

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP OF POTTSTOWN
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

(Approved by the Executive Board of Directors Date: August 5, 2006)

Preamble

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Pottstown, recognize the importance of creating reasonable precautions in order to protect our children and youth. It is in this spirit that we have developed this Child and Youth Protection Policy.

This policy will apply to all Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Pottstown sponsored activities and events.

Table of Contents

- I. Definitions
- II. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth
- III. Supervision Guidelines and Policies
- IV. Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth
- V. Procedures for assuring Safety of Children and Youth
- VI. Policies for assuring the Safety of Children and Youth
- VII. Education and Implementation
- VIII. Forms

I. DEFINITIONS

“Abuse” is an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust that harms or threatens to harm a child. There are four categories of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect. Harm caused by withholding life’s necessities – food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education – is called “neglect”.

A “child” or “minor” is a person under the age of 18 years. “Youth” means generally young adults, or children between 14-18 years.

A “group” is defined as those children or youth under the age of 18 who have been assigned to a nursery, preschool, Religious Education (RE) class or any planned, organized program or activity.

“Mandatory Reporters” are persons who are under a legal duty to report abuse to designated civil authorities. In Pennsylvania, mandatory reporters must report both actual and reasonably suspected cases of child abuse. The UUMA code of conduct requires the RE Administrator and the minister to be mandated reporters. At UUFPP our Minister and our Religious Education Administrator are mandatory reporters who must report to the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) whenever there is “reasonable cause” to believe that a child may have been abused. Any person who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse is permitted by law to make a report.

The “Safe Congregation Committee” is the authorized body responsible for all UUFPP formal responses to allegations / reports of abuse as outlined in this policy. The Board of Directors is the group legally empowered to notify the police, lawyers, insurance company, media spokesperson and/or JPD district executive as needed.

The “Safe Congregation Committee” is the established body within UUFPP that is entrusted with the implementation of this policy.

“Supervision” is defined as the reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and responsibility by adults working with an assigned group, realizing that what constitutes appropriate supervision will vary with the ages of those in the group and the context of the activity.

“Workers” are persons who are engaged with UUFPP children and youth, whether they are paid or unpaid, permanently assigned or occasional.

II. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Those volunteers who provide direct care or supervision for children or youth at UUFP must meet the following criteria:

All volunteer workers must be:

- Active participants at UUFP, as a fellowship member or contributing friend for at least six months prior to taking on any assigned group, committee, activity or event or
- Active participants at UUFP, as a fellowship member or contributing friend for fewer than six months who were active participants as a fellowship member or contributing friend in good standing at another Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregation. Participation should be of at least one year duration through the current or preceding calendar year. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the RE Administrator with provision of appropriate references.

The RE Committee Chair/Administrator and RE lead teachers must be UUFP members.

Youth, age fourteen (14) and up, who teach and/or assist in religious education and childcare must work with an adult whenever practical.

Workers with a known documented history of child abuse are prohibited from providing care or supervision of children or youth below the age of 18 years.

All workers must complete the application form included in this policy and must consent to such reference and/or background checks as UUFP deems necessary, and must agree to be bound by the code of conduct set forth in this policy.

All workers are required to read and agree to the terms set forth in this policy as well as sign the Application Form for Child and Youth Workers prior to being assigned duties with any group or program involving care or supervision of children or youth at UUFP.

Background checks

All staff members, teachers, volunteers, and facilitators who will have an ongoing relationship with and access to the RE program and RE area of the fellowship will have child/sexual abuse background checks done through the State Registry (ChildLine). Background checks also may be done in three areas: State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), Department of Human Services (DHS), and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The cost is charged to the fellowship, and the findings of these investigations are kept in a confidential file in the fellowship. Should any of these departments report past violations or reports, the RE Administrator and the minister/Safe Congregation Committee will determine further steps to insure safety of minors. Individuals with a known documented history of child abuse are prohibited from providing care or supervision of children or youth below the age of 18 years.

The inherent worth and dignity of the adult will be respected, but safety of our children is our top priority.

III. SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

All workers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the RE Administrator. All workers are required to comply with the following policies to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth:

- Whenever feasible, each group should have at least two workers present at all times with at least one worker being an adult. The RE Administrator shall determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group and activity, and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis. For infants and toddlers, the desirable ratio is outlined in the Nursery Policy.
- In order to provide visibility into classrooms any window coverings will be open and door windows will not be covered.
- The RE Administrator and/or designee shall circulate the RE classroom area and monitor classroom activities randomly during regular RE classes.
- Children and students in grades kindergarten and up may use the restroom in the RE wing as needed. Teacher/supervisor permission must be obtained before leaving the classroom/activity to use the restroom. No worker will enter the restroom when in use by a student unless help is requested by the student. Assistance may be provided to nursery/preschool children by the classroom worker as needed. Infants under the care of the classroom worker may have their diapers changed as needed.
- All outings must be pre-approved by the RE Administrator. Participating children must have a signed permission slip from parent or guardian.
- Children third grade and younger must be picked up by a parent or guardian at the conclusion of RE class instruction/activities unless prior arrangements have been made with the RE Administrator.
- Corporal punishment or abusive language may not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- Behavior of all workers must both *be* and *appear to be* above reproach. Period.

IV. CONDUCT FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

UUFPA seeks to create an environment in which children and youth can explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives. We actively encourage relationships between young people and adults, and know that when healthy and genuine they can be transformative for both the adult and the child involved.

Workers are expected to nurture the child's physical, emotional and spiritual growth by treating him/her with kindness, trust, respect and good humor. Interactions must be genuine and not manipulative of the child's needs or vulnerabilities. They must always be engaged with the best interests of the child as the foremost goal.

We expect all adults working with children to understand the power differential in child/adult relationships. This differential places greater responsibility on the adult in the relationship. No matter the age of the child, it is always the responsibility of the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in order to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust. To that end we ask all workers to endorse this code of ethics:

Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Who Are Engaged In Leadership Roles with Children/Youth

"Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of 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 relationship is to be realized.

There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with children and youth which constitute verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

Leaders shall be informed of this code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violating of this code, appropriate action will be taken. "

Adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1986.

Other areas that may be of concern:

Physical Affection: Physical expressions of affection such as hugs are acceptable, but it is best to allow the child to initiate the contact or to at least to ask permission of the child, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow such affection to become too frequent or prolonged.

Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol: Our Youth Policy prohibits the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs by minors. Workers should at all times be aware that their own behavior is a powerful statement to children as to what is acceptable and responsible use of these agents. Adults while acting in a supervisory capacity should not use alcohol, drugs, or tobacco.

Confidentiality vs. Secrets: If a child discloses incidents of abuse or neglect, the worker should listen carefully to the report but ask limited questions. Should the disclosure raise a suspicion that abuse has occurred or that the child is in imminent danger, the worker should report immediately to the minister or RE administrator. While you can assure a child that you will respect the information and use it confidentially, never give the child the impression that you will keep secrets. Secrets are issues that put a person in danger

Disclosures: Children's statements will be taken seriously. In the event that a child makes a disclosure, or in an emergency situation, an approved adult will stay with the child until Children, Youth and Family services have been contacted.

V. PROCEDURES FOR ASSURING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Reporting and Response Procedures

Clergy are referred to as "mandated" reporters. They are required by Pennsylvania law to make a report when, based on their training and experience, they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child before them has been abused.

Any person who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse is permitted by law to make a report. In addition, anyone who suspects any child abuse should notify the minister and RE administrator, who will in turn notify the UUFP Board of Directors and Safe Congregation Committee.

The UUFP Board of Directors will ensure that the following notifications are made as applicable:

- Chester County Authorities (DPW):
 1. Call the Chester County Children, Youth and Families office immediately at 610-344-5800.
 2. If no one is available at that number, call the Pennsylvania Child Hotline at 1-800-932-0313.

3. Within 48 hours, file a written report using the form attached. This form may also be faxed to 610-344-5858. This form should include the following information as required by statute:
 - 1) names/addresses of child and parents or other person responsible for care of child, if known;
 - 2) where suspected abuse occurred;
 - 3) age and sex of children;
 - 4) nature and extent of suspected abuse, including any evidence of prior abuse to child or child's siblings;
 - 5) name and relationship of person(s) responsible for causing abuse, if known, and any evidence of prior abuse by that person(s);
 - 6) family composition;
 - 7) source of the report;
 - 8) person making report and contact information;
 - 9) actions taken by reporting source.
 - Parents/ guardians
 - UUFP Lawyer
 - Insurance Company
 - Media Spokesperson
 - JPD District Executive

All notifications should be documented, including telephone calls to the hotline. This documentation is to be confidentially retained in the fellowship records along with all written reports.

