UNITED CHURCH OF GAINESVILLE  
SAFETY AND PROTECTION POLICY FOR MINORS  
(those under the age of **18**)

Prologue

The United Church of Gainesville (UCG) has a long tradition of outstanding spiritual and moral education of its children and youth. Over the years, countless volunteers have given generously, and with integrity, of their time, energy, and creativity to provide both traditional and experiential learning opportunities for children and youth. Now, at the urging of the United Church of Christ, UCG has developed this policy statement in order to be more intentional and specific in setting forth procedures to guide our paid staff and volunteers, as well as to educate the entire congregation about our mutual responsibility to assure a safe, secure, and nurturing environment for our minors.

1. Guidelines for Full- or Part-Time Paid Employees who Work with Minors

at UCG

1. All full- or part-time paid employees who work with, or have contact with, minors at UCG must complete the appropriate application form. The person who hires and supervises the paid employee is responsible for overseeing the completion of this form, maintaining those records, and updating them as needed. All childcare aides and substitutes must complete this form.
2. Hiring Practices
3. When a new employee is being hired for the positions of Coordinator of Children's Programs, Childcare Coordinator, Director of Childcare for 2 year olds and under, Director of Childcare for 3 year olds-5th graders, Children's Choir Director, Youth Group Continuity Staff, or Supervisor of Youth Programs, the hiring supervisor or committee must complete a criminal background check on this potential new employee. This background check must include: identity confirmation, national and county criminal records, sex offender registry status, child abuse/neglect records, reference check, and (if the employee will be transporting minors) driving records. Background checks must be repeated every two years.
4. In addition to completing an application form, childcare aides and substitutes must provide two references and submit to a background check as outlined above.
5. The following employees who work with minors must have current certification and/or training in CPR, AED, and First Aid:
6. Coordinator of Children's Programs,
7. Childcare Coordinator,
8. Director of Childcare for 2 year olds and under,
9. Director of Childcare for 3 year olds—5th graders,
10. Children's Choir director,
11. Youth Group Continuity Staff, and
12. Supervisor of Youth Programs.
13. Documentation of this certification must be kept on file with the employee's records. The church will pay for this training and certification.
14. Guidelines for Volunteers who Work Regularly with Minors at UCG
15. As a pledge of our commitment to the safety of our minors, all members of the Board of Children's Ministry, preschool teachers, and elementary school guides will be asked to complete a Volunteer's Information Form (a copy is attached). Anyone who has regular contact (at least once a month) with minors must submit to a background check as outlined in Section I. The person who recruits and supervises these volunteers will oversee the completion of these forms as well as maintaining these records. Only appropriate staff members will have access to the information on these forms, which will be filed securely in the church office.
16. Persons wanting to volunteer with minors at UCG must be known to the congregation as a visitor or member for six months prior to fulfilling a designated volunteer role.
17. People who volunteer for occasional events or special programs for minors are exempt from the Volunteer's Information Form and waiting period. A copy of this Safety and Protection Policy for Minors will be provided to these volunteers. These volunteers may not be used to satisfy the two adult minimum requirement (outlined in Section III) and must be supervised at all times. A record of all volunteers will be kept by the supervisor for each event or program.
18. Operational Guidelines
19. General
20. Parental permission is implied for any minor attending regularly scheduled church activities or programs.
21. Medical emergency release forms shall be on file for every minor in regular attendance at UCG activities or programs.
22. Two or more adults must be on duty during all church activities and programs involving minors in the 5th grade and under. See section II. C. for information pertaining to adult volunteers. For youth programming, no adult should be alone with one youth.
23. All program staff should wear nametags or identifying clothing so that minors and guardians can easily recognize them as staff.
24. At least two adult leaders will stay with minors at the conclusion of activities and programs until all minors have been picked up. Under no circumstances shall a minor be left alone to wait for a ride home.
25. The Coordinator of Children's Programs will oversee the Childcare Coordinator and Directors of Childcare in developing a sign-in and sign-out procedure for children in the nursery and at Activity Time. These procedures will include information about who checked the child in, at what time, who picked up the child, and the time the child was picked up. No one will be allowed to pick up a child who has not been designated by the legal guardian of the child. In addition, these coordinators will oversee the written weekly attendance records for every church school class. All of these documents will be kept on file for at least six months.
26. The Coordinator of Children's Programs will oversee, using her/his discretion, situations which require the transporting of children.
27. An annual orientation and in-service workshop on the Safety and Protection Policy, and procedures to follow, will be provided to all staff that work with minors at UCG. The church will pay the staff and their supervisors for the time they spend at this workshop. Attendance is mandatory.
28. Possession or use of illegal drugs by adults, youth, or children is prohibited at all church-sponsored activities and programs.
29. Persons in violation of the drug policy above will be asked to leave the event or program. All violations of the drug policy will be reported to the ministers. Additional consequences will be determined by the ministers and the staff members responsible for the event or program where the violation(s) occurred.
30. These policies shall be reviewed annually with the Board of Children's Ministry.
31. On-Campus Activities

