

Unitarian Universalist Society: East - Safe Congregation Policy
October 2012

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the Unitarian Universality Society: East's Safe Congregation Policy is to identify and implement practices and procedures that protect the physical, emotional and sexual safety of the congregation's members, friends, children, youth, staff and vendors.

II. SAFE CONGREGATION RESPONSE TEAM

- A. The Safe Congregation Response Team is the body that will address issues that arise following allegations of child abuse/neglect, elder abuse/neglect, or any alleged behavior or activity that compromises the safety of UUS:E members, friends, children or vendors.
- B. Membership on the Safe Congregation Response Team is composed of the following:
- Minister
 - Director of Religious Education
 - Pastoral Friends Chairperson
 - Policy Board Appointee

III. EXPECTATIONS OF CONDUCT:

A. Minister

The Minister is bound by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's Guidelines, which include its Code of Conduct and Standards of Professional Practice. The Guidelines can be found at the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association website. The minister is also expected to comply with the laws of the state of Connecticut regarding his or her designation as a mandated reporter of child abuse and elder abuse.

The Minister is expected to respect and protect his or her own needs for spiritual growth and ethical integrity and to model healthy boundaries regarding sexuality and interpersonal relationships.

B. Director of Religious Education (DRE)

The Director of Religious Education is bound by the Liberal Religious Educators Association's Code of Professional Practice as last revised. This Code can be found on the Liberal Religious Educators Association's website. The DRE is also expected to comply with the laws of the state of Connecticut regarding his or her designation as a mandated reporter of child abuse and elder abuse.

The DRE is expected to respect and protect his or her own needs for spiritual growth and ethical integrity and to model healthy boundaries regarding sexuality and interpersonal relationships.

C. Adult Congregation Members and Other Staff:

All congregational members will abide by the Unitarian Universalist Principles as they relate to sexual ethics, as well as the UUS:E congregational covenant. A document entitled “Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sexual Ethics” and the UUS:E covenant are provided below.

“Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sexual Ethics”

One of the Leader Resources in *Creating Safe Congregations* restates the Unitarian Universalist Association principles in terms of sexual ethics, and appears in every age level of *Sexuality and Our Faith*, the companion volume to the *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education curriculum.

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Every person’s sexuality is sacred and is worthy of respect, and therefore, is not to be violated.
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relationships. We treat others as we would want to be treated; therefore, sexual exploitation and interpersonal violence is wrong.
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation. Accepting each other, as we are, means doing no harm and fostering well-being in one’s self and others.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. In our relationship to others, our freedom of sexuality is as important as the responsibility for it.
- The right to conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregation and in society at large. As a community and as an institution, we are responsible for creating a secure and safe environment.
- The goal of a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. We have the opportunity to create the kind of environment that lends itself to peace, liberty and justice in human sexuality, and we can become a model for the rest of society.
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. When we respect each person’s sexual integrity we honor the wholeness of life and we respect the web of all existence.

UUS:E Covenant

- Treat each other with respect
- Foster an encouraging and supportive congregational culture
- Engage each other with love, compassion, kindness and forgiveness
- Listen with an open heart and mind
- Speak our truths thoughtfully, openly and directly
- Acknowledge and recognize conflict as an opportunity for growth and understanding

- Welcome, accept and care for one another
- Nurture generous spirits
- Be sensitive to dynamics of power and privilege as they relate to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability and age
- Be accountable to one another and honor our commitments
- Maintain and encourage a sense of humor
- Learn and participate in Unitarian Universalist East's established system of due process and governance

IV. DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

If the words or actions of one or more individuals threatens the physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom of expression of another individual or group of individuals, this “disruptive behavior” must be addressed firmly, promptly and compassionately.

Examples of disruptive behavior include but are not limited to:

- Repeated physical touching without clear permission.
- Behavior that repeatedly interrupts church activities.
- Attendance at church activities while under the influence of illegal drugs or excessive use of alcohol.
- Use of excessively profane or violent language.
- Sexual harassment.
- Bullying

Instances of disruptive behavior will be referred to the Safe Congregation Response Team for resolution. Depending on the severity of the disruption, as a last resort the Safe Congregational Response Team can recommend to the Policy Board that the disrupting individual be barred from all involvement at UUS:E.

Because UUS:E conducts a number of its programs and community activities online, the Safe Congregation Response Team will consider electronic/online behaviors when discussing allegations of disruptive behavior in the UUS:E community. In general, behavior that is deemed disruptive in person will be deemed disruptive online.

V. HIRING

- A. Application:** All paid staff, including clergy, must fill out an application. All Applications must be kept in a locked file. Only the DRE, Minister and Personnel Committee are allowed to review these applications. However, any individual may review his or her own application.
- B. Interviews Process:** All persons seeking paid employment at UUS:E will be screened by the Personnel Committee, which will contact references (at least one of

whom has known the applicant for a minimum of five years) and record the contact. After screening, leaders from the relevant UUS:E committees will conduct a formal interview. The Minister will participate in the interview process for all applicants for paid staff positions that report to the Minister. The DRE will participate in the interview process for all applicants for paid staff positions that report to the DRE. The interview process provides an opportunity to educate potential paid staff about UUS:E's commitment to the physical and emotional safety of all congregational members, friends, children and vendors. At the conclusion of the interview process, the interviewers recommend a final candidate to the Policy Board. The Policy Board makes a formal offer of employment.

