

# Healthy and Welcoming: NWUUC Sexually Safer Congregation Policy

## Guiding Principles

Our congregation creates loving community, inspires joy and spiritual growth, and supports courageous action.

~ NWUUC Mission Statement

At Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation we covenant to welcome all people to the table, to nourish and serve each other, and to respect and honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person. To achieve these goals it is essential that we maintain a safe environment that protects children, youth, and adults from harm while fostering their spiritual growth.

We have designed these policies to promote a safe environment and to enable all to follow their own spiritual paths in an atmosphere of respect and mutual support. We have addressed numerous facets of operating a safer congregation, including preventing and promptly responding to incidents of verbal or sexual abuse and physical or sexual harassment, operation of the Religious Education program, and transportation during off site trips and special overnights. These policies will naturally evolve over time as we respond to incidents and learn to better refine our safety procedures.

In adopting this policy, we accept the responsibility to educate ourselves about sexual abuse and harassment, and to take the necessary steps to assure the policy's successful implementation.

Policy Adopted by the Board of Trustees of the  
Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
April 2016



Healthy and Welcoming: NWUUC Sexually Safer Congregation  
Policy by [Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation](#)  
is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#)  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

# Introduction

The Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation has created a Safer Congregation Policy in an effort to ensure the healthiest environment for all members, friends, and guests. The lifeblood of our congregation is community: community in worship, community in lifespan religious education, community in service, and community in caring relationships. When we gather we welcome others and we welcome our true, best selves. To create the healthiest environment for all comers to our ministry, we acknowledge that safety must be a primary concern. We will work continuously to create a safer and healthier congregation.

This policy is grounded in the principles of our religious community, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, which call us to affirm and promote:

**The inherent worth and dignity of every person.** Every person's sexuality is sacred and worthy of respect.

**Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.** We treat others as we would want to be treated; therefore, sexual exploitation and interpersonal violence are wrong.

**Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.** Accepting each other as we are means doing no harm and fostering wellbeing in one's self and others.

**A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.** Our freedom to explore and express our individual sexuality is as important as acting responsibly for it.

**The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.** As a community and an institution, we are responsible for creating a secure, safe, and nonviolent environment.

**The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.** We have the opportunity to create the kind of environment that lends itself to peace, liberty, and justice in human interactions, and we can become a model for the rest of society.

**Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.** When we respect each person's sexual integrity, we honor the wholeness of life and respect the web of all existence.

# Table of Contents

<b>Guiding Principles .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Definitions .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Sexual Harassment</i>	5
<i>Sexual Harassment and Employees</i>	5
<i>Abuse</i>	6
<i>Verbal Abuse</i>	6
<i>Sexual Abuse</i>	6
<i>Child Abuse</i>	6
<b>Relationship between Staff and Congregants.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Minister</i>	7
<i>Director of Religious Education</i>	7
<i>Other Staff</i>	7
<b>Prevention of Sexual or Physical Abuse and Harassment.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Training and Education</i>	8
<i>Screening and Supervision of Adults Working with Children and Youth</i>	8
<b>Gender Identity and Expression among Congregants .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Religious Education Safety Procedures .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Emergency Contacts</i>	11
<i>Adult Supervision</i>	11
<i>Visibility</i>	11
<i>Bathroom and Diapering</i>	11
<i>Empty Room Policy</i>	12
<i>Expressions of Affection</i>	12
<i>Supervision of Children and Youth</i>	12
<i>Travel Safety Protection Policy</i>	13
<i>Requirements of Adult Leaders on Field Trips and Overnight Events</i>	13
<b>Relationships within Youth Group (romantic/sexual relationships, public displays of affection &amp; exclusive relationships).....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Sexual Abuse/Harassment Among Children.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Responding to Complaints of Sexual or Physical Abuse or Harassment.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Reporting Within the Congregation</i>	16
<i>Response Group</i>	16
<i>Response Team</i>	16
<i>Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse</i>	18
<i>Leave of Absence and Restrictions with Children</i>	18
<i>Other Inappropriate Behavior</i>	19
<i>Additional Responsibilities of the NWUUC Board and RE Team</i>	19

<b>Guidelines Involving Sex Offenders .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Limited Access Agreement</i>	20
<i>Steps To Take</i>	21
<i>Reasons For Excluding A Person From All Congregation Activities</i>	22
<b>Use of Technology &amp; Social Media for Clergy, Staff and Volunteers.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Communication and Social Media</i>	23
<i>Blogging by NWUUC Staff</i>	23
<i>Use of Technology by Staff and Volunteers</i>	23
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Limited Access Agreement (Sample)</i>	24
<i>Limited Access Agreement - CONFIDENTIAL (Sample, in cases of convicted sex offender)</i>	26
<i>Screening Form for Youth Group Staff and Volunteers</i>	28
<i>Child Protection Covenant</i>	31
<b>References .....</b>	<b>34</b>

# Definitions

## **Sexual Harassment**

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Repeatedly standing too close to or brushing up against people;
- Repeatedly asking people to socialize when they have said no or have indicated they are not interested;
- Giving gifts or leaving objects that are sexually suggestive;
- Repeatedly making sexually suggestive gestures;
- Making or posting sexually demeaning or offensive pictures, cartoons or other materials;
- Any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.

