

## Acton Congregational Church Policy for Youth Advisors

Our philosophy is to provide a safe and non-threatening environment for fellowship and growth in the Christian faith. Since the majority of people come to faith because of the gentle nudge of a trusted friend, we need to make our resources and ourselves available to make those friendships. We attempt to fulfill this goal through our programs and individual relationships with youth.

This *Policy for Youth Advisors* establishes a set of expectations for all volunteers who work with junior and senior high youth in our congregation. First and foremost we must remember that no rule or policy is a substitute for good judgment.

- Advisors are expected to be at least 19 years old to work with Junior High and 23 years old to work with Senior High youth (unless waived at the discretion of the Associate Minister for Youth in consultation with the Youth Committee).
- Adults working with youth should avoid being in compromising situations — by staying in open public areas and keeping doors open unless noise or confidentiality is an issue. At least two adults must be present during youth activities, events and outings. No youth should be alone in the church building with one adult. If necessary, one adult may wait with youth outside the building until parents arrive or may transport youth home with prior parental notification.
- If an advisor witnesses or learns of any inappropriate conduct or inappropriate relationship between an advisor and a minor, the advisor shall promptly report the observations to the Associate Minister for Youth.
- No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- The sexual abuse of a minor child is a crime. The church will comply with state and federal laws if abuse occurs.
- The possession or use of illegal drugs, tobacco or alcoholic products by youth or advisors on or in church facilities or during a youth activity, event or outing is not permitted. In addition, youth or advisors must not be under the influence of alcohol during a church activity.
- Overnight outings will include at least one male and one female youth advisor.
- Advisors will not attend an overnight with the youth until they have spent time working with youth at ACC or in a similar setting, at the discretion of the Associate Minister for Youth.
- Advisors will submit to a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.
- Advisors will read and agree to the ACC Driver Policy before transporting youth (see attached).
- Advisors will read and agree to support the Youth Advisor Expectations (Attachment B), the Youth Expectations (Attachment C), and the Safety at ACC (Attachment D) document.
- Advisors will complete a Youth Advisors Application (attached) and meet with the Associate Minister for Youth before serving as an advisor.

## Acton Congregational Church Expectations of Youth Advisors

The philosophy of both SHYF and JHYF is to provide a non-threatening environment for fellowship and growth in the Christian faith. Since the majority of people come to faith because of the gentle nudge of a trusted friend, we need to make our resources and ourselves available to make those friendships. We attempt to fulfill this goal through our programming and individual relationships with the youth. As an advisor to Acton Congregational Church's youth programs, please know that you are loved and appreciated in your contribution to this vital ministry.

**SHYF is the Senior High Youth Fellowship** of Acton Congregational Church, and is open to all senior high aged youth from the church and the community. SHYF meets at ACC every Sunday night from 7 - 9 PM during the school year. Regular meetings encourage growth in the Christian faith, fellowship, fun, and service. SHYF is run by a board of 8–10 youth elected from within the group, with the help of the advisors and the Associate Minister for Youth.

**JHYF is the Junior High Youth Fellowship** of Acton Congregational Church, and is open to all junior high aged youth from the church and the community. JHYF meets at ACC every Sunday night from 5:00 – 7:00 PM during the school year. Regular meetings encourage growth in the Christian faith, fellowship, fun and service. JHYF is lead by the Associate Minister for Youth and/or Advisors.

### **Youth Advisors should be people who:**

- Enjoy junior and senior high school kids and feel comfortable with them
- Have a growing personal faith and commitment to Christ, the church and our ministry to youth
- Can commit their time and energy to youth activities without robbing family time
- See themselves as leaders in the lives of our youth
- Offer new ideas and possibilities to enhance the ministry
- Carry themselves in a manner and lifestyle consistent with biblical truths
- Confront with compassion situations where people strongly disagree with each other or have been wronged by someone.

### **Youth Advisors are asked to:**

- Attend and participate in as many youth meetings as possible (at least 2/month)
- Attend monthly advisor meetings
- Help plan and present the program for a SHYF meeting every 4-6 weeks with a youth
- Help plan and attend at least one retreat (of course all advisors may attend all retreats!)
- Assist with transportation to retreats and special events
- Assist in planning fundraisers, worship services, etc.
- Be looking for visitors, shy or withdrawn people to make them feel welcomed
- Pray for the youth, the leadership of the program, ACC's ministry to youth in general
- In addition, SHYF advisors are expected to attend board meetings.

### **Support and Resources for Youth advisors will include:**

- Input, direction, support and general guidance from the Associate Minister for Youth
- The Youth Committee
- Collegiality of other advisors
- Books, magazines, tapes, etc. available from the youth library and minister's resources
- Scholarships for youth ministry training events which advisors may want to attend
- Registration fees for activities, events and outings.

