

BUUF SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES

PREVENTING, REPORTING AND DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE AND INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT

The members of the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship covenant to promote and affirm the sharing of our Unitarian Universalist values and diverse religious heritages with our children in an atmosphere embracing the vision and wonder of their spiritual journeys. (BUUF Bylaws, Article II, ¶ 1). Although not common in children and youth church programs and activities, child abuse and inappropriate conduct does sometimes occur as revealed in experiences of church communities from time to time. We can take steps to reduce the likelihood and potential adverse effects of child abuse and inappropriate conduct by addressing child abuse issues openly and setting out written guidelines through policy developed after thoughtful planning and attention to the issues. A safe environment for our children and youth will promote the best interest and welfare of the children and youth and assist each of them in their search for growth and meaning as set out in the BUUF mission statement. A written policy directed towards maintaining a safe congregation will also promote compassion, understanding, and healing for those congregants who may be adult survivors of child abuse.

This policy is designed to:

- (1) Improve the safety of children and youth in our church programs by implementing preventive steps and by providing guidelines regarding appropriate behavior with the children and youth of our church;
- (2) Provide guidance on how to effectively respond to incidents that may occur, whether during a church activity or at other times; and
- (3) Through prevention steps, reduce the likelihood that allegations (true or false) will be made against church staff and volunteer workers.

Underlying Principles For This Policy

Unitarian Universalists have a covenant with one another. Our covenant is not a creed. It does not dictate correct doctrine or belief. It does outline our relationship with one another. It is a voluntary and unconditional agreement to act in ways which express the values of our Unitarian Universalist Principles:

We, the members of the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship believe that our commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, justice, equity and compassion in human relations, spiritual growth, and the use of the democratic process within our congregations compels us to create a safe environment that protects children, youth and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

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

PREVENTION

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, in partnership with parents, to create and maintain a safe environment that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth in our church programs. However, this policy is devoted primarily to situations in which children are in a supervised relationship with church members other than their parents.

In an effort to protect our young people as well as our leaders, teachers and all other adults who work with children and youth, all adults and older youth working with children and youth in the church will be required to sign the Code of Ethics before they assume child supervision roles. The policy also encourages other church members and friends to read and sign the Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth.

Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth

adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association 1986

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential is to be realized. Among the most important areas of growth are those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates and research shows that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care.

Therefore, I will not engage in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and youth. I will not sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

I will not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug which would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively while in a leadership role with children or youth.

I have read and understand the above Code of Ethics for leaders of children and youth, and I am in agreement with their spirit and purpose.

Signed _____

Date _____

What is Child Abuse?

The UUA defines child abuse as “an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust that harms or threatens to harm a child’s well-being or physical or mental health.” Child abuse is also against the law.

There are four categories of child abuse according to the UUA:

1. **Physical Abuse:** Deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child. Instances of child abuse include violent assault with hands, feet, a knife, or other instrument, or burns, fractures, and bruises resulting from being beaten, shaken, or thrown.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** Engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child, using a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child. Any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or a significantly older child, abuse has occurred. The child is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. Sexual abuse can include the fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, and exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution. Child sexual abuse is illegal regardless of whether the child “consents” or not. Consent is not an issue. The offender bears the entire responsibility for the abuse, whatever form it takes.

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- * Sexual Fondling;
- * Oral, genital, and anal penetration,
- * Intercourse;
- * Forcible rape

Types of abuse that do not involve touching include:

- * Verbal comments such as statements intended to seduce children;
- * Pornography;
- * Obscene phone calls;
- * Exhibitionism

3. **Emotional Abuse:** Emotional abuse may be very difficult to identify and document. Emotional abuse deeply affects a child’s self-esteem by subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It can include close confinement, inadequate nurturance, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse.
4. **Neglect:** Children have basic physical, nutritional, and environmental needs that must be supplied. Chronic withholding of food, clothing, medication, and proper living quarters, as well as abandonment are all acts of neglect. Neglect can include physical, emotional, or educational neglect through such actions as inadequate supervision, health hazards in the home, refusing to seek treatment for illnesses, providing inadequate nurturance, and deliberately permitting chronic truancy.

