

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT FIRST PARISH UU CHURCH: GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to grow in love, understanding of truth, and service to one another in the world.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to live out this purpose in a religious community that is always open, loving, and accepting to those who share our purpose, principles, and values.

COVENANT

To accomplish our mission, we covenant for ourselves and our children:

- ★ To gather in recognition and celebration of our diversity, uniting the vision of love, truth, and justice offered by our Unitarian Universalist faith
- ★ To seek and encourage a deepening spiritual faith
- ★ To nurture and love one another through collective worship and meditation, exploring the mysteries and struggles of life, celebrating life's passages, sharing our talents and resources, and examining and reinforcing the values by which we act

Thus, we promise to care for one another, for the people of the world, and for the earth.

Our Religious Education (RE) program is a cooperative effort. You, as parents, play a significant role in the religious education of young people. Your active participation is encouraged as we share this important responsibility

FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

Arrive on time and come regularly. Children develop a sense of belonging by attending regularly. Encourage your children to participate. Classrooms are safe and fun when all children are willing participants in class activities.

- ★ Introduce yourself to your children's teachers.
- ★ When possible, let the teachers know if a child will be absent.

- ★ All children third grade and under must be delivered to class and picked up by an adult.
- ★ Be on time to pick up younger children. Pick-up is at 11:30.

Spend time together at church. Attend the 10 a.m. Worship Service regularly and make a special effort to be with your children at church family celebrations. Your presence and participation is appreciated. Our children learn to worship by worshipping with us.

Help with RE when asked, whenever possible. Religious education is a cooperative venture. All teachers are volunteers. We ask that you budget your time to include periodic teaching/aide experience at First Parish. There are additional opportunities to support the program. All families are encouraged to volunteer for jobs that help make the entire program run smoothly.

Register your children. We require the parent or guardian of children in our program to provide us with a completed registration form for all children and youth, to ensure that we have updated and correct contact information and emergency numbers. For those children whose parents are not regular church attendees, a sponsoring family will be identified. Those sponsors will act as a liaisons with the church—providing information on the child and ensuring that the child adheres to classroom behavior expectations or the youth group covenant.

Keep lines of communication open. The RE team is committed to providing you with as much information as possible about your child's experience at church. Periodically letters will be mailed to your home or, if possible, e-mails sent to update you on general classroom activities, special events, or projects. Please read the weekly announcements to learn more about church and Sunday School happenings. We are better able to provide you with information if our database is accurate. Any changes in contact information may be sent to the RE Director at dre@firstparish.info.

In extreme weather conditions, the church may close. If you are concerned about coming to church, please check the First Parish Web site at www.firstparish.info or call the RE Office at (781) 648-3799, ext. 5, to hear a recorded message regarding closings.

Help sustain the church financially. We ask families to make a financial contribution to the church. Without the dedication of its participants, our program could not be the successful one that it is. Substantial church dollars are necessary to support it. We expect that families will financially support this and other programs of the church in a responsible way as they are able.

Attend parent meetings. Some meetings may be required, and they are designed to help you and your child. We know that you are the primary religious educators for your children. It is our responsibility to support you and your children as they make their way through the RE program at First Parish. In return, we ask for your support and your time.

Share your point of view. Let your children know your thoughts, opinions, and values. Talk with them about why you think it is important to be part of a religious community.

Review the safety policies and classroom behavior policies (below). We need your help in keeping our classrooms and church welcoming and safe. You will be asked to help your child behave appropriately while participating in church activities.

CODE OF ETHICS

For People Working with Children and Youth

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well-qualified to provide the special nurturance, care, and support that will enable youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if this positive potential is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting youth in these areas of growth.

It is critical that leaders not engage in sexual or seductive behavior with youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Leaders will refrain from being under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or any other substance that would impair their judgment or ability to function effectively in a leadership role with children and youth. All teachers, youth advisors, and volunteers are required to review, agree to, and follow this Code of Ethics.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

It is our goal to have our program available to all young people. If children have special needs—behavioral, physical, emotional, medical, and educational—we want to know about them so that we can make arrangements that meet their needs. Parents are the most knowledgeable about their own children, and we ask for your guidance

and help. Please let DRE Tina Schultz know how we can make our programs inviting and successful for your child.

As a cooperative effort, we need to partner with parents for the best program for your child. If challenges arise, a team will be assembled to meet and strategize for the best possible educational plan. This team may include the DRE, members of the RE Committee, the Minister, and the teachers.

It is important to note that First Parrish's building is not physically accessible for all needs.

NURSERY GUIDELINES

The Nursery is available for our youngest RE students, ages 0–3. Our Nursery Coordinator, Amy Rogers, is an experienced child care professional, and she is assisted by members of our youth group. The Nursery will care for your children during church services at no cost to you. You are welcome to stay with your child in the Nursery if you wish.

- ★ The Nursery is for children 0 to 3 years old. The September after your child turns 3, we invite you to enroll him or her in our pre-K class.
- ★ The Nursery is open before the service at 9:45 a.m. and closes at 11:30 a.m. When you arrive, please check your child in by signing the attendance list on the clipboard and making a nametag for your child. Let the coordinator or her assistants know where you can be located during the service. Please pick up your child promptly at 11:30.
- ★ The Nursery Coordinator is not expected to change diapers or administer medicine. If you think your child will need assistance during the service, please come to visit at that time. The Nursery staff will help all potty-trained children use the bathroom and wash their hands before snack time (about 10:30).
- ★ Please do not bring sick children into our Nursery. Children must not have vomited, had diarrhea, or had a fever for 24 hours before coming to church. You may be required to bring a doctor's note if your child appears to have a contagious skin condition.
- ★ The RE Committee has provided the children in the Nursery with snacks of water and goldfish crackers. If you do not think your child should eat these foods, please let us know. If you would like your children to drink something else, please provide a sippy cup for them. Please do not bring food from home unless there is enough to share with all the children.
- ★ Nursery children go outside to the playground when the weather permits, so they will need to have outdoor clothing with them in the Nursery.

