

Section II: Children & Youth Ministry

Statement of Policy:

Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ is committed to providing a facility and staff that supports the faith formation experiences of both children and youth in a physically and emotionally safe environment. We recognize that all persons are created in God's image. Both the Old and New Testaments instruct the faithful to do justice and to care for all persons. The Faith Development Ministry Team will endeavor to create environments of safety and trust where adults, children and youth can mutually explore and grow in their faith.

Our intent is to provide a safe environment for children and youth to learn, grow, and experience God's love. We believe that effective ministry with children and youth requires relationships with caring, loving, and mature adult leaders who can demonstrate God's love to them. The safe church policies are intended to keep these relationships and all aspects of ministries with children and youth safe.

When adults and leaders are interacting with children and youth, they need to be in a safe place as well. Our intent is to create an environment that sets appropriate guidelines and boundaries and to provide the support that staff and volunteers need to be effective in their roles with children and youth.

Volunteer Leaders

The Faith Development Ministry Team invites friends and members of the congregation to serve as adult leaders. These leaders respond to the call to be partners in educational ministry and share their unique gifts and talents. Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ values their commitment and expects these leaders to follow the safe church policy. The Faith Development Ministry Team recognizes the call to serve in the educational ministry of the church as a special one. Volunteers shall be encouraged to use their talents creatively, and maintain a safe and caring environment. Activities will be designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment where adults, children and youth can explore and grow in their faith.

Friends and members of Rincon Congregational Church United Church of Christ may serve in volunteer leadership roles in educational ministry following an invitation to leadership and appropriate leadership development. Invitations to leadership may be extended by Faith Development Staff, members of the Faith Development Ministry Team, or a designee. All volunteers will complete a Volunteer Covenant Form, participate in appropriate leadership development and be familiar with the contents of the Safe Church policy.

As a partner in educational ministry, the Faith Development Ministry Team will provide opportunities for leadership development, as well as, ongoing support to adult leaders.

Creative problem-solving is encouraged among the staff, Faith Development Ministry Team and volunteers at Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ. It may be that resources such as the Faith Community Nurse can be consulted in particular

circumstances. Serious conflicts or violations of the Safe Church Policy will be addressed according to the procedures in the Safe Church Document under Section I.

Standards of Behavior & Actions:

A safe environment for children and youth necessitates appropriate adult supervision.

It is expected that all children and youth will either be in the care of a parent/caregiver, be in worship or participating in one of the provided Faith Development experiences.

When children or youth are participating in Faith Development experiences adult leaders will follow the Two Adult Rule:

The Two-Adult Rule states that there must always be two adult leaders present when supervising one or more children/youth. This rule is designed for the safety of children and youth as well as adult leaders. Planning ahead will help avoid the potential of being alone with one or more children. Compliance to the two-adult rule includes the following:

- There must always be two adults present when supervising one or more children or youth.
- The adults should be in sight of each other at all times.
 - (exception: see Bathroom Procedures)

Faith Development experiences are coordinated and supervised by adult friends and members of Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ in conjunction with the Faith Development Ministry Team, Senior Pastor, Faith Development Staff, and the Rincon staff. Junior/Senior High youth may act in support roles. Minors may not act in primary coordinating or event supervisory roles.

A safe environment for children and youth requires respectful behavior.

Children or youth who disrupt a learning environment or willfully ignore directions given by adult leaders may be removed from the experience and may be excluded from future Faith Development experiences until a solution has been worked out between a designated Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ representative, the child/youth and the child/youth parent/caregiver. (see Discipline Procedures)

A safe environment for children and youth requires respectful adult leaders.

Corporal punishment and/ or personal verbal abuse (name calling, bullying, habitual yelling, and degrading comments) are not part of a safe and nurturing environment at Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ. Adult leaders will respect all participants involved in Faith Development experiences. Inappropriate actions, including but not limited to the list above, by leaders will be referred first to the Faith Development Staff person or Faith Development Ministry Team and/or will follow the procedures in the Safe Church document under Section I.

A safe environment for children and youth necessitates appropriate boundaries.

