

## **DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AND CONFLICT POLICY**

**Objective:** Outline the process for dealing with disruptive behavior and conflict in the First Parish Brookline community.

**Guiding Principles:** First Parish in Brookline strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. Openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values of our congregation and is expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles. Finding ways to integrate all those interested in being a part of our community is a core value.

We affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. Concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. When the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security. The ability of the First Parish in Brookline community to debate, exchange and explore ideas will always be preserved so far as the debate is respectful.

**Scope:** When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the exclusion of the person causing the disruption. This policy covers all participants and members of the church community, regardless of age, during official events, and any event occurring on First Parish in Brookline property.

### **Community Behavior Standards**

Behavior Standards of First Parish in Brookline outline what behaviors are considered to be disruptive. These behaviors can take a number of forms, for example (but not limited to):

- Perceived or real threats to the safety of any adult or child;
- Violent behavior towards oneself or others
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Disruption or obstruction of church activities
- Destruction of personal or church property
- Diminishment of the willingness of others to participate fully in church activities
- Possession of weapons of any kind, illegal drugs, inappropriate materials for age-- including cigarettes and sexually explicit materials, not used as part of approved curriculum
- Physically aggressive play, without permission
- Any behavior that may increase the chance of fire or injury

We know that it is good practice for groups, including Religious Education classes, to establish a covenant early on that describes how each member of that group intends to treat others. Such covenants will be the primary means of communicating the above expectations for living up to the church's Behavior Standards.

### **Responding to and Healing from Breaches of the Behavior Standards**

As a covenantal faith, the heart of our faith is building relationships with each other as we embark on our collective journey. The goal of the policy is to assess, address, and begin to heal from a breach of the Church's Behavior Standards. Our goal, in every case, is to find ways to integrate and include the disruptive person(s) in the church community, within the limits of providing a secure environment for all. We hope to be able to use a restorative approach that

aims to build a new covenant between the community and those involved in conflict, a covenant that will allow the individual to participate safely and accountably in the church community. We seek to address issues of diversity in conflict and work toward being able to truly see each other and move past misunderstandings toward a deeper understanding. The policy aims to aid that process by providing three channels for conflict resolution depending on the age of the individual: Those who are age 18 and older, those 13 to 18, and those under 13.

### **Assessing Impact of a Breach of the Behavior Standards**

No matter the age, when assessing the impact of a behavior, the following questions are to be asked and assessed:

- **CAUSES:** Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness? Is there a cross-cultural conflict aspect of the cause?
- **HISTORY:** What is the extent, if any, of disruption caused in the past?
- **PROBABILITY OF CHANGE:** How likely is it that the problematic behavior will diminish in the future?
- **DANGER:** Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **DISRUPTIVENESS:** How much interference with the church functions is occurring?
- **OFFENSIVENESS:** How likely is it that the behavior will interfere with the willingness of others, both prospective and existing members, to participate fully in church activities?

### **Responding to a Breach of the Behavior Standards**

No matter the age, those involved in responding will, on a case-by-case basis, consider the appropriate response depending on the severity of the behavior.

#### **For Adults**

Our goal, in every case, is to find ways to integrate and include the disruptive person in the church community, within the limits of providing a secure environment for all.

Except in cases in which the Minister is directly involved, the Minister generally will not participate in any investigative or enforcement role, as such involvement could compromise or be in conflict with the Minister's pastoral role. The same applies to the Director of Religious Exploration, in instances involving children or youth.

The following is the process of First Parish in Brookline for dealing with disruptive behavior with those who are age 18 and older:

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the leader of the group involved, or the Minister if present. This may include asking the disruptive person to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Brookline Police Department may be called. If any of these actions are undertaken without a Minister being present, a Minister must be notified.
2. In situations involving an acute disruption that precludes thoughtful discussion with the person at the time of the incident, as well as situations not requiring immediate response, the chair of the committee most closely associated with the activity at which the disruption occurred will speak directly and privately to the disruptive person, review and reaffirm the church's Behavior Standards, state that the behavior is not acceptable, and explain that their continued participation in that activity is contingent on their meeting the Behavior Standards.