## **Sexual Harassment and Employees**

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act as well as State discrimination laws. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is the federal agency that enforces the federal law. The EEOC's guidelines define sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is made an implicit or explicit condition of employment;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct affects employment opportunities;
- The conduct unreasonably interferes with an individual's performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment;
- Any indication, expressed or implied, that any aspect of employment conditions, depends or may depend on the granting of sexual favors or on a willingness to accept or tolerate conduct or communication of a sexual nature

Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted).

Both victim and the harasser can be either male or female, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employer, such as a congregant. Any employee who believes he or she has been sexually harassed by another employee, a supervisor, or any other person encountered in the course of employment should report that conduct immediately to his or her supervisor. If the report or complaint

involves the supervisor the individual receiving the report or complaint should immediately report it to the president of the congregation.

Retaliation or reprisal against employees who report sexual harassment claims is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Any violation of this policy will be treated as a serious matter and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **Abuse**

Abuse includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment; offensive physical or sexual contact, including physical or sexual abuse; physical or sexual harassment; physical or sexual molestation; or physical or sexual exploitation

### **Verbal Abuse**

Verbal abuse is the excessive use of language to undermine someone's dignity and security through insults or humiliation in a sudden or repeated manner.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse means any sexual touching of a child, or any activity that causes a person to engage in any sexual act or conduct without that person's consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to give consent 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.

### **Child Abuse**

According to Georgia Law (OCGA § 49-5-180), child abuse includes the following acts:

- Physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker thereof by other than accidental means; provided, however, that physical forms of discipline may be used as long as there is no physical injury to the child;
- Neglect or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker thereof;
- Sexual abuse of a child; or
- Sexual exploitation of a child.

Child sexual abuse may also include exposing any child under the age of 16 to any immoral or indecent act with the intent to arouse or satisfy the sexual desires of either the child or the person, which can include committing the act in the presence of the child or transmitting images of such acts.

# Relationship between Staff and Congregants

## **Minister**

We place great trust in our ministers to use their positions and powers only for the best interest of all congregants and never to take advantage of others for their personal gratification. Clergy sexual misconduct harms both the individuals involved and the church as a whole because it breaches the minister's covenant with the entire congregation. We expect our ministers to understand and abide by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) [Code of Professional Practice](#). This Code can be found at the UUMA website: <http://www.uuma.org/>.

## **Director of Religious Education**

Like Ministers, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) has a special trust relationship with the congregation and must never misuse the authority and power inherent in the position to exploit, manipulate or take advantage of any child, adolescent, young adult or adult participant for personal gratification. This includes, but is not limited to sexual or physical misconduct or sexualized behavior. We expect the DRE to fully understand and abide by the Liberal Religious Educators Association's [Code of Professional Conduct](#). This Code can be found at the LREDA website: <http://www.lreda.org/>.

## **Other Staff**

Similar to Ministers and the DRE, the Director of Music and other staff must take great care to maintain the special trust relationship with the congregation. We expect staff to fully understand and abide by their respective ethical codes (i.e. [Unitarian Universalist Code of Ethics Musicians Network Code of Professional Practices](#), Association of Unitarian Universalist Administrators [Code of Ethics](#)).

# Prevention of Sexual or Physical Abuse and Harassment

## Training and Education

Greater understanding of the complexities of sexuality and abuse will help to establish and protect healthy boundaries and will help avoid situations that could lead to false accusations of abuse. The DRE and the RE Team will oversee implementation of the following education programs:

- For our **children and youth**, the DRE and/or RE Team will provide age appropriate information about development and sexuality. Our children must be empowered to protect themselves and report abuse. Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality training will be offered whenever possible for appropriate ages.
- For **RE teachers, paid childcare staff and other volunteers working with children and youth**, the DRE and /or RE Team will provide annual training and written information designed to help prevent child abuse, including this policy.
- For the **entire congregation**, the DRE/RE Team will provide information on this policy as well as child safety including workshops, Second Hour Programming, and/or written materials annually.
- For **new members of the congregation**, the DRE/RE Team will provide a summary of this policy to be included in all new member packets.

## Screening and Supervision of “Approved Adults” Working with Children and Youth

All RE teachers and other adults working with children and youth on a regular basis will:

- Read, understand, and sign the “Child Protection Covenant,” which will include a written attestation of a full understanding of this policy.
- Complete at least a biannual background check (with the understanding that background checks can be repeated randomly).
- Complete the Screening Form for Youth Group Staff and Volunteers

Any other volunteers (e.g. occasional helpers) will read, understand, and sign the “Child Protection Covenant”.

