

MAIN LINE UNITARIAN CHURCH
SAFE CONGREGATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

ADOPTED OCTOBER 18, 2023

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1. SELECTION, SCREENING, AND SUPERVISION OF WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Those workers who provide direct care or supervision for children or youth at MLUC on a regular basis must meet the following criteria:

All volunteer workers must be:

- Active participants at MLUC, as a church member or active friend for at least six months prior to taking on any role working with children. The Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) may waive this requirement for volunteers who previously attended a different Unitarian Universalist congregation for at least one year before coming to MLUC and receive a positive recommendation from leadership at the previously attended congregation, or for community volunteers who provide an appropriate reason for wishing to volunteer (such as experience in a classroom for someone working towards a degree in education) and provide appropriate references.
- Over the age of 18, unless approved by the DLRE. Youth who teach and/or assist in faith development classes and groups and childcare must work with an adult whenever practical.
- Able to provide acceptable results obtained within the past 5 years from the Pennsylvania Criminal Record Check (PATCH) AND ChildLine Clearance AND either an FBI background check or, if the volunteer has lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years, a signed Disclosure Statement as required by the Child Protective Service Law.
- Willing to agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth in this policy.

All paid workers must be:

- Able to meet all requirements above for volunteer workers except for length of membership.
- Able to provide acceptable results obtained within the past 5 years from an FBI background check (Disclosure Statement is not acceptable.)
- Able to provide three positive references.

All workers are required to read and agree to abide by the Safe Congregations Policy and Procedures prior to being assigned duties with any group or program involving regular direct care or supervision of children or youth at MLUC.

All workers are subject to the supervision, direction, and evaluation of the DLRE.

2. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

MLUC seeks to create an environment in which children and youth can explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives. We actively encourage relationships between young people and adults, and know that when healthy and genuine they can be transformative for both the adult and the child involved.

Workers are expected to nurture the child's physical, emotional and spiritual growth by treating him/her with kindness, trust, respect and good humor. Interactions must be genuine and not manipulative of the child's needs or vulnerabilities. They must always be engaged with the best interests of the child as the foremost goal.

We expect all adults working with children to understand the power differential in child/adult relationships. This differential places greater responsibility on the adult in the relationship. No matter the age of the child, it is always the responsibility of the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in order to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust.

To that end we ask all workers to endorse this code of ethics *Adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1986:*

Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Who Are Engaged In Leadership Roles with Children/Youth

“Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable children and 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 the positive potential of their relationship 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 children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with children and youth which constitute verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

Leaders shall be informed of this code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violating of this code, appropriate action will be taken.”

3. CHILD SAFETY PROCEDURES

All workers are required to comply with the following procedures to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth:

- Whenever feasible, each group should have at least two workers present at all times with at least one worker being an adult. For infants and toddlers, the desirable ratio is one worker for each three children. DLRE shall determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group and activity, and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis. In order to provide visibility into classrooms any window coverings will be open and/or the door to any classroom must remain open at all time.
- It may be necessary for workers to accompany children to the restroom at times. Avoid one adult being alone with one child at any time by taking multiple children to the restroom at once.
- Any departure from the church grounds must be pre-approved by the DLRE. Participating children must have a signed permission slip from parent or guardian.
- Children third grade and younger must be picked up from their classroom or group by a parent or guardian unless prior arrangements have been made with the DLRE.
- Corporal punishment or abusive language may not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse and any behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- Physical expressions of affection such as hugs are acceptable, but it is important to allow the child to initiate the contact and/or to ask permission of the child.
- State and Federal laws prohibit use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs by children and youth. Workers should at all times be aware that their own behavior is a powerful statement to children as to what is acceptable and responsible use of these agents. Adults may not use alcohol or drugs while supervising children, and may not use tobacco within the sight of the children.

4. VOLUNTEER OR STAFF DRIVERS

Volunteer drivers are welcome and necessary for many MLUC functions and activities for children and youth, while staff members may also occasionally need to provide transportation for participants in MLUC activities. To protect the safety of our children, any individual driving in any capacity for or coordinated by MLUC leadership, groups, or staff, when transporting minors as passengers, shall meet the following qualifications:

- Be at least twenty-one years of age
- Agree to abide by all traffic laws and regulations
- Provide acceptable proof of current vehicle liability insurance
- Provide an Individual Driver Record issued within the past 12 months covering the past three years which:
 - Shows that the driver has a valid drivers' license
 - Shows that the driver has not been reported as committing any of the following violations within the past three years:
 - Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - Driving with an open container (alcohol).
 - Reckless/careless driving.
 - Speeding in excess of 14 mph over the speed limit.
 - Hit and run.
 - Eluding a police officer.
 - Driving with a suspended/revoked license.
 - Vehicular assault, manslaughter or homicide.
 - Operating a vehicle without the owner's permission.
 - Speed contest/racing.
 - Use of a vehicle to commit a felony.
 - Passing a stopped school bus.
 - Shows that the driver has not been reported as committing two or more of the following violations within the past three years:
 - All other speeding violations.
 - Distracted driving (texting, calling, etc.).
 - Improper lane changes.
 - Failure to yield.
 - At-fault accidents.
 - Tailgating.
 - Running a stop sign or red light.

Drivers may obtain an Individual Driver Record here: <https://apps.pwp.pa.gov/IDR/> (if the fee is a barrier, please ask for financial assistance from the church.) Drivers should provide the

required agreements and documentation here: <https://mluc.breezechms.com/form/356d79> or by bringing paper copies to the church office, prior to beginning driving duties.

5. ILLNESS POLICY

MLUC is a community of all ages, stages, and abilities. Some members and friends of MLUC live with compromised immune systems while others are in stages of life where they are more likely to experience a wide variety of frequent viral infections.

Stay at home (or keep your child at home) if you (or they) have experienced any of the following symptoms within the past 24 hours:

- fever above 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- vomiting or severe diarrhea
- uncontrollable coughing or sneezing
- any other condition believed to be contagious or dangerous to the community

Notify a staff member if you or your child are diagnosed with a serious communicable illness or pest such as head-lice and there is reason to believe you (or your child) may have been contagious when at MLUC.

Staff will be able to discreetly share information with those who may have been exposed while preserving your privacy. For example, a notification might go out which says something like, "Someone who was later diagnosed with Pertussis attended your child's faith development class last Sunday and your child may have been exposed. Most individuals are vaccinated against this illness. Information from the CDC about this disease can be found here [link]. If you are concerned about your exposure, please contact your own care provider for more information."

MLUC will comply with local, state, and federal guidelines for public gatherings during any public health or disaster event, and expects congregants and visitors to observe all applicable physical distancing, hygiene, and quarantine guidelines for individuals.

6. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Adult workers are in a special position of trust and may learn things from children or other adults, directly or indirectly, which lead them to suspect that abuse or neglect may have occurred either at MLUC or in other settings in a child's life.

Under Pennsylvania law, any person who has direct contact with children as part of a regularly scheduled program, activity, or service is a Mandated Reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect. This means all workers in our programs for children and youth are Mandated Reporters.

Trained specialists are available 24/7 at ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313 to receive referrals of suspected child abuse and general child well-being concerns. The law requires that the Mandated Reporter identify themselves and where they can be reached. In addition to having documentation that the report was made, this information is also helpful so that if clarification on the situation or additional information is needed, the children and youth caseworker can contact the Mandated Reporter. There is also an electronic reporting system at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>.

This means that any worker at MLUC who suspects a child has been abused or neglected either at MLUC or in another setting must immediately and personally make a report by phone or electronically. The worker must ALSO communicate that they have made a report to the DLRE immediately and in writing, to allow the DLRE to activate the Congregational Response Team to facilitate MLUC's cooperation with the investigation of the report.

For more information see: <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/CWIS/Public/ReferralsLearnMore>

In the event that a child's immediate well-being is threatened, the worker will ask another worker to stay with the child while the worker reports, and will in addition call local law-enforcement at 911.

Concerns may arise about a worker's behavior which do not rise to the level of a reportable suspicion or crime. These concerns should be reported immediately and in writing to the DLRE to allow the DLRE to activate the Congregational Response Team to review the concern and take internal action as appropriate.

7. LIMITED ACCESS POLICY AND TEMPLATE

Individuals with a background which causes concern about their ability to behave appropriately and legally with regard to children and youth may from time to time seek community in our congregation. Such background information may include but is not limited to persons who are registered sex offenders, persons who have been convicted of any of the crimes listed on the Disclosure Statement, or persons who have been alleged to have committed such a crime. Whenever such information comes to the knowledge of an MLUC lay leader or staff person, a Limited Access Agreement will be implemented immediately if it is determined that the person will be allowed on the premises.

The following document provides a template for a Limited Access Agreement to be customized to the details of each particular individual at that particular time in the congregation's life.

