

Safety Policy for Children and Youth At the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville

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Introduction

Our vision is a strong, vibrant, and loving religious community actively engaged in nurturing spiritual freedom and working for social justice.

Our mission is to engage one another in a free and inclusive religious community that encourages lives of integrity, service, and joy. We aim to:

- Nurture, sustain, and challenge people to grow spiritually and find meaning in their lives through worship, religious education, social, and creative opportunities
- Grow together as a multi-generational, diverse, and inclusive community
- Lead social justice, community service, and outreach activities to positively transform our community.

Through our UU Principles we are called to treat everyone as a person of worth and dignity.

This call means we have a responsibility to:

- assure that children and youth will be safe in our congregation;
- offer a congregational home to all whom are seeking one like ours, while; honoring that in some cases, there may be a limitation to congregational involvement;
- educate ourselves about all forms child abuse and healthy childhood mental health;
- be well informed about sexual offenses and offenders and to develop processes that will help us make good decisions.¹

General Oversight and Administration of RE Safety policies and processes

- a) There will be an RE Safety and Response Team that will ensure compliance, and support the management and response to issues and situations related to this policy.
- b) The RE Safety and Response Team will be constituted by the Board of Trustees, no later than 30 days after these policies are approved. It will include the Minister(s), Director of Religious Education, and two members of the congregation, preferably with experience in the mental health, education or related field.
- c) At least annually, the RE Safety and Response Team will review this policy and submit to the Board any suggested revisions.
- d) At least annually, the RE Safety and Response Team, in coordination with the DRE, will provide training for religious education staff and volunteers on issues, policies, and procedures relevant to abuse prevention and response.

Policies and guidelines will be:

¹ Excerpted from “Balancing Acts – Keeping Children Safe in Congregations” by Rev. Debra W. Haffner

- i) presented at least annually in training and/or orientation for leaders, teachers, advisers, and mentors,
 - ii) placed on the UUCR website.
- e) Policies will apply to all UUCR programs/events which include children and youth, and groups sponsored by UUCR (such as Rainbow Youth Alliance and Youth Choir).
- f) The Members of the RE Safety and Response Team will seek out appropriate training, which will include, but is not limited to the following:
- (1) Child and youth mental health
 - (2) State guidelines surrounding mandatory reporting
 - (3) Best practices in responding to sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and threats of harm to self or others.
- g) The RE Safety and Response Team will have the following responsibilities:
- i) Know about the community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors.
 - ii) Know state laws regarding reporting.
 - iii) Evaluate applications for RE volunteers that are flagged by the religious professionals in the congregation as needing more information or follow up.
 - iv) Receive allegations of possible abuse, neglect, or self-harm and develop a process for expedient handling of such allegations.
 - v) Create and implement a Limited Access Agreement as needed.

Religious Education for Children and Youth Volunteer Screening

- a) Volunteers interested in participating in the UUCR RE and Youth programs will
- i) have been active in the congregation for at least 6 months prior to volunteering,
 - ii) fill out a volunteer application form, providing at least the following information:
 - (1) name
 - (2) address
 - (3) 2 references who can speak to the volunteer's experience with children (at least once every three-years)

- b)** Volunteers will complete a background check through the secure Church Mutual website.
- c)** The DRE or other designated staff member will call the character references no later than 6 weeks after the volunteer has submitted their application and before volunteer duties have commenced.
- d)** Volunteer applications will be stored using the church website.
- e)** Background checks will be conducted on each RE volunteer in the first year that this policy is in place. Thereafter, volunteers continuing in the RE and Youth Group programs will undergo a background check once every 3 years. New volunteers will have a background check upon their initial application to volunteer, and once every 3 years thereafter as long as they are active volunteers.
 - i)** Background check reports will be submitted electronically to the DRE and RE Assistant via a secure website hosted by Church Mutual. The following types of background checks will be included in the report: Criminal, and State and National Sex Offender.
- f)** Potential volunteers in the RE and Youth Group programs may observe in a class for up to 4 class sessions with the approval of the DRE and the class teachers. There must be at least two other unrelated teachers and/or helpers present while the potential volunteer observes in the classroom.

