

FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON

# SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

## Version History:

**This document incorporates materials from earlier versions of the Safe Congregation Policy and the Guidelines for Email and Social Media the congregation began using as early as 2009.**

It was significantly revised and updated by the Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen and the Healthy Communications Team in the autumn of 2018 and presented to the Board in January 2019.

It was further revised in August 2019, to incorporate changes suggested by the Adult Programs Team.

It was further revised in June 2021 to incorporate new Appendix 6 (“Healthy Communications Process”), clarify elements of Section 3.2 (“Harassment”) and Section 3.13 (“Guidelines For Email And Social Media”) and to make non-substantive grammatical and presentation edits.

**For questions about the Safe Congregation Policy or to suggest changes to it please contact the Healthy Communications Team at [hct@firstuu.org](mailto:hct@firstuu.org).**

FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON

**SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY**

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# FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON

## SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

**Preamble:** We, the congregation of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston (“FUUCH”), wish to be a welcoming and inclusive congregation that is a safe and life-affirming place for the people who trust FUUCH as their congregational home. We respect the worth and dignity of every individual. It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership positions, or formally signed members, but all community participants, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of everyone in the congregation. Therefore, we covenant to develop policies and practices that

- Promote safety in all areas of congregational life: physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual.
- Provide training and guidelines for handling unsafe situations and
- Establish a plan for addressing these issues of safety.

**We covenant** to educate ourselves and our children to issues of safety and to learn ways that will help us to offer compassionate and skillful responses for those at risk or in crisis. Finally, we covenant to address whatever problems arise with courage, equity, compassion, and the thoughtful application of our Unitarian Universalist values.

The Senior Minister of the FUUCH will designate members of a team to act on issues concerning a Safe Congregation. This Team will be primarily composed of the Senior Minister and/or an Assistant Minister designated by the Senior Minister and the Healthy Communications Team.

In regard to Safe Congregations, the Healthy Communications Team (HCT) will generally have the following responsibilities:

- Know about community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors.
- Know about state laws regarding reporting of abuse. **(See Appendix 1 - Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a child, elderly, or adults with disabilities.)**
- Be a resource for people to share their concerns and affirmations. The HCT has developed a “Healthy Communications Process” (HCP) to set forth the process for these communications. **(See Appendix 6)**
- Evaluate applications for Religious Education (RE) teachers, youth group leaders or Pastoral Care Associates that are flagged by the Minister or Religious Educator as needing more information or follow up.
- Facilitate annual training on issues, policies, and procedures relevant to sexual/physical abuse.

- Receive allegations of possible abuse and develop a process for expedient handling of such allegations.
- Meet with accused and convicted sex offenders to develop a Limited Access Agreement for participation in congregational activities. **(See Appendix 5.)**
- Regularly review the Safe Congregation policies of the FUUCH and make recommendations to the Senior Minister about updates and revisions.

All activities of the HCT will be conducted in a confidential fashion and may only be disclosed when necessary and appropriate. The congregation will be advised annually of the members of the HCT via the E-News, the website, and the Annual Report. Information regarding the HCT and Safety Policies will be presented in the New Members classes. Additionally, this information will appear in the Annual Report.

# SECTION I: CHILDREN

(anyone under the age of 18 years)

## 1.1) SCREENING AND SELECTION OF PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN

- a. Those who provide direct care or supervision for children (“workers”) at FUUCH must meet the following criteria:
  1. Unpaid workers (“volunteers”) must be active participants at FUUCH as a church member or friend for at least six (6) months.
  2. Those working with children junior high school and younger must be at least 18 years of age. Workers below the age of 18 must be approved by the Director of Religious Education (“DRE”).
  3. Those working with high school groups must be at least 21 years of age. Workers below the age of 21 must be approved by the DRE.
  4. All workers must consent to such reference and/or background checks as FUUCH, in its sole discretion, deems necessary and must agree to be bound by the Code of Ethics (**see Appendices 2 and 3**). The DRE and Senior Minister will be responsible for determining disqualifications based on background or reference checks. This information will be kept confidential and disclosed on a “need to know basis” only.
  5. All workers must be trained as prescribed by the DRE. (**See Appendix 2 - First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston - Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children**) and (**Appendix 4 - NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR PROJECT OF FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON - NURTURING CHILD CARE - Policy for Care Giver Volunteers**)

## 1.2) SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

- b. All workers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the DRE.
- c. All workers are required to comply with the following policies to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children while participating in FUUCH activities:
  6. Each group should have at least two (2) workers present at all times with at least one (1) worker being an adult. For infants and toddlers, the desirable ratio is one (1) worker for every three (3) children. The DRE will determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group and activity and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis.
  7. Visibility into classrooms must be maintained at all times.
  8. The DRE and/or designee will circulate in the RE classroom area and monitor classroom activities randomly during regular RE classes.
  9. No private off-site meetings are allowed, other than with a parent or guardian, without prior parent arrangement and approval by the DRE.
  10. All outings must be pre-approved by the DRE. Participating children must have a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian.