Introductory paragraph in cases of allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Congregational Response Team. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Minister, the Religious Educator and the members of the Congregational Response Team. It will be kept in a locked file in the office

Introductory paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:

The NAME OF CONGREGATION affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who choose to worship with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited in ways to ensure the safety of our children and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

Agreement:

You understand that you will not be allowed to volunteer or chaperone events for children and adolescents, including children's religious education classes, talks with children/adolescents during worship, youth group, children's and adolescents' activities during intergenerational events, and driving children and young people.

The following activities checked "Yes" are activities that we feel are appropriate for your participation.

- Worship services

No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

- Coffee Hour
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()
- Adult meetings with children in building, such as choir
No () Yes ()
- Adult meetings without children in building
No () Yes ()
- Have a key to the building
No () Yes ()
- Intergenerational church activities
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()
- Intergenerational group outings such as ice skating, baseball games, etc
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()
- Alone in building with minister or other staff
No () Yes ()
- Access to church computer
No () Yes ()
- Social activities in other member's homes with children present
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()
- Other:
 - Activity:
No () Yes ()
 - Activity:
No () Yes ()
 - Activity:
No () Yes ()

*A support person is a person who knows about your history/situation and has been designated by you with our approval to accompany you to activities where children and youth may be present.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITION IN CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I agree that if I violate this

agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Date:

Minister:

Date:

Director/Minister of Religious Education:

Date:

Board Chair:

Date:

8. PROTOCOL FOR A DISTURBANCE

The disruption of a worship service or some other church event, such as someone shouting down a speaker or discharging a gun, is extremely unlikely, but having a plan of action ahead of time can enhance the safety of congregants in such an event.

Prevention

- Exterior doors lock automatically on schedule. Congregants should ensure that doors are fully closed to allow locks to engage.
- Exits from the building should be clearly marked, and these locations should be reviewed periodically with the congregation. In addition, the steps of this protocol should be reviewed periodically with staff, greeters, ushers, and other pertinent congregants.
- During services, a custodian should roam throughout the building and grounds to be on the lookout for suspicious activity.
- Greeters should engage visitors who look or act suspiciously to try to assess potential danger. Of course, this is a subjective judgment, but people who have committed acts of violence in group settings have some common characteristics:
 - Almost always a white male
 - Espouse extremist ideological, religious, and/or political views
 - Have a preoccupation with weapons and safety
 - Are pathological blamers and complainers
 - Have a grievance and perceive themselves as being victimized
 - Has exhibited erratic and unpredictable behavior
 - May have recently suffered a personal crisis (e.g, job loss, breakup, divorce, etc.)

If a visitor is deemed suspicious (i.e., wearing a coat in warm weather, perhaps to hide a weapon), someone should keep a watchful eye on him or her during their stay.

Remember: See something, say something.

- If a visitor is seen with a weapon, greeters should call 911 immediately, notify others in the immediate area so they may evacuate or hide, and notify persons with access to the sound system so that a warning to other congregants may be issued. Adults in the immediate vicinity may consider physically restraining the person and disarming him or her.

A Verbal Disruption

- If a person disrupts a service or other event by shouting, congregants with cell phones should call 911 immediately.

- The worship leader (typically the minister) should firmly and respectfully ask the disruptive person to leave.
- If the person refuses to leave, congregants should calmly evacuate the building and/or wait for law enforcement.

A Shooting or Other Assault

- If a person begins assaulting congregants, congregants with cell phones should call 911 immediately.
- Persons nearest fire alarms should pull the fire alarm lever, which will automatically notify the church's security company and the local fire department. The fire alarm will also alert RE teachers in the basement and on the 2nd and 3rd floors to evacuate the children from their classrooms through the fire exits. Once outside, teachers should lead their children across the road to the Dittmar Park parking lot. This escape location should be made known to parents so that they will know where to find their children.
- The worship leader (typically the minister) should forcefully communicate the danger and necessary action to the congregation (e.g., "He's got a gun! Everyone head for the nearest exits!").
- RUN. The first course of action should be for congregants to run out of the building at the nearest exits, leaving personal belongings behind and assisting children, elderly members, and members with disabilities. Give directions to those uncertain of where to go. Do not stay behind because others will not go.
- HIDE. If evacuating the building is not a safe option, then hide. Lock the doors and/or barricade the doors with heavy furniture. Close and lock the windows and close the blinds. Turn off the lights, silence all electronic devices, and remain silent until given an all clear by law enforcement.
- FIGHT. As a last resort, when confronted by a shooter, adults in immediate danger should act decisively to disrupt, disarm, or incapacitate the shooter. Use items in your vicinity, such as chairs or fire extinguishers, as weapons and/or to throw at the shooter.
- When law enforcement arrives, congregants should cooperate and not interfere with first responders. Raise your hands to show that you are not the shooter. Remain calm, do not make quick movements, and follow the instructions of law enforcement officers.

