

UUFC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SAFETY POLICY

I. Philosophy Statement

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Clemson (UUFC), are aware of the prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment in our culture: that it crosses gender, race and class lines, and that we as a fellowship must address these issues. Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to create a safe environment that protects children and youth from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

II. Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment

We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about sexual misconduct, abuse, molestation, harassment, and exploitation. We also pledge to do our best to protect and support those who participate in Fellowship activities, especially those who come to us either at risk or in crisis.

Additionally, we affirm our commitment to maintain an environment free of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner which conveys mutual respect and consideration.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support this policy and to work with the Sexual Abuse Response Team (Item III.1.) so that concerns may be addressed and appropriate response made.

III. Scope

The general scope of UUFC's involvement with physical and sexual misconduct and abuse will be framed around prevention. Prevention is fostered in ways that include but are not limited to:

Education and Training - Inasmuch as it is the intention of our religious education program to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our adult membership, we will attempt to provide the following as part of the educational program:

- Age-appropriate programs about development and sexuality for our children, teens, and adults which are offered on a regular basis and include greater clarification and understanding of the complex aspects of sexuality, including a focus on sexual abuse prevention and reporting.
- General training and support for our religious educators, youth leaders, and parents in areas of parenting skills, growth and development, first aid, sexuality, and related issues.
- Specific training each year for leaders of youth programs and classes. At this meeting sponsored by the Religious Education (RE) Committee, all youth leaders

will discuss in detail the Code of Conduct for Working with Children and Youth and ways to create safe spaces for both youth and leaders.

- Information for all members of the fellowship regarding resources within the community that address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Reporting - Although South Carolina law does not consider persons in a church setting to be mandatory reporters of suspected abuse, the Board of UUFC hereby directs that all volunteers in our RE program, our DRE, our Minister, and the President of the Board shall consider that they ARE mandatory reporters as defined under South Carolina law. This means that when they believe that they are in possession of such knowledge that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child in the Fellowship has been the victim of abuse or neglect (whether it may have occurred during a Fellowship activity or not), they are required to report such evidence. In addition, we encourage any member or friend of UUFC who has such knowledge to follow these procedures as well. Reports should be made to Department of Social Services or the Sheriff's Office.

If a teacher, volunteer, or any other adult suspects abuse of a minor during a UUFC sanctioned activity, that adult must immediately report it to the Abuse Response Team in addition to contacting the appropriate authorities. If a child or youth is in a situation of risk, the responsible person should immediately remove the allegedly abusive adult (or the child) from the situation and take any other steps necessary to protect the minor.

Other than notifying the Abuse Response Team, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.

If the reported abuse involves a worker or volunteer at UUFC, the supervisor of that person will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at UUFC until the matter is resolved. The supervisor will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and any circumstances.

Support - Support, counsel, referral, and the promotion of healing will be available to all adults, youth, and children of the UUFC community. Counseling and referral on an individual basis to other resources are available through the Sexual Abuse Response Team. The Fellowship's specific areas of concern fall within the following four categories:

- If a minister or any other of the church's leadership, paid or unpaid, are involved as an alleged perpetrator or an alleged victim.
- If a perpetrator within the Fellowship community discloses a current situation or a past history.
- If any adult within the Fellowship community alleges sexual harassment or misconduct from another adult member.
- If any child within the Fellowship community discloses fear, harassment, or abuse by any adult, teacher, parent, or other adult within or outside of the Fellowship community.

IV. Procedures

1. Sexual Abuse Response Team

The Response Team will be established and in place at all times, with the names and phone numbers of team members available to all members and friends of UUFC. This team will be composed of the Minister, the DRE, and three members of the Fellowship (appointed annually by the Board). In cases of a conflict of interest, a team member may be excused from participation and replaced by a suitable alternate. Members of the team will be well educated in the Policy and will become knowledgeable about available resources for adults and children as well as specific reporting procedures for children.