1. The Coordinator of Children's Programs, Childcare Coordinator, Director of Childcare for 2 year olds and under, Director of Childcare for 3 year olds-5th graders, and the minister who provides supervision for children's programming, along with designated members of the Board of Children's Ministry will develop, publish, implement, and review annually safety procedures for minors including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Identifying infants and toddlers and providing for their security;
2. Escorting children from the church service to church school;
3. Maintaining records of attendance;
4. Accounting for children in the transition from church school classes to Activity Time and to other organized programs;
5. Developing rules for safe use of the playground;
6. Providing supervised access to restrooms. Only adults who have signed the Employee or Volunteer's Information form and completed a background check may accompany children to the bathrooms: Coordinator of Children's Programs, Childcare Coordinator, Director of Childcare for 2 year olds and under, Director of Childcare for 3 year

olds-5th graders, Childcare Aides, preschool teachers, elementary school guides, and Children's Choir Director; and

1. Releasing children to authorized adults at the end of activities.

2. Under no circumstances are children 5th grade and younger to roam church grounds unattended or to be released to find their parents.

1. Off-Campus Church-Chaperoned Activities
2. Permission forms, signed by parents, are required for trips off church premises, both during and outside of regular church school group hours.
3. For overnight events, when there are both female and male participants, there shall be both female and male chaperons. Chaperons for overnight events shall be approved by the Coordinator of Children's Programs (for events for children) and the minister who provides supervision for those programs. The recommended ratio is one adult for every 4-5 minors.
4. An adult shall not chaperon any overnight event until a Volunteer's Information Form has been submitted and a background check completed.
5. Education
6. A copy of the Safety and Protection Policy for Minors at the United Church of Gainesville will be given to all members of the congregation, to all paid staff, to all volunteers who work with children, to parents, and to each class of new members.
7. UCG will endeavor to provide appropriate ongoing abuse-prevention education to the congregation, staff, and all volunteers who work with children.
8. Reporting
9. Parents or guardians will be notified immediately of an accident or injury to their child. If an accident or injury requires professional medical attention, a detailed report (with a copy for the parents, the appropriate board, and the minister who provides supervision for the program) must be written by the adult in charge of the activity where the accident or injury occurred within 10 days of the incident.
10. Any violation of the Safety and Protection Policy for Minors at the United Church of Gainesville shall be reported immediately to the immediate supervisor and to the minister who provides supervision for the program.
11. By Florida law, anyone who knows of, or has reasonable cause to suspect, child abuse or neglect is required to report it to Florida Protection System (1- 800-962-2873).

UNITED CHURCH OF GAINESVILLE  
STATEMENT ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Prologue

The following Guidelines inform the members of the United Church of Gainesville (UCG) about the use of social media to represent UCG as a whole or any part, including boards, committees, and programs, services, or events that are church-sponsored. All UCG social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) are considered official church sites and administrators must adhere to these guidelines. In this document, the term "administrator(s)" will refer to those persons responsible for monitoring the social media site(s). These guidelines are to work in conjunction with the Personnel Policy regarding Electronic Information Systems.

Guidelines will be reviewed annually in December by the Council Executive Committee with recommended changes to be approved by Church Council.

The Church Council recognizes that members of the UCG Congregation may maintain personal social media accounts and are entitled to express personal opinions.

