

# **Children and Youth Safety Policy Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Redwood City**

As a community of people of all ages, we at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Redwood City (UUFRC) want to work to create a safe environment for everyone, especially for our children and youth.

As a community with growing numbers of children and of adults working with children, we recognize that it is important to think deliberately about these issues. We strive to create safe environments for all members, but as a church organization we can be vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, welcoming spirit and strong reliance and need for volunteers, especially in children's and youth's programs.

UUFRC has always been a friendly and informal community. By creating safety standards, we do not seek to create obstacles to interaction. It is true that to adequately address the need for safe environments, it will mean change and the sacrifice of some convenience, yet we know our responsibility to respond to the reality of our situation and to our children and youth. This policy seeks to create a safe and secure environment where everyone has the structure needed to do their best. We realize that institutions operating in the best manner possible with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free environment.

The Religious Education Committee takes ownership for this portion of the overall UUFRC Safety Policy, which is reviewed and approved by the UUFRC Board of Trustees.

In this spirit, we introduce the Children and Youth Safety Policy.

This policy applies to all children and youth events sponsored by the church, including but not limited to the following:

- Religious Education for children on Sunday mornings
- Youth group functions
- Church retreats
- Intergenerational church events
- Adult church events with childcare

# **I. Screening of Staff and Volunteers Working with Children and Youth**

## **A) Screening**

### **1) Paid Church Staff**

- (i) For the purposes of this policy, paid staff members are those in staff positions which require a leading role in a children's activity. Examples include the Parish Minister, the Intern Minister, the Director of Religious Education, staff Childcare Provider(s), staff teachers, staff Youth Advisor(s), and the Choir Director or other staff with the duty of leading the children's choir.
- (ii) The staff members listed above must consent to a criminal background check and pass a background check prior to commencing employment. The church administrator will arrange for the background check and will be responsible for confidential, secure storage of any records pertaining to background checks, and secure disposal (shredding) of such records when they are no longer needed.
- (iii) The exception to this policy is adults or older teens (minimum age 15) that are hired to provide childcare when the primary childcare provider is not available. In this case, these workers will provide two references that will be checked by the Director of Religious Education.
- (iv) Younger teens, age 12 to 15, can be hired to assist a church staff member who has a background check. These younger teens do not need a background check or references. While working, they will be in the constant supervision of an adult.
- (v) All paid staff must sign a Code of Ethics Covenant each church year and review the Children and Youth Safety Policy. They will receive their own copy of both documents.

### **2) Volunteers**

- (i) Lead and co-teachers must be approved by the Religious Education Committee and be known within the church community.
- (ii) Substitute teachers must be known within the church community.
- (iii) Volunteer Youth Advisors (an advisor has a major role in planning and attending youth classes and programming), OWL teachers, and Youth Mentors (a mentor is expected to meet with youth one-on-one as part of a program such as Coming of Age) must consent to a criminal background check and pass a background check. The church administrator will arrange for the background check and will be responsible for the confidential, secure storage of any records pertaining to background checks, and secure disposal of such records when they are no longer needed.

- (iv) Volunteer leaders of the children's choir must be approved by the Music Committee and be known within the church community.
- (v) Volunteer leaders of other children's activities must be approved by the sponsoring committee and be known within the church community.
- (vi) All volunteers must sign a Code of Ethics Covenant each church year and review the Children and Youth Safety Policy. They will receive their own copy of both documents.

#### B) Minimum Ages of Staff or Volunteers

- 1) Advisors and mentors of high school aged youth must be at least 25 years old.
- 2) Advisors and mentors of middle school youth must be at least 21 years old.
- 3) The lead or co-teacher for all other age groups must be at least 18 years old.
- 4) Childcare providers, working without supervision, must be a minimum of 15 years old.
- 5) Childcare providers or classroom assistants working with adult supervision must be at least 12 years old.

## II. Religious Education and Church Event Supervision Requirements

### A) Religious Education Classes and Sunday Morning Childcare Supervision

- 1) There will be a minimum of two teachers, or a teacher and assistant, scheduled to teach each RE Classroom on Sunday mornings. In the event that it is not possible to have a second teacher or assistant in the classroom, the hallway doors are to remain open for the duration of the program. The DRE should be notified of this situation.
- 2) While it is always preferable to have two care providers (e.g., teacher and assistant) with children at all times, paid church staff who have passed a background check may be with children without another care provider if necessary. In this case, the door to the room should remain open.
- 3) Guidelines for Religious Education Classes and Sunday Morning Childcare Ratios
  - (i) It is recommended that there be a ratio of no more than 12 children/youth to one care provider for kindergarten and older.
  - (ii) The recommended ratio for preschool children, 2 to 4 years of age, is 6 children to one care provider.
  - (iii) The recommended ratio for infants and toddlers 24 months and younger is 3 children to one care provider.

- (iv) In the case where there are mixed age groups of children, the ratio of care provider to children will satisfy each of the above ratios within each age group. For example, if there is one child under 24 months of age and 11 children over the age of kindergarten, there should be two care providers; however, if there are three children under 24 months of age and 8 over the age of kindergarten, there should be three care providers.
  - (v) It is preferable to have at least 2 care providers in the blockroom during Sunday worship services.
- 4) A sign-in sheet for Sunday morning childcare must be provided for guardians leaving children in non-classroom care. Childcare providers should ask guardians to sign in and out.
  - 5) All teachers should take attendance in their Sunday School classroom.

