

Child Protection Policy

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Longmont, Colorado

UCC Longmont believes in the belovedness of each person. We seek to provide a safe space for people of all ages to experience God. As part of this commitment, we take these steps for clergy and staff:

- All clergy at UCC Longmont have completed federal background checks and are in good standing with the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ, including keeping up-to-date on ministerial safety and boundaries.
- All clergy and staff, whether they work directly with children or not, have completed background checks and reference checks.
- Clergy and staff who work with children and youth have been trained in our Child Protection policy, mandatory reporter training and First Aid/CPR training.

Volunteers are an important part of our children and youth ministries at UCC Longmont, and we want the best leaders for our children and youth programs. Lay leaders (volunteers) at UCC Longmont:

- Have been actively involved in the church for at least six months.
- Have had a background check at the beginning of their volunteer period and every three years after.
- Complete a training that includes child safety, boundaries, developmental stages, and age-appropriate teaching and guidance strategies. This is updated and reviewed annually.

Recognizing the trust that kids and their families place in us, we also take these steps to help our church be as safe as possible:

- Maintain open communication with parents and kids about these safety steps and why we take them.
- Model healthy physical, mental and emotional boundaries and respect the physical, mental and emotional boundaries of each child.
- All classrooms and meeting spaces used by children or youth have windows into the hall.
- Classroom doors remain open when children and youth are present, with the exception of when the building is heavily used and noisy.
- At least two responsible leaders are on-site for events with children and youth. Teens sixteen and up may be one of these leaders, if the other leader is an unrelated adult. This guideline is important for oversight, but also so that in the event of an emergency or injury an adult is able to focus their attention on the children while the other handles the urgent need.

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- An adult or older teen is never alone in private with a child. If a pastoral need arises and one of our pastors meets individually with a child or teen, they will meet in a space that is visible and will clearly communicate with guardians about where they will be meeting.
- If it is not possible for two adults to lead a gathering with children or youth, a second adult will regularly check on that group, or the group will gather in an open space, with other adults nearby. For example, we might use the Fireside Room during a Sunday morning worship service, or outdoor space during an event.

Digital ministry

Our community extends beyond our doors. We make use of technology in many ways, including:

- Our worship services on Sunday morning are livestreamed and remain available on YouTube for several weeks after the service.
- Children and youth may meet using an online platform like Zoom, Google Meets, etc.
- We communicate by email, text and phone.
- Church members connect using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter, and many of these social media platforms have their own messaging app.

These can all be important ways we connect with one another. They also bring important considerations for safety for young people. With that in mind, we covenant to:

- Make our communications as transparent as possible. Clergy and volunteers will only initiate digital conversations (text, email, chat) with children and teens with prior permission from a parent or guardian. If a young person reaches out by text or email, leaders will let their parents or a pastor know they've been communicating one-on-one in a digital space.

We do respect the privacy of children and youth and recognize that they may choose a trusted adult to discuss a challenging or sensitive issue. We also recognize that texting or chatting are often the most comfortable communication tools for children, teens and adults. The intention of this guideline is that adult leaders model healthy openness in digital spaces.

- We treat our online space like our church physical space. An online meeting with children or youth will have at least one of these safety criteria:
 - Two trained leaders from UCC Longmont (formal volunteers in our Children/Youth Ministry or staff) present
 - At least three people present, counting children, teens and adults (for example, 1 leader may lead online with several youth)
 - Be recorded and have the recording available to at least one pastor or staff member if needed.

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- In addition, online meetings will use at least one security measure to prevent outsiders from accessing the meeting for “Zoom-bombing” or similar activities. These could be: a passcode, waiting room and/or a private link.

Online Worship

Our services are live streamed and public on YouTube and Zoom. Recordings remain available on YouTube for several weeks after the initial live stream. We also value the worship leadership of our children and youth. This requires some flexibility and awareness about the safety and comfort of worship leaders of all ages, especially children and teens.

- During congregational participation in worship, we will show the congregation from the back. This applies especially during Bringing in the Light, where children and youth carry candles to the front of the sanctuary, or a Children’s Sermon/Children’s Moment or similar time that may take place in front of the sanctuary.
- When children or youth serve in other leadership roles in worship, for example, readers, or musicians, a pastor will confirm with them and their parents whether UCC Longmont has permission to keep that portion of the service online. If not, the service or that portion of the service will be removed from YouTube or made accessible only to authorized viewers. This guideline applies to baptisms, confirmations, pageants or any other service where children take part.
- If at any point an individual or family would like a recording of themselves removed from UCC Longmont’s YouTube account, they can contact the office at office@ucclongmont.org or 303-449-7670.
- We recognize that these guidelines may not address all situations adequately and that some situations, for example children in foster care, require extra diligence for online safety and/or photographs. If there is something we can do to make our worship space safer for you, please contact one of the pastors.
- Photos taken during children/youth ministry events may be posted in our closed church Facebook group, which is for active UCC Longmont attendees. They may also be used in church slide shows, which are occasionally shown during worship or for special events. Church leaders will obtain permission from children and parents before posting pictures of kids in public online spaces, like our Facebook page, website or on flyers. Volunteers and leaders will also get child and parent approval before sharing a picture on their personal social media accounts.

In addition to our Child Protection Policy, we also have a Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy which outlines our safety measures and response to survivors of physical or sexual abuse, and a Community Covenant which is the foundation of our life together as a church. You can find these on the church website or by contacting the church office, clergy, or lay leaders.