environments for vulnerable individuals. The safety, rights and well-being of vulnerable individuals participating in our programs is a priority in our daily operations.

SSUC takes seriously its commitment to create a safe space for all who gather and participate in its programs.

Incidents of abuse can occur in any church – including SSUC. Churches have traditionally accepted the services of anyone expressing an interest in working as a volunteer with children, youth or other vulnerable persons. Churches are by nature trusting institutions. Asking sensitive questions of those who are giving their time and talent can be seen as intrusive by church leaders. No one wants to offend potential volunteers, especially long-time church members with a history of good service. These realities can make a church susceptible to incidents of abuse. There are few topics that create more emotional turmoil than that of child abuse, especially if it is sexual in nature.

A single allegation of abuse can devastate a church. A potential victim and their family are forever harmed. Members become outraged and bewildered. Other parents question whether their own children are safe. The viability of the church's youth and children's programs is jeopardized. Church leaders face blame and guilt for allowing the incident to happen. The risk of an unfounded accusation is also devastating for an accused individual and their family.

The intent of the Code is to guide our employees/volunteers in developing healthy relationships with the vulnerable individuals involved in activities or programs delivered by our church and to model appropriate boundaries for all parties engaged in a SSUC activity.

## SSUC Commitment of Safety

Southminster-Steinhauer United Church makes the following commitments to protect children, youth and all vulnerable individuals, and those who work and volunteer with them:

- 1) Screening of those who work with children, youth and other vulnerable individuals is important.
- 2) All ministry personnel and salaried staff working with vulnerable individuals will undergo a police information check.
- 3) All volunteers who work with preschoolers, children and youth will be made familiar with the nature of child sexual abuse.
- 4) All employees and volunteers who work with children, youth and other vulnerable persons will be made familiar with the guidelines contained in the *Policy and Code of Conduct Protecting Vulnerable Individuals*
- 5) The policies to prevent all abuse are regarded seriously and will be enforced.
- 6) All volunteers will complete a VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM and sign the *Policy and Code of Conduct Protecting Vulnerable Individuals*, agreeing to comply with SSUC's policies and guidelines.
- 7) In general, at least two adults who are approved volunteers will be present during activities involving children, youth and other vulnerable individuals.
- 8) In general, volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth only after they have been active participants of SSUC for a period of six months. (This provision may be waived where the person is transferring from another United Church of Canada congregation and has a letter of recommendation signed by a minister of that church.)
- 9) References for volunteers applying for any position involving work with children, youth or other vulnerable individuals will be checked. The right to require a police information check is reserved. A police information check will always be required in those instances where someone is a new resident or unknown to the church community or where an applicant's credentials cannot be verified.

## When does this Policy and Code Apply?

This Code is intended for use throughout every activity that is sponsored by SSUC even when a SSUC endorsed activity is being held by a third party or at a third party location. This policy does not apply to outside events or activities that are held at SSUC and for which SSUC has no responsibility or involvement save and except for providing space (with or without charge) for this event or activity.

# Understanding Abuse

SSUC understands that abuse can take many forms and at its root is a misuse of power when those in a position of authority take advantage of the power disparity with other individuals. Abuse can take the form of any of the following:

- Physical: including hitting, shaking, biting, grabbing, withholding food or drink, force-feeding, wrongly administering medicine, unnecessary restraint, failing to provide physical care and aids to living;
- Sexual: including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual assault. This includes but is not limited to rape, inappropriate touching or molesting, pressurising someone into sexual acts they don't understand or feel powerless to refuse, exposure to sexually explicit material, exhibitionism, allowing others to witness sexual activity, etc.;
- Emotional or psychological: including verbal abuse, shouting, swearing, threatening abandonment or harm, isolating, taking away privacy or other rights, bullying/intimidation, blaming, controlling or humiliation;
- Financial or material: including withholding money or possessions, theft of money or property, fraud, intentionally mismanaging finances, borrowing money and not repaying;
- Neglect: including withholding food, drink, heating and clothing, failing to provide access to health, social and educational services, ignoring physical care needs, exposing a person to unacceptable risk, or failing to ensure adequate supervision;
- Discriminatory abuse: including slurs, harassment and maltreatment due to a person's race, gender identity, disability, age, faith, culture or sexual orientation;
- Service provision situations such as a recipient threatening allegations if services are not rendered, documented overuse of services or abuse of volunteers/staff as described above.

