

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork Safe Congregation Policies and Forms

Congregation leaders and members have the responsibility to provide a safe and welcoming environment for children and adults – both regular attenders and visitors.

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Our faith calls us to act in ways that foster well being in ourselves and others by doing no harm and acting responsibly to create communities and institutions that are safe from all types of abuse and violence. Ours is a covenantal faith, based in right relationships that promote mutuality and equal regard. The goals of the UUCSF Safe Congregation policies are to support leaders in creating a safer space within our congregation, encourage right relations among persons who are part of the congregation, and promote just relations between the congregation and the larger community of which it is a part.

Elements of the Safe Congregation Policies:

Definitions

Disruptive Behavior Policy

Safety Policy for Children and Youth

Code of Ethics

Authorization of Background Check for Purposes of the Religious Exploration Program

General Permission for Attendance on R.E. Field Trips

Registration Form for Religious Exploration Programs

Definitions

Abuse – the misuse of power in a relationship to manipulate, control or hurt – takes many forms. The following definitions apply to abuse in relation to children, youth, adults and elders:

- Physical abuse is deliberate and intentional harm to the body
- Emotional abuse is harm that deeply affects self-esteem
- Sexual abuse is the use, inducement or coercion of a child, youth, adult or elder by another person who is usually older and/or more powerful to engage in sexual conduct.
- Neglect occurs when a parent, relative or caregiver endangers the health, welfare or safety of a child, youth, adult or elder through negligence
- A sexual offender is a person who has been found guilty of a sexual crime by any governmental entity

Disruptive Behavior can be summarized as one or more of the following:

- Dangerous – actions of one or more individuals are the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property
- Disruptive – actions of one or more individuals interfere with church activities
- Offensive – actions of one or more individuals are likely to drive existing members and visitors away

Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we also affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere in order for such openness to thrive. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly.

While the UUCSF strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual.

Disruptive Behavior can be summarized as one or more of the following:

- Dangerous – actions of one or more individuals are the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property
- Disruptive – actions of one or more individuals interfere with church activities
- Offensive – actions of one or more individuals are likely to drive existing members and visitors away

The implementation of a Disruptive Behavior Policy means that all are held to the same set of standards, and provides a process that leaves less room for singling out a person based on stereotyping or personality conflicts. Such a policy establishes behavioral guidelines that consider the community's well-being first and foremost.

The following shall be the policy of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork in dealing with these issues:

1. Each committee or group of the UUCSF is encouraged to agree to and adopt covenants and/or ground rules for meetings and events. When some participants in these meetings or events do not adhere to previously made agreements, the following processes will guide our actions.
2. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister(s), if available, and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such time that it may be safely resumed. If the behavior is violent or threatening, the Police Department should be called immediately. Any time any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) present, the Minister(s) must be notified, and a follow-up letter detailing the offense and the action taken because of the offense, should be written and distributed to the Minister and the Board President.
3. If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the Minister(s) or the Board President will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

4. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board. The ad hoc committee will include representatives from the Committee on Ministry, the Board, and the Minister(s). The committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define “acceptable” behavior in advance.

b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals. Stereotypes will be avoided.

c. The committee will collect all necessary information, and hear from all parties who wish to be heard.

d. To determine an appropriate response, the committee will consider

- Cause – why did the disruption occur? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church?

- History – what is the extent, if any, of the disruption in the past?

- Probability of change – how likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

e. The committee will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. Three possible levels of action/response are recommended:

- Level One - The committee informs the Minister(s) and a member of the committee meet with the disruptive individual(s) to communicate the concern.

- Level Two – The individual(s) may be excluded from specific congregational activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and conditions for return written and made clear.

- Level One or Level Two actions may be appealed to the Board.

- Level Three – The individual is permanently excluded from the congregation’s premises and all congregational activities. Before this is carried out, the committee will consult with the Board. If it is agreed that a Level Three recommendation be implemented, a letter will be written by the Minister(s) and Board, and sent to the individual, outlining the decision, and any possible recourse.

f. Any request for reinstatement must be made by the individual who was excluded from

congregational activities, including membership. The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement: 1) a statement of understanding of the reasons for which s/he was asked to leave and 2) an explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified. The request will be made to the Board of Trustees. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the removed member. The decision of the Board will be final and not subject to further appeal. A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the removal. In the event that a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent requests may be made no sooner than one year following the member being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

5. While the congregation cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, the congregation will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individuals involved only on a “need-to-know” basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

Safety Policy for Children and Youth at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork

All of us, children, youth and adults, members and friends, are called to conduct ourselves responsibly and caringly for the benefit of each and every one of us. Recognizing the need for a consistently safe environment for children, youth and adults, the UUCSF has developed the following guidelines.

1. Child protection and safety.

- Adults working with children and youth in any capacity must agree to comply with our Code of Ethics prior to accepting any responsibility.
- There must be a minimum of two adults present at any class, meeting, program or event involving children and youth.
- Adults working with children and youth should be aware of precautions needed to protect minors from the adverse affects of allergic reactions and spread of infectious diseases.
- Adults must be aware of other UUCSF policies that may affect programs and events where children and youth are in attendance. These include particularly the UUCSF policies on alcohol, animals
- There will be a first aid kit available in all classrooms.
- There will be a hard-wired working telephone available in or near to all classrooms.

2. Sexual harassment and abuse

The following behaviors are unacceptable for adults working with children and youth:

- Off-color jokes, sexual remarks or use of profane language
- Unsolicited, unwelcome, or otherwise inappropriate physical contact

The word “no” shall be recognized as a signal to others to cease any behavior that may cause a child or youth to become uncomfortable.

