

**First Parish in Concord  
Unitarian Universalist**



# Religious Education Handbook

Guidelines for teachers and program  
leaders working with Children and Youth

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## Safety and Health

### Fire

Smoke is the most serious danger, not flames. The building sprinkler system is designed to save the structure but by the time the system is set off, the heat and smoke could well be harmful and possibly fatal.

1. The first thing to do in case of a fire is **move people out of the building** calmly and in an orderly fashion. It is important to know where exits are and to keep exit paths clear of obstructions.
2. **Stay with your students** and **take attendance clipboard with you**. Each classroom has a designated emergency gathering spot outside the church. Teachers must take a head count and make sure all children in the class have been accounted for.
3. There are clearly marked fire extinguishers throughout the buildings. Trying to put out a fire with an extinguisher should be secondary to removing people.
4. All exits should remain clear of toys, boxes, etc.
5. There are two highly sensitive smoke detectors in the downstairs Nursery School rooms. If you are using hot plates or heat producing instruments they could trip off the alarm in the Concord Fire Station unless you are careful not to let smoke accumulate. (Open windows and doors quickly.)

### Fire Emergency Gathering Locations

Location #1: Milldam Play Yard (behind the church)  
Lower level classrooms (in the Milldam space)

Location #2: Courtyard/Lawn in front of the white houses  
RE classrooms: Bulkeley, Brooks, Emerson, Greeley & Ripley,  
Chapel, Wright Tavern

Maps of emergency exit routes are posted.

### Chalice Lighting Safety

Please DO NOT light candles of any kind in the classroom. This year we ask all teachers to “light” a LED candle, battery-operated candle or use a flannel board (Little RE) for the classroom Chalice Lighting. This way the flaming chalice, symbol of Unitarian Universalism can remain lit for the entire session and be symbolically extinguished at the end.

## First Aid

1. **First Aid Kits** are located in the RE Office and the RE supply closets.
2. **Incident Report Form:** If you or another adult have to administer any form of First Aid, including just putting a Band-Aid on a child, you must fill out an Incident Report Form. If possible, notify the parent/guardian about the injury or incident and ask them to sign the form. The form should be given to the MRE or put in her mailbox.
3. **Head or Body Injury:** If a child is seriously injured, **do not move** them. Have one adult teacher stay with the child and send a responsible messenger to the nearest land-line phone to call 911. Nearest phone locations:
  - a. Main Office: Emerson, Greeley, Ripley, Brooks or Bulkeley rooms, Wright Tavern
  - b. Chapel: Minister's Offices
  - c. Milldam hallway: Milldam classrooms
4. **Bee and Wasp Sting Allergies: Immediate response is critical.** If children have severe allergies we ask parents to bring an EpiPen with them on Sunday morning. Allergy information is listed on the attendance sheets for all classes. If a child has a severe reaction (swelling, trouble breathing) then administer the EpiPen (if available) and immediately call 911. Send a messenger to notify parents and a church staff member. If a church staff member is not present, please remain with the family until medical care arrives. If a child is stung and there is no allergy alert information, it is still important that you contact the parents immediately since allergies can develop unexpectedly.
5. **Food Allergies:** Parents/guardians of children with allergies or dietary restrictions should be proactive in providing this information during RE registration. During a child's first visit and/or first contact with a teaching team member, the teacher will ask the parent/guardian and/or child (as age-appropriate) about any allergies or other dietary restrictions and record this information. A snack is served in RE classrooms as part of the regular lesson plan. If there are allergies in a class, the MRE will confirm which foods may be served.
6. **EpiPens:** Some children who have severe allergies carry their own EpiPens or their parents carry them. EpiPens are an injection that must be administered into the thigh. If a child is having an allergic reaction it is important to administer the EpiPen immediately. We do not keep EpiPens at First Parish. If a child is experiencing swelling or trouble breathing and it could be an allergic reaction, dial 911 and then send someone to contact the parent.
7. **Food Planning:** Please consult with RE staff before planning cooking or food-related activities. Teachers are asked to be mindful of allergies and other dietary restrictions. If children in your class have allergies, please inform the MRE well in advance so she can confirm about food safety with parents/guardians. We are unable to accept food donations without advance notice.

