



# Trustworthy Care

## Helping Organizations Provide Safe Service



Recommended Screening Procedures for Use in Camps, Residences, Service Organizations, Outreach Ministries, and Other Ministries Associated with The United Church of Canada

### Statement of commitment

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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.

### Theological statement

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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).

## **What is our duty toward those we serve?**

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The United Church of Canada has a legal, moral, and spiritual duty to care for and protect all individuals who receive services in United Church–related institutions or participate in United Church programs. This is a legal principle called **duty of care**, which identifies the obligations of organizations to take reasonable measures to care for and protect their participants.

This document is one of a series of resources produced by The United Church of Canada to help our institutions, organizations, ministries, camps, and congregations understand the principles of screening, as one measure of our duty of care, and to put these procedures into practice in recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers.

We need to be consistent and open about our screening practices when placing a person in a position of trust or authority working with any individual vulnerable due to age, illness, personal crisis, etc.

When screening procedures are followed as a matter of policy, this tells our communities that we take seriously our responsibility to offer a safe and nurturing environment for study, service, worship, and personal growth.

## **Understanding risk**

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Employee and volunteer positions 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 worker

Understanding the nature of the risk will help organizations determine the kind of screening, training, and supervision needed to make programs and services as safe as possible for those who are involved. The higher the risk to vulnerable individuals, the more stringent the screening measures should be.

## **An example**

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Personal assistance with dressing and bathing for young children or elderly people in a non-family residential setting, such as a camp or nursing home, is considered an activity with a high degree of risk. Why?

- The participant is vulnerable due to age and lack of independence.
- The setting is fairly private.
- The activity involves physical contact.
- There is no immediate supervision of the worker.
- The relationship is one of trust, where the service provider has power (physical).

Screening for a position of this type needs to be stringent, including personal and professional references, police checks for a history of abuse or assault charges, child abuse registry checks if available in your area, and a plan for regular supervision and evaluation.

An activity director's position could be a fairly low-risk position if all activities occur in a group context, in a public place, with additional adult helpers.

## **Where does screening fit?**

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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.

## **Screening steps**

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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
  - activity
  - setting
  - supervision
  - relationship
3. Recruit based on the job description and skills needed.
4. Use formal application forms to keep track of important information about the applicants.
5. Interview prospective candidates, preferably with more than one interviewer.
6. Check references. Written references should be followed up with phone calls.
7. For positions involving significant trust and vulnerable individuals, conduct a police records check as determined by the risk assessment. Advise applicants that this is required, and obtain their consent to the check. Know ahead of time what types of offences would be relevant to the job under consideration.
8. Provide orientation and training to new workers and volunteers.
9. Provide supervision and feedback regularly and formally.
10. Conduct regular performance evaluations, including feedback from program participants.

## **Sound human resources and volunteer management practices**

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Appropriate screening procedures are just a part of sound human resources and volunteer management practices. If your organization has a volunteer coordinator or a human resources manager, that person would be your primary resource for screening. However, it is shocking to discover that written references are often not followed up with phone calls, credentials are not checked, and background information is not authenticated.

Screening policies offer protection only if they are followed consistently. Have your Board of Directors adopt a comprehensive screening policy, and ensure that those on selection committees follow it well.

## **Hope and faith, but no guarantees!**

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There is no way to absolutely guarantee that no harm will ever come to any participant, staff, or volunteer in a program or service. But your organization exists and serves because there is a human need, and in faith you step in to offer support and service. Thanks be to God!

Organizations need to guard against charges of negligence by diligent screening and other safety policies. Adequate insurance is needed to safeguard the future of your organization. These things are necessary. What is essential is that United Church–related organizations minister in a spirit of faith and hope, responding to the gospel call to love and serve others.

## Recommended next steps

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- Read *Faithful Footsteps: Screening Procedures for Positions of Trust and Authority in The United Church of Canada: A Handbook* ([www.united-church.ca/handbooks#ministry](http://www.united-church.ca/handbooks#ministry)).
- Contact the volunteer bureau in your area and ask about a workshop on screening for non-profit organizations.
- 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.
- Offer support and thanks to those workers in your organization who demonstrate loving service, trustworthy care, and compassion to your program participants.



**For more information, contact the United Church Conference office in your area or go to [www.united-church.ca/local/duty/overview](http://www.united-church.ca/local/duty/overview).**

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