## SOME INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE ABUSE

Church volunteers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse, as well as to behavioural and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

Behavioural signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behaviour toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” sexual behaviour
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- I don't like (names a particular person).
- You'll be mad at me.
- I don't like to be alone with (particular person).
- (Particular person) plays games with me that I don't like.

## **THE PROFILE OF AN ABUSER**

Who is the typical abuser? Some church leaders assume that abusers are “strangers wearing trench coats”. These stereotypes are not only inaccurate, but they also contribute dangerously to a false sense of security. Researchers in the field of child sexual abuse currently indicate that no single profile fits the various perpetrators of abuse. Church leaders can become preoccupied screening for stereotypes, while not suspecting the real molester could be an active adult or teen in the church.

If abuse occurs in the church, a respected member will most likely be the abuser. Emphasis upon “stranger danger” will leave the church ill prepared. While it’s uncomfortable even to consider this, the most likely assailants include teachers, religious educators, nursery or preschool volunteers, teachers in a church-operated school, camp counselors, Scout leaders, “concerned” adults who volunteer to transport children to church, and clergy. Trusted adults – male or female – can easily mislead children. Most incidents of child sexual abuse take place in the context of an ongoing relationship between the abuser and the child.

- Over 80% of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim.
- Most abuses take place within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- The typical offender is between the ages of 20 and 30 years.
- 20% of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18.
- Abusers are often married and have children.

## **GROOMING**

An individual who sexually abuses a child often uses a variety of techniques to gain sexual access to the child. The individual first gains the trust of the child and the adults around the child. An emotional connection is purposely built to reduce the likelihood that the child will disclose the abuse.

This process is known as grooming. Grooming is often a slow, gradual and escalating process of building trust and comfort with a child. The offender’s goal is to have the child see them as a caring adult that the child can trust and whose directions they should follow.

Grooming also includes the process of making inappropriate behaviour seem normal. This process of normalizing inappropriate behaviour can range from the telling of sexual jokes to physical contact. Once trust has been established, the result can be a child who is very confused, one who is torn between what they know to be wrong and their positive feelings for the offender.

Although the purpose of grooming is to non-violently access and control children, in extreme cases offenders may also attempt to physically maintain control over children.

In extreme cases, some offenders may attempt to gain control over a child through the use of threats (to the child, their pets or family) and/or physical force. This type of violence may be used to overcome resistance, maintain compliance, and/or prevent the child from disclosing the abuse.

It is of the utmost importance to realize that the reason cooperative and compliant children are victims is not because they were groomed, manipulated or brainwashed but simply because they are children.

## Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals

As a reputable congregation within the United Church of Canada that works with children, youth and persons of all ages, Southminster-Steinhauer United Church has developed the following code of conduct to guide our employees/volunteers. While every employee/volunteer is valued and unique, we come together as an organization in the best interests of children and their families. The safety, rights and well-being of children and youth we serve are at the core of our congregation's values and goals. We nurture supportive relationships with children and youth while balancing and encouraging appropriate boundaries.

Employee/volunteer misconduct will not be tolerated, especially as it relates to the well-being of the vulnerable individuals in the church's care.

### Treating Vulnerable Individuals With Dignity and Maintaining Boundaries

All employees/participants/volunteers must:

- Treat all vulnerable individuals with respect and dignity.
- Establish, respect, and maintain appropriate boundaries with all vulnerable individuals and families involved in activities or programs delivered by SSUC.

It is important to monitor our own behaviour towards vulnerable individuals, and pay close attention to the behaviour of our peers to ensure that behaviour is appropriate and respectful, and will be perceived as such by others.

All of your interactions and activities with vulnerable individuals:

- Should be known to, and approved by, your supervisor/designated person and/or the vulnerable person's caregiver,
- Tied to SSUC duties, and
- Designed to meet the vulnerable person's needs not your own needs.

