

Safe Congregation Policies and Procedures for Children and Youth

Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester
669 Union Street ~ Manchester, New Hampshire 03104 ~ (603)625-6854

As Unitarian Universalists, we have covenanted to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This Principle carries with it the imperative to protect and support the most vulnerable among us: members of our congregation who are minor children and youth. If we are to be a caring community, we must ensure that everyone who comes here feels valued, safe and secure.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester (UUCM), as a spiritual community, takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment. UUCM recognizes the reality of child sexual and physical abuse in our society; its impact on children and families, and the need for responsible means of addressing this issue. By overcoming the secrecy involved in this area and by providing a forum for possible problems and concerns, we will reflect our commitment to provide protective care for all children, youth and volunteers who participate in church-sponsored activities.

We will achieve these goals through:

- > Screening all church staff and volunteers who work with children.
- > Supervising our children and those who work with them.
- > Providing a specific process by which allegations of abuse are reported and investigated.
- > Treating all persons with dignity and respect.
- > Requiring those at risk of incident or accusation to refrain from contact with children.
- > Denying access to our children and youth to known sex offenders.
- > Sharing the responsibility with every member of the church to create a safe congregation.

While the main focus of these policies is directed to those most directly involved in working with our young people, all members of UUCM carry a responsibility to provide a safe and caring community in which our children and youth are respected, in which their self-worth is affirmed, and in which spiritual, social, and intellectual growth are encouraged.

The congregation as a whole will have access to these policies and procedures, the screening process will be completed for every person working with our children and youth, training will be provided to staff and volunteers, and a statement about these policies will be included in the new member packet. We are committed to the care of our children and to the principles of fairness, kindness and forgiveness that have long been part of our religious heritage and tradition.

1. Safety and Protection in the Church Building

This policy applies to all members, friends and congregants that function under the umbrella of UUCM, including use of the building for denominational activities.

For purposes of this document, references to a document's confidentiality means that said document will be kept secure with limited access.

For purposes of this document, the terms child or children, will refer to individuals from their birth through the completion of grade six while the term, youth, will refer to individuals entering seventh grade to the age of eighteen.

1.1 Particular Requirements - Building

1.1.1 First aid kits and fire extinguishers shall be readily available within the church building at all times. These items shall be maintained by the Buildings and Grounds Committee.

1.1.2 The Director of Religious Education, in conjunction with the Chairs of the Religious Education and Buildings and Grounds Committees shall develop and maintain a fire drill plan and, in cooperation with the Manchester Fire Department, in accordance with the procedures set by the Manchester Fire Department, arrange for at least one church wide fire drill using our alarm system to be held yearly. An emergency lock down drill shall be arranged by the Director of Religious Education on a yearly basis also. Evacuation and lock-down plans shall be posted by each exit within each classroom and at each exit within the church building. Keys for lock down and covers for classroom door windows shall be hung in a readily accessible and visible location close to each classroom door.

1.1.3 Alcohol shall not be permitted at church events to which children are invited.

1.1.4 Illicit drugs and weapons are not permitted at church events or on church grounds.

1.2 Training of Staff and Volunteers

1.2.1 First aid/CPR training from a certified first aid instructor shall be mandatory for the Director of Religious Education and optional for the Minister. The church shall pay any fee required for this training and retraining to maintain current certification.

1.2.2 Training of Religious Education program staff, paid or volunteer, will involve the knowledge of church safety policy and procedures, location and use of fire extinguishers and first-aid kits, and evacuation and lock-down procedures as well as teaching methods and use of curriculum.

2. Safety and Protection for Interactions with Children and Youth

2.1 Selection and Screening of Staff and Volunteers

Each applicant for any position working with children and/or youth must submit to the following as a condition precedent to employment or appointment, both for initial hire

and ongoing work.

- Primary Screening Form, which shall be updated both when any pertinent information changes and at the discretion of the Director of Religious Education, and shall include 2 personal references.
- Criminal Records Request and Authorization Form
- Code of Ethics Form
- Teacher/Advisor Job Description/Contract Form

In addition:

- All staff and volunteers must attend training sessions facilitated by the Director of Religious Education at least once a year.
- Paid staff must have a personal interview with the immediate supervisor or supervisory committee.
- All staff and volunteers working with youth must be 25 years of age or older.
- All staff or volunteers involved in OWL, or having overnight responsibilities with children and/or youth, must have a criminal records check no more than five years old on file.

2.2 Implementation Specifics

2.2.1 The Director of Religious Education and the Religious Education Committee shall be responsible for overseeing completion of the appropriate paperwork for checking references.