## B) Other Children's Activities

The ratios of adults to children/youth during children's choir and other children's activities should follow the guidelines set forth for Religious Education Classes and Sunday Morning Childcare (see Section II.A.3).

## C) Mentors

- 1) Mentors are often expected to meet one-on-one with youth. Such meetings shall take place in a public place such as a restaurant, museum, or park. Such meetings may also take place at UUFRC, but only if other people are in the building and the door of the meeting room is left open.
- 2) Mentors may transport their mentee to and from the meeting place. Parental consent and other Requirements for Transportation to and from Church Events (see Section III) shall apply.

## D) Church Event Supervision

- 1) Recommended Childcare Ratios at Church Events
  - (i) At many church events, it is not feasible to provide two childcare providers for a small number of children.
    - (a) Guardians attending church events with only one childcare provider should check in on their children periodically.
    - (b) The door to the area where the childcare is being provided must be left open if there is only one childcare provider.
  - (ii) The ratios of children/youth to care provider should follow the guidelines set forth for Religious Education Classes and Sunday Morning Childcare (see Section II.A.3).
  - (iii) In the event that more children than expected come to an event and there are not enough childcare providers, guardians attending the event will be asked to take a shift of time assisting the childcare provider. The safety

and well being of the children in childcare takes precedence to guardian's being able to attend a church event where childcare was offered.

- 2) There should be a sign-in log for childcare at all church events.

### **III. Unaccompanied Minors**

- A) In general, guardians of children and youth are expected to remain at UUFRC while their children are here. Exceptions are noted below.
- B) Guardians of youth attending a youth group event are not expected to remain during that event. Guardians must fill out a registration/medical release form for their youth and return it to the DRE in order for their child to participate in youth group.
- C) Youth, age 13 and older, are allowed to attend UUFRC services and Sunday school without a guardian. Guardians must fill out a registration/medical release form for their youth and return it to the DRE before youth are allowed to attend on their own. Youth attending UUFRC services or Sunday school on their own must not be dropped off before 10 am and must be picked up no later than 12 noon.
- D) Youth are expected to behave in a manner consistent with the standards of the church community while at the Fellowship. The DRE will contact the guardians of youth who cannot handle this responsibility, if issues arise.

### **IV. Transportation to and from Church Youth Events**

The following requirements apply to all events for which UUFRC coordinates the transportation of youth.

- A) All drivers must be at least 25 years of age.
- B) Drivers will sign a form indicating that they have a valid California driver's license and the legally required minimum automobile insurance.
- C) All drivers are responsible for their own automotive liability insurance. They are not covered by the church's insurance.
- D) There must be enough seat belts for everyone and everyone must wear a seat belt. Children requiring car seats under California law must have appropriate car seats provided by the guardians. All other laws regarding child safety restraints will be followed.
- E) Written permission by the guardians of all minor passengers will be obtained prior to being transported. This permission will include all relevant details pertaining to the event, such as date and location, name of driver(s), time of departure and time of return.

- F) While performing their driving duties, no driver may consume, use, or be under the influence of alcohol or any form of drug which can affect physical or mental performance.
- G) Drivers may not use a cell phone or texting device while driving.
- H) When soliciting drivers for an event, event planners must make drivers aware of the requirements necessary to be a driver for a church event.

## **V. Reporting of Incidents**

This policy does not negate mandatory reporting rules as regulated by the law.

- A) If a child receives a minor injury on the church site, the care provider supervising that child shall record the incident in the Incident Log and report it to the guardians.
- B) If there is a significant injury to a child on-site, the care provider who was supervising that child shall write a report summarizing what occurred and submit it to the DRE within 24 hours. This should be done after the child has been cared for and the guardians are informed.
- C) All teachers, assistants, and child care providers, including staff and volunteers, who acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that one or more youth has been sexually molested or exploited, injured or been the victim of significant objectionable conduct, shall immediately report the incident to the person in charge of the church event and to a member of the Board of Trustees. If the event is religious education on Sundays, the DRE is the person in charge. If the person in charge is alleged to be involved in the incident, then the incident should be reported to the Minister or to a second member of the Board of Trustees instead of the person allegedly involved in the incident.
- D) Those persons reporting the incident and receiving the report should respect the confidentiality of the involved parties.
- E) Every person in charge of a church event to whom a report of molestation, injury, or objectionable conduct is made shall immediately:
  - 1) Report the incident to appropriate authorities if the person in charge is a “mandatory reporter” under the law;
  - 2) Report the incident in writing to either the minister or DRE of UUFRC; and
  - 3) Report the incident to the guardians of the apparent victim, unless the incident involves the guardian.
- F) Adults, even if not in charge of an event, who acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that one or more youth has been sexually molested or exploited, injured, or been the victim of significant objectionable conduct must consider whether they are required to report the incident to the law enforcement authorities.
- G) Refer to the overall UUFRC Safety Policy regarding responding to the media.

