



SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

Approved by Board of Trustees

Name of Board President: John Shirreffs

Approval Date: 8-18-21

Revision History: 6-27-19

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to inform church members and friends, outside organizations and groups of UUCCVs “Safe Congregation” Policy.

Policy: The congregation of UUCCV is committed to providing a safe, secure, and nurturing environment for all who participate in its ministries or any church-sponsored activities. The following policy statements and procedures reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving the church as a sacred place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the power of love in relationship to others.

The following is the policy of UUCCV as it relates to minors and vulnerable adult populations (e.g., children, youth, disabled persons, elders, etc.).

Definitions

The terms in this document have the following meanings:

Abuse refers to intentional conduct that includes bodily impairment or injury, offensive physical or sexual conduct, including physical or sexual abuse, physical or sexual harassment, physical or sexual molestation, or physical or sexual exploitation.

Minor refers to a person under the age of full legal responsibility, heretofore defined as a person under the age of 18.

Physical abuse refers to activity or contact that causes bodily harm.

Physical harassment or molestation or exploitation refers to activity that places a person in fear of bodily injury by means of acts such as threatening or tormenting behavior, compelling an individual by force or the threat of force to engage in conduct from which the person has a right to abstain, restricting the movement of another person without that person’s consent, communicating verbal threats to commit an act against a person where the consequence of that threat places the person in fear or results in the person engaging in conduct in which that person would not usually engage.

Sexual abuse refers to the sexual touching of a minor, member of a vulnerable adult population, or congregant or any activity that results in a non-consensual sexual act or activity, or in the circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or

mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. Sexually harassing behaviors range from words (written and spoken) and gestures to unwanted physical contact.

Sexual molestation or exploitation refers to activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual conduct to which that person would not voluntarily consent, or in circumstances where the person is unable to consent due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental capacity or the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

Vulnerable adult refers to someone who is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activities of daily living, or protect themselves from emotional abuse, physical abuse, financial exploitation, or other hazardous situations without assistance.

Part 1: Child and Youth Safety

Adult Volunteers

Adult volunteers in the UCCV Religious Education Program must meet the following criteria:

- (1) Volunteers must be a member or friend of the church who have been active participants for a minimum of six months.
- (2) All regular volunteers (serving more than quarterly) must consent to a criminal background check. After the initial screening, a background check will be conducted every other year.
- (3) All volunteers must agree to this and all other policies at UCCV, including the Covenant of Right Relations. .

Youth Volunteers

Youth volunteers (13-17) who assist in the UCCV Religious Education Program must work under the supervision of an approved adult.

Working with Minors and Vulnerable Adult Populations

It is the responsibility of all members of the UCCV congregation, not just those in leadership positions, to foster a climate that nurtures the growth and welfare of minors and vulnerable adult populations. All UCCV members are required to read and abide by this policy for the protection of our children, youth and vulnerable adults. However, those working with minors and vulnerable adult populations as volunteers at UCCV have a critical and privileged role, one that carries with it power and influence. While acting in any volunteer capacity (i.e., chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, etc.), a volunteer has the opportunity to work with UCCV's young people and adult vulnerable populations in ways which can be affirming to all those involved.

While it is important that volunteers be capable of maintaining meaningful relationships with the people with whom they work, they must exercise sound judgment and emotional intelligence in exerting their influence over minors and members of vulnerable adult populations, and refrain

from using minors and vulnerable adults to fulfill their own needs. Minors and members of vulnerable adult populations are vulnerable when dealing with people in positions of authority and may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior.

Chaperones, teachers, and helpers who have gained the trust of young people and members of vulnerable adult populations are in the unique position of being able to observe behaviors or take part in conversations in which a participant may reveal a possible abusive situation (either within or outside of UCCV). In compliance with North Carolina's mandatory reporting law, any suspicions of abuse or neglect should be reported to the board president, who shall follow stated procedures.

UCCV expects all persons working with minors and vulnerable adult populations to respect the natural power differential inherent in relationships of varying status, authority, and self-efficacy. No matter the age or the ability of the individual participant, it is the responsibility of the volunteer to maintain appropriate boundaries in order to promote an atmosphere of emotional health and trust. Volunteers will not engage in sexual contact, sexualized behavior, or a sexual relationship with a minor or member of a vulnerable adult population.

The use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco on church property or at church-sanctioned functions for children and youth is prohibited. Participating adults may not consume alcohol or use any form of illegal drugs before or during the carrying out of their duties and responsibilities.

General Supervision Guidelines

All staff/volunteers are subject to the evaluation of the Board of Trustees and are required to comply with the following guidelines to ensure a safe and secure environment for UCCV's children, youth, and members of vulnerable adult populations:

- (1) Each group should have at least two volunteers present at all times, with at least one volunteer being an adult. If it is not possible to have two adults in the classroom, a designated adult "floater" may be assigned to do a "walk-through" of RE classrooms to check-in with teachers during Religious Education classes.
- (2) Guest teachers and speakers working with children will be paired with a regular volunteer who has been screened and who understands all policies and procedures.
- (3) In order to maintain visibility into classrooms, all window coverings shall be open and the doors to any classroom must remain unlocked at all times.
- (4) When taking children to the restroom, the volunteer should remain outside until the child is finished. Volunteers should only enter and assist when necessary.
- (5) All outings/field trips must be pre-approved by the Religious Education team and all participating minors must have a permission slip signed by a parent or legal guardian.
- (6) Children birth-to five years old must be checked-in and checked-out by a parent or legal guardian unless prior arrangements have been made with the lead teacher.
- (7) Corporal punishment or verbally abusive language shall not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes emotional, physical, or verbal abuse and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- (8) A parent or legal guardian will enroll their child in the RE Program annually by filling out a registration form that includes information about special needs (i.e., an Allergy Action Plan, written consent to administer medication if needed, etc.). All personal information is

considered confidential.