11. All drivers shall be a minimum age of 21. All drivers must have a current, valid driver's license and proof of insurance before being assigned driving responsibilities.
12. Drivers should have two (2) or more children in the car when transporting children to and from activities. The only exception is when the driver is transporting a child with prior parent arrangement and notification of the DRE.
13. If disciplinary issues arise, there should be two (2) adults present during all disciplinary meetings between the worker and the child involved. The parents will be informed of any such meeting and its contents as soon as possible.
14. Corporal punishment or abusive language may not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
15. Behavior must both be and appear to be above reproach.

### 1.3) MAINTAINING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- a. **Friendships.** We actively encourage mentoring relationships between children and adults. Although we hope children and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to a child for peer-to-peer friendship should not be in a position of responsibility over them. Friendship is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the friendship than the other. This is antithetical to the healthy adult/child relationship where the adult assumes responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries in order to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust. The age of the child makes no difference in this matter. A teen-aged child is no more responsible to maintain healthy boundaries than is a three-year-old. In fact, teens may have more confusion about appropriate boundaries and should be treated appropriately.
- b. **Physical Affection.** Physical expressions of affection such as hugs are acceptable, but it is best to allow the child to initiate the contact and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to become too frequent or prolonged.
- c. **Sexualized Behavior.** It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but to sexually provocative, seductive, or erotic behavior, or language as well. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, connotations, or "double entendres".
- d. **Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol.** Children should be prohibited from using tobacco, drugs, or alcohol, and should be barred from exhibiting illegal behavior while engaged in church-sanctioned activities. Workers should always be aware their own behavior is a powerful statement to children. Adults, while actively supervising children at a church-sponsored event or gathering, will not consume alcohol or illegal drugs, or use tobacco products.
- e. **Confidentiality vs. Secrets.** If a child discloses incidents of abuse or neglect or is exhibiting self-destructive tendencies, the worker should report it immediately to the Senior Minister or DRE. Workers will cooperate with any subsequent investigation. Adults should never give children the impression they will keep secrets for them or promise to keep such information confidential.

#### 1.4) REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES

- a. If a worker has reason to believe abuse has occurred during an FUUCH program or event, **the adult must immediately report it** to the Senior Minister or DRE. If the worker ascertains the child is in a situation of imminent risk, he/she (or another responsible person) should immediately remove the abusive adult or vulnerable child from the situation and take steps necessary to protect the child.
- b. The Senior Minister or DRE will alert the President of the Board of Directors (the “President”) that an abuse situation has been reported and will report it, as required by law (**See Appendix 1**) and to the church’s insurer as the matter requires. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential and treated on a “need to know basis” only. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution of the offender, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.
- c. If the reported abuse involves a FUUCH worker, the DRE should immediately relieve that person of further duties involving the supervision, care or teaching of children until the matter is resolved.
- d. Should the media contact FUUCH about an alleged incident of abuse, the President shall represent the FUUCH to the public. In general, while no identifying information should ever be disclosed, the President may disclose steps taken to prevent such incidents, investigate this incident, and to guard against abusive situations in the future.

#### 1.5) IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT OF THIS POLICY

- a. Procedures will be developed, and training will be provided as necessary to support this policy.
- b. It is the goal of FUUCH to teach the Our Whole Lives Curriculum to all age groups.

## **Section II: VULNERABLE ADULTS**

(those who are 18 years or older who are in need of community care services by reasons of mental health or other disability, illness, or are age 65 and older and are unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.)