Prevention Through Training and Education

Greater understanding of the complexities of sexuality and abuse will help us to avoid situations that could lead to abuse or false accusations. The Board of Directors and RE committee will see to the implementation of the following education program.

For our children and youth, the RE Committee will provide:

- Age appropriate information about development and sexuality. Our children must be empowered to protect themselves and report abuse.

For RE teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth, as well as temporary child care providers paid on an hourly basis, the RE committee and Safe Congregation Panel will provide:

- Training and written information designed to prevent child abuse.

For all paid staff, including those working with children and youth, the board and the Safe Congregation Panel will provide:

- Training and written information regarding this policy and child abuse prevention.

For the entire congregation, the board will provide:

- Information on child abuse including workshops, Adult RE classes and/or written materials.
- Information regarding this policy.

For new members of the church, the Membership Committee will provide:

- A copy of this policy or written information regarding this policy to be included in all new member packets.

Prevention Through Screening and Supervision of Adults Working with Children and Youth

The following guidelines will be put in place for the 2004/2005 program year commencing September 2004:

- All RE teachers and other adults working with children and youth...
 - a) will have been a congregant for at least one (1) year, as determined by the RE director, or have references from other UU churches that include the minister or RE director.
 - b) will have completed a screening application and have been interviewed before assuming their duties. Two references will be requested and kept on file for new RE teachers and other adults working with children and youth.
 - c) will have attended at least one training session on child abuse put on by, or approved by, the RE committee or the Safe Congregation Panel.
 - d) will have read, understood and signed the "Code of Ethics."
- Temporary child care providers paid on an hourly basis...

- a) will have completed a screening application and have been interviewed before assuming their duties. Two references will be requested and kept on file for temporary child care providers.
 - b) will have received written information designed to prevent child abuse.
 - c) will have attended at least one training session on child abuse put on by, or approved by, the RE committee or the Safe Congregation Panel.
 - d) will have read, understood and signed the “Code of Ethics.”
- The Safe Congregation Panel will work with the RE Committee in developing training and screening materials.
 - Confidential criminal background checks will be conducted for all paid adult staff prior to hiring or signing of any contract and may be conducted, at the discretion of the RE Committee, for adult teachers and other adult volunteers working with the children and youth. In the case of paid staff, information will be shared with the Personnel Committee and Board of Directors as appropriate. For purposes of this policy, an adult is defined as an individual eighteen years of age or more.
 - Individuals who have been convicted of, are under current indictment for, or self disclose any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or child abuse are precluded from participation in the RE program and other children or youth church activities.

In addition, this policy encourages any congregant 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, DRE or any other member of the Safe Congregational Panel. Other members or friend of the congregation, including the minister and DRE, who becomes aware of such information, should report this to a member of the Safe Congregation Panel who will then form a Response Team and decide how to handle the situation. (*See pages 6 and 7, “Reporting and Response” for definitions of Safe Congregation Panel and Response Team*).

- At least one teacher or child care provider shall be present in each classroom on Sunday mornings. On every outing, overnight and other church-related activity with groups of children, including children and youth trips, there shall be at least two adults present. Exceptions to this guideline (for example, to transport children from one location to another) require written permission from parents.

The RE Committee will also be responsible for developing and publicizing additional guidelines concerning other child safety issues such as a

- Supervision of and responsibility for children and youth before and after church events
- Ratio of adults to children on field trips and overnights,
- Minimum age of advisors on field trips and overnights,
- Requirements for transporting children (insurance, minimum age of driver, etc.)

REPORTING & RESPONSE

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straightforward. Religious leaders should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting the children. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations.

If a church member or friend or staff person has reason to believe that a child has been abused, either while in the church program or at other times, the person should report the incident to State authorities. Title 16, Section 1619, Idaho Code. Other law may be applicable depending upon the facts and circumstances.

Reporting Within the Church

In addition, if the person with the concern believes the abuse occurred during a church program, the individual should report his or her concerns to

- 1) The minister, or
- 2) The DRE, or
- 3) Any other member of the church's Safe Congregation Panel.