## **VI. Relieving a Care Provider of their Duties**

- A) If anyone at a church event has concerns about the ability of a child care provider to provide care, they should report the situation to the person in charge of the event. Whenever concerns are brought to the attention of the person in charge, the person in charge shall immediately investigate the situation.
- B) If the person in charge of the church event determines that a care provider is not a suitable person to work with children or youth, the person in charge shall immediately:
  - 1) Relieve the care provider of their duties;
  - 2) Make other child care arrangements (e.g., asking guardians in attendance to take shifts assisting with child care); and
  - 3) Report the actions taken to the minister or DRE of UUFRC.
- C) If the event is religious education on Sundays, the DRE is the person in charge.
- D) After relieving a care provider of their duties, the person in charge of the church event shall refer to the overall UUFRC Safety Policy to determine if other actions are required.

## **VII. Spirit of This Policy**

While this policy strives to be as clear as possible, it is recognized that situations could arise that are not directly addressed in this policy. In such cases, individuals must use their best judgment, in accordance with the spirit of this policy.

As a community, we believe that situations of possible abuse, molestation, exploitation, or other significantly objectionable conduct must be handled immediately and directly, and not ignored or “swept under the carpet.” Even if there is doubt about what may or may not have occurred, the situation should be addressed and reported. Congregants should not be put in a position where they have to question whether to report a situation. When in doubt, address the issue and err on the side of the safety of the youth or child.

## **Appendix A**

### **Code of Ethics Covenant for Leadership Roles**

#### **UUFRC Religious Education Program**

In response to an increased awareness and understanding of the importance of relationships between adults, youth and children in the church environment, the Religious Education Committee has adopted the following Code of Ethics. Please read this carefully. You are asked to embrace these standards and covenant to follow the behavioral guidelines as you engage in the shared ministry of religious education at UUFRC.

Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in positions of stewardship in fostering spiritual development. It is especially important that those in leadership positions provide appropriate nurture, care and support. Spiritual growth in human beings involves physical, emotional, intellectual and sexual identities. Please be mindful that all communication has the potential to carry affirming or harmful messages. Communication includes body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, as well as the choice of words in written and verbal expression.

Children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders engage in physical, emotional, or verbal abuse of any kind. In addition, behavior that is sexual in nature or contains sexual innuendo can be especially damaging.

Consequently, as a leader and role model in the Religious Education program at UUFRC, you are asked to enter a covenant to follow these guidelines. If there is a violation of these guidelines, appropriate action will be taken.

As I engage in the shared ministry of religious education, I agree to:

- Be conscious that much of the spiritual growth within a community happens in the context of relationships and my modeling of healthy relationships as a teacher is influential;
- Be consciously gentle and non-threatening in all physical contact and proximity with children, youth and adults;
- Communicate in a manner that is positive and affirming, as feelings and ideas are shared most honestly in a safe environment;
- Refrain from all behaviors, verbal and physical, that is in any way sexual in nature, including sexual innuendo;
- Model and encourage kindness and honesty among people in my care and discourage meanness and dishonesty.

I have read the above and agree to abide by the Code of Ethics.

Printed Name

Signature



## Appendix C

### How to Arrange for Childcare at Church Events

- 1) It is the philosophy of the UUFRC to provide childcare for any fellowship event where childcare is requested for one or more attendees of the event.
- 2) General guidelines for childcare:
  - (i) Childcare should be requested a minimum of one week before the event.
  - (ii) The planner or sponsoring group of a Fellowship event has the final responsibility for childcare at that event. The DRE is supervisor of the Fellowship's staff childcare provider. The DRE and office administrator act as a resource to assist you.
  - (iii) In the unusual event that all of the Fellowship's paid childcare providers are not available, the event planner will have to recruit volunteers, find another childcare provider or cancel the planned childcare.
  - (iv) Leaving a group of school-age children unattended at the Fellowship for a long time is not recommended, even if each of them individually can take care of themselves at home. The event planner should use their judgment in this situation and ask for a childcare provider if there is any question.
- 3) To Arrange for Childcare for a Church Event
  - (i) Determine if childcare is needed for your event.
    - (a) Announce small-scale events with "childcare available if requested by (deadline date)". Set the deadline at least one week in advance.
    - (b) List yourself as the person to contact for requests.
    - (c) Announce the childcare for the event in as many places as timing allows: the newsletter, in the Order of Service and at announcement time in Sunday Services, and the UUFRC yahoo e-mail group. The DRE can also forward a message to family e-mail lists she maintains if requested.
  - (ii) Send a request to the Church Administrator ([office@uufrc.org](mailto:office@uufrc.org)) or DRE ([dreuufrc@yahoo.com](mailto:dreuufrc@yahoo.com)) by phone or e-mail.
  - (iii) A church staff member will contact the childcare provider(s) and arrange for childcare.
  - (iv) The event planner is the contact for the childcare provider at your event. This includes greeting them as they arrive, directing them to their work area (usually the Block Room with preschoolers or Front Lounge or Back Lounge with school-age children), and directing guardians to check their child into the provider's care and to pick up their child on time.