Always consider the vulnerable person's reaction to any activities, conversations, behaviour or other interactions. **If at any time you are in doubt about the appropriateness of your own behaviour or the behaviour of others, you should discuss it with a member of the Ministry Team or Chair of the Board.**

# General Rules of Behaviour

Employees/participants/volunteers of SSUC must not:

- Engage in any sort of intimate or inappropriate physical contact with a vulnerable individual that may make the vulnerable individual or a reasonable observer feel uncomfortable, or that may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating reasonable boundaries.
- Engage in any communication with a vulnerable individual within or outside of role/volunteer duties, that may make the vulnerable individual uncomfortable or that may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating reasonable boundaries.
- Engage in any behaviour that goes against (or appears to go against) SSUC's mandate, policies, or Code, regardless of whether or not they are serving SSUC at that moment.
- Conduct their own investigation into allegations or suspicions of potentially illegal or inappropriate behaviour – it is an employee/participant/volunteer's duty to report the matter to the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board, and/or police and child welfare authorities, if applicable. It remains the prerogative of the police and child welfare authorities to investigate in cases of illegal or potentially illegal activity.

## What Constitutes Inappropriate and/or Criminal Behaviour

1. **Inappropriate Contact.** Spending an inappropriate or excessive amount of time with a vulnerable individual outside of designated work/volunteer activities, particularly outside of group or family interactions. This includes excessive phone calls, electronic communications (email, text message, instant message, online chats, social networking, etc.), personal letters, etc. that are of a non-professional or intimate nature.
2. **Favouritism.** Singling out the vulnerable individual and providing special privileges and attention (e.g. paying a lot of attention to, giving or sending personalized gifts, or allowing privileges that are excessive, unwarranted or inappropriate.)
3. **Taking Personal Photos/Videos.** Using a personal cell phone, camera or video to take pictures of a vulnerable individual, or allowing any other person to do so, as well as uploading or copying any pictures you may have taken of a vulnerable individual to the Internet or any personal storage device. Pictures taken as part of your employee/volunteer duties are acceptable, however, the pictures are to remain with SSUC, and not be used by you in a personal capacity.
4. **Emotionally abusing** a vulnerable individual through coercion, intimidation or threats.
5. **Engaging in economic abuse** by economically exploiting a vulnerable individual through demanding guarantees, loans and/or money.
6. **Telling sexual jokes** to a vulnerable individual, or making comments to a vulnerable individual that are in any way suggestive, explicit or personal.
7. **Showing a vulnerable individual material that is sexual in nature**, including, signs, cartoons, graphic novels, calendars, literature, photographs, screen savers, or displaying such material in plain view of a vulnerable individual, or making such material available to a vulnerable individual.
8. **Making fun** of or bullying a vulnerable individual. This includes language or behaviour that is criticizing, embarrassing, shaming, blaming or humiliating.
9. **Physically assaulting** or intimidating a vulnerable individual.
10. **Engaging in the sexual assault**, sexual interference or sexual touching of a vulnerable individual.



**\*Note that all criminal behaviour is inappropriate but not all inappropriate behaviour is criminal. All behaviour listed will not be tolerated, especially as it relates to the well-being of the vulnerable individuals involved in activities or programs delivered by SSUC.**

Whether or not a particular behavior or action constitutes inappropriate behaviour will be a matter determined by the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board, having regard to all of the circumstances, including past behaviour, and allegations or suspicions related to such behaviour.

## Supporting Policies for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals

### When a Child or Youth Discloses Abuse

A child, youth or other vulnerable individual may choose any time to disclose personal information about abuse. If this happens, the vulnerable person has shown a comfort and trust in their relationship with you and therefore it is expected that you respond in the following ways:

1. Listen. What a person needs when disclosing is to be heard. They fear an adult's reaction as well as not being believed. It takes courage to share such an experience. Listen attentively.
2. Control your reaction. Do not over- or under- react. Be aware of your facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice as the child or youth will be sensitive to your reaction. A young child can pick up on differences between what an adult is saying and how they are acting. This can be confusing to a child.
3. Do not correct language. A child who has been abused often uses slang for genitals and sexual acts. You should not try to educate a child about correct terms at this time. Doing so could make the child feel bad, stupid or dirty, or prevent the child from continuing to disclose.
4. Never communicate blame. Never imply guilt such as "I told you so" or "This wouldn't have happened if..." Be non-judgemental, verbally and non-verbally. A child who has been abused needs to understand that what has happened was not their fault and that they are not alone. In the case of youth disclosure, don't push. Understand that they may feel guilty for not saying 'no' or deny that abuse took place, not understanding that they were a victim.
5. Praise the child for telling. It takes courage to disclose and a child will often assume responsibility for the abuse. Assure the child that it is not their fault and that they did the right thing to disclose.
6. Protect the child and other children from overexposure. Respect the child's need for confidentiality and make sure that no other children are around to hear the child's disclosure. Only adults who will be directly involved in taking action should be present.
7. Show care and support. Adults can be apprehensive to communicate their support to a child after hearing that they have been abused. Research indicates that a child who discloses abuse needs appropriate support and understanding.
8. Avoid making promises. Promise the child that you will take quick steps to stop the abuse. Avoid making promises about matters over which you have no control, such as "I will make sure the offender goes to jail", etc.

It is important to let children know that other adults (child welfare authorities, parents, police, etc.) must be told about what has happened. This is required, even when they plead with you not to tell. Give them back some control by letting them know what is going to be happening next, and that you may be there as a support through the process if so desired.

# Reporting Requirements

All employees, participants and volunteers must report suspected abuse of a vulnerable individual, inappropriate behaviour or incidents that they become aware of, whether the behaviour or incidents were personally witnessed or not.

Where to report:

1. All allegations or suspicions of **potentially illegal behaviour** (for example, vulnerable individual sexual abuse) that an employee/participant/volunteer witnesses first-hand, must be promptly reported to police and/or child welfare authorities if applicable.
2. To ensure the protection of all vulnerable individuals in our care, all allegations or suspicions of **potentially illegal behaviour** that an employee/participant/volunteer learns of must also be promptly reported to police and/or child welfare authorities if applicable. Police and/or child welfare authorities will make the determination as to whether the allegation or suspicion requires further investigation.
3. All allegations or suspicions of **inappropriate behaviour** that an employee/participant/volunteer learns of or witnesses first-hand, must be reported to the Ministry Team or Chair of the Board following a report to authorities where applicable.
4. Where uncertainty exists as to validity of reporting illegal or inappropriate behaviours, the employee/participant/volunteer will immediately consult with the Ministry Team or Chair of the Board who must make the appropriate determination in consultation with police and/or child welfare authorities where applicable.

Keep in mind that you may learn of potentially illegal or inappropriate behaviour through the vulnerable individual or some other third party, or you may witness it first-hand. Examples of the type behaviour you may learn of or witness and that you must report as set out above includes:

- a. Potentially illegal behaviour by an employee/participant/volunteer of the organization
- b. Potential illegal behaviour by a third party, such as a parent, teacher, babysitter, coach

**Remember: You have an independent duty to report all suspicions of potentially illegal behaviour directly to police and/or child welfare authorities if applicable.**

**Some useful numbers:**

Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-387-5437,  
Alberta Supports Call Centre 1-877-644-9992  
Family Violence Info Line 310-1818,  
Crisis Unit 780-422-2001 or 780-427-3390  
If in doubt, call 911

## Further Incident Reporting Procedures

When a child, youth or other vulnerable person discloses abuse or inappropriate behaviour, or when a person learns of abuse or inappropriate behaviour, the following procedures will be followed:

- All allegations will be taken seriously and problems will not be denied;
- Proper reporting procedures as outlined in this policy will be followed;
- Pastoral care will be given to all involved, and referrals offered when needed.
- The only claim of confidentiality which overrides the legal duty to report may be that of a solicitor-client privilege. Physicians, clergy and others who consider their professional relationships confidential for certain purposes are not exempt from the duty to report child abuse or neglect.
- SSUC will not be accusatory, blame the victim or victim's family, and the nature of the incident will not be minimized by saying such things as "it only happened once" or "it wasn't that serious."