Confidential criminal background checks will be conducted for all paid staff prior to hiring or signing of contract. In the case of paid staff, information will be shared with the Minister and Board of Trustees as appropriate.

Individuals who have been convicted of, are under current indictment for, or self-disclose any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or of commission of child abuse are precluded from participation in the RE program and other children or youth congregational activities.



In addition, this policy encourages any member or friend who has been convicted of, is under current indictment for, or has been involved in any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or of child abuse, to make him or herself known to the Minister or DRE. Other members or friends of the congregation, who become aware of such information, should report this to the Minister or DRE, who will then form a Response Team and decide how to handle the situation. (See “Reporting and Response”).

Adult survivors of child abuse are encouraged to meet confidentially with the Minister before working with children. The goal of this interaction will be for the Minister to help support the survivor in their personal journey, to identify any potential areas of concern in relation to the survivor working with children, and to potentially recognize the survivor as a resource in abuse or harassment incidents, if appropriate.

## **Gender Identity and Expression among Congregants**

NW embraces all forms of gender identity and gender expression. Personal gender identity and expression will be accepted in the use of all gender-specific facilities/arrangements (restrooms, changing rooms, overnight arrangements, etc.). People may request a private alternative to all gender-specific facilities/arrangements at any time. Additionally, NW will maintain a gender-neutral restroom in the main building.

# Religious Education Safety Procedures

## Emergency Contacts

Parents or guardians must complete registration form packets for each minor (First Aid form, Photo Release form, and others). Information collected will include emergency contact names and numbers, as well as any special needs, allergies, or restrictions, to be updated at least annually.

## Adult Supervision

**Two Approved Adults:** Two approved adults should be present in the Nursery, in every classroom, and during any congregation-sponsored children/youth activity. In some instances where unforeseen circumstances result in two approved adults not being present (for example, an unexpected absence of a teacher on a Sunday morning), the classroom door shall remain open and a designated approved adult will circulate outside the classroom area or be within easy reach to provide assistance if needed.

## Visibility

All activities/meetings with children/youth must be conducted in a way that allows visibility, for example glass areas of doors should not be obstructed; curtains/blinds should be open, when possible; door should be open or a window should allow easy observation of the room. Where possible, conduct activities in a public place, with another person within sight and sound of the activities.

Do not send two children/youth with a four or more year age difference to an isolated setting, like an empty classroom, bathroom, or tent.

## Bathroom and Diapering

In general, children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before and after classes or other activities so that parents can assist as needed.

If an approved adult needs to take a child to the toilet, they need to be aware of their visibility and the child's privacy, for example the adult might stand and hold the public bathroom door open while the child enters the toilet stall alone.

**Diapering:** Two approved adults must be present when clothes or diapers are being changed. The child's parent can also be recruited to change clothes or a diaper.

**Two and Three Year Olds:** An approved adult must accompany children to and from the bathroom and inform another adult when this takes place. The adult will assist the child only when necessary. If assistance is needed, the adult must leave the stall door open.

**Preschool:** An approved adult must accompany preschoolers to the bathroom. The adult will remain outside the stall. If assistance is required, the approved adult should

encourage independence but can assist with minimal tasks if necessary (belts, snaps, etc.).

### **Empty Room Policy**

After an activity, an approved adult will ensure that all participants have vacated the rooms.

### **Expressions of Affection**

A kind word of encouragement to a child/youth or a pat on the back can be a small but significant act for both the adult and the child/youth. That being said, adults must use caution and common sense when physically expressing affection toward children/youth.

- Respect a child's/youth's refusal of affection.
- Be aware of appropriate hand placement. A child/youth or an observer could misinterpret a pat on the bottom or a bear hug; a touch on private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit) or a kiss on the mouth is inappropriate.
- Discipline of any type involving physical contact is not permitted.

### **Supervision of Children and Youth**

Parents and other legal guardians are fully responsible for the supervision of their own children before and after the designated times for Religious Education meetings and all other NWUUC-sponsored events. Volunteer leaders, paid childcare staff, and other members and staff of the NWUUC are not in any way responsible for the welfare of children or youth on or off of our premises, except during those hours specifically designated for childcare or religious education meetings or field trips.

Promotion of any event (NWUUC or other) involving children on NWUUC bulletin boards, newsletters, or elsewhere must be approved by the DRE.

Childcare is provided for “all-congregational” events. Hours of childcare and Religious Education are to be clearly posted for each event that NWUUC sponsors or hosts. Parents and guardians must take responsibility for understanding these hours whether or not they are posted, and must be on time to pick up their children or youth at the end of these hours. Youth (children 12 and up) who babysit for congregational events must always work in groups of two or more and must be supervised by two approved adults. Children under the age of 12 will not be asked to assist with caring for children.