### **2.1) SCREENING AND SELECTION OF PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Those who provide direct care or supervision for vulnerable adults (“workers”) at FUUCH must meet the following criteria:

- a. Unpaid workers (“volunteers”) must be active participants at FUUCH as a church member or friend for at least six (6) months.
- b. Those working with vulnerable adults must be at least 18 years of age. Workers below the age of 18 must be approved by the Safety Officer. The Safety Officer will be selected by the Senior Minister.
- c. All workers must consent to such reference and/or background checks as FUUCH, in its sole discretion, deems necessary and must agree to be bound by the Code of Ethics for People Working with Vulnerable Adults (**See Appendix 3**). The Safety Officer and Senior Minister will be responsible for determining disqualification based on background or reference checks. This information will be kept confidential.
- d. All workers must be trained as prescribed by the Safety Officer.

### **2.2) SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND POLICIES**

- a. Annually, leaders of groups working with vulnerable adults will contact the vulnerable adults to obtain feedback on the performance of the volunteer and effectiveness of the program.
- b. Groups working with vulnerable adults will have regular meetings to share ideas, conduct training, and conduct other group business. “Regular meeting” frequency will be determined by the group according to their needs but in any case, will not be less than one time per year.
- c. All drivers transporting vulnerable adults shall be a minimum age of 21. All drivers must have a current, valid driver’s license and proof of insurance before being assigned driving responsibilities. Drivers may be asked to provide proof of valid license and insurance, and such proof may be photocopied.
- d. Abuse will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- e. Behavior must both be and appear to be above reproach.
- f. Workers must follow the processes and procedures provided by the group sponsoring their activities. Such processes and procedures will be shared with new participants prior to their beginning their volunteer activities. It is understood there may be urgent need for temporary or one-time volunteers. These individuals may

volunteer, but only on a very limited basis before receiving the appropriate guiding information.

- g. All workers must agree to participate in any required training provided for the group.

### **2.3) MAINTAINING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES**

- a. All groups working with vulnerable adults must have processes and procedures that address the following areas in which healthy boundaries must be maintained. and the Safety Officer will confirm at least annually that such policies and processes are in place for each group.
  - Physical
  - Gifts
  - Confidentiality and Secrets
  - Expectations
  - Psychological and Emotional
  - Legal
  - Financial

### **2.4) REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

- a. If any member of the congregation has reason to believe abuse or neglect has occurred or is occurring to any congregant, the individual must immediately consult with the Senior Minister or Safety Officer and report it to the appropriate authority as required by law. **(See Appendix 3)**
- b. If anyone in the congregation receives a report that a worker has abused a care partner, the report must be relayed to the Senior Minister or Safety Officer immediately. The worker must be relieved of duty until an investigation can be completed and the issue resolved. All workers must agree to cooperate with and participate in any investigations.
- c. The Senior Minister or Safety Officer will alert the President that an abuse situation has been reported and will report it as required by law and to the church's insurer as the matter requires. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential and disclosed on a "Need to know basis" only. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution of the offender, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the vulnerable adult.
- d. Should the media contact FUUCH about an alleged incident of abuse, the President shall represent the FUUCH to the public. In general, while no identifying information should ever be disclosed, the President may disclose steps taken to prevent such incidents, investigate this incident, and to guard against abusive situations in the future.

### **2.5) IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT OF THIS POLICY**

Procedures will be developed and training will be provided as necessary to support this policy. The HCT will be responsible for conducting training and the Safety Officer will be available to provide guidance or assistance.

## SECTION III: Adults

### 3.1) POLICY REGARDING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our congregation's purposes and principles, we affirm the FUUCH must maintain a safe and secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's social, physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons. There may be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building leads members to voice a concern about one or more of the following:

- a. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
- b. The disruption of church activities;
- c. Diminishment of the appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership; and/or.
- d. Sexual harassment and/or creating an intimidating environment.

#### **The following will be the policy of FUUCH in dealing with these issues:**

1. In any situation where an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Senior Minister or any Associate Minister(s), if available, and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Houston Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) being present, the Minister(s) must be notified and he/she will inform the HCT for investigation and consideration of possible recourse. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Senior Minister to the offending party or parties.

2. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the HCT. The team will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

- a. The team will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypical judgments will be avoided.
- c. The team will collect all necessary information for consideration of the appropriate response.
- d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
  - DANGEROUSNESS - Is the disruptive individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?

- DISRUPTIVENESS - How much interference with church functions (past, present or potential future) is going on?
  - OFFENSIVENESS - How likely is it the prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
- HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
  - CAUSES - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
  - PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- f. The HCT will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
- LEVEL ONE - The team shall inform the Senior Minister of the problem and either the Minister(s) and/or a member of the HCT shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.
  - LEVEL TWO - The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear. Written notice is given to the individual from the Senior Minister, with a copy going into the HCT files. Any action taken under item f. (above) may be appealed to the Board of Directors.
  - LEVEL THREE - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities by recommendation of the HCT to the Board of Directors. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Senior Minister explaining the expulsion.