2.2.2 If the applicant is not known, confirmation of identity will be requested.

2.2.3 The applicant shall have been a congregant of this church for at least six months prior to working with children and youth. If they have been a congregant of another church community and are willing to supply references acceptable to the Director of Religious Education and the Religious Education Committee, they may apply to work with our program.

2.2.4 The Director of Religious Education and the Religious Education Committee will make a best effort to annually check the UUCM mailing list against the Sexual Offenders Registry and to check names on visitor cards against the registry list three times yearly.

2.2.5 Adults, youth and children who are known to have criminal charges pending or have been convicted of or pled guilty to either child sexual or physical abuse will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

2.2.6 If it is determined that a potential volunteer should have restricted access to children, he/she shall be requested to sign and follow a Limited Access Agreement. If the same is determined for a potential church staff person, the person shall not be hired.

2.2.7 The Minister(s), the Director of Religious Education and the Religious Education Committee will maintain the confidentiality of all screening material.

2.2.8 The REC, the DRE, and the Minister(s) will include a discussion of these policies and procedures during any orientation to the Religious Education program at UUCM.

Efforts will be made to provide education, awareness and support to all adults and young people during the year.

3. Training and Supervision of Staff and Volunteers

3.1 Training

3.1.1 Every participant shall receive a copy of the Safe Congregation Policy Statement and acknowledge receipt in writing.

3.1.2 Staff and volunteers working with children and youth shall be trained to understand the following:

- The definition of child abuse;
- Sexual and physical abuse symptoms;
- What constitutes inappropriate conduct;
- Church policies that govern working with children or youth
- Reporting procedures for observed or suspected misconduct

3.2 Supervision of Children and Youth

Generally, parents or guardians of minor children must supervise their children at all church outings. Volunteers and compensated employees are not allowed to pick up children and youth to/from home from UUCM or to be alone in a car with one child or youth except by prior parental arrangement and notification of DRE.

3.3. Particular Requirements

3.3.1 Field Trips, Youth Gatherings, Vehicle Rides, Sleepovers:

- Permission slips and medical release forms for each child
- Leaders must have a list of names, emergency contacts, and medical conditions with them at all times.
- Every person transported in the vehicle must wear a seatbelt.
- First Aid Kits at all functions.
- Criminal background check for all sleepover chaperones.
- All drivers must have automotive liability insurance.

3.3.2 Staff/Volunteers meeting alone with a child :

- When possible, approval of Senior Staff or parent/guardian
- Immediate reporting to Senior Staff as appropriate

3.4 Implementation Specifics

3.4.1 Two appropriately screened adult supervisors, one of whom must be an adult, will be assigned at all times in Children's Church rooms. Should a volunteer or staff person need to escort a child or youth from a room for any reason, a third party must accompany them. No adult should be alone with a child or youth unless they are related and have family permission. No youth should be alone with a child, another youth, or an adult unless related (a part of the same family.)

3.4.2 Building will not be open to children or youth for any activity until 2 approved supervisors are present. Parents are responsible for supervising their children or youth until 2 approved supervisors are present in the church building for any church-sponsored activity.

3.4.3 A roaming supervisor will be present in the RE wing during Children's Church to provide supervision for children going to the lavatory or removed from a room for disciplinary purposes. This supervisor must meet requirements listed in section 2.1.1.

3.4.4 Youth will not be dismissed until church service has ended. Youth may be dismissed on their own. Children will be released only to an approved adult at the end of their religious education program.

3.4.5 Church functions providing childcare require two approved supervisors, one of whom is an adult, an unlocked classroom, and the presence of adult congregants in the building.

3.4.6 All doors to classrooms must have windows.

4. Reporting and Responding Procedures

Child abuse means the no accidental injury, sexual abuse (physical, verbal, or visual), exploitation, neglectful treatment or the maltreatment of a child (from birth to eighteen years) by any person under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare and safety are harmed. By reference this definition includes but is not limited to the definition of child abuse as defined in NH RSA 169-C:3, the New Hampshire Child Protection Act, II and XXVII.

4.1 Procedures for Previously Investigated Offenses or Charges

4.1.1 Anyone who becomes aware of child sexual or physical abuse charges made against an employee, volunteer, member or attendee of the church should notify the Minister, the President of the Executive Board or the DRE. Of these, whoever receives the information shall be responsible for reporting to the others. In the event that the charges involve a minister, the next points of contact shall be the Board President, the District Executive of the New Hampshire/Vermont District, or the UUA Department of Ministry.