If a child or youth is still in the care of a volunteer care worker or paid staff member after the designated pickup time, the care worker or staff member will bring the child or youth to the parent if they are in the building, or will make every effort to contact the parent. They will stay with the child or youth until the parent arrives or another legal guardian is able to take the child or youth into their care.

## **Travel Safety Protection Policy**

**Driving Requirements:** In order to drive to a field trip or overnight destination, adult leaders must provide to the DRE license plate number and proof of a valid driver's license and current insurance (covering injury and loss of life in their vehicle and other involved vehicles should there be an accident).

A background check will be conducted on all drivers prior to transporting minors. Parents will be required to provide written approval for their minor to be transported by a driver under 25. One or more adults should never transport only one unrelated minor.

**Parental Consent:** Parents or guardians must provide written permission for any offsite trip. For trips involving physical challenge, this should include a clause indicating parental understanding of the risk and releasing the congregation from liability in case of injury or death. Leaders will have emergency information for each minor. This information should include signed parental consent for emergency medical treatment, emergency contact information, and health insurance policy information. This information should be kept on hand at all times during the trip and available in the NWUUC office.

## **Requirements of Adult Leaders on Field Trips and Overnight Events**

No one under the age of 25 may be an adult leader responsible for children or youth on NWUUC-sponsored field trips or overnights. Adult leaders must be a member or friend of NWUUC for at least six months. All adults who volunteer or are paid to work with children and youth must meet the requirements in the "Screening and Supervision of Adults Working with Children and Youth."

During NWUUC-sponsored field trips and overnight events, one adult shall not be responsible for more than seven children or youth. No fewer than two unrelated adults will be present and awake whenever any number of children or youth are in their care and awake.

No unrelated adult may spend time alone with children or youth during any NWUUC-sponsored field trip or overnight event. This includes sleeping in the same room with children or youth unless other adult leader(s) are in plain sight or within hearing distance of each other. Children under 13 are not permitted to attend overnight trips without a parent or legal guardian. In consultation with the DRE and parent/guardian, children 13 and over will sleep according to their stated gender identity.

## **Relationships within Youth Group (romantic/sexual relationships, public displays of affection & exclusive relationships)**

Sexuality is a healthy and important part of young people's lives. Youth programs and events are important opportunities for youth to express themselves in healthy ways. All members of the community must respect each other's physical boundaries and the intention and purpose of youth programs and events.

The members of the youth group and their advisors, with input from the DRE, should create a covenant annually. Exclusive relationships, especially those of a romantic or sexual nature, often detract from the larger community. Inappropriate sexualized behavior is not permitted (i.e. oral, vaginal, anal or digital intercourse or contact, and or sexual harassment of any kind).

Adult leaders have the right to deem any behavior inappropriate. Breach of the above rules at a youth group program or event may result in participants being disallowed to participate in the remainder of the event or future events. Depending on the nature of the breach, further action may be taken.

## **Sexual Abuse/Harassment Among Children**

If a child is being used in any way to meet the sexual needs of another child, then it is sexual abuse.

Such an incident should be brought to the minister's attention immediately. The minister, in consultation with the DRE, should initiate contact individually with the parents of both children to confidentially discuss the allegation and next steps.

The minister and DRE may recommend or require the parents of the children involved to seek professional evaluations for the children before they may continue to attend children's programs and events. Depending on the state law and the nature of the incident, it may be necessary to call Child Protective Services.

It is not the responsibility of the minister or DRE to decide if abuse has occurred, but rather to assure that such an assessment takes place. The congregation will pay for an initial assessment if the funds are needed.

After such an incident, the child's religious education teachers should be informed of the allegation and the parents should closely monitor their child before and after programs and events.

The minister and DRE will decide if the situation warrants the involvement of the entire Response Team.

A meeting will be held between the Minister, DRE and the parents after the assessment to determine if future action is necessary.

Pastoral care and support for the families involved is crucial. This situation will likely be very difficult for the parents involved, and they will need the support of their church community, especially the minister and the DRE. Helping them to feel welcome and supported is essential, as is the ongoing offer of ministry.

# **Responding to Complaints of Sexual or Physical Abuse or Harassment Among All Congregants**

## **Reporting Within the Congregation**

Anyone who has concerns about inappropriate behavior or suspected sexual/physical abuse or harassment, should report their concerns immediately to the Minister, DRE, or other member of the Response Group by submitting a Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse. When an allegation is made, the responsible person receiving the allegation should take the necessary steps to establish a Response Team and convene a meeting of the Response Team (see below for definitions).

## **Response Group**

The Board will appoint, with input from the Minister and DRE, a Response Group of 6-10 responsible and knowledgeable people who could be called upon to form a Response Team and who will be available to hear confidential concerns about abuse or harassment.