Any child, youth or adult who suspects or is made aware of child abuse, has a concern about a child’s safety and well-being, or witnesses behaviors that might be construed or perceived to be a form of sexual abuse must notify the Minister and/or the Religious Exploration Co-Chairs as soon as possible.

3. Field Trips

Parents or guardians must sign a permission form whenever children or youth are planning to leave the congregation’s premises and are not accompanied by their parents or guardians. The

field trip leaders must compile a list of names, emergency contact numbers and medical conditions to bring on the trip.

All travelers, inclusive of children and adults, must obey all relevant laws for automobile liability insurance, proper restraints and car seats. All drivers must be at least 21 years old. No driver may consume any substance – prescription or over-the-counter medication, alcohol, etc. – that carries a warning about use while driving.

4. Childcare

The UUCSF is a community of families. We understand that families have many forms, and we welcome the many types of families that join our community. As a community we encourage groups and committees planning events for adults to make their events accessible to parents by providing safe, age-appropriate childcare.

When planning an event, including all-congregational meetings but excluding rentals, please determine whether the event will be intergenerational. If not, appropriate childcare is recommended so that all parents and guardians may fully participate in the event. If a committee or group responsible for planning a special event, the committee is responsible for ensuring childcare according to the following guidelines:

- When planning the event, the group, in a congregation-wide e-mail or newsletter posting, will ask that those with childcare needs to contact a designated person from the committee with the number and ages of children attending. The Religious Educator and RE Co-chairs are available to give supportive guidance for age-appropriate activities and childcare, but it is each committee's responsibility to ensure childcare for its event.
- The designated person must contact the congregation's building use coordinator to reserve space for childcare and children's activities.
- The entire Safety Policy for Children and Youth applies to all events.
- A primary sitter must be an adult 21 or older. A secondary sitter should ideally be 18 or older. Teenagers may be approved to be secondary childcare providers if there is a need.
- Since each committee is responsible for planning childcare for its event, payment, if any, should come from that committee.

Code of Ethics

I understand that adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both the individual 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.

I further understand that two especially important areas of growth are self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Wisdom dictates that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders act abusively. Therefore, leaders, teachers and adult volunteers will avoid any verbal, emotional, sexual or physical abuse of children and youth.

* * *

I certify that I have read and understand the Safety Policy for Children and Youth. I further certify that I have read and understand the above Code of Ethics. I understand that these guidelines are expected behavior for me as a leader and/or teacher of children and/or youth at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork, and that appropriate action may be taken in cases of violation of this code.

Signature _____

Printed Name _____

Date _____

Authorization of Background Check for Purposes of the Religious Exploration Program

Name _____

Other (Last) Name(s) Used _____

Address _____

Please list any other residences from the last eight years (use back if needed) _____

Social Security Number _____

Gender (optional) _____

Date of Birth _____

Phone Number _____

I hereby authorize the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork to conduct a criminal background check. I understand that this is standard procedure and is for the benefit and safety of the Religious Exploration program. I understand that information obtained because of this background check will be handled with respect and confidentiality as much as possible.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

General Permission for Attendance on R.E. Field Trips

I give my permission for my child or youth _____ to attend the following trip with the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork.

Event:

Date:

Departure time:

Meeting location:

Pick-up time:

Trip Chaperones:

S/he may participate in all planned activities EXCEPT: _____

The following information is required in the event of an emergency or the activity ends before the agreed upon pick-up time.

During the period of time planned for this field trip/event (check all that apply):

I will be on church grounds.

I will be at home and can be reached at: _____

I can be reached on my cell phone at: _____

My youth will have a cell phone to contact me.

If unable to reach me, please contact:

Name _____ Relationship _____

Phone _____

My child has the following allergies, dietary restrictions, or medical conditions:

Medications _____

I understand that the congregation does not accept responsibility for any bodily injury incurred during any event. I give my consent and authority for the Religious Education staff (paid or volunteer) of this congregation to take any reasonable action to help ensure the safety, health and welfare of my child/ward, and absolve the staff of liability. I give permission for any emergency medical, surgical, diagnostic and hospital care, treatment, or procedures deemed immediately necessary or advisable by emergency medical technicians, a physician or hospital to safeguard my child/ward's health when I cannot be contacted. I agree to be responsible for any medical expenses not covered by my insurance.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Registration Form for Religious Exploration Programs

Please Register All Children and Youth

Date: _____

Student Information

Name _____ DOB _____ M/F ____ Grade for current school year _____

E-Mail _____

Hobbies/Interests/Skills/Musical Instruments played, etc.

Name _____ DOB _____ M/F ____ Grade for current school year _____

E-Mail _____

Hobbies/Interests/Skills/Musical Instruments played, etc.

Name _____ DOB _____ M/F ____ Grade for current school year _____

E-Mail _____

Hobbies/Interests/Skills/Musical Instruments played, etc.

Family Information

Family Name _____ Home # _____

Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip ____

Parent(s) Name(s) _____

E-Mail(s) _____

Cell # (s) _____ Work # (s) _____ Call at work?

Additional addresses and contact information

Medical Release

Please fill out one medical information section for each child/youth, sign and date

This is to authorize the representative of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork to obtain emergency medical treatment if necessary during a UUCSF sponsored activity.

Name _____ Emergency # _____
Address _____ City/Zip _____
Physician's name _____ Physician's # _____
Allergies, dietary restrictions, or medical conditions we should be aware of _____

Name _____ Emergency # _____
Address _____ City/Zip _____
Physician's name _____ Physician's # _____
Allergies, dietary restrictions, or medical conditions we should be aware of _____

Name _____ Emergency # _____
Address _____ City/Zip _____
Physician's name _____ Physician's # _____
Allergies, dietary restrictions, or medical conditions we should be aware of _____

Parent signature _____ Date _____