

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville

Policy and Procedures

Section: Children and Youth

Revised: April, 2007
December, 2010

HONORING THE CHILDREN

Maintaining Appropriate Conduct Toward Children

PURPOSE

- 1) To insure that guidelines regarding appropriate behavior with the children and youth of our church are in place; and
- 2) through prevention steps, reduce the likelihood that inappropriate behavior toward children will occur; and
- 3) provide guidance on how to effectively respond to incidents that may occur, whether during a church activity or at other times.

PREVENTION

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, in partnership with parents, to create and maintain a safe environment that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth in our church programs. However, this policy is devoted primarily to situations in which children are in a supervised relationship with church members other than their parents. The child's welfare shall be considered to be the parent's responsibility if the child is on church grounds but not actually in a church supervised activity.

In an effort to protect our young people as well as our leaders, teachers, contracted child care workers and all other adults who work or volunteer with children and youth in the church will be required to sign the Code of Ethics before they assume child supervision roles. The policy also encourages other church members and friends to read and sign the Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth. (See addendum 1)

At least two adults, including child care workers, should be present in each classroom on Sunday mornings, and on every outing, overnight and other church-related activity with groups of children, including the Children's and Youth Choir rehearsals and trips. Exceptions to this guideline require written permission from parents. The RE Committee will also be responsible for developing and publicizing additional guidelines concerning other child safety issues in RE activities such as supervision of and responsibility for children and youth before and after church events, ratio of adults to children on field trips and overnights, minimum age of advisors on field trips and overnights, requirements for transporting children (insurance, minimum age of driver, etc.)

Prevention Through Training and Education

Greater understanding of the complexities of sexuality and inappropriate behavior will help us to avoid situations that could lead to abuse or to false accusations.

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For our children and youth, the RE Committee will provide age appropriate information about development and sexuality. Our children must be empowered to protect themselves and report abuse.

For RE teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth, the RE Committee and Safe Congregation Panel will provide annual training and written information regarding this policy and child abuse prevention.

For all paid staff, including those working with children and youth, the Board and the Safe Congregation Panel will provide training and written information regarding this policy and child abuse prevention.

For new members of the church, the Membership Committee will provide a copy of this policy to be included in all new member packets.

For the entire congregation, the Safe Congregation Panel will serve as a resource and provide educational opportunities as needed.

Prevention Through Screening and Supervision of Adults Working with Children and Youth

All RE teachers and other adults working with children and youth:

- A) will have been a congregant for at least six months or have references from other UU churches that include the parish minister or director of lifespan religious education (DLRE),
- B) will have completed a screening application approved by the Board of Directors and have been interviewed before assuming their duties. Two references will be requested and kept on file for new RE teachers and other adults working with children and youth,
- C) will have attended at least one training session related to this policy organized by the RE Committee or the Safe Congregation Panel within 6 months of starting date; and,
- D) will have read, understood and signed the "Code of Ethics."

The Safe Congregation Panel will work with the RE Committee in developing training and screening materials. Confidential criminal background checks will be conducted for all paid staff prior to hiring or signing of any contract and may be conducted, at the discretion of the RE Committee, for teachers and other adult volunteers working with the children and youth. In the case of paid staff, information will be shared with the Personnel Chair and Board of Directors as appropriate. Individuals who have been convicted of, are under current indictment for, or self disclose any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or child abuse are precluded from participation in the RE program and other children or youth church activities. In addition, this policy encourages any congregant who has been convicted of, is under current indictment for, or has been involved in any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or of child abuse to make him or herself known to the parish minister, DLRE or any other member of the Safe Congregation Panel. Other members or friends of the congregation, including a minister and the DLRE, who become aware of such information, should report this to a member of the Safe Congregation Panel and the Safe Congregation Panel will then decide how to handle the situation.

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REPORTING OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straight forward. Religious leaders should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting the children. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations. (See Addendum 2 for a definition of child abuse)

IF A CHURCH MEMBER OR FRIEND OR STAFF PERSON HAS A SUSPICION THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED, EITHER WHILE IN THE CHURCH PROGRAM OR AT OTHER TIMES, THE PERSON WITH THE SUSPICION MUST REPORT THE INCIDENT TO STATE AUTHORITIES BY STATE LAW.

In Tennessee "any person" is considered a "mandatory reporter" by law and reports may be made anonymously to the State. The Tennessee Children's Services Department operates a 24 hour hot line for this purpose. The toll-free phone number (as of 2/9/2007) is **1-877-237-0004** (The current number will be posted at the church on the RE bulletin board at all times).

Reporting Within the Church

In addition, if the person with the concern believes the abuse occurred during a church program, because the child or youth could be a continued risk, it is recommended that the individual should report his or her concerns to

- 1) The parish minister, or
- 2) The DLRE, or
- 3) The Youth Coordinator, or
- 4) Any other member of the church's Safe Congregation Panel.