(See below for definitions of Safe Congregation Panel and Response Team)

Anyone who has concerns about inappropriate behavior or suspected child abuse by teachers, childcare workers, other adults or youth in the church community, should report their concerns immediately to the minister, DRE, or other members of the Safe Congregation Panel.

When an allegation of child abuse occurring during a church program is reported to the minister, DRE, or other Safe Congregation Panel members, the responsible person receiving the allegation should take the necessary steps to

- 1) Abide by Idaho law on reporting child abuse;
- 2) Take appropriate action to assure protection of the children in the church; and
- 3) Convene a meeting of a Response Team (see below definition).

Safe Congregation Panel

The Board will appoint, with input from the minister, DRE, and RE Chair, a Safe Congregation Panel of 6-10 responsible and knowledgeable people who could be called upon to form a Response Team and who will be available to hear confidentiality concerns about child abuse.

The Safe Congregation Panel will be composed of at least 2 women and 2 men and an effort will be made to reflect the diversity of the congregation. These people will be qualified by their (1) professional or volunteer experience in working with children and/or child abuse issues or through other special training such as the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence workshops (Marie Fortune); (2) understanding of this policy and other UUA "Safe Congregation" material; and (3) knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, including applicable Idaho state laws.

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

The Safe Congregation Panel will also be delegated such duties as arranging training for the congregation, development of RE teacher training and screening material. The Safe Congregation Panel will review this policy annually and report and recommend any proposed changes at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Response Team

In response to a specific situation, a Response Team will be formed by the person who receives the initial complaint, in consultation with the minister and DRE. The Response Team will consist of people not involved in the incident and will include the minister (ex-officio), the DRE (ex-officio), and three individuals from the Safe Congregation Panel, one of whom is a member of the RE Committee if possible, (if the incident occurred within the RE program). If the incident or allegation involves a staff person, then that staff person will be removed from the Response Team and the Board will be notified immediately.

The Response Team does not have the legal authority, or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to protect members of the church community, and to ensure that the victim and accused are treated with dignity and respect. The team responding to the allegation should keep the following response guidelines in mind.

- 1. Safety of the Children** - the safety of the children in the church program should be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely actions should be taken to insure their safety based upon the credibility and severity of the allegation and other pertinent factors. All allegations will be taken seriously.
- 2. State Law** - A copy of Idaho 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 incidence is reported. Appropriate and timely reporting will be made to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare or proper law enforcement agency.
- 3. Professional Resources** - The Response Team should call on or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within the church and outside of the church.
- 4. Whom to Inform** - Decisions about whom to inform about the incident (parents, teachers, the board, the congregation, the child or children in question, the alleged perpetrator) and the information to be provided should be made in a careful, but timely manner by 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. Notification of Board and District Executive** - If any action is taken or recommended by the Response Team, the President of the Board and the District Executive of the Pacific North West District will be notified 1) that a Response Team has been convened, 2) of the nature of the issue and 3) whether a report has been made or will be made to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare or proper law enforcement agency. The President will report to the full board in a closed meeting at the earliest appropriate time.
- 6. 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 for the time period determined by the Response Team. It is understood that action may be appropriate that would include removal of the

matter from confidential status (for example, investigating the allegations; reporting to the Safe Congregation Panel, the Board of Directors, the PNWD Executive Director, State authorities; expulsion of an individual from BUUF premises; congregational vote for termination of an individual's membership, among other examples).

a. In order to ensure that the safety of our children and youth is our highest priority, we must encourage the responsible reporting of all concerns or suspicions of child abuse. To this end, all reports to the Safe Congregation Panel will be considered confidential and will be disseminated only on a "need to know" basis until such time as the Response Team determines other action is appropriate. In cases when the reporting person and/or the 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 to the extent required by this policy and/or when the Response Team determines that the Department of Health and Welfare or proper law enforcement agency must be informed. Otherwise, a full disclosure of the details of the suspected abuse or concern will be made to the accused at the appropriate time.

(In this context "confidential" means that the identity of the child victim and/or reporting person, the details of the allegation or concern and any other identifying information, will be kept among the members of the Response Team and the accused except to the extent otherwise required by this policy. "Strict confidentiality" means that this information will not be shared with the accused.)