1. Purpose and Goals of UCG Social Networking Media
2. To increase awareness of programs, services, and events at UCG.
3. To provide new ways to communicate with church members and visitors, and to further build and nurture communities within UCG.
4. To protect UCG's name and "brand" as a reliable source for information about UCG and its programs.
5. Definition of Social Networking Sites
6. Social media include the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate and share information and resources via the internet. Social media may include, but is not limited to, text, audio, video, images, podcasts, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and other multimedia communications.
7. We encourage the use of social media among our members to create dialog, build community and spread information about UCG and its mission. Social media can be a useful tool when communicating information to groups of people, and should be utilized as UCG grows.
8. General Guidelines
9. Be responsible - Members of the UCG community are personally responsible for their posts. Official UCG statements will only be made by the ministers or their designees. Ministers, administrators, and their designees will remove posts that do not adhere to the guidelines outlined in this policy statement.
10. Be smart and respectful - Social media posts are visible to the entire world. Respect your audience and express your views with appropriate language and content.
11. Identify yourself - Use your real identity. Anonymous posts and comments may be removed.
12. Respect the privacy of others - Do not publish the personal information of others without their permission or, in the case of minors, written permission of their parents.
13. Do not tell secrets - Respect the confidentiality of matters shared with you in confidence, or are meant to be kept confidential by the nature of your work, ministry, or volunteer mission.
14. Don't abuse the platform - Communication may not solicit, advertise, or promote any business or commercial interest, chain letters, or pyramid schemes.
15. Be inclusive - When appropriate, groups should remain open to the greater church and public, except in the case where minors are involved.
16. Photography
17. Photographs of church-sponsored events can be a great way to promote UCG and share about the many programs we offer. We also recognize the importance of protecting and respecting each other's privacy. Therefore, photographs shared on a UCG social media network should be positive, informative, and respectful. In addition, those wishing to share photographs on a UCG social media network should adhere to the following guidelines:
18. A media release form should be obtained from parents or guardians of minors (under the age of 18) who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videotaped for distribution on a social media network of UCG. Only staff and administrators should post photos of minors. These photographs should never embarrass the minors or portray them in any compromised state.
19. Photos that are posted on a social media network of UCG should never include the name or contact information of minors.
20. It is important for our youth ministry social media pages to be used to update parents and guardians, friends, and supporters about the ongoing activities of our youth groups. Therefore, the minister with responsibilities for youth and his/her designee(s) may post photographs of youth to UCG social media networks. These photographs should never embarrass youth or portray them in any compromised state.
21. Photos on a social media network of UCG should not include the contact information for adults unless the adult has given permission for the publication of that information. Members should use discretion in "tagging" or otherwise naming adults in photos. Do not tag individuals in photos, allowing each person the choice to do so for themselves.
22. In the case of UCG employees, failure to comply with these photography guidelines could result in disciplinary action (see Personnel Policy).
23. Minors and UCG Social Media
24. Digital space will be regulated in similar ways to other church space in keeping with the UCG Safety and Protection Policy for Minors.
25. There must be more than one adult who administrates church-related sites, closed groups, list serves, and other online presence that involves the participation of minors.
26. Adults who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church- sponsored digital communication groups to maintain contact with youth members. These groups should include other adult leaders (employed, volunteer, and/or parents). "Closed" or "private," but not "hidden" or "secret" groups should be used for youth groups. These groups should have both youth and adult administrators, and only those known to the group should be permitted access to the groups.
27. Adults, including ministers, should not submit or initiate personal "friend" or "follow" requests to non-public social media profiles/sites of minors or youth.

If youth request online friendships with adults, the request should be thoughtfully considered. In most cases, accepting all requests or accepting no requests is advised. Adults who choose to accept requests from minors or youth should use all applicable privacy settings to shield youth from any age- inappropriate content that may exist within the adult's profile.

1. If minister or other youth worker (employed or volunteer) chooses to accept personal friend requests, mutual follows, or the like from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adults within the same community of faith should also have access to that adult's profile(s).
2. Any inappropriate material that is not covered by mandatory reporting laws should be deleted from church-sponsored social networking groups or sites. Any material that is covered by mandatory reporting laws should be reported to the authorized minister, documented for church records, and then deleted from the social networking groups or sites.
3. All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs, private messages, or video blogs with minors should be saved when possible.
4. Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth and, if initiated by youth, should include another person, preferably an adult.
5. Oversight
6. Any group or committee wishing to establish an official Facebook page or group must fill out a UCG Social Media Approval Form and submit it to their staff resource person. Any additional future uses of social media must be approved by the staff resource person.
7. A minister and his/her designee will be assigned to all official UCG social media and are to be made administrators in any groups on Facebook. All comment and blog areas must be moderated. Anonymous, profane, defamatory, off- topic, or otherwise inappropriate comments should not be permitted. Page/group administrators may ban repeat offenders. Those assigned to the

social media site must maintain possession of all passwords, urls, handles, and other access or identifying information of the social media site and these must be shared with the ministers and all other administrators of the site.

1. All youth and adults should be informed that any communication sent via digital methods is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others.
2. Inappropriate content will be deleted from official UCG social media networks.
3. All official UCG pages must include this disclaimer: "UCG maintains the right to delete comments and content to protect the privacy of members and visitors [other than you, the poster]. We reserve the right to remove comments that contain defamatory language about our organization or an individual or employee."
4. On issues of social media that this policy does not address, members should use their best judgment, bearing in mind that they are ambassadors of UCG. Members should contact the church office if they have questions about the use of social media. Use of social media that does not comply with these policies should be brought to the attention of appropriate UCG staff immediately.