



A Tender Trust

Helping Churches to Provide Safe Service



The United Church of Canada Recommended Screening Procedures for Use in Congregations

Statement of commitment

The United Church of Canada is committed to providing a safe environment for worship, work, and study in all pastoral charges, congregations, institutions, agencies, organizations, and other bodies that operate under its name. The United Church of Canada seeks to ensure that all staff, volunteers, and ministry personnel who work with vulnerable individuals in United Church settings share this commitment. This commitment will be demonstrated by staff, volunteers, and ministry personnel showing respect for personal boundaries, protecting others from harm and abuse, and enabling those in their care to learn and grow without fear of exploitation.

As we work together to create this community of trust and safety, God's vision of shalom sustains and guides us. We will experience the presence of the Spirit, nurturing and prodding us to be a people of compassion and grace.

The United Church of Canada has a legal, moral, and spiritual duty to care for and protect participants in our church programs. This is a legal principle called **duty of care**, and church groups have been, and will be, held legally responsible for ensuring reasonable measures are taken to ensure safety.

**Whatever you do
to the least of these,
you do unto me.**

Matthew 25:35

Theological statement

Jesus came into the world to bring life in all its fullness. As followers of Jesus we are called to show love to one another and to the world (John 13:34–35), to share our gifts and resources, and to build a community of mutuality and respect (Acts 3:44–47). As a church, we have a primary duty to care for those in our community who are marginalized, less powerful, or more vulnerable (Deuteronomy 10:17–19; Isaiah 61:1–2).

God intends that all people enjoy a life free from exploitation and abuse. Created in the image of God, all people have a right to be treated with respect and protected from harm.

Our church is blessed with the gifts of many who offer leadership as volunteers, staff, and ministry personnel. These people have a special calling to offer their time and talents in congregations, Sunday schools, programs for children and youth, home visiting, and many other ministries of the church. These people are also called to act with integrity and discipline as they teach and care for the people of God. The church and all of its workers are called to honour the dignity of each person as created in the image of God.

Jesus teaches that we must love one another. Love does not insist upon its own way (Corinthians 13:5). Where manipulation and exploitation exist in a relationship, love is violated.

The principle that supports this statement on screening procedures for positions of trust and authority in The United Church of Canada is that followers of Jesus must demonstrate love, respect, and honour for one another as members of the body of Christ, for Jesus reminds us that as we do to the most vulnerable among us we do unto him (Matthew 25:35– 40).

Understanding risk

Church ministries have different levels of risk attached to them, depending on several factors:

- the participants
- the setting
- the activity itself
- the supervision provided
- the nature of the relationship between participant and leader

Understanding the nature of the risk helps church groups determine the kind of screening, training, and supervision needed to make activities as safe as possible for those who are involved.

An example

A mid-week children's group that meets for crafts and Bible study in the church basement with a lone adult, on an evening when no other groups are in the building, could be seen as high risk in several areas:

- participants: young children
- setting: isolated
- supervision: none
- relationship: adult in charge, kids dependent

Congregations should look carefully at their programs and assess the levels of risk involved. For programs and positions that involve higher risk, steps should be taken to address, manage, and reduce risks when possible. Putting more intense screening measures into effect is one way to do this.

Positions of religious leadership are positions of trust. Positions of trust exist where

- a person has significant access to another person and his/her property, or significant authority or decision-making power over another person
- the nature of the activity depends on the development of a close personal relationship

Where does screening fit?

The policies for screening are set before there is ever a candidate in mind. Screening begins with a clear position description and ends when the position is no longer needed. Screening is not about individuals; it is about creating and maintaining a safe environment through careful matching of tasks and skills.

Notifying both applicants and participants that screening procedures are followed as a matter of policy tells our communities that we take seriously our responsibility to offer safe programs and a safe and nurturing environment for worship, study, and personal growth.

Screening steps

1. Define the nature of the position and write a job description.
2. Complete a risk assessment to determine the nature of the risk:
 - participants
 - setting
 - activity
 - supervision
 - relationship
3. Recruit based on the job description and skills needed.
4. Use an application form to keep track of important information about the applicants.
5. Interview prospective candidates (can be a very formal process or fairly conversational, depending on the task).
6. Check references given on application form.

7. For positions involving significant trust and vulnerable individuals, a police records check may be required as determined by a risk assessment.
8. Provide orientation and training to people newly placed in church positions.
9. Provide supervision and feedback regularly and formally.
10. Check with program participants on how the leader/ministry volunteer is doing.

Recommended next steps

- Ask your church board to establish a screening committee in your congregation.
- Read *Faithful Footsteps: Screening Procedures for Positions of Trust and Authority in The United Church of Canada* (www.united-church.ca/handbooks#ministry).
- Contact the volunteer bureau in your area and ask for a workshop on screening to be given for your congregation (or team up with other congregations).
- See Volunteer Canada's screening resources: <http://volunteer.ca/content/volunteer-screening>.
- Contact the police forces in your area for information on the particular steps in conducting police checks in your jurisdiction (the process is determined by the local police force).
- Be mindful of how human rights legislation affects what can be asked in job interviews and on application forms (the Human Rights Code differs in various provincial and territorial jurisdictions).
- Find out whether there is a child abuse registry in your area and how to conduct checks if deemed necessary to the position.
- Give thanks for the workers in the church who faithfully serve God's people, honouring the tender trust of those in their care.



For more information, contact the United Church Conference office in your area or go to www.united-church.ca/local/duty/overview.

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