- C. Background Checks:** All those who receive an offer of employment from UUS:E will be required to undergo a national criminal history record check, including but not limited to checking the State of Connecticut Child Abuse & Sexual Offender registries.
- D. Past Crimes:** Applicants found to have criminal records will be interviewed by the Safe Congregations Response Team to consider whether or not they can work with children and youth. Any applicant with a prior legally documented history as a perpetrator of child physical or sexual abuse must not be allowed to teach or attend activities where children and youth are present. Applicants found to have criminal records that don't involve child abuse will be allowed to work with children and youth at the discretion of the Safe Congregation Response Team.

VI. EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Education and training is critical to the creation of a safer congregational environment. Information, knowledge and understanding support the development of healthy relationships based on self-esteem and respect for others. Greater understanding of sexuality and abuse will make us better able to avoid situations that could lead to abuse, and to move more effectively toward justice and healing. To this end we believe it is important to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children, members and friends. UUS:E will provide programs as follows:

- The Director of Religious Education and Religious Education Committee are responsible for offering age-appropriate information about development and sexuality for our children, youth, and adults on a regular basis, including clarification and understanding of the complex aspects of sexuality, as well as focusing on sexual abuse prevention.
- The Safe Congregation Response Team is responsible for training for staff and volunteers covering (1) definition of child abuse; (2) recognition of sexual and physical abuse symptoms; (3) characteristics of and ways to respond to disruptive behavior; (4) review of this Safe Congregation policy; (5) rationale behind screening procedures; and (6) reporting procedures for observed or suspect child abuse.

VII. SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN

No child or youth shall be left unattended or unsupervised in the UUS:E meeting house or its grounds at any time except in situations approved by the minister and/or the DRE. Parents are responsible for their children except during planned children's programming or when childcare is provided for those who have reserved space in advance.

No adult is allowed to work alone with children or youth without the knowledge of the minister or DRE. Adults must minimally work in teams of two when interacting with children and youth. As of October, 2012, there is one exception to this rule: adult mentors in the Affirmation program may interact with their mentees on a one-on-one basis. (At its October 2012 meeting, the congregation agreed to review this exception at a later date.)

Refer to "Childcare Guidelines" available from the UUS:E Administrator for additional information.

VII. RESPONDING TO INSTANCES OF SEXUAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT OF CHILDREN

A. Defintions: Child abuse occurs where a child or youth* has had physical injury inflicted upon him or her other than by accidental means, has injuries at variance with history given of them, or is in a condition resulting in maltreatment, such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment. (Connecticut General Statutes §46b-120). Child neglect occurs where a child has been abandoned, is being denied proper care and attention physically, emotionally, or morally, or is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances or associations injurious to his well-being. (Connecticut General Statutes §46b-120)

* UUS:E identifies children as being from 3-13 years of age, and youth as being from 14-18 years of age.

B. Mandated Reporters: The UUS:E Minister and DRE are "mandated reporters" under Connecticut law. Mandated reporters are required to report or cause a report to be made when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a person under the age of 18 has been abused, neglected or is placed in imminent risk of serious harm. (Connecticut General Statutes §17a-101a).

Within 12 hours of suspecting a child or youth has been abused or neglected or receiving a written or verbal report, the Minister or DRE will contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at its hotline (1-800-842-2288) to report the suspected abuse. Within 48 hours of making the verbal report, the Minister or DRE will submit a written report (DCF-136) found here:

http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/child_welfare_services/pdf/child_abuse_neglect_dcf_136.pdf.)

C. Further Procedures in the Event of Alleged Child Abuse at UUS:E: If the suspected abuse has been perpetrated at UUS:E's meeting house or during a UUS:E activity at another location, in addition to making a report to DCF, the Minister or DRE will notify the UUS:E President that a report has been made and schedule a meeting of the Safe Congregation Response Team within 24 hours. The Safe Congregation Response Team will:

- Review the application and reference forms kept on the accused person if the person is a UUS:E employee;
- Contact legal counsel if needed;
- Contact the church insurance company if needed;
- Discuss UUS:E's response to the press and the congregation if needed. (UUS:E leaders should defer to legal counsel if needed with respect to addressing questions from the press.)
- Reach out to the victim and their family to provide whatever care and support is required to prevent further harm. The Safe Congregation Response Team will work with the victim's family and legal counsel to decide how, if at all, to inform the congregation of a child abuse occurrence.
- Reach out to the accused and their family. Determine whether it is appropriate/necessary to separate accused individual from either the congregation or specific congregational activities (religious education, etc.) until such time that DCF's investigation is concluded.
- Carefully document all meetings and conversations regarding this matter;
- Keep all information as confidential as the circumstances warrant.