If a potential volunteer wishes to continue in the RE and Youth programs after their 4 sessions of observation, they must submit an application, other screening documents and processes, and undergo a background check (see paragraphs in **2c** and **2f**) prior to being placed on a teacher/helper class roster and scheduled for teaching or helping.

- g)** The DRE, in consultation with the RE Safety and Response Team, will make final decisions regarding which volunteers may or may not work with children and youth.
- h)** In the case that a volunteer is disqualified:

- i) the DRE will inform the Ministers of the disqualification so that a pastoral response and support may be provided to the disqualified volunteer;
 - ii) the DRE will provide the volunteer a report of the determination and any restriction on further service (such as a Limited Access Agreement);
 - iii) the DRE, or other member of the RE Safety and Response Team, will answer any questions the volunteer may have and provide explanation as appropriate;
 - iv) The RE Safety and Response Team may provide a process for the volunteer to become a qualified vetted Volunteer if the Team deems it appropriate.
- i)** Disqualification for volunteering in the RE programs based on commission of the following crimes would be automatic.
- i) Aggravated criminal sexual contact
 - ii) Aiding suicide of a child or youth
 - iii) Stalking
 - iv) Child sexual abuse
 - v) Kidnapping
 - vi) Criminal restraint of a child or youth
 - vii) False imprisonment of a child or youth
 - viii) Luring or enticing a child or youth by various means
 - ix) Promotion of prostitution of a child or youth
 - x) Sexual contact with a child
 - xi) Statutory rape
 - xii) Endangering the welfare of a child or youth
 - xiii) Child neglect, cruelty, abandonment, or endangerment
 - xiv) Contributing to the delinquency of a child or youth
 - xv) Indecent exposure
 - xvi) Involvement in pornography of minors or showing pornography to minors
- Other offenses may be added to the screening criteria, and thus result in disqualification, at the discretion of the RE Safety and Response Team if they feel that an offense or other questionable behavior not listed above could compromise the safety of children or youth.
- j)** The cost of the background checks will be borne by the congregation.

- k) The Administration Budget will include the cost of background checks, and will be adjusted as necessary to accommodate annual expense increases or other additional expenses required to perform the screenings.

Child and Youth Supervision and Safety

- h) Adults (aged 21 years or older) and older youth (16 years and older) working with children and youth in this congregation, either as teacher advisor, mentor, caregiver or classroom helper, must agree to comply with our “Behavior Covenant for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth” prior to beginning their duties and confirm their agreement by signing the covenant. The covenant will be signed each year the volunteer participants in the RE programs.
- i) A minimum of two adults are required for supervising any RE program. Two related adults are counted as 1 adult and two related older youth are counted as 1 older youth for supervision purposes. A related adult and older youth are counted as 1 adult.
- j) Older youth may provide care or supervision for children through the age of 11 years old.
- k) The following ratios of adults and older youth supervising children and youth are required onsite as per Maryland State licensing standards:
 - (1) Infants (1:3)
 - (2) Young toddlers (1:3)
 - (3) 2 years (1:6)
 - (4) Preschool (1:10)
 - (5) School-age (1:15)
- l) The following ratios of adults aged 21 years and older youth supervising children and youth are required off site:
 - i) Under age 3: 3 children per 1 adult / older youth
 - ii) Ages 3 to 11: 3 children per older youth
 - iii) Ages 12 to 18: 10 children per adult
- m) There must be a minimum of two unrelated adults present in the building, at youth group meetings and at other events involving children and youth of this church. If a program for

children and youth does not have the requisite adult leadership (e.g. 1 adult for 10 youth aged 12 and older), the adult leader must:

- i) Contact the DRE.
 - ii) In the case the DRE is unavailable , contact the Youth Coordinator, or Minister (in that order), whereupon the UUCR staff member will develop a plan with the adult leader which may include:
 - (1) finding adult assistance to be in compliance with UUCR policies;
 - (2) canceling the event;
 - (3) contacting parents immediately to pick up their children and youth;
 - (4) staff member coming to UUCR to be with the adult leader until children and youth are picked up.
- n) Adults working with children should be aware of standard precautions for preventing the spread of infectious diseases and such precautions must be used by staff and volunteers when caring for children. The following will be available in each building used by children and youth.
- i) Latex gloves
 - ii) first aid kits
 - iii) Disinfectant
 - iv) Small buckets
 - v) Rubber or plastic gloves
 - vi) Disposable towels or tissues
 - vii) Impermeable plastic bags
- o) Use of alcohol or illegal drugs at events held for children or youth groups, by either the children and youth or the adults present, is prohibited. Our facility is smoke free.
- p) In situations where alcohol is offered for adult consumption during church-wide events the use of alcohol should be self-supervised in such a manner as to safeguard the safety and health of any child or youth present.
- i) Adults providing care or supervision in an official capacity will refrain from consumption of alcohol.
- q) An escape plan and the location of the fire extinguisher must be posted near each classroom door.

- i) A review of first aid skills and fire escape plans must be part of the annual teacher and caregiver training.
- ii) Any building where classes, meeting and events for children or youth are held will have a visible, working telephone (including cell phones) for emergency use.
- r) No sexual activity. Sexual behavior is inappropriate and it is exclusive behavior that detracts from the group environment and sense of group safety of a trip, retreat, or church overnight.
- s) No vandalism or destruction of property.
- t) Comply with time parameters for events and sleeping curfew for overnights and retreats.

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

- u) The following behaviors are unacceptable for any person working with children and youth:
 - i) Inappropriate sexual remarks
 - ii) Unsolicited, unwelcome, or otherwise inappropriate physical contact
- v) Use of the word “no” shall be recognized as a signal for others to cease any behavior that may cause a child or youth to become uncomfortable.
- w) Any person performing as teacher, adviser, or supervisor for children or youth in an official capacity for UUCR is considered a “mandated reporter” for child abuse, as per 2013 Maryland Code Family Law Section 5-705.
 - i) Any adult that is performing as a teacher, adviser, or supervisor of children and youth in the RE and Youth Programs is required to report, by phone or in person, any type of suspected, reported, or witnessed sexual harassment, abuse, or harm to self to the DRE immediately.
 - ii) The DRE will support the volunteer or staff adult in making the mandatory report to the local Child Protective Services Department or law enforcement.

- iii) As part of the report to the DRE, the adult reporting must also provide a written incident report.
- iv) The DRE will immediately inform the parents and/or guardians of the minor child or youth involved in the incident and the action taken thus far.
- v) Upon receipt of the initial report, the DRE will inform the minister(s) and RE Safety and Response Team, and insure pastoral support is provided.
- vi) If the DRE is not available, the incident shall be reported to the RE staff available or directly to the Minister(s), who will ensure pastoral report.

Field Trips (including Offsite Retreats and Youth CONs)

- x) Parents must sign a permission slip before children or youth leave the church premises by vehicle and not accompanied by their parents. The destination and expected time of return must be posted near the church entrance. The permission slips will include names, emergency contacts and medical conditions and must be kept available during the trip. A list of all children's or youth names, parents' names, and contact information will be provided for each adult in a supervisory role.
- y) There must be a minimum of two unrelated adults with any group leaving the church property on a church-endorsed trip.
- z) All travelers, adults and children alike must have and use a working seatbelt or car seat in accordance with prevailing laws.
- aa) All drivers must be covered by automobile liability insurance. Proof of insurance coverage must be presented to the church official in charge of the trip upon request. Drivers must complete the "Driver Responsibility Check List/Contract" and the "Driver Roll Call List" as requested. Additionally, volunteer drivers to cons, retreats, Heritage trips, and other church-sponsored trips will have a driving record check performed.
- bb) No children shall be driven on a church-endorsed field trip by a driver under the age of 21.