## **Food Allergy Awareness**

For the safety of children in our program with life-threatening peanut allergies, **snacks provided in RE classes do not contain peanuts and have not been manufactured where peanuts are processed.** Occasionally, RE programming will include food-related activities and the First Parish community will be notified in advance through our weekly RE Announce. To help us keep children safe, if you or your child has had nuts or peanut butter please wash your hands and face and check your clothing before coming to church. If your child has any food allergies, be sure to note them in your RE Registration and check in weekly with your child's volunteer teachers.

## **Illness**

Any child who has a contagious illness should be kept at home. If teachers have any concern about the wellness of a child they should contact the MRE or ADRE. Teachers must wear gloves while changing diapers and dispose of gloves when finished.

## **Child Protection and Safety**

1. All adults working with children and youth must pass a CORI form background check annually.
2. In keeping with Safe Congregation Guidelines, there must be a minimum of two adults present in the building, in RE classes, at youth group meetings, and at other events or activities involving children of the church.
3. There must be no use of alcohol or illegal drugs at events planned for children.
4. All members of the First Parish community shall abide by our Code of Ethics.

## **Code of Ethics – Working with Children and Youth**

First Parish in Concord is a place of safety for all children and youth. Anyone working with children in a leadership role in any of our church programs has the social, moral, and spiritual responsibility to protect the children and youth both physically and emotionally. Both volunteer and salaried staff members of the church share this responsibility.

Leaders of children and youth at First Parish assume the responsibility to nurture, to teach, to share in, and to celebrate the spiritual and moral development of our children and youth. Leaders make a commitment to foster a positive sense of self, a spirit of independence, and responsible behavior in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

No leader shall engage in behavior which may be construed as physically, verbally, or emotional abusive. No leader shall ever engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth. Leaders shall refrain from being under the influence of alcohol

or illegal drugs, or any other drug that would impair their judgment or ability to function effectively in a leadership role with children or youth. In order to be in compliance with our Safe Congregation Guidelines, no leader shall be alone with any child.

Leaders will be informed of this Code of Ethics and agree to it before assuming their roles. In cases of any violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

### **Safety for Babies and Toddlers**

1. Parents must sign in and sign out babies and toddlers when they are dropped off and picked up each week.
2. Clipboards with sign-in sheets and allergy information are provided to Little RE teachers.
3. Children must be signed out by an adult parent/guardian. If there is any question or concern please contact the Assistant Director of Religious Education.
4. For the safety of the child and the adult, teachers must practice universal precautions when changing diapers. Plastic surgical gloves and disposable changing mats are provided in the diaper kits for children who need them.

### **Bathroom Policy**

In keeping with our Safe Congregation policy, two teachers must remain the classroom with our children and youth. Given that there are no bathrooms on the upper level of the RE wing, children in the Emerson Room, Greeley Room, and Ripley Room will go to the bathroom on the first floor accompanied by another classmate.

### **Religious Education Dismissal**

1. Children in third grade and younger must be picked up by their parents or guardians by 11:15am.
2. Teachers must stay with children third grade and younger until they are picked up.
3. If parents are late, teachers should ask the MRE or ADRE for assistance.
4. Children fourth grade and older are dismissed to coffee hour to meet their parents.
5. See the "Safety for Babies and Toddlers" section above for dismissal information for that age group.

## **Field Trips**

1. Parents or Guardians must sign permission slips when children and teens are leaving the church premises. Emergency information forms are also required for overnight visits or retreats. The leaders must take along the signed forms as well as a class list, which includes guardian's names and phone numbers.
2. In case of emergency, a medical release (on the Field Trip Permission Form) must be shown to hospital personnel before treatment.
3. A First Aid kit must be taken on field trips.
4. There must be a minimum of two adults with the group.
5. Drivers must have a valid driver's license, be of legal age to drive minors, and be covered by auto insurance.
6. Children must ride in a child safety seat until they are at least 8 years old or over 57" tall.
7. Seat belts must be provided for every child.
8. No child under 12 shall ride in the front seat of a car equipped with an air bag.
9. There must be no use of alcohol or illegal drugs on field trips.

