

Safe Congregation Policy

Unitarian Universalist Church of Evansville

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Evansville has adopted, as our guide to promoting a Safe Congregation, the “Balancing Act” manual (53 pages) by Reverend Debra W. Haffner available at <http://archive.uua.org/cde/ethics/balancing/BalancingAct.pdf>

From this guide we have created our Safe Congregation Policy to provide us with:

- Procedures for reporting physical or sexual abuse.
- Procedures for keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe from physical or sexual abuse.
- Procedures for educating adults, youth, and children in the congregation about child sexual and physical abuse and prevention.
- Procedures for responding to a person who has been convicted of a sex or violent crime offense against children, youth or adults.

Preamble

“Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent dignity and worth 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.

We believe our church must respond to this challenge, because it is a special place that highly values the ideals of community and the search for truth. It is a place that encourages personal growth, allows for personal truths, and supports individuals and families in their efforts to build better lives and a better society. As a caring, intergenerational community we can respond to those in need in broader, more flexible ways than many other institutions.

We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about sexual misconduct, abuse, molestation, harassment and exploitation. We pledge to do our best to protect and support those who come either at risk or in crisis. We as a Congregation pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner which conveys mutual respect and consideration.” [Haffner, 5]

Reporting Suspected Physical or Sexual Abuse

When physical or sexual abuse is suspected, we will follow the reporting laws set forth by the state of Indiana. (Note: Indiana requires anyone who suspects child abuse to report it, and offers immunity from liability as long as you acted in good faith. Suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS). They operate a 24-hour, 7-day a week hotline: 1-800-800-5556.)

Safe Congregations Response Team

1. The purpose of the Safe Congregation Response Team is to keep all members of the Congregation safe through prevention and monitoring and by responding or advising about issues involving Congregational safety while at the same time respecting the worth and human dignity of all parties involved in a situation and with a commitment to restorative justice.

2. The Team of 4 or 5 members will be appointed by the Minister or the official representative of the Church, President of the Board, Head of Committee on Ministry, and Religious Exploration director(s) by consensus and will change as needed.
3. The Safe Congregation Response Team may be activated by the Minister or the official representative of the Church, President of the Board, head of the Committee on Ministry, or Religious Exploration director(s) to respond to situations that fall within the scope of this policy and act on behalf of the Congregation.
4. The Safe Congregations Response Team will serve as a resource for the Church and Religious Exploration program.
5. The Safe Congregation Response Team should advise the UUCE Board on an annual basis of any resources that it may need to carry out its charge, and it will prepare an annual report for the outgoing and incoming Board on annual activities.

Keeping Children and Youth Safe

1. Two adults will be present in the nursery whenever childcare is provided by the Church, and at every program for all children and youth, as well as in cars transporting young people to activities.
2. Classes meeting at Chalice House will be directly supervised by their own teacher and there will be always be two adults present in the building whenever children are present.
3. Nursery and classroom doors will have a glass insert (or remain open).
4. Everyone who works with children or youth at UUCE will be educated about the content and purpose behind the “Code of Ethics” and “Safe Congregation Agreement” *each year* and sign them. The signed copies will be retained by the RE Committee.
5. Every employee and all volunteers who work with children, regardless of position, will fill out and sign the screening form and release for a background check. A background check is mandatory for all employees and all volunteers who work with children. The UUCE Board will carry out this function according to its policies and procedures.
6. The Minister or official representative of the Church, President of the Board, and Safe Congregations Response Team will be notified of any flags raised by a background check or of any signs of physical or sexual abuse.

Physical or Sexual Abuse Education

1. Education about physical or sexual abuse prevention will be offered to elementary, middle, and high school RE groups.
2. The sexual abuse prevention module of Our Whole Lives (OWL) will be offered as part of our religious exploration program.
3. At its annual orientation, the RE staff will be provided with information on recognizing signs of physical/sexual abuse and informed about the reporting process.
4. Members of our RE Committee, the Board of Directors, and our Safe Congregations Response Team will review this policy along with the “Balancing Act” manual each year.
5. **The Board will consider the dissemination of our policy so that all Congregation members and friends know about the existence the policy and can identify some of its key points.**

Guidelines Involving Sex or Violent Crime Offenders

1. A sex or violent crime offender who wishes to be active in the Congregation will make initial contact with the Minister or the official representative of the Church.
2. The sex or violent crime offender will allow our Minister or official representative to contact their parole officer and/or treatment provider before any consideration will be made as to their involvement with UUCE.
3. The Safe Congregation Response Team will be activated at this time and will interview the petitioning sex or violent crime offender
4. The Safe Congregation Response Team will determine the scope of any access to the congregation by a sex or violent crime offender. These terms will be laid out in a *Limited Access Agreement*.
5. The sex or violent offender is required to agree and sign the *Limited Access Agreement* that will specifically address safety issues involving their past offenses.
6. A sex or violent crime offender who willfully violates or otherwise does not comply with any of the steps above or the provisions of their *Limited Access Agreement* will be excluded from all congregational activities. Any appropriate authorities would be contacted.
7. The Safe Congregations Response Team will determine an appropriate monitoring system for the individual case, may appoint monitors, and will make a judgment through the system it has devised if the terms of a Limited Access Agreement has been violated.
8. These guidelines may be modified by the Safe Congregation Response Team to respond to other types of behavior or situations that fall within the scope of its duty.

Notification Policy

1. Should the Response Team be activated and terms of a Limited Access Agreement be carried out, the following people will have access to information pertaining to the situation:
 - a. The Minister or official representative of the Church and the Safe Congregations Response Team will know the identity of the sex or violent crime offender, have access to any released information about the case, and will participate in or have access to all the details of any or all interview(s).
 - b. The President of the Board, head of the Committee on Ministry, and the Religious Education director(s) should be notified any time the Safe Congregations Response Team is activated. After a Limited Access Agreement has been agreed to and signed by the sex or violent crime offender, the above parties or any monitors appointed by the Safe Congregation Response Team will be informed of the person's identity, any known publicly released information about the person's situation, the terms of the Limited Access Agreement, and any particular details that the Minister or Safe Congregation Response Team may determine that will make it easier for the them to monitor or enforce the terms of the signed Limited Access Agreement.
 - c. The Congregation as a whole will be notified by the President of the UUCE Board that a Limited Access Agreement has been signed. As part of the notification process, the President of the Board will inform the Congregation about the existence of this Safe Congregations Policy and will make it available for review. Any Congregant who wants to know more information about the person who signed a Limited Access

Agreement will be referred to the Minister. The Minister must safeguard private information but may refer the person to any publicly released information.

Resources

1. The Minister, Safe Congregations Response Team and UUCE Board will ensure that a list of resources and professionals is compiled, regularly updated, and accessible to the Congregation.
2. Regularly review local and state laws to keep the Minister, UUCE Board and Religious Education programs and policies current.

Disclaimer: The Church is attempting to establish policies and procedures to keep our children, youth and adults safe, but these policies and procedures should not lull us into a false sense of security. Every Congregant has a duty to keep their eyes and ears open and report any suspicious incident to the authorities.

See attached on file: Code of Ethics for Adult and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth, Safe Congregations Agreement, Screening Form for Religious Educators, Youth Group and Nursery Staff and Volunteers, and examples of possible Limited Access Agreements.

The present policy approved by the UUCE Board, April 2009 will supersede any prior version of this policy.