In the event the accused abuser is the Minister, reports will be filed by the UUS:E President.

It is not the function of any UUS:E employee or member to conduct an investigation into accusations of child abuse. Once a report is made to the Department of Children and Families, the Society will rely on the decisions of those authorities as to the validity of the complaint. The Safe Congregation Response Team will develop an appropriate plan of response to the conclusions of the DCF investigation.

D. Reporting by other UUS:E Staff and Volunteers: When UUS:E staff or volunteers other than the Minister or the DRE make a verbal report of suspected child abuse or neglect to the Minister or the DRE, the Minister or DRE will help the reporter complete an accident/incident report (Appendix A). Once completed, the report will be used as the basis for reporting to the Department of Children and Families if necessary. A copy of the report will be kept at UUS:E in a locked file.

E. Care of Accused Children and Youth: Accusing a child (age 3-13) or youth (age 14-18) in the congregation of inappropriately or sexually touching another person creates a difficult situation. Some children or youth may simply be acting impulsively, not understanding the importance of boundaries. In this situation, the Minister or DRE should discuss the behavior with the child or youth and parents/guardians and affirm the importance of boundaries and acceptable behavior. In some cases, children or youth who engage in sexual activity with younger children may have been victims of sexual abuse themselves and/or may become future adult offenders. Any child or youth who initiates sexual activity with a much younger child, or coerces someone to engage in sex, is exhibiting inappropriate sexual behavior and may require stronger church intervention, restriction from UUS:E activities and/or referral to professional services. If a child or youth has been barred from involvement in UUS:E activities, he or she may be allowed to return at a later time. A child or youth may return at a later date upon request from the family to the Safe Congregation Response Team. Such request must include documentation from a therapist or family intervention professional that it is safe for the child or youth to participate in UUS:E activities.

VIII. RESPONDING TO INSTANCES OF ELDER ABUSE

A. Definitions: Under Connecticut law (CGS § 17b-450-452) elder abuse includes, but is not limited to, the willful infliction of physical pain, injury or mental anguish, or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services which are necessary to maintain physical and mental health. Elder abuse also includes neglect, exploitation, and/or abandonment of an elderly (ages 60+) person (see CGS § 17b-451 for definitions of those terms).

B. Mandated Reporters: Under Connecticut law, clergy are mandated reporters of elder abuse. When any mandated reporter has reasonable cause to suspect or believes that someone age 60 or over (1) has been abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned, or is in a condition caused by one of these or (2) is in need of protective services (services designed to protect elderly individuals from such harm), he/she must report this to the Conn. Dept. of Social Services (DSS), Protective Services for the Elderly (PSE) within five days.

IX. GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION OF SEX OFFENDERS IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

In the event that an individual with a criminal record of child sexual abuse or other sexual offenses desires to participate in congregational life at UUS:E, the Safe Congregation Response Team will be responsible for determining how and under what circumstances such participation will be possible. The Safe Congregation Response Team may recommend that the individual sign a Limited Access Agreement and will seek the advice of the Policy Board and legal counsel as necessary to effectively enact such an agreement. An example of such an agreement is given in Appendix B.

X. AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 2012 CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

- 1) Should UUS:E require background checks for all volunteers who work with children and youth?
- 2) The congregation needs to develop safety guidelines for "off-hour events" when many members and staff are not necessarily present, especially events involving children and youth. The most obvious example of an "off-hour event" involving children and youth is a Youth Group Lock-in.
- 3) Are there any differences between face-to-face interaction and online interaction when it comes to congregational safety?

**Appendix A
Accident/Incident Report**

Day and Date of Report: _____ Day and Date of Incident: _____

Name of Victim: _____
(first and last name)

Reporting Party: _____
(first and last name)

Investigator(s): _____
(first and last name)

Witnesses: _____
(first and last name)

Check all that apply: Incident Injury Both

Summary: _____

Activity during which incident occurred: _____

Location where incident occurred: _____

Cause of Incident/Injury: _____

Check if Cause is Not Known:

First Aid Administered: Yes No

Signature of Reporting Party: _____

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____
(first and last name)

Signature of Safe Congregation Response Team: _____

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____
(first and last name)

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____
(If Victim is under 18 years of age)

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____
(first and last name)

Authorities Contacted: (check all that apply)

- Fire Department
- Emergency Medical Response
- Police
- Connecticut Department of Children and Families (CT DCF): CT DCF Not Required
- Other _____

Appendix B
Example of Limited Access Agreement

1. Introductory Paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:

a. Unitarian Universalist Society: East, affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who desire 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 to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

b. 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:

- i. Please do not talk with children.
- ii. 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.
- iii. Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present.
- iv. If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at the Society or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- v. Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

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:

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 Society functions and Society property.

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

(Printed name) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Minister: _____ Date: _____

DRE: _____ Date: _____

