

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Wayne

Safe Congregations Policy

As a Unitarian Universalist Congregation, we covenant to affirm and promote UU principles and practices, as well as to follow the promises we made in our Behavioral Covenant.

In addition, our mission is to create a spiritual community that inspires growth, seeks knowledge, accepts differences, and deepens compassion to build a just world. Our mission compels us to create a sexually safer congregation that promotes the safety of children and adults from harm and encourages their spiritual growth.

The following policy is designed to:

- Provide for the safety of children and youth in our church programs by developing and implementing policies and procedures for: keeping children and youth safe from sexual abuse; educating children, youth, and adults about child sexual abuse and prevention; and respond to a person who has been convicted or accused of sexual offenses against children, youth, or adults.
- Establish an ongoing **Safe Congregations Response Team** which will monitor the implementation of this policy, respond to reports of abuse or suspected abuse, and serve as a resource to staff, volunteers, parents, members, and friends.
- Through education and preventive steps, reduce the likelihood of allegations made against church staff and volunteers.

DEFINITIONS

1. Paid Staff: Minister, Congregational Administrator, Coordinator of Faith Formation, Choir Director, or other person who is paid. Both the Minister and the Coordinator of Faith Formation are expected to abide by their professional organization's code of conduct.
2. Children/Youth: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday.
3. Adult: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday.
4. Volunteer: Any unpaid person engaged in/involved in activities and entrusted with the care and supervision of minors. This includes any person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. Child Emotional Abuse: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying as defined by law.
6. Child Abuse or Neglect: The State of Indiana defines child abuse or neglect as follows:
 - a. The child's physical or mental health condition is seriously impaired or seriously endangered as a result of the inability, refusal, or neglect of the child's parent/guardian/custodian to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision.

- b. The child's physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury by the act or omission of the child's parent/guardian/custodian. An omission is an occurrence in which the parent/guardian/custodian allowed that person's child to receive an injury the parent/guardian/custodian had a reasonable opportunity to prevent or mitigate.
 - c. The child is a victim of a sex offense under the criminal citations (see Appendix).
 - d. The child's parents/guardian/custodian allows the child to participate in an obscene performance.
 - e. The child's parent/guardian/custodian allows the child to commit a sex offense.
 - f. The child needs care, treatment, or rehabilitation that the child is not currently receiving and that is unlikely to be provided or accepted without the coercive intervention of the court. This definition includes a child with a disability that is deprived of nutrition necessary to sustain life and medical or surgical intervention necessary to remedy or ameliorate a life-threatening medical condition if the nutrition or medical or surgical intervention is generally provided to similarly situated children with or without disabilities.
7. Sexual Abuse: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for purposes of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of a minor, or incest with a minor or adult, as defined by federal or state law.
8. Child Molesting: The State of Indiana defines child molesting as: A person who, with a child under 14 years of age, performs or submits to sexual intercourse or sexual deviate conduct or performs or submits to any fondling or touching, of either the child or the older person with the intent to arouse or satisfy the sexual desires of either the child or the older person. It is a defense to prosecution that the accused person reasonably believed that the child was sixteen (16) years of age or older at the time of the conduct, unless 1) the offense is committed by using or threatening the use of deadly force or while armed with a deadly weapon, 2) the offense results in serious bodily injury; or the commission of the offense is facilitated by furnishing the victim, without the victim's knowledge, with a drug or controlled substance.
9. Mandatory Reporter/Mandatory Reporting: Indiana law defines a mandatory reporter as follows: Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect must make a report. In agencies in which there are established reporting protocols, the report may be made to the individual in charge or to another designated agent, who also becomes responsible to report or cause a report to be made. **The law does not relieve individuals who make a report to another staff person of their own obligation to report directly to child protection services or law enforcement unless a report has already been made.** Anonymous reports are accepted. Failure to make a report can be a Class B misdemeanor.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES

1. UUCFW will conduct a thorough screening of all candidates for employment and for volunteers who will work with minors.
2. UUCFW will provide annual training and education to paid staff, volunteers, children and youth and members/friends of the congregation on required procedures to safeguard children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our congregation.
3. UUCFW will adhere to all state laws in reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. The minister, member, volunteer, paid staff, and friend/visitor will be considered mandatory reporters.

PREVENTION THROUGH TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The Board of Trustees, Minister, Coordinator of Faith Formation, and the Faith Formation Team will see to the implementation of the following education:

For our children and youth, the Coordinator of Faith Formation will provide:

Age appropriate information about development and sexuality. Our children must be empowered to protect themselves and report abuse. Our best education program as Unitarian Universalists is the *Our Whole Lives* program. When the congregation does not have the resources for providing this program to all ages of children, the Coordinator of Faith Formation and Faith Formation Team will work with local congregations in the offering of OWL. Should neither of these options be available, the Coordinator of Faith Formation and Faith Formation Team will make education about child sexual abuse prevention a routine part of the Faith Formation Program offering education once during early Elementary School (K-2), once during later Elementary School (3-5), once Middle School, and once during High School.