- The Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board will serve as the spokesperson for the congregation. They will speak to the media and the congregation regarding the matter in a discreet, informed, truthful and diplomatic fashion. Divulging details of an accusation in any public interview will not be tolerated. SSUC will endeavor to have legal counsel while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies. The accused will be advised to seek legal counsel and will be offered pastoral care.
- In the event of an allegation of abuse, the following will be affirmed:
  - It is always tragic when individuals are abused or exploited;
  - SSUC is aware of the toll which any form of abuse takes on all involved;
  - Careful precautions have been taken to protect the children entrusted to the church's care;
  - Accusations of abuse are distressing to all persons within the congregation;
  - The congregation will do all in its power to address any needs in the situation;
  - For the welfare of those involved, all information has been directed to the appropriate authorities.

## Internal Reporting Steps

Any potentially illegal or inappropriate behaviour between employee/volunteer/participant and a child, youth or other vulnerable person must be reported immediately, first to the appropriate authorities if the behaviour indicates it; then to the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board, who will report the incident to the child's parent(s) if appropriate, and engage SSUC internal reporting policy.

If any volunteer has concern for the safety or well-being of any child, youth or other vulnerable person, they should report the concern as outlined above and complete an INCIDENT REPORT FORM. If the alleged perpetrator is an employee or volunteer of SSUC, they will be advised of the allegation and suspended from duties. Pastoral care will be offered to all involved.

**IN THE EVENT OF AN ACCUSATION OF ABUSE**, the following reporting procedures will be followed:

When a child or youth discloses abuse by a SSUC employee or volunteer:

1. The person who receives the disclosure contacts the appropriate police/child welfare agency or contacts the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board to assist them in reporting to the appropriate police/child welfare agency. Document discussion on INCIDENT REPORT FORM
2. If the person who receives the disclosure has not yet done so, they notify the Ministry Team and/or the Chair of the Board. Document discussion.
3. The Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board consults Child and Family Services about notifying the child's parents. Document discussion.
4. If warranted, the Chair of the Board and/or Ministry Team meet with accused volunteer/employee to inform them of the allegation. Employee or Volunteer is told about the complaint without disclosing the source or details.
5. The Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board take steps to ensure that the employee or volunteer suspected of abuse does not have contact with children, youth or other vulnerable persons associated with SSUC until the case is resolved.
6. The Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board will seek legal counsel.
7. If a member of the Ministry Team is the accused, policies found in *Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures (August 2013)* of the United Church of Canada will be initiated.
8. Child welfare authorities and/or police carry out an investigation.
9. If the employee or volunteer is cleared of allegations, they may be reinstated to their position. All who were told of the investigation are informed that the person has been cleared of allegations. If the abuse is confirmed, the employee or volunteer is dismissed from their position. (In the case of ministry personnel, this will be accomplished by policies found in *Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures (August 2013)* of the United Church of Canada) If the abuse is unconfirmed or not substantiated, legal counsel will be sought.
10. Document the outcome of the investigation on the INCIDENT REPORT FORMS.

Note that many of these steps apply if a child or youth discloses abuse by someone outside of SSUC, a peer discloses on behalf of another child, or an adult suspects a child is being abused.

**IN THE EVENT OF AN ACCUSATION OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**, the following reporting procedures will be followed:

1. Information is revealed to any person of inappropriate behaviour by a volunteer or employee. Document information on INCIDENT REPORT FORM.
2. Employee or volunteer who receives information notifies the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board. Document discussion.
3. If concern is warranted, Ministry Team and Chair of the Board meet with the youth or child(ren) individually to discuss allegations and concerns. Depending on the nature of the misconduct determine whether the child/youth's parents should be notified about allegations of inappropriate conduct. Document discussions.
4. An internal investigation follows. If warranted, meet with accused volunteer to discuss allegations and concerns. Employee or Volunteer is told about the complaint without disclosing the source. The employee or volunteer is asked to share his/her version of the story. Document outcome.
5. If the accusation involves a member of the Ministry Team, discuss whether to enact policy from *Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures (August 2013)* of the United Church of Canada. If the result is the dismissal of the volunteer from the position, the Ministry Team and/or Chair of the Board meet with the volunteer to inform him/her. Document discussion.
6. If the employee or volunteer is to remain in the role, expectations are clarified with the employee or volunteer as outlined in the POLICY AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS.
7. Increase supervision and monitoring.
8. Conduct ongoing review of employee or volunteer performance. Document results.