3. If a second complaint occurs or if the chair prefers having the guiding input of others in the community before approaching the person, the chair (or minister) will refer the issue to the Chair of the Committee on Ministry.
4. If disruptive behavior continues or more severe behavior begins, the Chair of the Committee on Ministry and the Minister should be informed about the behavior and work together to find a solution.
5. For more serious behavior disruptions, or in repeated cases, the issue will be brought to the entire Committee on Ministry.
  - a. The Committee on Ministry's meeting will include a training session to understand the goals, context and issues of this work, including the risk of stereotyping behavior.
  - b. The Committee will collect all necessary information.
  - c. The Committee will construct a plan to respond to the situation, and will choose one of its members and another related member in a leadership capacity (e.g. the chair of the committee where the disruptive behavior occurred) to respond to the situation directly.
  - d. After a response has been made and a meeting with the person in conflict has been held, those who were involved in the incident or those connected will be informed about what had occurred and the plan going forward.
6. For the most serious of disruptions or disruptive patterns that put the person's continued participation at First Parish in Brookline in jeopardy, and when the above interventions have failed, the Committee on Ministry brings the case to the Parish Committee to determine next steps.
7. All responses will aim to build, if possible, a new covenant between the First Parish in Brookline community and those involved in conflict, seeking a covenant that will allow the individual to participate safely and accountably in the community.
8. All decisions can be appealed by the person in conflict to the Parish Committee with a written request.

### **For those age 13 to 18**

The church recognizes the special transition period that occurs during adolescence. The transformation of an individual into a mature adult with increasing levels of independence often occurs during these formative years. The place of parents/guardians in the conflict resolution aims to balance this burgeoning independence with the responsibility of the church to include the youth's parent/guardian.

Our goal, in every case, is to find ways to integrate and include the disruptive person in the church community, within the limits of providing a secure environment for all. Except in cases in which the Minister or Director of Religious Exploration is directly involved, the Minister or Director generally will not participate in any investigative or enforcement role, as such involvement could compromise or be in conflict with the pastoral role.

The following is the process of First Parish in Brookline in dealing with disruptive behavior from those between the age of 13 and 18:

1. If an immediate response is required, the leader of the group involved or the Director of Religious Exploration, if present, will undertake this.
2. If the behavior was an acute, one time, disruption it should be dealt with directly with the aim of facilitating further participation supported by the religious exploration

community. Depending on the situation the youth's teacher or the Director of Religious Exploration may be the best person to respond. The conversation will aim to facilitate further participation supported by the youth's parent/guardian. The youth will be reminded of the group's covenant, told that the behavior is not acceptable, and that their continued participation in that activity is contingent on their meeting the expectations of the covenant. The youth will be given an opportunity to express his/her reactions to the situation. The conversation will aim to facilitate further participation supported by the youth's parent/guardian

3. If a second complaint occurs or if the teacher prefers having the guiding input of others in the community before approaching the youth, the teacher will refer the issue to the Director of Religious Exploration and the Chair of the Religious Exploration Committee.
4. If disruptive behavior continues or more severe behavior begins, the Chair of the Religious Exploration Committee, the Director of Religious Exploration and a Minister should be informed about the behavior and work together to find a solution. The youth's parent/guardian will be included in the solution.
5. For more serious behavior disruptions, or in repeated cases, the issue will be brought to the entire Religious Exploration Committee, the Director of Religious Exploration and the Chair of the Committee on Ministry to work together to find a solution.
  - a. The group's meeting will include a training session to understand the goals, context and issues of this work, including the risk of stereotyping behavior.
  - b. This group will collect all necessary information, including meeting with the parent/guardian(s) of the youth.
  - c. The group will construct a plan to respond to the situation, will choose one of its members and another related member in a leadership capacity (ex. the Religious Exploration teacher or Director of Religious Exploration) to respond to the situation directly.
6. For the most serious of disruptions or disruptive patterns that put the youth's continued participation at First Parish in jeopardy, and when the above interventions have failed, the Committee on Ministry brings the issue to the Parish Committee to determine next steps.
7. All responses will aim to build, if possible, a new covenant between the First Parish in Brookline community and those involved in conflict, seeking a covenant that will allow the individual to participate safely and accountably in the community.
8. After a response has been made and a meeting has been held, those who were involved in the issue or those connected will be informed about what had occurred and the plan going forward.
9. All decisions can be appealed by the person in conflict to the Parish Committee with a written request.