The Response Group will be composed of at least 3 women and 3 men and an effort will be made to reflect the diversity of the congregation. These people will be qualified by their (1) participation in regularly offered training OR professional/volunteer experience in working with abuse issues; (2) understanding of this policy and other UUA “Safe Congregation” material; and (3) knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, including applicable Georgia state laws.

The DRE will keep an up-to-date list of the names and phone numbers of all members of the Response Group and will ensure that this list is posted at all times and available to all members and friends of the congregation.

## **Response Team**

In response to a specific situation, a Response Team will be formed within 24 hours by the person who receives the initial complaint, in consultation with the Minister, DRE, and Board President. The Response Team will consist of three individuals from the Response Group uninvolved in the incident and will include the Minister (ex-officio). If the incident involves children or youth, the DRE (ex-officio) will be included in the Response Team.

If the incident or allegation involves the Minister or DRE, then that person will be removed from the Response Team and the Board will be notified immediately.

The Response Team does not have legal authority or expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to protect members of the congregation and to ensure



that the victim and accused are treated with dignity and respect. The team responding to an allegation involving any congregant(s) should:

1. Consider the safety of the children: Regardless of whether or not children were involved in the alleged incident, the safety of the congregation's children should be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely action should be taken to ensure their safety based upon the credibility and severity of the allegation and other pertinent factors. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. If child abuse is suspected, follow state law regarding mandated reporting of child abuse: A copy of GA state law on child abuse should be kept in the child abuse policy notebook (maintained in the DRE's office) and should be referenced when an incident is reported. The DRE or designated member of the Response Team will make appropriate and timely reporting to the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The current number will be posted in the church office at all times:

The Georgia Department of Human Resources  
Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)  
Please call the DFCS Child Protective Center at:  
1-855-GACHILD / 1-855-422-4453.

For general inquiries, contact 1-877-423-4746

3. Explore professional resources: The Response Team should call on or refer involved parties to professional resources that they deem appropriate, both within the congregation and outside of the congregation.
4. Consider whom to inform: Decisions about whom to inform about the incident (parents, teachers, the congregation, the child or children in question if children are involved, classmates, the alleged perpetrator) and the information to be provided should be made in a careful but timely manner by the Board of Trustees in conjunction with the Response Team. The decision should be made based upon the individual situation (e.g. severity and credibility of allegation; does the threat to the safety of the children still exist).
5. Notify the Northwest Board and UUA Regional Executives: If any action is taken or recommended by the Response Team, the UUA Southern Region Consultant will be notified 1) that a Response Team has been convened, 2) of the nature of the issue and 3) if child(ren) are involved, whether a report has been or will be made to DFCS. The President will report to the full board in a closed meeting at the earliest appropriate time.
6. Respect confidentiality: Since these matters are sensitive, it is important that all persons involved, including the reporting person and the accused, maintain the level of confidentiality recommended by the Response Team.
  - a. If children/youth are involved in the alleged incident, we must ensure that their safety is our highest priority. Therefore, we must encourage the responsible reporting of all concerns or suspicions of child abuse. To this end, all reports will be considered confidential. In cases when

the reporting person and /or child or youth victim has reason to fear retaliation or recrimination, the strict confidentiality of the reporting person and/or child or youth victim will be maintained at his or her request, except when the Response Team determines that DFCS must be informed. Except when this request for strict confidentiality is made, a full disclosure of the details of the suspected abuse or concern will be made to the accused at the appropriate time.

- b. The reporting person must meet in person with the Response Team to give a full report of his or her concern. In order for the Response Team to respond appropriately and fairly, all members of the Response Team must be present for initial interviews and make every effort to attend all meetings. All information related to the concern and known to any one member, including the Minister and DRE, must be shared with the other Response Team members.
  - c. Due to the confidential nature of this subject, all communication within the Response Team should be made in person or by verbal phone conversation. Written communication should be limited and protected.
7. Mitigate false accusations: The protection from false or mistaken allegations is an important goal of this policy. A key way to prevent false or mistaken allegations is to abide by the guidelines outlined in this policy. We should be sensitive to the disruption and damage a false accusation may cause, even when the accusation is due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

### **Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse**

Under Georgia law, any persons whose duties, either as an employee or volunteer, involves attending to a child is required to report child abuse. Any reports should be made orally or in writing immediately to the Minister, DRE or member of the Northwest Response Group. The Minister, DRE or Northwest Response Group member, in turn, is required to make a report to the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services within 24 hours at 1-855-422-4453. The responsible individual receiving the report should immediately take appropriate action to ensure protection of the children in the congregation.

Any person who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is abused may report or cause reports to be made.

### **Leave of Absence and Restrictions with Children**

In order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk and to protect the accused from further suspicion, decisions about removing or suspending the alleged perpetrator from interacting with children in the RE program or other congregational programs will be made by the Response Team. A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to the children, the seriousness of the allegation, and other factors that may relate to the situation.