## Volunteer Process

### **VOLUNTEER APPLICATION**

Prospective volunteers for ministry with children, youth and other vulnerable individuals must complete a VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM. (To protect the church from legal liability and for the protection of all volunteers, every prospective ministry leader – including established or long-time members of SSUC must complete the VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM.)

The VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM is critical in protecting the church from legal action if a case of abuse occurs in which a church volunteer is involved. To protect vulnerable people and to be protected from liability, the church must take reasonable action in screening and supervising the volunteers involved in any work with children, youth or other vulnerable people. A court can find the church legally liable if it fails to exercise due diligence in screening volunteers. By having prospective volunteers fill out a VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM, the church reduces the potential for abuse to occur and the resultant liability.

A member of the Ministry Team and Administrator will monitor the status of the application process and will ultimately place completed material in a secure Volunteer Placement File containing:

- Volunteer Application Form
- Signed copy of *Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals*
- Volunteer Interview Form
- Volunteer References Verification Form
- Volunteer Approval Form
- Police information check report (if required)

## **INTERVIEW**

An interview, conducted by the Ministry Team, a Board member, or their designate, provides an opportunity to review the important items from the VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM in a personal setting. The interviewers can ask follow-up questions and questions of clarification. The information given in the interview will be available only to the interviewer and the Ministry Team and Board Member or designate. The interview will allow the prospective volunteer the opportunity to ask questions about various volunteer opportunities and the reasons behind our child protection procedures and *Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals*.

## **REFERENCE CHECK**

Three personal references are requested on the VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM. References that are acceptable are limited to the following:

- Former or present minister;
- Long-time friend (minimum of 5 years);
- One parent (for minors);
- Teacher (for minors);
- Congregational member (who has sufficient strength of relationship to comment on the individual's personal habits and character);
- Employer or colleague.

At least two of these references will be contacted and asked to affirm the appointment of the volunteer. The person making the contacts, the date, and a summary of the reference's comments will all be recorded on the VOLUNTEER REFERENCES VERIFICATION FORM which will become part of the individual's Volunteer Placement File.

## **POLICE INFORMATION CHECK**

SSUC requires a police information check from any prospective volunteer. (Ministry personnel must provide a current police information check for their own protection and for the protection of the church as outlined by Presbytery policy.) Minors (under 16 years of age) are exempt from a police information check.

The cost for a police information check requested by SSUC will generally be borne by the potential volunteer, except where in the discretion of the Ministry Team, it would be a barrier to the participation of the potential volunteer.

The police information check report is to be brought to a member of the Ministry Team. If there is no criminal record of any sort, the volunteer may be considered for ongoing service in the church. If there is a record or information which raises some concern, the Ministry Team and Board Chair, will meet to discuss and resolve the matter.

Criminal convictions which would automatically disqualify individuals from working with children and youth and other vulnerable persons are:

- A criminal conviction for a sexual offense involving a minor.
- Other offenses where the particular circumstances would strongly suggest that a person should not be considered for leadership or assistance in activities involving children, youth or other vulnerable persons at SSUC.

If the prospective volunteer has convictions for offenses that do not relate to assault or sexual assault, the volunteer is not automatically disqualified and may proceed with ministry in the church provided both the Ministry Team and the Board chairperson agree. The following are criteria to consider when evaluating the information:

- The number and type of convictions;
- The age and circumstances of the offender at the time of the offense;
- The length of time between the date of the criminal conviction and the present;
- The conduct and circumstances of the individual since the offense;
- The likelihood of the individual repeating the offense.

If any offense is related to the abuse of children or is of a sexual nature, the prospective volunteer will not be approved for ministry with children, youth or other vulnerable people at SSUC.

The information contained in the police information check report is considered strictly confidential. Only the Ministry Team and Board chairperson will be privy to the information.