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 all initial interviews and make every effort to attend all meetings and all information, related to the concern, known to any one member, including the minister and DRE, must be shared with the other Response Team members.

c. In cases not referred to the Department of Health and Welfare or law enforcement agency, when strict confidentiality requirements preclude informing an RE teacher or youth leader about the identification of affected individuals or the nature of any allegations against him or her and the decision has been made that he or she needs to be removed from interaction with children in the church program, then every effort will be made to use a process of informing the individual that does not reference or identify the victim or reporting person and the specific allegations as the reason for removal. Also, if it is appropriate to consider actions other than removal from teaching, or leadership those options will be fully explored.

7. False Accusations - The protection from false or mistaken allegations of adults who teach in the RE program or otherwise interact with children at church is also an important goal of this policy. A key way to prevent false or mistaken allegations is to abide by the prevention guidelines outlined in the Prevention portion of this policy. We should be sensitive to the disruption and damage a false accusation may cause to both the adults and the children involved. This is true even when the accusation is one due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what seems a child's straight-forward report of an event.

a. If the Response Team determines that an accusation has been made with malice or for any other reason believes that a report has not been made in good faith, the

confidentiality of the reporting person will not be protected, except as may be determined by the Response Team in the case of a minor. The Response Team may determine that a false accusation by a child or youth requires further consideration.

Leave of Absence & 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 the alleged perpetrator from interacting with children in the RE program or other church programs will be made by the Response Team, including the DRE and the minister. A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to the children, the credibility and seriousness of the allegation and other factors that may relate to the situation. Actions other than removal from teaching or leadership will be given full consideration depending upon the situation. Alternative actions might include additional training, review of the policy or changing classrooms.

- a. Even if an allegation is not reported to the Department of Health and Welfare or law enforcement agency, the adult against whom the allegations are made may be asked to refrain from teaching or otherwise interacting with the child or children in question for the adult's own protection.
- b. If a report is made to the Department of Health and Welfare or law enforcement agency this leave will be mandatory.
- c. The Response Team may also determine, even without an accusation of abuse made, 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 providing child care, volunteering or chaperoning for children's or youth events.
- d. If disputes arise out of the actions taken by the DRE, the Minister, or the Response Team, the matter may be taken to the Board. However, the DRE and the RE Committee (together) retain the independent right and responsibility to screen and authorize volunteers for teaching in the RE program, while the DRE and the Response Team will make final decisions about removing a teacher or otherwise restricting an individual's contact with children and youth on church property or at church-sponsored events except as may be otherwise required by the bylaws or policies of BUUF (for example, termination of membership may require a vote by the congregation, termination of employment of paid staff may require Board action and/or action by the congregation etc.).

Other Inappropriate Behavior

Some incidents or allegations in the RE or other children or youth programs may involve behavior that is not clearly child abuse, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate by a parent, by the DRE or by the RE committee. In such cases, a Response Team, including the DRE, the minister and appropriate members of the RE committee may be called together, to review the situation and decide what action to take.

Other Responsibilities of the Board

The Board of Directors of the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship 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 (except for the minister) and any additional action in the case of volunteers beyond that for which the Response Team is authorized.

Violation of this policy by the minister or DRE shall constitute good cause for discipline under the terms of the minister's or DRE's contract.

The Board shall also inform the following of any determination of serious violations by the minister of this policy:

The Pacific North West District Executive

The Director of the Department of Ministry of the UUA

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the UUA

The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

End Note to BUUF Safe Congregation Policy

The Safe Congregation Policy, Honoring the Children, developed by the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville and graciously made available to the BUUF drafting committee, has been a guiding beacon, template and the primary source for development of this policy. Other sources for this policy have been the workbook edited by Patricia Hoertdoerfer and William Sinkford entitled, *CREATING SAFE CONGREGATIONS: TOWARD AN ETHIC OF RIGHT RELATIONS*, published by the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1997, and the Church Mutual Insurance Company booklet entitled *SAFETY TIPS ON A SENSITIVE SUBJECT: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE*. Some ideas and influences finding their way into this policy may have been missed for attribution due to the limitations of the writer but without intent to fail to grant due credit to the sources.