1. Even if an allegation is not reported to DFCS, the adult against whom the allegation is made may be asked to refrain from teaching or other interaction with the child or children in question for the adult's own protection.
2. If a report is made to DFCS, this leave will be mandatory.

The Response Team may also determine, even without an accusation of abuse, that they have reason(s) for concern that a volunteer's contact with children or youth in our congregation potentially places both the volunteer and the children at risk of incident or accusation. For this reason, the Response Team is authorized to restrict an individual from teaching in the RE program or otherwise volunteering or chaperoning for children's events.

### **Other Inappropriate Behavior**

Some incidents or allegations may involve behavior that is not clearly abuse or harassment, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate by an individual, a parent or by the DRE. In such cases a Response Team, including the DRE (if children or youth are involved), the Minister and a member of the Response Group, may be called together to review the situation and decide what action to take.

### **Additional Responsibilities of the NWUUC Board and RE Team**

The Board of Directors of the NWUUC will make the final determination of any additional consequences appropriate to the violation of this policy, including, but not limited to, termination of a staff person (termination of the Minister would require a congregational vote) and any additional action in the case of volunteers beyond that for which the Response Team is authorized. Violations of this policy by the Minister or DRE shall constitute good cause for discipline under the terms of the Minister's or DRE's Letter of Agreement. The Board shall also inform the following of any determination of serious violations by the Minister of this policy:

- The UUA Southern Region Consultant
- The Department of Ministry and Faith Development of the UUA
- The Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the UUA
- The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

# **Guidelines Involving Sex Offenders**

The following policy guidelines were developed using UUA-approved resources, especially the document “Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Our Congregations” by Reverend Debra W. Haffner. Some of these guidelines focus specifically on individuals that have been convicted of offenses against children. Each individual circumstance should be examined carefully, and guidelines followed, recognizing that some individuals may have convictions that strictly involve adults.

Our Unitarian Universalist first principle encourages us to affirm and promote the inherent and worth dignity of every person. In many ways, the person with a history of sex offenses has the same needs for a faith community as the rest of us. But the sex offender needs more than a faith community to assure that his or her involvement doesn't pose risks to the congregation and that standards are in place for protection against false allegations and suspicions.

A key component of a commitment to keep our children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe in our congregation, therefore, is developing policies and procedures to use when a person who is known pedophile or sex offender wants to be part of the congregation or an existing member is accused of a sexual offense.

The following steps and precautions will be followed. Not only is this a means to protect Northwest's children, youth and vulnerable adults, but we must assure that the convicted sex offender does not have the opportunity in our congregation to re-offend again. This includes avoiding situations where they can be accused falsely.

No person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of, any sexual misconduct involving children can be permitted to be involved in any religious education or youth group activities. For sex offenders whose offense involved other adults, participation in adult activities will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Our message to the child sex offender is that they are both welcome to participate in adult worship, adult social, and adult educational activities and that they must covenant with the congregation to avoid all contact with children through a Limited Access Agreement.

## **Limited Access Agreement**

This agreement invites the person with a history of sex offenses to participate in certain aspects of congregational life, setting clear boundaries including what the individual will or will not do. For example, it denies the person access to keys to the building. It requires the sex offender to avoid being on the property .

As a UU congregation, Northwest strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, 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.

### **Steps To Take**

1. No matter how the situation is revealed, the Minister as quickly as possible should meet confidentially with the individual to discuss the concerns that have been raised.
2. A Response Team should be formed to discuss and advise.
3. The individual should be asked to sign a release form so that the Minister can contact his/her sex offender treatment provider and/or current therapist. The therapist and, if applicable, the parole officer should be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will re-offend, and whether additional restrictions beyond the standard Limited Access Agreement ought to be placed on the person's participation.

The question the Response Team must be able to answer is this: given what professionals have advised you, will this person comply with a Limited Access Agreement that they can maintain with the leadership in order to assure the safety of children, youth, and other congregants?

4. If the assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the Response Team will develop a Limited Access Agreement. A sample Limited Access Agreement is available below which can be tailored to the situation. If the professional assessment indicates that the person is at high risk for re-offending, it is appropriate to deny that person involvement in the faith community until treatment is successful at reducing the risk.

All persons with past histories of sexual offenses should be asked to sign an annual Limited Access Agreement or other similar document. If the offender refuses to do so, it is then appropriate to deny the person access to congregation functions and property. Offenders who refuse to sign a Limited Access Agreement should know that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked to leave by a member of the Response Team or the Board of Trustees. If they refuse, the local police will be called for assistance.

5. The Minister and the President of the Board will meet at least quarterly with any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangement and address any concerns. Copies of files including Limited Access Agreement information should be treated with care, and kept in a secure file drawer.

6. The Minister, the DRE, the Chair of the Board and the Response Team need to know the exact parameters of the Limited Access Agreement, that the person is attending the congregation, that he or she has agreed not to have contact with children, has signed a Limited Access Agreement or other document, and that he or she should never be alone with children and adolescents.

