

# **UUCM Safety and Ethics Policy & Guidelines: Adopted February 14, 2012**

## **Introduction**

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Milford, understand that our spiritual community must be a place where all our members and friends can be safe and nurtured in an environment of trust, respect, and cooperation. To create and sustain such an environment we need first to recognize that our community operates in the larger world, and that the high level of trust and the spirit of welcome that define us also make us vulnerable. While we cannot guarantee an absolutely safe environment, we can put in place a safety policy that aligns with our core values, assumes right relations, and provides guidelines that operate in an open, caring manner for all involved in incidents that threaten the safety and integrity of our congregation.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this safety policy is to establish a common understanding around threats to the personal safety or psychological well-being of any child, youth or adult in our community. Any threat to an individual is a threat to the congregation as a whole. We are all responsible for the well-being, strength, and reputation of our congregation. We must be alert and proactive in order to protect children, youth, adults and the congregation as a whole from abuse and unresolved conflict. We must recognize potential levels of concern for personal safety, act to prevent them, and be ready to respond to allegations or occurrences of behavior that violate our safety and ethics policy & guidelines.

Maintaining right relations, assuming good intentions, and adhering to the UU Principles are essential. Without these common assumptions no safety and ethics policy can provide the support and guidance necessary to protect our members and their core values. As individuals, adult members of the community should exhibit behaviors that enhance the dignity and inherent worth of all participants: expressing sincere appreciation; allowing for human fallibility; dealing directly with each other; speaking softly and thoughtfully; being creative in problem solving; maintaining a sense of humor; actively listening and clarifying what we hear; letting others have their say; respecting boundaries that may differ from our own; respecting confidentiality; refraining from harmful gossip about others; and speaking honestly. Each person, regardless of his or her role in the congregation is expected to live to this covenant within the context of his or her relationship with the congregation.

Because we aspire to be a community that values interaction among all age levels in our congregation, we encourage adult involvement in children's programming and youth activities. We hope that all those interested in teaching and mentoring our children and youth will find opportunities to do so, and we understand that rotating adult supervision of children and youth helps to promote these opportunities and gives our children and youth a wide spectrum of adult role models. With such openness and inclusion comes a responsibility for safety.

As responsible members of this community we have an obligation to bring to light concerns that threaten the health and safety of our church. While we strive to be an inclusive, affirming, and welcoming community, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. Protecting the children and youth in our congregation is an understood priority, but every individual who participates in our activities must be able to do so with a sense of personal safety. This policy and its component guidelines are not only a statement of our intention to provide a safe environment for our members and friends, they outline the active steps for implementation of our policy and the documentation of actions taken.

## Scope of the Policy:

This policy applies to all individuals, committees, or groups that are part of the congregation. It applies, as well, to any groups using our facility that are in effect sponsored by UUCM. For example, when District Youth Conferences are held at UUCM, our expectation is that all adult advisors will have been through a screening process like the one described in this policy.

The policy recognizes three basic levels of concern: direct threats to the personal safety of children, youth and adults; threats to psychological well-being; and disruptive behavior that threatens the congregation as a whole.

## Safe Congregation Team [SCT]:

UUCM takes seriously its responsibility to implement and enforce this safety policy. The Council shall appoint a Safe Congregation Team [SCT] consisting of the Minister, Director of Religious Education [DRE], Council President, and the three members of the Committee on Ministry. This Team will meet once yearly to update the policy if necessary and to take action to familiarize members and friends with the policy and its importance. The Team will otherwise meet as needed to deal with allegations of unacceptable behavior that violate the policy. The Team will educate itself in the legal issues involved in reporting and enforcement as well as with the social service agencies that are charged with or which provide resources in situations of abuse.

## Protecting the Congregation as a Whole

UUCM takes seriously its responsibility to maintain a safe and civil atmosphere for all its members and friends. This policy is meant to ensure that the congregation is prepared to be proactive in prevention and able to act quickly and fairly in response to a threat.

### Prevention

In addition to its inclusion in the policy handbook, the safety policy will be posted in Barnum Hall, called to the attention of the congregation at an appropriate ingathering activity each year, presented at new member orientations, posted on the congregation website, and essential elements included periodically in the congregation newsletter.