- ★ Children are discouraged from bringing toys from home, as it is difficult for young children to share, and special toys can get broken or lost.
- ★ Please communicate to the RE Director any medical or emotional information that would be helpful to keep your child safe and happy. For example, we would like to know about food allergies, phobias, or medical issues. If your child is going through a difficult behavioral stage (such as biting), you will be expected to supervise him or her to prevent injury to other children. The Nursery staff will make every effort to comfort your child if he or she misses you, but if your child is inconsolable, a staff member will find you in the Sanctuary and ask that you care for your child.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Child Protection and Safety

- ★ Teachers, the Minister, parents, and other adults who interact with children (infant to 12 years) and youth (12–18 years) at First Parish will adhere to the Code of Ethics.
- ★ There must be a minimum of two adults present in the building during classes, meetings, and other events involving children and youth.
- ★ RE classes will be staffed with “teaching teams” that include at least two adults.
- ★ During RE morning classes, parents (or a designated adult) of children 12 or younger must remain on church premises.
- ★ Children who are not enrolled in an RE class or church-sponsored activity must be supervised by their parents at all times. Children should be supervised in the building or on church property. Outside of RE classes, parents (or a designated adult) are responsible for their children.
- ★ Children in the third grade or below will remain in their classrooms until they are picked up by their parents or a designated adult.
- ★ At adult events where alcohol is being served, parents will supervise children at all times.
- ★ Weapons may not be brought onto church property or brought on church-sponsored trips.
- ★ Acts of violence and bullying will not be tolerated.
- ★ There is a First Aid kit in every classroom.

Trips, Overnights, and Retreats

- ★ Parents will complete and sign Activity Permission Forms when children and youth are leaving by vehicle on a church-designated field trip, overnight, or

retreat. The leaders will copy the Activity Permission Forms, carry one set with them at all times, and leave the other set in the church office. Students participating in the Neighboring Faiths course will complete one form for the program year.

- ★ There will be a minimum of two adults with the group, with a recommended ratio of one adult per five children or one adult per eight youth.
- ★ All drivers will be covered by their own car insurance and have valid drivers licenses.
- ★ Each child/youth will be secured individually with a seat belt.
- ★ Rules of conduct for youth overnights and retreats will be developed and periodically reviewed by the Youth Adult Committee or, if there is no YAC, by the Youth Group Advisor and youth.
- ★ A First Aid kit will be taken on all field trips, overnights, and retreats.
- ★ There will be no use of alcohol or illegal drugs on field trips, overnights, or retreats. Such use will be grounds for dismissal from the RE program or Youth Group.
- ★ Weapons may not be brought on field trips, overnights, or retreats. Camping equipment must be approved in advance.

YOUTH CONTRACT

Below is a sample youth contract. Every year, the youth advisors and the students will draft and mutually agree on a similar contract, which youth and parents will be asked to sign for all youth events.

- ★ The Big Four:
 - NO** illegal drugs
 - NO** alcohol
 - NO** sexual behavior
 - NO** violence
- ★ All persons will participate in planned activities as a group rather than as individuals.
- ★ All persons will behave with respect, concern, goodwill, and consideration toward one another as befits a church-sponsored organization.
- ★ Each student will respect the adult sponsors and chaperones and will obey directions and guidelines provided by them.

- ★ We recognize our responsibility to leave our church and other facilities in the same condition as we find them.
- ★ We will use good judgment with respect to safety and use of facilities.

CHILDREN'S CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR POLICY

To help promote a classroom environment in our church school that is most conducive to learning and best meets the needs of our entire population, we expect each child to behave in a manner that is appropriate to a classroom setting.

Appropriate behavior includes:

- ★ Listening
- ★ Paying attention
- ★ Respecting oneself and others
- ★ Trying one's best
- ★ Asking for what one needs
- ★ Participating in class
- ★ Helping the teacher and other children

Inappropriate behavior includes:

- ★ Playing with electronic games from home
- ★ Physical or verbal aggressiveness
- ★ Bullying
- ★ Name calling
- ★ Refusing to follow teachers' requests
- ★ Talking back or interrupting
- ★ Failure to respect the right of others to have a meaningful class experience

At the beginning of each year, teachers create ground rules and classroom norms collectively with the students. These rules will form the classroom code of behavior.

Please bring your child to church ready to learn and to engage in a positive way with other children and their teachers. A well-fed and rested child, dressed appropriately for movement (and for outdoor activities, should that be a part of their curriculum), will be most ready and able to participate and enjoy classes. Electronic games, handheld computer toys, musical headsets, and other gadgets that will isolate and/or distract the students from group activity should not be brought to church or class.

Because we strive to be a caring community and want to support the entire family as best we can, please inform the Minister, the RE Director, or a Lay Minister of any life-changing or -altering experiences that may affect your children and their church life. Information will be help in strictest confidentiality.

CONTACT US!

We welcome your feedback. If you have any concerns or issues regarding RE, please feel free to contact RE Director Tina Schultz at dre@firstparish.info or (781) 648-3799, extension 5.