The Response Team serves two purposes: *First*, they will serve as a source of general information about sexual abuse and a link to available resources. They will be available to consult informally with members of the fellowship about questions and concerns. For example, the Response Team would be available to discuss concerns regarding situations that have felt uncomfortable, but may not constitute abuse or harassment. The Team's function would be to help individuals clarify the source of their discomfort, brainstorm effective means of resolving the problem, and share information about appropriate resources.

Second, if a member of the fellowship feels they have been harassed or abused, or observes or has reasonable cause to suspect behavior they believe constitutes physical or sexual abuse of a child, or if someone discloses such abuse, the Response Team will aid in the process of filing a report to the appropriate agency. Suspected abuse of a child would be reported to the Department of Social Services (DSS) or to the Sheriff's Office.

The Response Team does not have the legal authority or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to protect members of the community, both children and adults, potential or actual victims, and the accused. While charges are being investigated, the Response Team will work to protect and support all involved parties, in a way which allows the community to go about its business in a non-persecutory but safe atmosphere.

2. Recruiting Religious Education Volunteers and Hiring Staff

Volunteer religious education teachers must have been active participants at UUFC for at least six months.

Volunteers working with high school age youth on a regular basis must be at least 25 years of age; volunteers working with middle school age youth on a regular basis must be at least 21 years of age; all other continuing religious education teachers, nursery and childcare supervisors must be at least 18 years of age.

Volunteers under 18 may be used as helpers for event childcare and are encouraged to complete Red Cross Babysitter Training or equivalent course. An adult must supervise them throughout the event.

All compensated employees and regular RE volunteers must complete an application form, read this UUFC Religious Education Safety Policy, and sign the Code of Conduct.

Occasional volunteers, parents, or fellowship members who substitute in the classroom occasionally must read and sign the Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. The DRE and/or volunteer religious education teachers will supervise these volunteers.

All compensated staff must meet UUFC personnel committee requirements that include a criminal background check.

V. The Role of the Volunteer

While it is important that volunteers be capable of maintaining meaningful friendships with the young people they work with, they must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and youth, and refrain from using young people to fulfill their own needs. Young people are in a vulnerable position when dealing with persons older than themselves, and may find it difficult to speak out about any inappropriate behavior of their leaders, teachers, and caretakers.

Volunteers who have gained the trust of young people are in a unique situation to observe behavior or be party to a conversation in which a possible abusive situation (either within or outside the Fellowship) is revealed. In this situation, it is the teacher/leader's responsibility to report any such concerns immediately to the Abuse Response Team. Volunteers should never give children or youth the impression that they will keep secrets for them. Confidentiality is not secret keeping. Although a covenant of confidentiality can mean that adults do not repeat information told to them in confidence, when that information is of a major, crisis nature, the child or youth should be encouraged to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. Volunteers should consult with the minister or the DRE about an appropriate course of action.

The RE Committee will provide regular training each year on the issues relating to the Child Safety Policy, the Code of Conduct, the reporting mechanism, and the need to create safe places for children and their adult and adolescent volunteer leaders, teachers, and caretakers.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire fellowship, not just those in leadership and teaching positions, to create and maintain a climate which supports the growth and welfare of children and youth. In an effort to protect our young people as well as our leaders and teachers, we encourage all Fellowship members to read and sign The Code of Conduct.

VI. Code of Conduct

Statement of Position. Adults and older youth in leadership roles in this fellowship are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the 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 of their relationships is to be realized. Respect on the leader's part must include recognition of the absolute right of children and youth to the privacy of their bodies and minds.

Statement of Expectation of Behavior. As specified in the UUFC Religious Education Child Safety Policy, all compensated and volunteer staff are expected to adhere to the following behavior:

- Religious Education workers shall not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse; this includes behavior or language that is personally threatening or demeaning.
- Religious Education workers shall neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior or engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.

- Religious Education workers shall not allow the use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol, or any illegal activities among children or youth.

Statement of Action. In the case of paid or volunteer workers failing to meet the abuse expectations, UUFC will take appropriate actions.

Statement of Agreement. I have read and understand the UUFC Religious Education Child Safety Policy and the Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by the provisions of the Policy and the Code of Conduct and to honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this fellowship.

Name (Printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____