For Faith Formation teachers, parents/guardians, and other volunteers working with children and youth, the Coordinator of Faith Formation will provide:

Annual training and written information designed to prevent child abuse.

For all paid staff, including those working with children and youth, the Minister will provide:

Annual training and written information regarding this policy and child abuse prevention.

For new members of the church, the Membership Committee and/or the Minister will:

Inform members of the Safe Congregations Policy and of our commitment as a congregation to ensure a sexually safer congregation.

For the congregation, the Board of Trustees will:

Annually review the implementation of this document.

PREVENTION THROUGH SCREENING AND SUPERVISION

Screening Procedures: UUCFW will screen all candidates for paid employment and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees/and/or exerts control or oversight of minors.

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted if possible. These materials will be archived.

1. Any person (paid staff and volunteers who will work with a minor) must complete and sign the Employment Application and/or the Volunteer Application.
2. Individuals who have been convicted of, or who are under current investigation by the Department of Child Services (DCS) or by any law enforcement agency, or self disclose any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or child abuse, are precluded from participation in the Faith Formation Program and other children or youth church activities.
3. The applications include a statement, which the applicant must acknowledge in writing, which certifies that the information provided in the application is true and complete. Misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of the applicant or for dismissal if he/she is employed. The signed statement authorizes UUCFW to contact all individuals and/or organizations listed in the application.
4. The interview committee or person responsible for hiring staff/selecting volunteers will review all statements made in the application, paying specific attention to any gaps in time and irregular employment patterns or unexplained absence. The person must investigate these gaps with employers listed and in a subsequent interview.
5. The interview team or person responsible for interviews will speak personally with qualified applicants. If detrimental information is uncovered but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is the choice of the interview team, the Minister and/or Board of Trustees must see the documented reasons for overriding the prior information. This must occur **before** an offer of employment is made.
6. Contact each of the volunteer applicant's references and ask for any information that might help determine the applicant's suitability for the position. If a response is not received within a reasonable period of time, follow up and keep notes if possible.
7. Contact all listed references and employers for paid staff. Inquire as to the reason the applicant left and ask for any information that might help determine the applicant's

suitability for the position. If a response is not received within a reasonable period of time, follow up and keep notes if possible.

8. **Criminal Background Check:** UUCFW will conduct a criminal background check on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All criminal background checks will be updated periodically.
9. Volunteers who have not been a part of the community of UUCFW for six months will be paired with a volunteer who has been involved with UUCFW for one year or longer.
10. All Faith Formation teachers will sign the Code of Ethics and complete basic training **before** they begin teaching.

DISQUALIFICATION

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal or Department of Child Services (DCS) charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence (or in the case of DCS they have not made a determination to substantiate/unsubstantiate or decided not to investigate) has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. Any misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession of or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

SUPERVISION PROCEDURES

1. Ensure the Children & Youth Faith Formation Program will:
 - a. Have two screened, trained and unrelated paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors at church or on outings. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity.
 - b. Release children up to 13 years-old only to a parent or guardian or will take the child to the parent/guardian.
 - c. Obtain written parental or guardian permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips. Parents/guardians will be provided information regarding the trip.

- d. Whenever possible use two unrelated paid staff or volunteers when transporting minors in vehicles or taking students to overnight events. All drivers for Faith Formation activities must provide copies of their driver's license and insurance.
 - e. Require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the minor.
2. Expect the Coordinator of Faith Formation or another appointed adult will monitor classrooms or other areas used during activities involving children.
 3. Expect the Coordinator of Faith Formation, along with the Faith Formation team, to be responsible for developing and publicizing additional guidelines concerning other child safety issues such as:
 - Supervision of/responsibility for children and youth before/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.)
 4. Ensure staff and volunteers with responsibilities for communications and social media understand the congregation Facebook Page is only open to members, age 15 and above. An adult youth advisor, along with the Coordinator of Faith Formation, will monitor any Youth Group Facebook Page and no sexual content will be allowed. Adults will not friend unrelated minors without explicit permission of parents. Parents must give written permission for use or posting of any minor's photo in any venue. Tagging of any minor's photo is not allowed in any public venue. Photographing minors at events is only by parental permission.

BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES FOR THE FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM

All volunteers and paid staff are asked to keep in mind the UUCFW mission, vision and behavioral covenant as well as to observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited to minors.
2. Do not consume drugs or alcohol in the presence of children and youth.
3. To the extent possible, UUCFW events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.
4. Off-site events should include staff or volunteers with at least six months experience/participation in UUCFW.
5. Faith Formation teachers for high school youth must be at least twenty-five years old.
6. Whenever possible, at least two unrelated paid staff or volunteers will be in the room when minors are present. Doors will be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present. Speaking to a minor or minors one-on-one should be done in public settings where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other people.