- (9) Parents/legal guardians are responsible for their children before the service begins and after the RE program has ended.
- (10) Parents/legal guardians, teachers, and volunteers are the only people allowed in the RE classrooms during services.
- (11) Nursery through Fifth grade parents/legal guardians (or appointed designer) must pick up their child(ren) from the RE Program at the end of service. The “floater” or an appointed designee will locate parents or guardians for parents who fail to comply.

UUCCV General Sleepover Guidelines: Lock-Ins and Sleepovers

For lock-ins, church-related field trips, and off-site sleepovers, the following guidelines must be adhered to:

- (1) Adults supervising youth sleepovers must be approved RE volunteers. Ideally, they will have been active participants at UUCCV for a minimum of one year and have had previous youth group experience in a Unitarian Universalist setting. Parents who are staying over with their own children are exempted from that rule.
- (2) There will always be a minimum of two adults present during the hours when the youth are sleeping regardless of the number of children/youth attending. One adult must remain awake until all youth have fallen asleep.
- (3) During sleepovers at UUCCV, all outside entrances will be locked against forced entry once the last overnight guest has arrived. Outside doors will remain locked until parents arrive in the morning for pick-up.
- (4) A permission slip signed by a parent/legal guardian and a Medical Release Form and a Medical Information Form will be required for each minor participating in the sleepover.
- (5) Each youth will be required to complete and sign the Youth Code of Ethics for each sleepover event.
- (6) Adults will sign youth in and out.
- (7) Youth will sleep only in areas equipped with functioning smoke detectors.
- (8) Adults will be trained in fire safety procedures and first aid procedures. Youth will be made aware of these guidelines.

Transportation To and from UUCCV Sanctioned Events

It is the responsibility of the UUCCV RE Program, or the parents, to provide safe transportation to and from UUCCV sanctioned events. The UUCCV RE Program requires that drivers meet specific qualifications to transport minors and members of vulnerable adult populations:

- (1) When traveling to and from outings, conferences, meetings, and other UUCCV activities, a permission slip signed by a parent/legal guardian is required for each minor participating in or being driven to an off-site activity.
- (2) Parents must provide written approval for minors to ride with drivers who are under 25.
- (3) Drivers and all passengers must use seatbelts and age appropriate seating will be arranged in accordance with airbag safety rules.
- (4) Each driver must show proof of license, vehicle registration, and active automotive liability insurance

- (5) Volunteers will inform parents/legal guardians of minors on off-site trips of arrival at and departure from site.

EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Church leaders share in the responsibility of educating the UCCV congregation about its *Safe Congregations* policies and procedures. In summary, they are as follows:

- (1) A copy of the *Safe Congregations Policy* will be provided to all RE volunteers.
- (2) A copy of the *Safe Congregations Policy* will be distributed to the parents of all children currently participating in the RE program, and thereafter a copy shall be provided to the parents of children enrolling in RE for the first time.
- (3) All staff members and volunteers who work with minors and other vulnerable populations shall receive annual training. UCCV will maintain documentation showing who participated and when. Educational opportunities will be provided by the church and can also be accessed online.
- (4) Full criminal background checks shall be conducted at the local, state and national level as well as through the National Sex Offender Registry, at the expense of UCCV, for all persons, whether paid or volunteer, who work with minors or other vulnerable populations. Volunteers may be re-screened at any time if RE leaders have any concerns. Volunteers under the age of 18 will be interviewed by RE leaders and will need to receive permission from parents or guardians.
- (5) The Minister or RE Director shall be responsible for reviewing background checks and determining whether or not individuals will be allowed to work with minors or members of vulnerable adult populations. The following items appearing on background checks will merit special consideration: violent crimes, crimes against children, felony convictions, weapons misdemeanor charges, or recurring crimes.
- (6) Volunteers will be re-screened every other year.
- (7) The Operations Assistant shall store any paper documentation that contains personal information in a locked file in the church office.

Anyone with access to volunteer disclosures, background check reports, and application forms must agree to hold that information in confidentiality except to share relevant information with the crisis response team as needed.

CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT - Check-in and check-out documentation for children participating in off-site activities or church programming will be required.

INCIDENT REPORTS - If any accident, injury, fight, discipline or abuse occurs during any church activity on or off site, the incident will be documented in writing. The child's legal guardian will receive a copy of any report and a copy will be retained in a locked file.

MANDATED REPORTING - Information about mandated reporting for child abuse will be included in annual volunteer training.

RELATED FORMS:

- RE Registration Form
- Incident Report

- Field Trip Permission Slip
- Photo Release Form

RELATED POLICIES

- Fire and safety (Not created)