We strive 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 must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.

### **3.2) HARASSMENT**

The Church is committed to providing an environment free from all forms of discrimination and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive, or disruptive, including sexual harassment. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on an individual's sex, race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other legally protected characteristic will not be tolerated. Any employee, volunteer, congregant, or member who feels he/she has been a victim of harassment should immediately report such incidents to his/her supervisor, the Senior Minister or the Executive Committee (NOTE: the Executive Committee is the President and the Vice President). If

such a concern is reported to a member of the staff or the HCT, that person shall immediately notify the Senior Minister and Executive Committee upon receiving the report.

All allegations will be quickly, discreetly, and thoroughly investigated by the HCT or other independent person(s) as assigned by the Senior Minister. In cases involving the conduct of the Senior Minister, the President shall assign an independent person(s) to perform the investigation. To the extent possible, all information including information from the alleged victim, any witnesses, and the alleged harasser, will be kept confidential and protected against unnecessary disclosure and disclosed on a "need to know" basis only. Reprisals and retaliation against a victim of harassment are forbidden. When the investigation is completed, the accuser and the alleged harasser will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and the actions taken by the Senior Minister or Board to resolve any damage.

Concerns about professional sexual misconduct by one of the ministers should be reported to the President or any other member of the Board who shall immediately notify the President. If such a concern is reported to a member of the staff or the HCT, that person shall immediately notify the President upon receiving the report. The President shall assign an independent person(s) to conduct an investigation on behalf of the Board. In addition, the President shall notify the entire Board that such a concern has been raised within 48 hours of receiving the report.

### **3.3) SAFETY WITH TECHNOLOGY - CYBERSTALKING**

"**Cyberstalking**" is the use of the Internet or other electronic means to stalk or harass an individual, group, or organization. It may include false accusations, defamation, slander, and libel among other actions. It may also include monitoring, identity theft, threats, vandalism, solicitation for sex, or gathering information that may be used to threaten, embarrass or harass. Since harassment on these platforms has also become more common, no one should be pressured to give personal contact information or feel required to add people to social media. **See Appendix 7 for Email Policies and other Social Media Issues.**

### **3.4) DEFINITION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual harassment refers to behavior of a sexual nature that is unwelcome, personally offensive, or interferes with the performance and/or effectiveness of the recipient. Sexual harassment is a form of misconduct that is demeaning to another person and undermines the integrity of the working relationship. Sexual harassment can be committed by, for example, a supervisor, coworker, volunteer, congregant, or vendor. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when one or more of the following are true:

- a. Submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;
- b. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for an employment decision affecting such individual; and/or
- c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the employee's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

### **3.5) SEX OFFENDERS**

- a. It is expected that members of the congregation, staff, renters, or any other adults using the building or potential members/participants with a history or active accusation of sexual misconduct/abuse/sexual offense, will make that history or accusation known to one of the congregation ministers, who will follow the procedures below:
- b. No person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of, any sexual misconduct can be permitted to be involved in any RE or youth group activities.
- c. The core response of the congregation to a convicted or accused sex offender is a Limited Access Agreement (LAA).
- d. Any adult, adolescent or child **accused** of a sexual offense of any kind will be placed on a tailored LLA without prejudice. **(See Appendix 5)**. The HCT will convene within 10 days of such a person being made known to the Senior Minister, the DRE, or any member of the HCT to develop the agreement (which may be subsequently revised upon more information). The LAA will remain in effect until all charges are dropped or confirmed (in which case see below.) Persons will not continue to attend or participate in any programs or services of the congregation until a LAA is agreed to and executed. Adolescents or children who are known to have sexually abused or sexually assaulted another youth or child will only be allowed adult-supervised participation in future RE or youth group activities. A therapist's evaluation can be considered by the committee before termination of a LAA.
- e. Any person **convicted** of a sexual offense or with **a history of known sexual offenses** will be placed on a LAA without prejudice. The HCT will convene within 10 days of such a person being made known to the Senior Minister, the DRE, or any member of the HCT in order to initiate and develop the LAA. This will be done upon consultation with the person's parole officer and/or treatment provider so it may be determined that they can safely participate in the adult life of the congregation.
- f. Any person accused, convicted, or with a history of known sex offenses who will not agree to a mutually agreed LAA will be denied access to any programs or services at the congregation. For further procedures on responding to a person accused, convicted, or with a history of known sex offenses, the congregation will follow the procedures outlined in Balancing Acts. <https://www.uua.org/safe/children>