## **Overnights**

1. All over nights must be arranged with the MRE, ADRE, and /or the Youth Programs Director prior to sending out any invitation to the children and the youth.
2. Adult supervision must be present at all times.
3. Those who volunteer to help during any First Parish overnight activity involving minors will be pre-screened as follows:
  - Must have been involved with First Parish for a minimum of six months
  - Two institutional reference checks, preferably in organizations where the volunteer worked with minors, such as scouts or school
  - Must have permitted First Parish to conduct a national criminal background check on them within the past three years
4. A First Aid kit must be taken on any overnight or retreat.
5. A class list with guardians' names and phone numbers must be taken.
6. The children must meet with the adults at the beginning of the overnight and must be informed of the overnight ground rules before activities begin.
7. The Sanctuary may only be used as places of worship. It is important to teach our children respect for these spaces as places that have personal and sacred meaning for our congregation.
8. Please discuss any plans you may have for the Sanctuary with the MRE.
9. No food or running games are allowed in the Sanctuary.
10. The organ is not to be touched by anyone – adults or children.
11. The Parish Hall may be used as a place for fun and games. Please remember that it is not a gym. There are precious paintings and furnishings. Have fun, but be careful.

12. Offices, Milldam Nursery School space, and the herb garden are off limits unless otherwise arranged with the Sexton.
13. To be in compliance with our Safe Congregation Guidelines, two adults must be present at all times when working with children and youth.

## **Essential Information**

### **Attendance**

Once the children gather in your classroom, take attendance. There are many ways that this can be done. Children and youth can help in taking attendance if you wish. It is essential to have a record of who is present. If there are children whose names do not appear on your attendance sheet, please add their names. **Please return attendance clipboards to the RE box for your group.**

### **Visitors**

Please offer a **Visitor Information Form** to all parents or guardians of visiting children and note the names of any students who are not registered on the attendance sheet. Ask them to fill it out and return it to you so the information may be included with the attendance. RE staff will follow-up with all new families.

### **Discipline and Classroom Management**

Our job is to make students feel welcome when they arrive and to provide a classroom experience that motivates children and youth to learn with enjoyment. Sometimes however, even with our best efforts to create a positive experience, conflict and disruptive behavior can occur in the classroom. Tips for prevention:

1. Create a covenant (a promise list): Create a list of rules with students that everyone agrees will make the class a pleasant experience for everyone. A covenant is typically created during the first session of each term and revisited periodically.
2. Foster a sense of community: Learn everyone's name and use them often, praise good behavior, let the children know you know their parents, and offer choices whenever possible.
3. Be sensitive to varied learning styles. Offer activities that engage auditory, visual, gross motor, and fine motor learning. Alternate whole group activities with opportunities for small group and individual projects.

Take positive, constructive action steps when there is a problem:

1. Sit next to a child who needs more limits or between children who distract each other.
2. Use positive verbal reminders about the agreed upon rules.
3. Use positive redirection and/or distraction: try to engage the disruptive child in a constructive activity such as helping the teacher or another student.
4. If a student continues to be disruptive, one RE teacher may take the child into the hall for a quiet moment. The child may return when collected.
5. If a child has repeated difficulty, please let the MRE or ADRE know. RE staff is available to help explore with teachers and parents how to enable the child to have a positive classroom experience.

## **Snack**

Snack is a regular part of our Sunday morning RE classes. Tostitos and water will be provided in all RE classes on Sunday mornings. In Little RE, Cheerios and water will be provided for our youngest children (0-4 year olds). These two snack foods have been selected to be mindful of food allergies and to make our offerings consistent and predictable. We are unable to accept food donations and any food-related activities without advance notice.