9. HARASSMENT AND ABUSE POLICIES

Sexual, verbal, or physical harassment or abuse is not acceptable behavior within our church community. Prevention through education is key. If harassment or abuse happens within our church community, it is important to provide clear procedures for those who experience harassment or abuse within our community to seek help and receive justice. It is also crucial to support those in positions of authority and responsibility who must set and enforce boundaries up to and including reporting to law enforcement or excluding harassers or abusers from membership or participation at MLUC.

Education:

All paid staff members (including ministers) and Board members will complete harassment and abuse training on an annual basis, covering issues of sexually, verbally, or physically appropriate behavior or a rotating basis (depending on availability of appropriate training courses and materials.) Paid staff members (including ministers) who have managerial responsibility will complete additional training in how to deal with issues of harassment or abuse that may arise in the course of their duties.

What to do if you feel you are experiencing harassment or abuse at MLUC:

If you experience harassment or abuse, or learn that someone else in the congregation has experienced harassment or abuse from a minister, staff member, lay leader, or fellow congregant, you should report this experience to the Congregational Response Team as soon as possible. There is, however, no statute of limitations. The Congregational Response Team will listen to your experience, and do their best to take appropriate steps to resolve the situation in a way which protects you from further harassment or abuse. Your confidentiality will be respected, although there are situations in which your anonymity may not be able to be preserved (if a report must be made to law enforcement, for example).

10. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM

The Congregational Response Team consists of four persons: the Senior Minister, the Director of Lifespan Religious Education, the President of the Board, and one other trusted and experienced member of the congregation selected annually by the first three.

The Congregational Response Team will be activated any time:

- a report of child abuse or neglect is filed by a worker at MLUC
- a concern about behavior at MLUC which is illegal or constitutes sexual, verbal, or physical harassment or abuse is reported to any member of the Congregational Response Team
- a Limited Access Agreement is created or updated
- an incident with a disruptive person occurs during worship or another event at MLUC

The Congregational Response Team will:

- In the case of child abuse or neglect, confirm that a report has been filed with ChildLine by the worker who suspected child abuse or neglect (and if not, facilitate this happening immediately).
- In the case of child abuse or neglect, notify the parents or guardians of the child(ren) concerned (unless this could place the child in further danger of harm).
- In the case of a concern about harassment or abuse other than child abuse or neglect, gather information from all parties concerned as quickly as practicable.
- Notify the church's liability insurance company as necessary.
- Seek legal representation as necessary.
- Cooperate with law enforcement and other responsible agencies fully and freely.
- Take action as necessary to resolve the situation, within boundaries of authority and law.
- Document all information received and actions taken and retain this documentation in the Church records along with all written reports.

The Congregational Response Team is also responsible for disseminating information about safe congregations concerns, incidents, or events to some or all members and friends of the congregation, and making decisions about what information should be communicated, when, and to whom.

Our obligation as a community of faith is to protect victims and potential victims of abuse, neglect, harassment or violence first, then care for the well-being of our community second,

and only thirdly protect the privacy of a person accused of misconduct.

Accountability and transparency are crucial. When the Congregational Response Team addresses an incident or suspicion, they will remain accountable by reporting out about the process in the following ways:

- The Board will always be notified that the Congregational Response Team met and what category of concern they met to address.
- In any matter concerning children where law enforcement has been involved, families of children who could have been affected (even if we know that there is no reason to think that they were in fact affected) will be notified.
- In any matter where law enforcement has not been involved, the Congregational Response Team will use their best judgment to determine who needs to know what occurred and what steps have been or will be taken to protect victims or potential victims.

In any situation where any member of the Congregational Response Team is the or one of the individuals against whom a complaint or report has been made, that member of the Congregational Response Team will be recused from the work of the Team. The remaining members of the Team will select an additional trusted and experienced member to serve for that particular incident.