The Faith Development Ministry Team recognizes and affirms the importance of physical contact among persons as a part of building relationships in a faith community.

- Appropriate physical touch is an important part of showing love and support to children. Nothing in the Safe Church policy should be construed as stopping an adult from hugging a child to show affection or approval for something well done or to comfort a child who has faced a disappointment or injury.

- Inappropriate touch will not be tolerated. Inappropriate touching between the child's shoulders and knees, kissing, any type of hitting, or any touch uncomfortable to a child is strictly prohibited.

The contents of the addendum with appropriate/inappropriate forms of affection will be provided to volunteers as part of the leadership development process.

Sexually inappropriate physical contact or verbal suggestions between adults and children or youth, or between adults and adults supervising the children or youth, or between children or youth are not acceptable. Complaints will be addressed according to the procedures in the Safe Church document under Section I. All staff and volunteers of Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ have a responsibility to report actual or suspected abuse of children/youth under the age of 18 whether or not it may have occurred in church ministry activities. Staff and volunteers will respond compassionately, seriously, supportively, without minimizing or explaining the behavior of others. Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ will respond immediately to and take seriously all cases of actual or suspected abuse of children.

A safe environment for children and youth requires appropriate procedures.

- All paid staff working with children/youth will complete a background check and/or fingerprinting.
- Paid caregivers will follow current best practices regarding health and safety procedures in caring for children in child care.

Children being cared for in the child care area will be signed in and signed out of the space by a parent/caregiver.

- First aid kits will be available in spaces utilized by children and youth.
- Injuries incurred during a planned Faith Development experience will be documented on an Emergency Action Form and parent/caregivers notified verbally of the injury by a supervising adult.
- A record will be kept of children and youth participating in Faith Development experiences.
- Children (5th grade and younger) will be picked up by parent/caregiver from Faith Development experiences.
- Following the Two Adult Rule, both adult leaders will remain in the meeting space until all children have been picked up.

Bathroom Procedures

- Child care: Children younger than 5 may be assisted in the restroom, if necessary. In this case, the restroom door must remain open.
- Children's Education: Children in Kindergarten-5 grades must be escorted to the restroom.
- The escort must determine if anyone is in the restroom. If the restroom is empty, the children may go in and the escort must remain outside the restroom and listen for the children in the restroom. If someone is in the restroom, enter the restroom with the children (if same gender) or wait until it is empty. If another person arrives, go into the restroom (if escort's gender) and stay there while the children use the facility.
- It is understood that having an adult taking children to the bathroom may leave one adult alone in the room with multiple children for a short period of time.

Discipline Procedures

Each person is a child of God and should be treated with respect, love, and support.

Clear rules and expectations and consistent messages about behavior are the key to effectively guiding a child's behavior. It is understood that the way in which these expectations and messages are presented is dependent on the age of the child and the child's developmental stage. Occasionally, children have trouble following the rules or display disruptive behavior. In these cases, the following steps will be taken.

1. The leader will talk with the child and state clearly what the challenging behavior is and what the child should do instead. For a younger child, the leader will attempt to redirect the child to another activity.
2. If the child continues to exhibit challenging behavior, the leader will intervene and the Faith Development staff person will talk individually to the child.
3. Upon the third intervention, the child will be removed from the experience and a parent/caregiver will be contacted.

Incident reporting:

Should an injury, conflict or abuse situation arise, an Incident/Accident Report describing the event will be completed by the adult leaders and given to the Faith Development Staff, Senior Pastor, and/or the Faith Development Ministry Team.

All incidents of a severe nature will be handled according to the procedures in the Safe Church document Section I.

Transportation:

For events located off of the Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ campus, transportation will be provided by adults (age 21 or older); each child/youth must travel with seat belt restraints. The accompanying adults should have copies of the signed permission slip and medical release from each child/youth. The driver will have proof of license, registration and insurance.

Emergency evacuation:

In the event of any type of emergency evacuation, children and youth and adult leaders will gather in the west parking lot to be reunited with parent/caregivers.

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