## **Children with Special Needs**

When children have special needs we depend on the parents to tell us. We will pass on any relevant information to classroom teachers. Special needs information is treated with discretion. Teachers should know we also encourage parents to speak directly to their child's teachers. Teachers should feel free to speak directly to parents and/or to RE staff to request information and/or to ask for help teaching students with special needs. Teachers should not hesitate to let RE staff know if there are any children having any difficulties in RE. RE staff are available to help children and their families have positive experiences at First Parish. If children or their guardians have accessibility needs, we will make accommodations as necessary.

## **Substitutes:**

You are responsible for finding a substitute if you are unable to teach on a given Sunday. Please do not wait until the last minute to secure a substitute.

When you need a substitute:

1. Inform your co-teacher
2. Call a person who teaches the same grade/class during a different term
3. Call a parent from your class list
4. Call a parent from a different grade/class during a different term

If an emergency arises on Sunday morning, please **EMAIL BOTH the MRE and ADRE:**

Rev. Amy Freedman: [afreedman@firstparish.org](mailto:afreedman@firstparish.org); Dawn Van Patten:  
[dvanpatten@firstparish.org](mailto:dvanpatten@firstparish.org)

## **Supplies for Teachers**

In each classroom storage area, there is a bin stocked with supplies.

- Pencils
- Markers
- Crayons
- Scissors
- A stapler and staples
- Scotch Tape
- Masking Tape
- Glue Sticks
- Glue
- Ruler

The RE supply closet on the upper level of the RE wing contains more supplies including paper, glitter, paint, and craft supplies. These supplies are shared with all the classes so please take only what you need. If we are running low on any items, please notify the RE staff.

Please check with us before purchasing anything for your class. We have a large supply of “stuff” in the attic and may have exactly what you need. Please keep your receipts so you can be reimbursed.

If you would like the staff to purchase or to find something for you, please let us know as far in advance as possible at the latest by **Wednesday of the preceding week.**

## **Kitchen Use**

If you plan on using the kitchen area and/or ovens, please let Doug Baker know by the preceding week: [dbaker@firstparish.org](mailto:dbaker@firstparish.org)

## **Religious Education Library**

The RE Library is located in the hallway between the Brooks and Bulkeley rooms. These books are available for your use as resources for your teaching. If you borrow a book and take the book offsite, please let us know. There is a sign out form on a clipboard above the bookshelf.

## **Messy Projects**

In order to keep our classrooms in excellent condition, please cover all tables and floors for projects including art and baking. Tarps are available in the RE supply closet. Please clean up all materials and tabletops when you are done.

## Milldam Space

If your classroom is on the lower level, please be respectful of the Milldam Nursery School's space. Please use only First Parish supplies and return all toys, books, and puzzles to their places on the shelves.

## Special Equipment

Please let us know if you need your room set up in a special way or if you want a DVD player, slide projector, or other equipment by the Wednesday before the Sunday needed.

## Sunday Morning Routine

- 9:30            **K-7 Teachers Arrive** to set-up their classrooms.
- 9:45            **Little RE Teachers Arrive** to greet families and sign-in children.
- 9:50            **Worship:** K-7 Teachers join congregation for first part of service
- 10:15           **Accompany Kids** to classrooms, following the Children's Message.
- 11:15           **RE Dismissal:** Children in Little RE, Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade should be picked up by their parent or guardian in the classrooms. Older children and youth will be dismissed to Coffee Hour.
- 11:30           **Teacher Review:** Please fill out a Teacher Feedback Form, Incident Report Form (if necessary), return supplies, and cleanup the room. Teachers may also want to look over next Sunday's plan together.

## Contact Information

If you have any questions, concerns or bright ideas to share, do not hesitate to contact our Minister of Religious Education, Rev. Amy Freedman. The best way to reach Amy is by email: [afreedman@firstparish.org](mailto:afreedman@firstparish.org). She would be happy to arrange a phone appointment or visit. For questions or concerns about Little RE, contact our Assistant Director of Religious Education, Dawn Van Patten: [dvanpatten@firstparish.org](mailto:dvanpatten@firstparish.org)