4.1.2 The Minister(s) the President and the DRE shall:

- Collect and review all pertinent facts regarding the incident or charges;
- Review the application and reference forms kept on the person;
- Determine what, if any, actions need to be taken; and
- Carefully document all meetings, conversations, information, etc., regarding this matter, and keep all this information as confidential as the circumstances warrant.

4.1.3 If the allegations have merit or cannot be disproved, actions to be considered shall include:

- Signing a limited Access Agreement;
- Determining who in the church and the larger community should be notified, and means of notification; and/or
- Suspending or terminating employment, volunteer duties or membership in accordance with UUCM By-Laws.

4.2 Procedures for an Uninvestigated Occurrence:

4.2.1 Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult volunteer worker and a member of the youth group or a child should be reported immediately to the DRE.

4.2.2 Anyone informed of an incident of child sexual or physical abuse (whether the abuse may have occurred during a church activity or not) shall:

- Complete the Report of Suspected Abuse form included in all volunteer training packets or provided by the DRE; and
- Report the incident to either a Minister, the President of the Executive Board or the DRE. Of these, whoever receives the information shall be responsible for reporting to the others. In the event that the charges involve a minister, the next points of contact shall be the Board President, the District Executive of the New Hampshire/Vermont District, or the UUA Department of Ministry.
- New Hampshire State law, RSA 169-C, the Child Protection Act, states that any person who has reason to suspect that a child under the age of 18 has been abused and/or neglected must make a report to the Division for Children, Youth and Families immediately. This law also states that any person making a report in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability.

4.2.3 In the presence of one of the above-listed church leaders, (Section 5.2.2) report the incident to DCYF (1-800-894-5533). Keep careful written notes of the telephone conversation and the name of the person you speak with. A follow-up written report may be required by DCYF. While you will be required to provide DCYF with your name, they will keep your identity confidential if you wish.

4.2.4 The entire matter needs to be kept confidential from anyone other than the Minister(s), the Board President and the DRE until you are informed that an investigation has been completed.

4.2.5 The Minister(s), the Board President and the DRE shall carefully document the handling of the incident, and report the incident immediately, as appropriate, to the child's parents, the church's attorney, the proper civil authorities, and the church's insurance company.

4.2.6 Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously. The

Minister(s), the Board President and the DRE shall reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.

4.2.7 The Minister(s), Board President and the DRE shall determine how to address the incident both publicly and within the congregation. While civil authorities are investigating the reported incident, these people shall determine the appropriate actions to be taken regarding the accused, as specified herein under "Procedures for Previously Investigated Offenses or Charges."

4.3 Procedures Regarding a Person Against Whom An Allegation Has Been Made.

4.3.1 Use our Unitarian Universalist Principles as a guide during all interactions with the accused person.

4.3.2 If the accused is a paid staff person or a volunteer, that person shall be suspended from all activities involving the supervision of children. This is true for an incident that allegedly occurred either within or outside the realm of the church. Suspension will continue pending the outcome of the investigation by the appropriate authority.

4.3.3 Regardless of where or under what circumstances the alleged incident takes place, if a paid staff person is involved and convicted, or a legal charge is brought but not acted upon for reasons that leave too many questions unanswered, it may be considered as job related and affecting job performance.

4.3.4 Reinstatement of paid staff member or volunteer will occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the Executive Board.

4.4 Procedures for Working with and Caring for a Person Who Has Been Convicted of Sexual Abuse (Known Offender)

4.4.1 Because we "affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person" we do not believe any person should be "automatically" excluded from our membership because of their past actions. However, we also believe we have a responsibility to insure the well-being of all of our participants, especially the most vulnerable. If someone who has been convicted of sexual abuse, regardless of where it occurred, wishes to participate in this church, we will welcome him or her but their participation will be limited in ways to ensure the safety of our children.

4.4.2 Known offenders must sign the Limited Access Agreement. Refusal will grant UUCM the authority to deny access to church property.

4.4.3 Those who refuse to sign and who enter church property will be asked to leave. Refusal will prompt a call to the local police for assistance.

4.4.4 Implementation of this section shall fall to the discretion of the Executive Board, the Committee Council, and the Religious Education Committee, working closely with the Minister (s) and the Director of Religious Education.

5. Restricted Access to Children

If it is determined that any person should have restricted access to children, he/she shall be required to sign a Limited Access Agreement, and shall not be allowed to have any further contact with children.