An approved adult should stay with a child in any emergency situation that involves disclosure of abuse.

Pastoral care and counseling referrals will be provided as desired in coordination with Chester County Children, Youth and Family Services.

Registration Process

Registration on an annual basis is required for all students attending Religious Education at UUFP. Parents and guardians who register their children are asked to provide information such as name, age, and home address and telephone number for ongoing UUFP contact as well as for emergencies. They are also asked to provide information regarding allergies, special needs, and anything we should know about in classrooms and during fellowship events relating to health and safety. This information is kept in the RE Administrator's Registration folder, and is accessible only to the RE Administrator, minister, and Board of Directors. The RE Administrator will share information with workers as needed.

Incident reports

In the event that any injury or any safety violation occurs on fellowship property during fellowship functions, an incident report must be filed within 24 hours by the worker. Witnesses to an incident may also file an incident report. Forms are located in the fellowship office and in each of the class rooms.

Incident reports are filed with the RE Administrator, who will then contact parent/guardian(s) of the child(ren) involved. A copy of the incident report will be

provided to parent/guardian(s). If there is immediate concern and the RE Administrator is not available, any RE Committee member or fellowship staff on the premises should be next. The RE Administrator will immediately notify the Safe Congregation Committee. In the event of criminal activity reported, the police and/or DHS officials will also be notified. The UUMA code of conduct requires the RE Administrator and the minister to be mandated reporters.

Permission slips

For travel, or walking trips that take children and youth off fellowship grounds, permission slips need to be signed by each participant's parent/guardian. In the case of JPD or General Assembly events, the permission slips generated by those groups will take the place of those generated by UUFP.

VI. POLICIES FOR ASSURING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

IN THE CLASSROOM

Sunday morning class time extends from the time when RE workers take the children out of the sanctuary until services have concluded, at which time classes are dismissed.

If at any time there is inadequate staff to teach classes or provide for childcare, the children will be returned to their parents/guardians.

In keeping with the recommendations of the UUA, we support the position that more than one RE worker should be in class with our children and youth at all times. However, as a small congregation this is not always possible at UUFP. We recognize the need for classroom activities to be visible at all times so the classroom doors have glass windows to allow rooms to be monitored. We also therefore will allow one worker to supervise or instruct the RE children and youth when two RE workers are not available to staff the classroom on any given Sunday throughout the year.

We believe that children need classrooms where they will be safe. For the safety of our children, children are to attend the RE class that is appropriate for their age, unless special permission is granted by the RE Administrator. Scheduled class activities that involve all grades will be supervised by multiple adults to ensure the safety of the children.

During class time, children must remain with the RE classroom leader(s) and the rest of their class for the entire class period, whether that be in the classroom or on an outdoor class excursion. A child is not permitted to freely roam the halls or wander away from the group unsupervised. If the child does not want to attend the class, the child must go into the Sanctuary with their parents/guardians.

Classroom Conduct

Our teachers and staff spend much time and energy creating a supportive, nurturing, and positive atmosphere in the classroom. We expect all children to behave in a manner that fosters these feelings for themselves and their classmates. Each teaching team is encouraged to develop a classroom covenant with the children. Parents/guardians can help by discussing appropriate behavior with their children and reinforcing the classroom covenant.

Unacceptable behavior in the classroom will first result in a warning, then in time-out, and finally the child may be returned to the Sanctuary to remain with their parents\guardians. Communication between the teacher and parent is encouraged in these events.

In the event that a child injures another child at UUFP, the parents/guardians of the child(ren) involved will be notified immediately. An incident report will be filled out, and procedures will be followed as outlined in section V. PROCEDURES FOR ASSURING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

If a child reports to the RE classroom worker that he was treated in an aggressive or unacceptable fashion by another student, the worker will relay any complaints by a child to the parents/guardians of all parties involved. The worker will first help the children/students involved discuss the problem and work out a resolution. Further concerns will be handled as outlined in section V. PROCEDURES FOR ASSURING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

Before and After RE Classes

Before and after class time, children are not allowed in classrooms unsupervised. The fellowship doors are open with people coming and going. Without direct adult supervision, there is no way to prevent a child from leaving the fellowship or to prevent a stranger from entering.