### Response

The authority to act must be clear in situations involving a threat to physical safety or allegations of abuse. Such situations fall into two broad categories and our response shall be as outlined.

1. An immediate threat to physical safety at any UUCM activity either on church property or at a church sponsored event held elsewhere (e.g. Ferry Beach).
  - a) If present, the Minister will lead the response to the threatening situation.
  - b) If the minister is not present, response to the situation will be the responsibility of the following, in the order listed, depending on who is present: the President, Vice President, any other Council member, the Director of Religious Education (DRE), a designated Religious Education teacher, the Chair of the sponsoring committee or leader of a given event, if the situation occurs at a committee meeting, committee-sponsored event, or a general congregational event under an appointed leader, or any member present. In the event that the behavior involves one of the above, responsibility for handling the situation will pass to the next on the list.

- c) If the minister is not present, she/he will be notified as soon as practicable after the threat has been dealt with.
- d) Immediate threats will be handled with attention to the following, in order of priority:
  - i) Physical safety of individuals threatened
  - ii) Compassion and concern for psychological well-being, especially of children, and respect for individual privacy
  - iii) Physical safety of the individual initiating threatening behavior
- e) Response may include, but not be limited to
  - i) Evacuation of physical spaces to remove individuals from the threat
  - ii) Verbal interaction *with* individual engaging in threatening behavior
  - iii) Summoning of law enforcement officials
  - iv) Arranging to alert a person at risk
- f) Following any such incident, the SCT will conduct a thorough investigation of the event, and report to the Council. A written version of the report will be kept on file. If required by law or otherwise deemed advisable, the SCT will also report to the appropriate civil authorities. In addition, the SCT will be responsible for all communications with the media regarding the incident.

## 2. Allegations of behavior at UUCM activities in violation of this policy.

Concerns about behavior may be brought to the Minister or DRE by any member or friend of the congregation. The Minister or DRE will undertake an informal process of investigation during which they may take advice from the Committee on Ministry. If the situation warrants, the SCT may then be convened.

- a) Allegations of abuse may be reported by any member of the congregation, any adult participant in a UUCM activity, any child or youth involved in a UUCM activity, or the parent of such a child or youth whether or not the parent is involved in the specific activity or in any UUCM activity. Alleged abuse should be reported in a timely fashion to the Minister or DRE.

At her/his discretion, in case of perceived immediate danger, the Minister may notify authorities immediately. In the case of child abuse, the Minister and Director of Religious Education and all volunteers are legally mandated reporters. A volunteer who suspects abuse is encouraged to report the incident to the Minister and/or DRE. [Protecting our Children and Youth: Procedures and Guidelines, section 4D]

In the event the allegations involve the Minister, the DRE, a Council member, or a member of the SCT, then that individual will not be involved in the investigation in any role other than that of alleged perpetrator.

In the event that the allegations involve the Minister, the Council will notify the District Executive and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

- b) In conducting its investigation, the SCT will thoroughly investigate the allegation, interviewing the individual making the allegation and any others with relevant information. The SCT will
  - i) Protect the privacy and confidentiality of those it interviews and others mentioned in the allegation, whenever possible
  - ii) Show respect and openness toward all those interviewed, in particular avoiding disparaging remarks to either alleged perpetrators or victims
  - iii) Provide the alleged perpetrator with a clear statement of the allegations, an opportunity to defend him/herself against the allegation, and the knowledge of what is on file about the allegation.
  - iv) Except in emergency situations, inform the alleged perpetrator if it is deemed necessary to share information about the behavior in question with someone not on the SCT, and hear that individual's response. When sharing information, the SCT will be both honest and sensitive to the risks faced by UUCM in light of the alleged incident.
- c) The SCT will report its findings to the Council, with recommendations for a formal UUCM response. If the SCT decides that a written report is necessary, this report, including documentation of all steps taken, all individuals interviewed, all conclusions and recommendations, will be placed in a secure file. The alleged perpetrator will be offered the opportunity to provide a written statement to be included as part of the documentation.
- d) If the allegation involves child abuse or other potentially criminal acts, the President or a designated Council member will report to the appropriate civil authorities, provided this has not been done by the Minister as provided for under (a) above.
- e) During and after the resolution of the situation, the Council, in collaboration with the SCT, will be responsible for communicating to the broader congregation and, if deemed advisable, to the media regarding the incident. Such communication will be undertaken at the discretion of the SCT and the Council, in consultation.