7. Avoid inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
8. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
9. If you recognize an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and adult, maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the minor to another individual with supervisory authority.
10. If one-on-one pastoral care is necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments.
11. Parents, teachers, approved volunteers, and children are the only people allowed in the Faith Formation wing during services.
12. The Coordinator of Faith Formation, or designated supervisor, will do a walk-through of all Faith Formation spaces to check-in with teachers during classes.
13. Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the Coordinator of Faith Formation, Minister, or President of the Congregation.

The following situations should prompt a concern about sexual or physical abuse or harassment:

1. A child, youth, or adult reports possible abuse by a UUCFW staff, volunteer, member, friend, or visitor;
2. A UUCFW staff, volunteer, member, friend, or visitor suspects that a child is being abused;
3. A child or youth reports possible abuse by a family member or other individual; or
4. UUCFW staff or leaders learn that a member, volunteer, friend, visitor, or attendee is under investigation for allegedly abusing others.

In the event of any of these situations, the concern must be reported to the authorities following the procedures outlined in the following section.

RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS OF SEXUAL, PHYSICAL OR VERBAL ABUSE OR HARRASMENT

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straightforward. The UUCFW congregation, including the Minister, staff, members, volunteers, friends, and visitors will be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting the children.

Procedures:

All accusations of sexual abuse (or any type of abuse) will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who engage in sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse. It is not the function of the Minister, the

Coordinator of Faith Formation, or the officers of the Board of Trustees to conduct an investigation into the accusations of child abuse. Indiana law requires that any person who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected must make a report.

Steps to follow:

1. If the person with the concern believes the abuse occurred during a church program, the individual should report his or her concerns to the Minister, or the Coordinator of Faith Formation. If the Minister or Coordinator of Faith Formation are the accused, the person should report his/her concern to the President of the Congregation. This does not relieve individuals who make a report to another person at UUCFW of their own obligation to report directly to the Child Protection Services or law enforcement, unless a report has already been made.
2. Make a telephone call to **the Indiana Statewide centralized Child Abuse Reporting Hotline 1-800-800-5556 and if the person believes the child is in imminent danger, also call 9-1-1.**
3. Report the matter to UUCFW's insurance carrier, Church Mutual. The Congregational Administrator will provide the telephone number and contact name.
4. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
5. In all cases, the Minister will also notify the Congregational President and the MidAmerica Regional Lead Congregational Life Consultant and seek their advice and counsel.
6. UUCFW may suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted following consultation with the full Board of Trustees.
7. The Safe Congregations Team and the Board of Trustees will be responsible for developing a plan of action to support both the alleged offender and the child, as well as any members involved in the situation (including the children and their parents in the Faith Formation Program). The Safe Congregations Team will also determine if legal counsel is needed.
8. The Minister will respond to media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees.
9. In the event the accused abuser is the Minister, reports will be filed by the President of the Congregation, and the notifications referenced above will be the responsibility of the President of the Congregation.

SAFE CONGREGATIONS RESPONSE TEAM

The Safe Congregations Response Team will be established upon approval of this policy and will be in place at all times. The names and phone numbers of the team members will be available to all UUCFW members and friends.

The Response Team will be composed of the Minister, the Coordinator of Faith Formation, and the President of the Board of Trustees, with two members of the congregation to be appointed by the Board of Trustees in the event of an alleged incident.

In a case of conflict of interest, a Team Member shall be excused from participation and must be replaced by a suitable alternate. The Team's function will be to offer confidential support, advice, and counsel with concern for the safety of all parties involved.

Responsibilities: The Safe Congregations Response Team is responsible for the implementation of our Safe Congregations policies. They have the following responsibilities:

1. Know about community resources for child abuse and neglect, treatment and support for the child and their families, and treatment for the offenders.
2. Know about the state laws regarding reporting.
3. Be a resource for people to share their concerns.
4. Evaluate applications for Faith Formation teachers and youth group leaders as requested by the Minister or Coordinator of Faith Formation.
5. Work with the Coordinator of Faith Formation to facilitate annual training for paid staff and volunteers on issues, policies, and procedures included in this document and beyond as appropriate.
6. Plan ways to communicate with the congregation about the policies, procedures, and other safeguards for the safety of our children and youth.
7. Monitor transitions of Minister, Coordinator of Faith Formation, and Congregational President to ensure all parties have read and are aware of any Limited Access Agreements.
In sharing information, it is important to remain aware of confidentiality and privacy for all involved.
8. Develop a plan for responding to abuse allegations that are in the hands of authorities.
9. Develop an interim safety plan to be used during investigations of abuse. The purpose of the plan will be to safeguard the children and also provide protection to the accused abuser from further complaints. If the accused abuser is another youth, the plan must be developed with input from both sets of parents or guardians. The plan will be clearly communicated to the accused abuser and, if a minor, also to his/her parents or guardians, by the Response Team.
10. The Minister may ask the Team to review allegations which were not accepted for investigation by authorities. They may develop a plan to address and resolve these complaints which will make it clear that UUCFW will not tolerate harassment of any form

and to provide information about appropriate counseling for both the person who alleges harassment and the alleged offender.

GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING SEX OFFENDERS

The UUA states: *a key component in the commitment to keeping children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe in our congregations is developing policies and procedures to use when a person who is a known pedophile or sex offender wants to be a part of the congregation or when an existing member is accused of a sexual offense.*

This policy and procedure recommends any congregant who has been convicted of, is under current indictment for (or under investigation by DCS), or has been involved in any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or child abuse to make themselves known to the Minister and/or Coordinator of Faith Formation. Regardless of who becomes aware of such information they should immediately report this to the Minister. If and when the Minister determines that there is a genuine cause for concern, they will continuously consult with the Safe Congregations Response Team.

The following steps will be taken when involving sex offenders in the life of the congregation:

1. The Minister will meet privately with the individual to discuss concerns that have been raised. The Minister will check the local sex offender registry before meeting with the person. (If the Minister is the one being accused, these steps do not apply. Instead the President of the Board should be contacted immediately and the President should contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA and/or the Regional Lead of the MidAmerica Region serving the congregation.) If the person is a member of the congregation and has a partner who attends the church, then the minister should reach out to the partner as well.
2. The individual should be asked to sign release forms so that the Minister can contact his/her sex offender treatment provider and/or current therapist and their current probation/parole officer. The Minister may want to determine if the offender is engaged in a formal court ordered Sex Offender Program or is only working with a therapist who has specialized training/experience in working with sex offenders. Both the therapist and the probation/parole officer should be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood/risk that the sex offender will re-offend and whether additional restrictions above and beyond the court ordered restrictions and the Limited Access Agreement ought to be placed on the person's participation. (The Limited Access Agreement is located in the Appendix). It will be very important to know the number, timing, and nature of offenses. Such information allows consideration of different situations. For example, an 18-year old male who had sex with his 16 year old girlfriend and against whom her parents pressed charges varies in risk from the person who has served time in jail for sex offenses against neighborhood children. In the second scenario, if the person has been in the community for some time and has previously completed mandated treatment, the Safe

Congregations Response Team would be wise to ask the person to go for a professional assessment with a therapist who specializes in working with sex offenders. The congregation may choose to provide the funding for the assessment. If the offender refuses permission to contact the current therapist and current probation/parole officer or refuses to participate in a current assessment (if mandated therapy and monitoring of the offender is no longer done by the courts), the congregation would be right to refuse participation in any congregation activity.

The question the Safe Congregations Response team must be able to answer is this: Given what the professionals have advised you, and given that the offender has agreed to sign a Limited Access Agreement, will this person adhere to every aspect of the Agreement in all of their interactions with the Minister, the Safe Congregations Response Team, and the entire UUCFW congregation in all of their interactions? Should the Response Team determine that this person is denied involvement given the risk for re-offending is at an unacceptable level, the person will be given the opportunity to periodically meet with the Minister and/or the Safe Congregations Response Team until such time as their risk is low enough that a Limited Access Agreement and signed releases/communication with therapist and probation/parole, will reasonably ensure the safety of our children/youth.

3. All persons known to have past histories of sexual offenses will be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement. The sex offender cannot participate in any of the child or youth programs or enter the Faith Formation wing of the building. Depending on the Limited Access Agreement, the offender may be required to be assigned a support person/escort that will accompany or keep them in sight at all times. Upon entry into the congregation, until such time as the Safe Congregations Response Team determines that this annual renewal is not necessary, the offender will be asked to sign a Limited Access agreement annually. If the offender refuses to do so, it is then appropriate to deny the person access to congregation functions and church property. An offender who refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement should know that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked to leave by a member of the Response Team or a member of the Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.
4. The Minister will meet with any person who has a signed Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangements and address any concerns every six months. Copies of files including Limited Access Agreement, and other information documented by the Minister and the Safe Congregations Response Team should be treated with care and kept in a secure file drawer.
5. A very difficult decision is who in the congregation needs to be informed that a congregant has a sex offense history. As a congregation we are committed to ensuring that every participant at UUCFW, of all ages, is educated about child safety and in

particular this policy. The Safe Congregation Team will, on a case by case basis, review who will need to be informed and respond to any requests by members and friends who want more information than is publicly known.

Updated and approved by the Board of Trustees November 19, 2018