### **Reasons For Excluding A Person From All Congregation Activities**

- Refusing permission for the minister to contact the treatment provider and parole officer.
- Refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.
- Report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high risk for recidivism.
- Refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement.
- Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement.

An individual who previously was excluded from congregational activities based on their refusal to comply may request to return to the congregation. Once an individual decides that they can comply with these conditions, the process begins again to reassess the individual and see if they can be welcomed into the life of the congregation anew.

# **Use of Technology & Social Media for Clergy, Staff and Volunteers**

## **Communication and Social Media**

All technological communications by and between staff, youth, children, and RE volunteers shall fall under the same guidance and boundaries laid out in this policy. These communications should be transparent and visible to the Board or Response Team if a need to review communications should arise. Whereas adherence to these guidelines is expected of all staff, RE volunteers and “approved adults,” all adults, regardless of leadership role or involvement with the congregation, are strongly encouraged to abide by these boundaries.

Staff should not use personal email accounts when communicating with the congregation. REALM groups should be used in place of Facebook and other social media groups to conduct the work of the congregation whenever possible. Email addresses for staff should be based in the congregation website.

Adults working with the children or youth of NWUUC should refrain from personally friending or interacting on social media outside the groups set up by congregational administration. Posting and tagging photos or names of NWUUC members and friends should only be done on approved NWUUC groups and sites created by congregational administration.

Minister, staff and youth volunteers should copy DRE/parent/other youth advisor on any electronic communication sent to a child or youth.

## **Blogging by NWUUC Staff**

Personal blogs fall under the personal and legal responsibility of the author. Please place the following statement at the bottom of any personal blog:  
The views expressed on this website/blog are mine alone and many not necessarily reflect the views of NWUUC.

## **Use of Technology by Staff and Volunteers**

Staff and Volunteers should respect the technology provided by NWUUC. This equipment should be used only for congregational business. Internet usage and/or computer equipment should not be used to view any content that violates the ethical agreement made between the staff or volunteer and NWUUC. This includes but is not limited to: personal business, graphic sexual, violent content.

# Appendices

## **Limited Access Agreement (Sample)**

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Northwest Safe Congregation Response Group. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Board President, Minister, the Director of Religious Education and the members of the Response Team. It will be kept in a locked file in the Minister's office.

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events.

This includes the following while these allegations are under investigation:

- Please do not talk with children.
- Please do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present.
- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at NWUUC or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: Minister, DRE, Board President and members of the Response Group.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future NW functions and NW property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period if the allegations are found true.

---



Signature

Date

---

Board President

---

Date

---

Minister

---

Date

---

DRE, if applicable

---

Date

**Limited Access Agreement - CONFIDENTIAL (Sample, in cases of convicted sex offender)**

The NWUUC of Sandy Springs affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all adult social events, and well supervised intergenerational events. You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events.

This includes the following:

- Please do not talk with children.
- Please do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present.
- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at NWUUC or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: Minister, DRE, Board President and members of the Response Group.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future NW functions and NW property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Board President

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Minister

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
DRE (if applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT – CONFIDENTIAL

## Screening Form for Youth Group Staff and Volunteers

Model Screening Form for Religious Educators And Youth Group Staff And Volunteers  
Thank you for your interest in working with the children and youth of our congregation. Our congregation takes seriously the responsibility of assuring the safety of our youth. Please fill out this form and give it to the director of religious education. Thank you for your support in providing a safe and secure environment for all of the congregation's children and youth.

Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
First Middle Last

Have you ever used a different name? \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_ Yes

If yes, please list the dates:

\_\_\_\_\_  
How long have you been attending this congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_  
Home Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State Zip

Number of years at current address? \_\_\_\_\_

If you have not lived at this address for at least five years, please list any other addresses over the last five years with dates:

\_\_\_\_\_  
What states have you lived in since you were 18 years old?

\_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Work Phone

Number of years at current employment \_\_\_\_\_

May we call your current employer for a character reference? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If not, please tell us why

\_\_\_\_\_  
A. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please explain on an attached piece of paper if necessary.

B. Have you ever been accused of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, sexual or physical assault of a minor?

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No If yes, please provide details on an attached piece of paper if necessary.

Have you ever been accused of sexual misconduct or child abuse?

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please provide details on an attached piece of paper if necessary :

D. Have you ever been convicted of any crimes against as person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, sexual or physical assault of a minor?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

If yes, please provide details on an attached piece of paper if necessary:

E. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children and youth? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No If yes, please provide details on an attached piece of paper if necessary:

Congregation History and Prior Work with Children and Youth

List congregations you have attended during the past five years.