Following an incident, the SCT will be responsible for developing and implementing the healing process for the individuals involved and for the congregation as a whole.

### **Protecting our Children and Youth:**

*Boundaries:* Due to the inherent power imbalance between adults and minors, adults will assume primary responsibility for setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. While adults may develop a healthy mentor/mentee relationship, care must be taken to discourage the reality or appearance of an inappropriate relationship.

Adults responding to communication from minors will maintain appropriate boundaries and use discernment, always acting in the best interest of the safety and well being of the child/youth.

## Definitions:

*Child Abuse: Pursuant to NH RSA 169-C: 3,II - “an abused child is any child who has been: sexually abused; intentionally physically injured; or psychologically injured so that said child exhibits symptoms of emotional problems generally recognized to result from the consistent mistreatment or neglect; or physically injured by other than accidental means.”*

*Child:* A minor less than 14 years old.

*Youth:* A minor 14 years old or older, enrolled in high school or in a high-school level home schooling program. Minors 16 to 18 years of age who are not enrolled in an education program may participate in UUCM youth activities with the permission of the DRE.

*Young Adult:* An individual at least 18 years old, but less than 25 years old. The same waiting period and screening policies apply to young adults who volunteer their time with children and youth as apply for adults.

*Adult:* An individual 25 years old or older.

*Two Deep Leadership:* We intend to avoid creating situations where children, youth, young adults, and adults may be vulnerable. In all cases there will be a minimum of two screened adults with children or youth. At no time without written parental permission should an adult (unless the adult is a parent or legal guardian of the child/youth) be left alone with a child or youth out of sight of other adults unless unforeseen circumstances make it impossible for two screened adults or young adults to be present. If it is not possible to have two leaders, the group will meet in an open area that is visible to other adults and the adult with the overall responsibility for that function, such as the director of Religious Education, will circulate through that area.

## Procedures and Guidelines:

1. Primary Responsibility for this policy
  - A. Overall responsibility for administering this policy lies with the Council.
  - B. The minister and the SCT will be knowledgeable about the available resources concerning child abuse and about reporting procedures for children. The committee will be available to all who have concerns about child abuse within the congregation. If a situation arises that has implications for UUCM, the SCT will inform the Council.
  - C. It is understood that everyone is a mandated reporter meaning “if you suspect abuse, you must report it.” It will be the responsibility of the Children’s Programming Committee [CPC] to educate the volunteers on how to report.
  - D. If the concern involves either the minister or one of the members of the SCT as an alleged perpetrator, the concern should be brought to the Church President.
2. Procedures to prevent abuse from occurring within UUCM.
  - A. The DRE and CPC will be responsible for organizing and overseeing the screening process each year. This process will include police background checks for anyone working directly with the children and youth. The sex offender registry will also be checked.