The information will be noted and the submitted police information report will be returned to the potential volunteer.

### **APPROVAL AND RECORD KEEPING**

The Administrator or a member of the Ministry Team will review the materials and complete the VOLUNTEER APPROVAL FORM. A prospective volunteer becomes an approved volunteer once the Ministry Team signs the VOLUNTEER APPROVAL FORM. All volunteer application materials will be kept in a confidential, secure Volunteer Placement File on SSUC premises for a minimum of 7 years. The administrator will maintain the records and ensure files and police record checks are kept current, requesting a new check after three years.

### **EDUCATION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Routines will be established for the training of all new employees and volunteers who serve the church. Employees who will be working with children or youth or other vulnerable individuals will be introduced to the *Code of Conduct to Protect Vulnerable Individuals* upon being called or hired.

New volunteers will be educated by way of training or orientation sessions about the policy, which shall occur in the congregation at least once a year. Depending upon the circumstances and the time of year, an individual training session may also be offered for a volunteer who joins a program mid-Year. Individuals who apply to begin volunteering after a program is under way must still complete the volunteer approval process. The initial policy orientation/training session may be arranged on an individual or small-group basis.

# Washroom Guidelines

Parents are to be encouraged to take their children to visit the washroom prior to each class or gathering. This recommendation is to be communicated to parents at the beginning of each new year, and throughout the year to newcomers.

## A. Baby and Toddler Care

As a general rule, volunteers in the nursery will not be expected to change diapers. However in the event that this becomes necessary the following rules will apply:

- Diaper changing must always take place in such a way that another nursery volunteer or responsible adult can see the child being changed.
- Young volunteers must be 13 years of age or older, with appropriate training, before being permitted to change diapers.
- A volunteer should never be alone with a child in a washroom, especially with the door closed. If a toddler needs to use the washroom, the volunteer shall remain outside the open bathroom door. If the child needs assistance, the adult may enter the washroom to assist only when a second adult is within visual contact.
- For the protection of male volunteers, it would be wise for men to avoid assisting boys or girls of any age in the washrooms. It is suggested that only women assist children in the washrooms.

## B. Preschool

- For a group of preschoolers, two adults will escort the children to the washroom.
- If just one child must go to the washroom, the adult volunteer should escort the child to the washroom, check the room for others and prop the outside door open. The volunteer should then remain outside the washroom door and wait for the child before escorting the child back to the classroom. The volunteer should call the child's name if they are taking longer than seems necessary.
- The volunteer should never be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom and never go into a washroom cubicle with a child and shut the door.
- When preschool children need assistance in the washroom, an adult may enter the washroom cubicle to assist only when a second adult is within visual contact. If this is not possible, inform another adult when taking a child to the washroom and when returning.
- For the protection of male volunteers, it would be wise for men to avoid assisting boys or girls of any age in the washrooms. It is suggested that only women assist children in the washrooms.

## C. Ages 5-7

- A child seven years of age or younger should not be sent to the washroom alone, but should be accompanied by an adult volunteer.
- For children seven years of age and under, the adult volunteer should escort the child to the washroom, check the room for others, and prop the door open to make sure that everything is in order. The volunteer should then remain outside the washroom door and wait for the child before escorting him or her back to the classroom.
- The volunteer should call the child's name if they are taking longer than seems necessary.
- The volunteer should never go into a washroom cubicle with a child/youth and shut the door.

# Supervision Guidelines

Church employees and volunteers should always conduct themselves appropriately, being an example of integrity, respect and honesty to those in their care. The goal of SSUC is to provide a safe and loving environment where children, youth and all vulnerable individuals feel comfortable and are protected.

## A. Supervision

Programs that involve children and youth must always include adequate supervision. Supervision should also be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

## B. Two Adults

In general, there are to be at least two adults in any enclosed room with children, youth or vulnerable individual(s). Family (couple) volunteer teams work well and are encouraged as a method of staffing. However, for the protection of this family, we recommend the presence of at least one other volunteer not related to the family.