## Acton Congregational Church Expectations of Youth

**PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES:** The following are general guidelines intended to apply to all Acton Congregational youth activities, events and outings. Individual events, such as retreats or mission trips, may require additional guidelines. All participants are expected to abide by these guidelines. Any questions about their interpretation or application should be directed to the Associate Minister for Youth.

The Associate Minister for Youth is the supervising adult unless he/she designates another advisor to act in such a capacity. Any time a group of youth are in the church building for a Church-related activity, the Associate Minister for Youth or an approved designated adult must be on the premises and aware of the activity and the youths participating.

### **Expected Behavior During Youth Activities, Events and Outings**

- **Mutual respect and confidentiality** — Youth activities, events and outings should be occasions where all participants can freely express themselves in an atmosphere of mutual respect and caring for one another. We respect each other's opinions even when we disagree, and we allow everyone the opportunity to be heard. We respect the confidentiality of discussions and agree not to repeat conversations outside of youth activities.
- **Respect for Advisors** — Youth are expected to acknowledge the authority and responsibility of the advisors to maintain acceptable behavior and to keep all parties to youth activities safe, and to agree to follow instructions from the Associate Minister for Youth and from all adult advisors to any youth activity.
- **Separation from the group** — Youth will not separate themselves from the group without the express permission of a youth advisor.

### **Unacceptable Behaviors During Youth Activities**

The following are examples of unacceptable behavior. These examples are not meant to be all-inclusive.

- Possession, use or being under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol.
- Use of tobacco or tobacco products
- Engaging in sexual activity
- Harassment, including sexual harassment, which may include threatening language or behavior, assault, inappropriate touching, comments, or gestures
- Fighting, pushing, shoving, wrestling or threats of violence
- Vandalism of church or other property
- Possession of weapons
- Use of abusive or obscene language
- Leaving the facility where the activity is held without permission of the advisors or the Associate Minister for Youth.

**Consequences for Unacceptable Behavior**

As a first step, the youth advisors and/or the Associate Minister for Youth will talk with the participant to define solutions for the behavior. If the behavior continues, or there is a serious breach of these guidelines, the participant will be sent home at his or her own or the parent's expense and inconvenience. The decision to send a participant home will be in the sole discretion of the supervising adult.

**Driving**

Youth are allowed to drive when an event or activity is off-site (away from church property) and local, and directions have been given to the youth to meet directly at the designated site. If directions are given to meet at the church, youth are permitted to drive to the church but not to the site of the activity. In this case advisors and volunteer adults will drive youth to the event.

**Medical Release and Liability Form**

A valid ACC Medical Release and Liability Form (updated at least annually) is required for youth to participate in:

- Overnight activities away from or at the church
- Whenever youth are transported away from the church under the church's supervision out of the local area.

Participants and their parents are responsible for ensuring that the Associate Minister for Youth has an updated copy of this document at all times.

**Emergency Procedures**

In the event of a medical emergency the following protocols will be followed:

- The supervising adult will seek medical care for the youth and will accompany the youth for treatment if necessary.
- The supervising adult will refer to medical/liability form and provide appropriate information to medical professionals.
- The supervising adult will notify the parent/guardian of the emergency as soon as possible.

## Acton Congregational Church Safety at a Youth Activity, Event or Outing

First and foremost, we want you to know that we are, at all times, concerned with safety. We not only want you to be safe — we want you to feel safe. We want this for you, for ourselves, and for our entire congregation. Every person deserves to feel comfortable in his/her surroundings — to feel safe physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually.

The following are some examples of "good touch" and appropriate behavior, examples of "bad touch" and inappropriate behavior, and guidelines for what to do if something inappropriate is happening to you.

### **Good Touch / Appropriate Behavior**

- A pat on the back, a hug, a handshake, or a touch that is welcome
- A non-threatening look or smile
- An interaction that respects boundaries
- A compliment or a positive, affirming statement.

### **Bad Touch / Inappropriate Behavior**

- A touch in private areas, rubbing up against the body, hugs or touching that makes us uncomfortable — especially without permission
- Forcing unwanted sex or unwanted sexual contact
- Staring for a long period of time or smiling in such a way that we feel uncomfortable or threatened
- Not respecting our boundaries
- Cursing, speaking in a derogatory manner, or telling inappropriate jokes.

### **What You Should Do If Something Happens To You:**

1. **Say NO!** Let the person know you are uncomfortable with what he/she is saying or doing.
2. **Leave the situation, and immediately tell an adult whom you trust.** This can be a youth advisor, a minister, a parent, or another adult in the church. *We are concerned with these issues and only want to help you.*