When an allegation of child abuse occurring during a church program is reported to the parish minister, DLRE, Youth Coordinator or Safe Congregation Panel member, the responsible person receiving the allegation should take the necessary steps to

- 1) Abide by Tennessee law on reporting child abuse;
- 2) Take appropriate action to assure protection of the children in the church; and
- 3) Convene a meeting of the Safe Congregation Panel

REPORTING OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR TOWARD CHILDREN

If any congregant witnesses behavior toward any child that could be viewed as inappropriate, that congregant should report that behavior to the appropriate person as noted below.

If the perceived inappropriate behavior is by an RE teacher or a volunteer working with children or youth, the DLRE should be informed. The DLRE may chose to discuss this behavior with the teacher or volunteer and educate that person on appropriate behavior. If the teacher or volunteer does not understand and correct the behavior or if the DLRE believes that the behavior puts children or youth at risk, the DLRE is to report the behavior to the RE Committee. The DLRE, on consultation with the RE Committee, shall be empowered to remove the teacher or volunteer from the RE program and

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recommend that the teacher involved not work with children or youth in any capacity at the church. If the teacher feels that the DLRE or the RE Committee was unjust in their actions, the teacher may file a grievance with the Safe Congregation Panel.

If the perceived inappropriate behavior is by a congregant other than an RE teacher or volunteer working with children or youth, it should be reported to the Safe Congregation Panel. The Safe Congregation Panel will meet and decide what the appropriate response of the church should be, weighing the seriousness of the report and the possible risk to children and youth against fair and compassionate treatment of all concerned parties. The Safe Congregation Panel may decide that no action is necessary. If any action is thought to be required, that action will be reported to the Board of Directors meeting in Executive session. Actions may range from education of the individual to restriction of contact with children and youth on church grounds and in all church activities. In cases of recurrent inappropriate behavior or behavior that places children or youth at significant risk, the Safe Congregation Panel may request that the person be asked to leave the church.

If the perceived inappropriate behavior is by a staff member, a member of the Safe Congregation Panel should be notified and a meeting of the Safe Congregation Panel held to determine the appropriate response. The Personnel Chair should be present if a staff member is involved. If the Personnel Chair can not be present for the meeting, a report will be made to the Personnel Chair following the meeting. The Safe Congregation Panel must make a report to the Board of Directors in an executive session.

SAFE CONGREGATION PANEL

There will be six members of the Safe Congregation Panel. Five will be elected by the congregation at the annual meeting. The members will serve rotating 3 year terms. The sixth member will be appointed by the Board of Directors. If a member resigns, the Board of Directors may appoint a member to complete the year until the next Congregational Meeting.

The Safe Congregation Panel members will select from among themselves one person to be the chair. The DLRE is an ex-officio member of the Safe Congregation Panel in regard to matters concerning this policy. Panel members are charged with understanding this policy and being knowledgeable about available resources and reporting procedures for children, including applicable Tennessee state laws. The DLRE will keep an up-to-date list of the names and phone numbers of all members of the Safe Congregation Panel and will insure that this list is posted at all times and available to all members and friends of the congregation.

The Safe Congregation Panel will:

- 1) arrange training on this policy for new staff and update that training as needed,
- 2) develop RE teacher training and screening material,
- 3) discuss and recommend to the Board of Directors a response to any reported inappropriate behavior toward children by staff, and
- 4) develop the response to the congregation of any alleged or confirmed cases of child abuse.

The Safe Congregation Panel may also be asked by the Parish Minister, DLRE, Youth Coordinator or the Board to undertake other duties such as arranging training for the congregation on appropriate behavior toward children. The Safe Congregation Panel will review this policy annually in the spring and report and recommend changes to the Board of Directors at the end of the fiscal year.

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If the Safe Congregation Panel is meeting to discuss the response to reported inappropriate behavior by a staff member, then that staff person will be removed from the Safe Congregation Panel and the Board will be notified immediately by the Safe Congregation Panel. THE SAFE CONGREGATION PANEL DOES NOT HAVE THE LEGAL AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE GUILT OR INNOCENCE. It is designed instead to protect the children of our church community and to ensure that all involved are treated with dignity and respect. The following guidelines should be kept in mind.

- 1) **Safety of the Children** - the safety of the children in the church program should be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely actions should be taken to insure their safety based upon the credibility and severity of the behavior and other pertinent factors.
- 2) **State Law** - A copy of Tennessee state law on child abuse should be kept in the child abuse policy notebook (maintained in the DLRE's office) and should be referenced when an incidence is reported. Appropriate and timely reporting will be made to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.
- 3) **Professional Resources** - The Safe Congregation Panel should call on or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within the church and outside of the church.
- 4) **Whom to Inform** - Decisions about whom to inform about the behavior (parents, teachers, the board, the congregation, the appropriate Committee, etc) and the information to be provided should be made in a careful, but timely manner by the Safe Congregation Panel. The decision should be made based upon the individual situation (e.g., severity and credibility of allegation; whether the threat to the safety of the children still exists).
- 5) **Confidentiality** - Since these matters are sensitive, it is important that all persons involved, including the reporting person and the staff member involved, maintain the level of confidentiality recommended by the Safe Congregation Panel.