6. Monitoring of Policies and Procedures

While complete enforcement of policies may not always be possible, and as the Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester takes seriously its responsibility as a spiritual community to provide a safe and nurturing environment, the Executive Board will monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures and evaluate the success of these efforts routinely.

Limited Access Agreement – Confidential

(This document should be placed on church stationary without the heading.)

The following paragraph would be used in cases of allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse 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 Response Team (or other appropriate congregational entity). It will be kept in a locked file in the office. Introductory Paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:]

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester, New Hampshire affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping 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 to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations. Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all adult social events, and well supervised intergenerational events.

You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- Please do not talk with children.
- Please do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present. If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.

- Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

I understand that my conviction is public knowledge and 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:

Minister

Director of Religious Education,

President of the Executive Board,

Chair (Co - chairs) of the Religious Education Committee

Chairs of any intergenerational event

Any families of children or youth active in our program who request to see

Limited Access Agreements on file.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and 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

President of the Executive Board Date

Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester
669 Union Street ~ Manchester NH 03104

Thank you for your interest in working with the children and youth of our congregation. Our congregation takes seriously our responsibility of assuring the safety of our youth. Please fill out this form and give it to the Religious Educator. Thank you for your support in providing a safe and secure environment for all of the congregation's children and youth.

NAME: (First, Middle, Last)

Have you ever used a different name? ___ No ___ Yes

If yes, please list with dates:

How long have you been attending this congregation? _____

ADDRESS:

Street

Town, State, Zip

Number of years at current address: _____

If you have not lived at this address for at least 5 years, please list any previous addresses with dates.

What states have you lived in since you were 18 years old?

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-mail _____

Place of work _____

Number of years at current employment _____

May we call your current employer for a character reference? ___ yes ___ no

If not, please tell us why.

A. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense? If yes, please explain.

B. Have you ever been accused of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

If yes, please provide details:

C. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by any employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

If yes, please provide details:

D. Have you ever been convicted of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

If yes, please provide details:

E. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children

and youth?
If yes, please provide details.

Congregation History and Prior Work with Children and Youth

List congregations you have attended during the past five years.

Name of congregation: _____

City, State _____

When did attend _____

Others: _____

List all previous work involving children and youth (list name, type of work performed, person you were responsible to)

Please list two references who are not relatives who have known you for at least three years and who are familiar with your character as it pertain to your experience with children or youth:

1) Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____ Relationship to you: _____

2) Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____ Relationship to you: _____

I authorize the congregation to contact references and other congregations to obtain information about my background regarding my character and fitness for work with children and youth. I authorize references to provide such information about me. I hereby release and hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to hold harmless this congregation, its trustees, employees and volunteers.

I understand that a member of the staff may check the sex offender registry and/or contact the local police for more information about my background.

This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff or volunteers or participating in a response team, who have children and youth attending UUCM on a need to know basis, or as required by law.

I attest that the above information is true and correct.

Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

Agreement to Teach Form for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders
Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester
669 Union Street ~ Manchester NH 03104 ~ (625-6854)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ E-mail _____

I have read and understand our congregation's policies on keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe, including, but not limited to, all emergency procedures. I agree to follow these policies and procedures as I also uphold the UU Principles in my work with Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester, NH children, youth, adults, and families.

I have signed the Code of Ethics statement.

I agree to cooperate with the Director of religious Education and the volunteer team I am assigned to in order to arrange a schedule which is convenient to all while maintaining staffing in the classrooms according to specifications of the safety policy. I agree to arrive at 9:45am on the Sunday mornings I am to be in the classrooms and understand morning RE programming runs to 11:15. I agree to arrive at 5:45pm if advising an evening youth meeting and understand that while the evening programming for Junior and Senior YRUU runs to 8:00pm, I must remain with the other advisors until all youth have left the building in an appropriate way. I understand I am responsible for supervising the children and youth in cleaning their spaces before they are dismissed.

I affirm that I have never been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty to any sexual crime. I also have not pled guilty to a lesser charge after having been charged with a sexual crime. I have never engaged in any form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. I have never been determined to have engaged in any sexual offenses in any civil, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum or other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, I have met to review this information confidentially with the Minister and the Religious Educator. Further, I agree to notify the Minister and the Religious Educator immediately should I be accused of sexual abuse, sexual offenses, sexual harassment, or other sexual improprieties in the time that I am working with children and youth in this congregation.

Signature _____ Date _____

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Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both 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 youth and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if positive potential 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 youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse. Leaders shall be informed of the code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I have read and understand the above statements of position, expectations, and actions.

Name Printed _____

Name Signed _____ Date _____