---

Name of Congregation	City,	State	Dates
----------------------	-------	-------	-------

---

Name of Congregation	City,	State	Dates
----------------------	-------	-------	-------

---

Name of Congregation	City,	State	Dates
----------------------	-------	-------	-------

---

List all previous work involving children and youth (list name, type of work performed, person you were responsible to)

---

---

Please list two references who are not relatives who have known you for at least three years and who are familiar with your character as it pertains to your experience with children or youth.

---

Name (1)

---

Address

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Name (1)

---

Address

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_

---

I authorize the congregation to contact references and other congregations to obtain information about my background regarding my character and fitness to work with

children and youth. I authorize references to provide such information about me. I hereby release and hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to hold harmless this congregation, its trustees, employees, and volunteers.

Further, I understand that a member of the staff may check the sex offender registry and/or contact the local police for more information about my background. I give permission for a background check in my state.

This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff and volunteers or participating in a response team, or as required by law.

I attest that the above information is true and correct.

---

Signature

Date

**Child Protection Covenant**  
**Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth**

Adults and older youth who teach and/or lead our children and youth play a key role in fostering the spiritual growth and character development of our children and youth. It is therefore especially important that those in leadership positions provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable our children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. Therefore, those who teach and/or lead our children/youth will:

- Work to help children/youth develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence.
- Respect the self-hood of each young person, including the absolute right to privacy of his or her own mind and body.
- Not engage in any behavior with young people, which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.
- Not engage in behavior or language, which is personally threatening or demeaning.
- Not engage in any sexually harassing behavior, nor any other sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children/youth.
- Not encourage or condone any sort of illegal or unethical activity on the part of children/youth.

Leaders shall be informed of the Code of Ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken. I have read the above Code of Ethics and understand that they govern expected behavior of those working with the children and youth at Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

Name Printed \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person who initiated this report: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and title of worker or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

Victim's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's age/birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/place of initial conversation with or report from victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here):

---

---

---

---

Name of person accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other):

Reported to minister/DRE (state one): \_\_\_\_\_

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

---

---

---

---

Call to victim's parent/guardian/family member:

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Spoke with:

Summary:

---

---

---

Call to Department of Human Services – 24/hr abuse report hotline

Date and time

Spoke with:

Summary:

---

---

---





# References

UUA Safe Congregation Handbook <http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook>

Religious Institute Safer Congregations Guidelines.  
<http://www.religioustheology.org/safer-congregations/>

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. <http://www.eeoc.gov/>. Sexual Harassment [http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sexual\\_harassment.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sexual_harassment.cfm)

Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA). <http://www.uuma.org/>. Code of Professional Practice.  
[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/Guidelines\\_2013\\_Updated.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/Guidelines_2013_Updated.pdf)

Liberal Religious Educators Association. <http://www.lreda.org/>. Code of Professional Conduct. <http://www.lreda.org/code-of-professional-practices>.

Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network. <http://www.uumn.org/>. Code of Professional Practices. [http://www.uumn.org/assets/docs/code\\_of\\_prof\\_prac.pdf](http://www.uumn.org/assets/docs/code_of_prof_prac.pdf)

Association of Unitarian Universalist Administrators. <http://www.uuadmins.org/>. Code of Ethics. <http://www.uuadmins.org/professionalism/>

Eliot Chapel. <http://www.eliotchapel.org/>. Safe Congregation Policy Final 2015/16.  
<http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/2388/SafeCongregationPolicyFinal201516.pdf>

UU Congregation of Grand Traverse City, Michigan. <http://www.uucgt.org/>. Safe Congregation Policy. <http://www.uucgt.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Safe-Congregation-Policy.pdf>

Unitarian Society of Ridgewood. <http://uuridgewood.org/>. "Toward a Safer Congregation: Policies for Congregational and Child/Youth Safety and for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct, Physical Abuse and Harassment."  
[http://uuridgewood.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC=%7B445BA90E-7D4C-435A-B267-AF27A744590C%7D](http://uuridgewood.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B445BA90E-7D4C-435A-B267-AF27A744590C%7D)

Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock. <http://www.uuclr.org/>. Safe Congregation Policy and Procedures. [http://www.uuclr.org/downloads/safe\\_cong.pdf](http://www.uuclr.org/downloads/safe_cong.pdf)

May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society. <http://www.mmuus.org/>. Safe Congregation Policy published June 2011.  
[http://www.mmuus.org/docs/pdfs/safe\\_congregation\\_policy-march\\_2012.pdf](http://www.mmuus.org/docs/pdfs/safe_congregation_policy-march_2012.pdf)

UUA Midamerica Region. <https://www.midamericauua.org/>. “Youth Conference Rules of Conduct and Code of Ethics”  
[http://www.midamericauua.org/Site%20Documents/Events/Youth\\_Rules\\_and\\_Code\\_of\\_Ethics.pdf](http://www.midamericauua.org/Site%20Documents/Events/Youth_Rules_and_Code_of_Ethics.pdf)