- B. The SCT will handle any concerns arising from the screening process. The final responsibility resides with the Council for ensuring that this process is implemented. The information screened by this committee will be regarded as confidential.
  - C. All staff must complete the screening process at the time they are called or hired. Volunteers and others from outside the Congregation who are to be entrusted with the care and supervision of our children or youth must also complete the screening process before they work with children or youth.
  - D. Staff and others from outside UUCM, as well as members and friends who volunteer to care or supervise the children on a regular basis, such as teaching in the RE program, will complete the Primary Screening Form for Children and Youth Work (Appendix 1), the Code of Ethics, and the Request for Criminal Records Check.
  - E. Members and friends who volunteer to care for or supervise the children only occasionally, such as filling in one or two Sundays at the nursery will complete the Secondary Screening Form for Children and Youth Work (Appendix 2) and the Code of Ethics.
  - F. The DRE will review the forms, check the responses from the criminal records check, and keep the forms in a secure file.
  - G. If upon reviewing the forms or checking of references, the DRE feels there is a need for an interview, she or he will contact the Minister and/or the Committee on Ministry to decide whether an interview with the SCT is warranted. That committee will conduct an interview with the applicant.
3. Criteria for determining whether an applicant can be entrusted with the care or supervision of children or youth.
- A. Before a new member or friend can be considered as a potential volunteer who may be entrusted with our children or youth, he or she must have participated actively in the Congregation for a minimum of six months.
  - B. Adults, young adults or youth who have legal charges pending, who appear on the sex offender registry or who have been convicted of or have pleaded guilty to either sexual abuse or physical abuse will not work with children or youth.
  - C. Those instances in which adults or youth have been charged with but not convicted of either child sexual or physical abuse will be independently evaluated by the SCT.
  - D. The DRE will maintain a list of all who have successfully completed the screening process and make it available to the Council upon request.
4. Procedures for reporting of suspected abuse.

A person who has been abused may tell his or her story to anyone with whom he or she feels comfortable. The following guidelines outline the appropriate response:

- A. Listen carefully.
- B. If a person begins to reveal abuse during a RE program, be honest with the person telling the story. Don't make promises you can't keep but offer support and hope.

- C. Volunteers need to avoid interviewing or encouraging people, especially children and youth, to continue to disclose. Instead, validate the child or youth and tell him or her that you are going to help make sure that he or she is safe. You can mention that he or she will be telling about the situation to a caring adult, but you want to make sure a child or youth only has to tell his or her story once.
  - D. The law requires us to report what a *reasonable* person would *suspect* to be abuse or neglect. Remember, we are not asked to determine whether or not a crime has been committed. UUCM volunteers should report their concerns to the Minister or the DRE. Volunteers may make a formal report to the authorities or leave it to the Minister and/or DRE to do so. Reasonable suspicions must be reported to the New Hampshire Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF, telephone 1-800-894-5533) immediately. DCYF will give instructions. A follow-up written report may be required by the DCYF.
  - E. If you are concerned for a child's immediate safety, contact local law enforcement.
5. Procedures for working with and caring for a person against whom allegations have been made.
- A. If an incident occurs within the realm of UUCM, we will do all we can to support the victim. However, we cannot disregard the well being of the alleged perpetrator. We may need to set limits on the participation of the alleged perpetrator, such as outlined below, but we will not rush to judgment or ostracize that individual.
  - B. If a reported incident of abuse involves either a paid staff person or volunteer, the Council will suspend the person from all activities involving the supervision of children and youth. This is true for an incident that allegedly occurred either within or outside the realm of UUCM. Again, because we cannot disregard the well being of the alleged perpetrator, we will not rush to judgment or ostracize that individual.
  - C. Suspension from activities involving children and youth will continue pending the outcome of the investigation by the SCT and/or appropriate authorities.
  - D. Regardless of where or under what circumstances the alleged incident takes place, if a paid staff person is involved and convicted, or legal charges are brought but not acted upon for reasons that leave too many questions unanswered, it may be considered as job related and affecting job performance.
  - E. Reinstatement of a paid staff member or volunteer will occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the Council.
6. Procedures for working with and caring for a person who has been convicted of abuse:

Because we "affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person" we do not believe any person should "automatically" be excluded from our Congregation because of his/her past actions. However, we also believe we have a responsibility to ensure the well being of all our participants, especially the most vulnerable. To date, it is our understanding that the ability of pedophiles to change their behavior is problematic. If someone who has been convicted of sexually abusing a child or youth, regardless of where it occurred, wishes to participate in this Congregation, his or her participation will be limited in order to ensure the safety of our children and youth.

## 7. Responding to the media

If you are contacted by the media, you need only to say that our congregation adopted a Safety and Ethics Policy and Guidelines. We are following those guidelines at this time. If more information is requested, suggest contacting the Minister or Council President. To speak about the specifics could significantly alter the ability to prosecute.