### **For those under the age of 13**

Those under the age of 13 are not eligible to be members of First Parish in Brookline. For these participants in the First Parish in Brookline community the process of dealing with conflict or behavioral concerns involves the parent or guardian of the child in any resolution process.

Our goal, in every case, is to find ways to integrate and include the disruptive person in the church community, within the limits of providing a secure environment for all.

Except in cases in which the Minister or Director of Religious Exploration is directly involved, the Minister and Director generally will not participate in any investigative or enforcement role, as such involvement could compromise or be in conflict with the pastoral role.

The following is the process for dealing with disruptive behavior and conflict with children under the age of 13:

1. If an immediate response is required, the teacher of the group involved or the Director of Religious Exploration, if present, will undertake this. This may include calling the parent or guardian of the child in conflict and asking them to pick up the child. If any of these actions are undertaken without the Director of Religious Exploration or a Minister being present, the Director of Religious Exploration must be notified.
2. If the behavior was an acute, one time, disruption it should be dealt with directly with the aim of facilitating further participation supported by the religious exploration community. Depending on the situation the child's teacher or the Director of Religious Exploration may be the best person to respond. The child will be reminded of the expectations of the covenant, told that the behavior is not acceptable, and that their continued participation in that activity is contingent on their meeting the expectations of the covenant. The child will be given opportunity to express his/her reactions to the situation. The conversation will aim to facilitate further participation supported by the child's parent/guardian.
3. If a second complaint occurs or if the teacher prefers having the guiding input of others in the community before approaching the child, the teacher will refer the issue to the Director of Religious Exploration and the Chair of the Religious Exploration Committee.
4. If disruptive behavior continues or more severe behavior begins, the Chair of the Religious Exploration Committee, the Director of Religious Exploration and a Minister should be informed about the behavior and work together to find a solution. The child's parent/guardian will be included in the solution.
5. For more serious behavior disruptions, or in repeated cases, the issue will be brought to the entire Religious Exploration Committee, the Director of Religious Exploration and the Chair of the Committee on Ministry to work together to find a solution.
  - a. The group's meeting will include a training session to understand the goals, context and issues of this work, including the risk of stereotyping behavior.
  - b. This group will collect all necessary information, including meeting with the parent/guardian(s) of the child.
  - c. The group will construct a plan to respond to the situation, will choose one of its members and another related member in a leadership capacity (ex. the Religious Exploration teacher or Director of Religious Exploration) to respond to the situation directly.
6. For the most serious of disruptions or disruptive patterns that put the child's continued participation at First Parish in jeopardy, and when the above interventions have failed, the Chair of the Committee on Ministry brings the case to the Parish Committee to determine next steps.
7. All responses will aim to build, if possible, a new covenant between the First Parish in Brookline community and those involved in conflict, seeking a covenant that will allow the child to participate safely and accountably in the community.
8. After a response has been made and a meeting has been held, those who were involved in the issue or those connected will be informed about what had occurred and the plan going forward.
9. All decisions can be appealed by the person in conflict to the Parish Committee with a written request.

***Adopted by Parish Committee on June 2, 2014***