## C. Discipline

Physical or corporal punishment will not be tolerated and will never be utilized with any child, youth or other vulnerable individual. Verbal abuse, shaming or humiliating of a child, youth or other vulnerable individual will likewise not be tolerated. Calm dialogue, consequences such as sitting out, distraction with a different activity, or being removed from the classroom and to the care of their parent/guardian are all options available to leaders. When in doubt, confer with the Ministry Team.

## D. Parental Permission

Consent of a parent must be obtained before transporting or being alone with a child or youth. Children and youth must also have written parental permission for involvement in overnight programs or other church-sponsored field trips or outings.

## E. Day Trips

Activities conducted away from church property must be pre-approved by the Ministry Team or Chair of the Board.

- Parents should be notified at least one week prior to the outing.
- A completed ACTIVITY PERMISSION FORM is required for each child participating in day trips.
- Day trips must be supervised by a minimum of two approved, unrelated adult leaders.
- All supervising adults must be approved volunteers.
- When transporting children or youth is involved in an activity, all drivers must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance. The number of persons per car must never exceed the number of seat belts.

## F. Overnight Events

Overnight activities must be pre-approved by Ministry Team or Chair of the Board.

- Parental permission should be secured in writing for over-night events.
- A completed ACTIVITY PERMISSION FORM is required for each child participating in overnight events.
- Overnight trips must be supervised by a minimum of two approved, unrelated adult leaders, representing both genders.
- Overnight activities should have a minimum of two adult leaders, adding one additional adult for every 5 participants over 10 participants (eg. 15 participants = 3 leaders; 20=4). Each leader should have an assigned group of children/youth for whom they will be responsible during the overnight event.
- All supervising adults must be approved volunteers.



## Specific Program Area Guidelines

### A. Baby and Toddler Care and kidSPIRIT

- All volunteers must wear name tags so that they can be easily identified.
- Two adults should be with any group of children. If it is necessary for an adult to be alone with children/youth for a short time, there must be a window in the door providing an unobstructed view of the children/youth or the door must be left open.
- There should never be opportunity for one adult and one child/youth to be alone together.
- Each Sunday, a member of the Ministry Team (or designate) should make regular visits to ensure each class is properly staffed and supervised.
- In the Baby/Toddler Care room staffed by volunteers, a sign-up sheet indicating child's name, parent's name and parent's location should be provided.
- Children should not be dropped-off in any classroom without a leader or care-giver present and acknowledging their arrival.
- All baby care, toddler and kidSPIRIT aged children should be released only to a parent or adult family member known to the volunteer. This means that children will either remain in their classroom until a family member arrives or the class will return together to the parents' location.
- Washroom guidelines, page 14 above, shall be followed as closely as possible.
- Observe the guidelines for Rules of Behaviour and Inappropriate Behaviour, pages 6-8 above.
- When in doubt, confer with the Ministry Team or Board Chair.

### B. Youth Programs

- Two adult leaders should always be present at any youth group activity.
- There should never be opportunity for one adult and one child/youth to be alone together.
- Each Sunday, a member of the Ministry Team (or designate) should make regular visits to ensure each class is properly staffed and supervised.
- Obtain parental permission for youth to be transported or involved in youth group activities offsite. See ACTIVITY PERMISSION FORM.
- Observe the guidelines for Rules of Behaviour and Inappropriate Behaviour, pages 6-8 above.
- For day trips or special events, follow guidelines, page 15 above.
- Youth shall not be released into the care of anyone other than their parent/guardian or known family member without prior parental permission.
- When in doubt, confer with the Ministry Team or Board Chair.

## Sources

This document was created with the help of multiple resources, including:

Commit to Kids: Helping Organizations Prevent Child Sexual Abuse. Canadian Centre for Child Protection. 2011.

Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable People in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The United Church of Canada. Faithful Footsteps: Screening Procedures for Positions of Trust and Authority in the United Church of Canada.

The United Church of Canada. A Tender Trust: Helping Churches to Provide Safe Service



## Acknowledgement and Commitment

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read and agree to comply with the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church *Policy and Code of Conduct for the Protection of Vulnerable Individuals*.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Volunteer's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
SSUC Staff/Administrator Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Please bring this page to sign in the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church office when you return your application package/forms.*