## 8. General guidelines for working with children and youth

- A. Age appropriate covenants will be established by each RE program so that there is an understanding of safe behavior.
- B. Two adults will be present at all UUCM activities where children or youth are present. This includes meetings of Young Religious Unitarian Universalists [YRUU], where every attempt will be made to have one male and one female advisor present. Necessary exceptions to this policy guideline will be arranged with the DRE.
- C. The Director of Religious Education will regularly check in on classes.
- D. Attendance will be taken at all meetings of children's circles, other RE classes and meetings of the YRUU.
- E. Permission slips will be collected for any field trips.
- F. Parents or guardians of youth enrolled in our high school age youth programs such as the YRUU will sign a permission form (see appendix) which acknowledges that they approve of the youth's participation in the program. The permission form will specify the ways in which the youth can interact with and contact YRUU advisors both inside and outside the UUCM facility, and the communication methods the parent/guardian prefers for contact. In no case will a YRUU advisor meet with a youth alone without such a permission form on file. If a YRUU advisor meets with a youth alone, as permitted by the parent/guardian via a signed permission form, the meeting must be in a public place, or have express parental permission, and be transparent. This transparency is understood to mean notifying the DRE and parents (if they have requested this on the permission form). Notification of the DRE will include the name of the youth, the location of the meeting, the approximate starting and ending time of the meeting, and plans for notification of parents/guardians as required by the signed permission form.
- G. In order to ensure a safe environment for the 4-year YRUU Group timeframe, YRUU Advisors may serve for no more than three consecutive years. After a hiatus of two consecutive years, a previous YRUU Advisor may serve again. Each year, at least one new YRUU Advisor should rotate on to the YRUU Advisor team, and one YRUU Advisor who has served from one to three consecutive years should rotate off. The new YRUU Advisor rotating on may be someone who has never served as a YRUU Advisor prior to a hiatus of two or more consecutive years. If the YRUU Advisor team consists of less than four people at the end of a year, all existing YRUU Advisors may continue to serve the following year if a) no one on the existing team has served three consecutive years and b) a new YRUU Advisor joins the team.
- H. Any concerns should be reported to the DRE or Minister who will involve the SCT if necessary.

9. Guidelines for transporting children and youth for UUCM events.

- A. Automobiles used for transporting youth for UUCM events should have adequate auto insurance coverage. The recommended level of liability coverage is at least \$300,000.
- B. Drivers should be at least 21 years old, hold a valid drivers license, and obey all state laws for transporting passengers.
- C. Every person transported in the vehicle must wear a seatbelt or use car seats as required by law.
- D. A UUCM adult volunteer (25 years or older) may drive a single youth to a church-related event if parent/guardian permission has been obtained in advance; otherwise, there should be at least one adult and a total of at least three individuals in every car. A YRUU advisor may drive a single youth to a church-related event if parent/guardian permission has been obtained in advance; otherwise, there should be at least one adult and a total of three individuals in every
- E. The required forms and resources attached to this policy as appendices will be reviewed annually.

**APPENDIX IV: Parental Permission Form for High School Age Youth (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists [YRUU])**

I \_\_\_\_\_, give permission to the adult advisors of the UUCM  
(parent/guardian name)

high school youth group (YRUU) to communicate or interact with my child \_\_\_\_\_

in the following ways:

**Initial** all that apply:

- 1. \_\_\_ email
- 2. \_\_\_ Facebook
- 3. \_\_\_ phone
- 4. \_\_\_ text message
- 5. \_\_\_ outside of UUCM activities and events as part of a group
- 6. \_\_\_ outside of UUCM activities and events in one on one conversations
- 7. \_\_\_ drive to/from UUCM activities

I want to be notified of all one on one meetings with my child (circle one) YES NO

If YES is circled, please indicate how to contact, including phone number or e-mail address:

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\_\_\_ I understand that I am responsible for making arrangements to get my child to and from UUCM events.

\_\_\_ I understand that I am responsible for deciding with whom my child may ride in a car or give a ride to and for maintaining an understanding about this with my child. Specifically, I understand that neither UUCM nor the YRUU adult advisors are responsible for monitoring how my child gets to and from UUCM events.

Please include any other restrictions or concerns below:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_