11. FIRE DRILL PROCEDURES

MLUC Fire Evacuation Plan

Design Features:

The MLUC building includes numerous features to minimize the effects of a fire and to ensure the safety of people in the building if a fire does occur. Every area of the building has access to an emergency fire exit in addition to a normal exit. The emergency exits in the front part of the building are enclosed staircases (called fire towers) constructed to higher than normal fire resistance standards to provide protection for people evacuating the building. The building has a fire alarm system, an automatic sprinkler system, an “annunciator system” for making emergency announcements, and nine fire extinguishers, which are located near each fire tower door on the 2nd and 3rd floors, in the 2nd floor kitchen, in the pulpit, the kitchen by the fire tower door and outside the pantry, outside the library, and in the office suite on the 1st floor, in the hall leading to the childcare rooms and outside the Children’s Recreation Room in the basement (see section on fire extinguisher use).

If You Discover a Fire:

If you discover a fire, you should first pull one of the fire alarm levers so other inhabitants can evacuate safely. Sounding the alarm will also cause the building security company and the local fire department to be notified automatically. *If the alarm is not activated, you must dial 911 to notify the fire department.* If the fire is minor and you feel you can do so without endangering yourself, you may then attempt to put it out using a fire extinguisher. If not, you should yourself leave the building. When in doubt, call the fire department (911).

General Evacuation Procedures:

If a fire does occur, the foremost objective is to evacuate all the inhabitants safely. The following sections describe the preferred exits for each section of the building. (See attached floor plans). In general, one should leave through the nearest fire exit. These exits are marked with red “exit” signs. Do not attempt to use the elevator. It is not usable in a fire. (In a fire, the elevator will automatically go to the bottom level, open its doors, and stop there). Handicapped people must be carried or otherwise helped from the building.

After leaving the building, move away from it. Do not congregate in the driveway immediately in front of the building; that area must be kept clear for fire fighting equipment. Proceed down the exit driveway to the right as you exit the front of the building and across the street to Dittmar Park.

During daytime church operating hours, either on Sunday or during the week, there will normally be a church staff member on hand to take overall responsibility for the situation and report to the fire department upon its arrival. However, if this is not the case, another adult should take charge.

The building has an emergency announcement system. The microphone is in the large red box to the right of the main doors as you enter. To use it, you must open the box. If the key is not in the lock, it can be found on top of the box. Once the box is open, pick up the mic and press and hold the button on its side. There will be a pre announcement tone after which you can speak into it.

There is a door leading directly from this room into one of the fire towers on the front of the building. The staircase in the fire tower leads to a door exiting at ground level.

McGinness Room:

This room has a dedicated fire exit with a staircase that leads down and out the rear of the building.

Main Meeting Room:

Unless the fire is in the Main Meeting Room itself, people in this area should not exit through the normal entrance into the main hallway of the building. Instead they should either exit through the doors at the rear onto the patio, or they should go down the stairs behind the stage area and exit to the rear of the church. To speed evacuation in extreme cases, able-bodied people can also open the patio doors on the sides at the rear of the room, which are near ground level, and jump over the rails to safety. Persons who have difficulty walking should remain in their seats while the aisles clear and wait for assistance, then evacuate to the upper section of the Memorial Garden above the entrance driveway. After exiting the Main Meeting Room, those able to do so should proceed down the exit driveway to the right as you exit the front of the building and across the street to Dittmar Park. Parents who have children in a faith development class should not in any case re-enter the building to retrieve their children directly from their classes. The children will be evacuated from their rooms by their teachers and led to Dittmar Park, where their parents can meet them.

Kitchen Fire:

The MLUC stove is equipped with a fire suppression system. Never use the stove without the exhaust fan running. The fire suppression system over the stove will not work without the exhaust system operating. Activation of the kitchen fire suppression system will automatically activate the fire alarm for the building and this in turn will notify the offsite alarm monitoring company.

The kitchen fire suppression system is a released dry chemical, which smothers the fire. The manual release for the fire suppression system is located to the left of the rear kitchen doors. This is the preferred method for fighting a fire over a fire extinguisher.

12. EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This is an Operational set of policies and procedures, adopted by the Executive Team on 11/28/2018 and updated on 5/21/2020 AND 10/18/2023. It is to be communicated to the congregation and implemented as follows:

- These policies and procedures will be posted publicly on the MLUC website.
- All paid staff members (including ministers), board members, and volunteer workers with children and youth will be asked to review and initial their agreement to the policies and procedures annually.
- All paid staff members (including ministers), board members, and volunteer workers with children and youth will be directed to up to date information regarding child abuse and neglect reporting annually.
- All documentation related to these policies and procedures including but not limited to background check results, Disclosure Statements, and records of the Congregational Response Team will be kept on file in a secure manner until any child who could have had contact with any person or situation recorded is at least 21 years of age.