Parents and guardians are responsible for their children at any time other than class time. Sunday morning class time extends from the time when RE workers take the children out of the sanctuary until services have concluded, at which time classes are dismissed. Parents/guardians can not assume that their child is being supervised by the RE workers after class time. Parents/guardians are responsible for any actions of the child(ren) that are harmful to people or property.

Scheduled fellowship events

When there is childcare provided for activities other than Sunday mornings, for whatever age groups, the same policies apply as on Sunday mornings.

Consent from parents/guardians is required for R.E. activities outside of Sunday classes and off UUFP grounds.

ON FELLOWSHIP PROPERTY

Outdoors

Any child or group in our playground or yard during class time will be supervised by their classroom leaders. Classroom rules of conduct for rough play apply to the outdoors. Before and after church, parents/guardians are responsible for the safety of their children.

Kitchen area

As a general rule, parents and guardians are responsible for keeping their children out of the kitchens for their own safety. Occasionally a classroom activity or fundraising opportunity may involve children's participation in the kitchen, always with adult supervision. Teens often use the kitchens during youth group activities. Children may be accompanied by an adult to obtain snacks or drinks.

Social Room

Children are to be supervised in the Social Room at all times by their parent/guardian(s) and other adults to prevent children from engaging in dangerous activities.

Sanctuary

Our worship begins at 10:00, and until the children leave the sanctuary at approximately 10:15, they are the responsibility of their parent/guardian. If a child leaves the sanctuary for a bathroom break or to go elsewhere in the fellowship or outside, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to supervise the child.

OFF FELLOWSHIP PROPERTY

Transportation

Any child or youth transported by a fellowship worker or volunteer, must have a permission slip signed by their parent or guardian. On youth group outings where youth person may have driver's licenses and offer a ride to another youth, this needs to be dealt with by the parents/guardians of the involved youths, and is not covered by fellowship policy.

Joseph Priestly District

JPD events, such as conferences or workshops, daily or overnight, have their own rules and regulations. While the policies and procedures for these events are in line with those of the UUFP, they are specifically designed for the safety and enjoyment of the participants of these events. The behavior of children and youth at district events is outlined in a contract signed by the participant and their parent/guardian before engaging in any of these events.

General Assembly

Any youth less than 18 years who is sent with the financial or other support of fellowship council must adhere to the rules put forth by the YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists). The UUFP will not be responsible for any adult or youth who does not comply. Sponsors and youth will be familiar with code of ethics and expected behavior before going.

VII. EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The UUFP Board of Directors approved this policy on August 5, 2006. It is to be communicated to the congregation and implemented as follows:

- A copy of this *Policy* will be provided to anyone identified by the RE Administrator as being within its definition of “worker”. All new and existing workers will be required to sign a form indicating that they have read this *Policy* and agree to be bound by it.
- A summary of this *Policy* will be distributed to the parents/guardians of all children currently participating in the RE program, and thereafter a copy shall be provided to the parents/guardians of children enrolling for the first time.
- References to this *Policy* will be a standard part of every application interview and training of new workers.
- This policy and information on child abuse awareness will be provided to workers annually.
- The RE Administrator shall store all application forms, signed consents and background check reports in a locked file.
- The Safe Congregation Committee will report annually to the Board of Directors regarding the implementation and compliance of this policy.
- The Board of Directors shall ensure that this policy is made public and available.

VIII. FORMS

The forms listed in this next section are to be kept on file and accessible for implementing aforementioned procedures. It is imperative that they be kept up to date and reviewed yearly. Our fellowship documents need to be continually reviewed and updated as our fellowship family grows and changes, and as our RE program changes. Changes may be implemented more frequently than yearly, on an as needed basis, by the RE Committee with Board of Director approval of respective changes.

- Family Registration for Children and Youth Form
- Parent/Guardian Expectation and Permission Form
- Incident Report Form
- Application Form for Child and Youth Workers
- UUA Application for paid or volunteer employment