THE RE COMMITTEE

The RE Committee shall be charged with understanding this Policy and being certain that all its actions and rules governing the RE program are agreement with the Policy. The RE Committee will meet with the DLRE when requested by the DLRE to remove a teacher or volunteer from working with youth or children, and advise the DLRE in such matters.

STAFF OBLIGATIONS

All staff are to read and be in compliance with the Honoring the Children Policy. Issues related to the policy may be brought to the Safe Congregation Panel by any staff member either through a member of the panel or by attending a meeting of the panel.

The Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE)

The DLRE shall make every effort to ensure compliance with this Policy. The DLRE shall be certain that the teachers and volunteers working with youth and children sign the Code of Ethics yearly, keep these on file, ascertain that all teachers are in compliance with the Honoring the Children Policy, and maintain

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appropriate confidential records. The DLRE is to seek the advice of the Safe Congregation Panel on all matters related to this policy. The DLRE shall be an ex-officio member of the Safe Congregation Panel in regard to those matters concerning this policy. The DLRE shall make certain that the Youth Coordinator is also in compliance with this Policy.

The Youth Coordinator

The Youth Coordinator shall be charged with ensuring that all youth groups are operating in compliance with this Policy and any policies passed by the RE committee regarding youth and children.. The Youth Coordinator will keep the DLRE informed of such compliance and of any breaches in compliance.

THE ROLE OF THE CONGREGATION

Maintaining the safety of our youth and children is part of the covenant we all have with the church and with each other. Any member of the congregation or staff should feel to contact the Safe Congregation Panel with any concerns or ideas that would make First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville a better place for children or youth.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Parents are responsible for their own children and youth when that young person is not in a scheduled church activity. Parents are also responsible for their own children and youth before and after scheduled church activities. The church is **NOT** responsible for the safety of children and youth on church grounds at times other than during the time of scheduled church events.

No children or youth should be on the church grounds at times when no church events are scheduled unless a parent or adult authorized by a parent is present with the child or youth.

The Board of Directors of The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville will make the final determination of any additional consequences appropriate to the violation of this policy, including, but not limited to, termination of a staff person (except for a minister) and any additional action in the case of volunteers or members beyond that for which the Safe Congregation Panel is authorized. Violation of this policy by a minister or DLRE, Youth Coordinator, or other staff persons shall constitute good cause for discipline under the terms of that staff member's contract. The Board shall also inform the following of any determination of serious violations by a minister of this policy: the Mid South District Executive, the Director of the Department of Ministry of the UUA, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the UUA, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association.

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Addendum 1

Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1986.

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 young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential is to be realized. Among the most important areas of growth are 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 and research shows that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care. Therefore, I will not engage in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and youth. I will not sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse. I will not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug which would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively role with children or youth.

I have read and understand the above Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth, and I am in agreement with its spirit and purpose.

I give consent to the DLRE to do a back-round check on me at the DLRE's discretion.

Signed _____ Date _____

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Addendum 2

What is Child Abuse?

The UUA defines child abuse as "an act committed by a parent, care giver, or person in a position of trust that harms or threatens to harm a child's well-being or physical or mental health." Child abuse is also against the law. There are four categories of child abuse according to the UUA:

Physical Abuse: Deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child. Instances of child abuse include violent assault with hands, feet, a knife, or other instrument, or burns, fractures, and bruises resulting from being beaten, shaken, or thrown.

Sexual Abuse: Engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child, using a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child. Any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or a significantly older child, abuse has occurred. The child is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. Sexual abuse can include the fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, and exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution. Child sexual abuse is illegal regardless of whether the child "consents" or not. Consent is not an issue. The offender bears the entire responsibility for the abuse, whatever form it takes. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects. Types of abuse that involve touching include: sexual fondling; oral, genital, and anal penetration; intercourse, forcible rape. Types of abuse that do not involve touching include: verbal comments such as statements intended to seduce children, pornographic videos, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse may be very difficult to identify and document. Emotional abuse deeply affects a child's self-esteem by subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It can include close confinement, inadequate nurturing, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse.

Neglect: Children have basic physical, nutritional, and environmental needs that must be supplied. Chronic withholding of food, clothing, medication, and proper living quarters, as well as abandonment are all acts of neglect. Neglect can include physical, emotional, or educational neglect through such actions as inadequate supervision, health hazards in the home, refusing to seek treatment for illnesses, providing inadequate nurturing, and deliberately permitting chronic truancy.