- cc) No driver shall consume any substance – prescription or over-the-counter medication, alcohol, etc. - that carries a warning about use while driving, or might impair their ability perform their duties as a volunteer driver.
- dd) There must be no use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or tobacco products by adults leading field trips, overnights, retreats, or any programs for children and/or youth.
- ee) Adults attending youth-centered events, whether in an official chaperone capacity or not, must complete and adhere to the “Behavior Covenant.”
- ff) Drivers must get a full night’s sleep before driving children and/or youth to and from UUCR-sponsored events.

Classroom Safety

- gg) All classrooms must provide an unobstructed view from the corridor into the classroom at all times when class is in session.
 - i) If other groups using RE classroom space cover the windows, then RE staff or volunteers must remove the covering during RE classes and programs, and replace it after class.
 - ii) Replace coverings to their original place before leaving the classroom.
- hh) All RE classroom must have a fully stocked first aid kit.
- ii) For all RE classes, events, and programs there will be at least two adults unrelated by blood, marriage, or committed partnership present.
- jj) In the case of nursery through 5th grade, youth aged 16 years and older may be present, with a ratio of no more than 1 older youth per 3 children under the age of 3 years old.
- kk) Emergency and evacuation procedures for RE and Youth Group classes will be followed as posted in the classroom and in the RE folders.

- ll) No photos of children shall be taken or shared on social media unless parents have given permission on the RE Registration. Photos of minors shared on social media will not include any identifying information such as first or last names or “tagging” parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are welcome to “tag” themselves on pictures of their children.

- mm) Teachers and helpers will be trained at least once each year on all RE and Youth Group classroom management procedures and policies, which include, but not limited to:
 - i) Emergency and Evacuation Procedures
 - ii) Incident Reports
 - iii) Behavior Management
 - iv) RE Safety Policies and Procedures
 - v) Mandatory Reporting Process and Requirements
 - vi) Basic First Aid and Standard Precautions

- nn) Incident report forms will be included in each RE class folder to be used when Standard Precautions or Basic First Aid procedures are used.
 - i) Each incident shall be recorded and photocopied once, the original of which will be signed by the person completing the form and at least one guardian/parent. The photocopy will be given to the parent.
 - ii) Once completed, the signed form shall be given to at least one parent/guardian, and one to the DRE, or her/his designee.

- oo) When children/youth need to take medication during RE programs, the medication will be submitted to, stored and dispensed by the staff on duty, or the adult leader. Medication must be in original prescription package, complete with instructions to dispense medication. Staff or adult leader will store the medication during the class/program, keep track of dosage and when medication was dispensed, and return medication and a schedule of medication doses to the parent/guardian. One copy of

dispensed medication and dosage schedule will be given to the DRE, or his/her designee.

- pp) If a child or youth refuses to take their medication in accordance with the provided schedule, the staff or adult leader may ask the parent to come get the child/youth, even when the event is offsite.
- qq) When materials, whether in print or other media, of an unusually sensitive or graphic nature are used with anyone under the age of 18, teachers will notify and get written permission from parents/guardians prior to use of such materials.
 - i) Notification must include the description of the materials, and why and in which ways the materials will be used to further learning.
 - ii) Furthermore, the teacher must indicate whether the materials are “rated” according to media format. For instance, if an “R” rated movie is chosen to be played in a class or program, parents will be informed of such, the title, and what caused the “R” rating.
 - iii) A permission slip must be signed by parents if the (MPAA/ESRB) rating on RE program materials falls in the “unsuitable for” or “inappropriate for” or “restricted” age ranges for a particular child/youth.
 - iv) Teachers may provide an alternative activity, but they are not required to do so, and should indicate such to the parents of children/youth.

Management of Concerns

- rr) Any concern by teachers, helpers, parents, or congregants should be first shared directly with the persons involved, and explained or resolved respectfully in accordance with the UUCR Covenant of Right Relations.

- ss) If a teacher or helper has received negative feedback or a complaint from a parent or guardian, the teacher will report the feedback to the DRE without delay.
- tt) If there is an issue between teachers, it is expected that those teachers will resolve the issue themselves. If this is not possible, the teachers should request a meeting with the DRE.
- uu) DRE will report any concerns that have not been resolved to the minister(s) and RE Safety and Response Team as appropriate.