### 3.6) VISITORS

Our congregation strives to be a safe and welcoming place to all. Visitors are less likely to know of the accepted norms of behavior at FUUCH. Actions which are offensive or disruptive should be brought immediately to the individual's attention by a member of the church leadership in a non-threatening, polite manner, explaining what behavior is accepted. Failure or refusal to meet the change of behavior required will result in applying the guidelines listed in the **Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior. (See Section III above).**

### **3.7) INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE HOMELESS**

During public events such as Sunday morning services, individuals who are homeless are welcomed into the regular activities of church, which include coffee hour, church service and visiting, reasonable use of restroom, as well as adult groups. (See sections on Visitors and Disoriented for related information.)

**Our policy is to not give money to individuals.** If someone asks for money, say something like “Our church does not give money to individuals at events. You can make an appointment with one of our ministers OR go to one of the organizations we support that provides basic services.” Provide Community Resource handouts (see attached). Since the handing of a pamphlet, is a minimal amount of help to someone in need, offering use of the phone to make a local call for a few minutes, or help in pointing to an organization that will likely offer the support needed, is preferred if it can be offered at the time. Also dialing 211 is the United Way, which provides information to anyone in need of the available local services. Staff and volunteers will use their own judgement on what to offer based on various factors of safety and availability of potential support.

During non-public events such as closed adult groups during the week and RE classes for children and youth on Sundays (these are not open to adults other than trained teachers and parents of those in the group), leaders are encouraged to provide the handouts of Community Resources and tell individuals the church (or class) is not open to the public at this time.

### **3.8) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SITUATIONS**

If an individual requests assistance with a domestic violence situation, leadership staff in contact should show empathy, provide information on contacting the appropriate domestic violence phone number. If they indicate an immediate potential threat on church grounds, police should be contacted, and the ministerial staff notified immediately.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 TTY**

Advocates who are deaf are available Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (PST) by videophone (855-812-1001), instant messenger (Deaf Hotline) or email ([deafhelp@thehotline.org](mailto:deafhelp@thehotline.org)).

Links to shelters and services by city in Texas can be found at

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/tx/texas-domestic-violence-help-statistics>

### **3.9) INDIVIDUALS WHO APPEAR DISORIENTED**

Individuals showing signs of disorientation or incapacity due either to impairment due to drugs/alcohol or illness should be addressed by a member of the church leadership, a minister, an HCT member, a Welcome Team member, a Care Team member, or the leader of the group the individual is in. If someone finds a disoriented person, the Ministerial staff should be notified as soon as possible.

Anytime an individual appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, care should be taken to ensure their safety, especially in regards to transportation. If the individual's behavior is disruptive, their safety and the safety of other church members is the primary concern. Once this is established, a review by the HCT will be initiated.

Depending on the situation, if diminished capacity due to illness is suspected, a meeting with the individual's caretakers, minister(s) and the HCT/Care Team will be held to determine whether attendance at the church will require a caretaker to accompany the individual to activities to avoid disruptive behavior and stress on the individual.

### **3.10) INDIVIDUALS WHO THREATEN SUICIDE OR HARM TO OTHERS**

If any member of the leadership receives information indicating an individual is contemplating suicide or harm to others, the Ministerial staff should be notified as soon as possible. All threats and statements should be taken seriously and not ignored.

### **3.11) PROHIBITIONS SPECIFIC TO HANDGUN LICENSE HOLDERS**

Possession of firearms on church grounds is prohibited. Any individual entering church property in possession of a firearm should be notified of the FUUCH policy by the member of the Ministry or other member of the church leadership.

Texas law specifies that a handgun license holder is prohibited from intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly carrying a handgun on or about his or her person, regardless of whether the handgun is concealed on the premises of a church, synagogue, or other established place of religious worship, provided effective notice was given.

Effective "notice" is given if the owner of the property or someone with apparent authority to act for the owner provides notice by:

- Oral communication;
- A card or other document on which is written the following language: "Pursuant to Section 30.06, Penal Code (trespass by holder of license to carry a handgun), a person licensed under Subchapter H, Chapter 411, Government Code (handgun license law), may not enter this property with a handgun"; or
- A sign posted on the property that includes the above language in both English and Spanish, appearing in contrasting colors with block letters at least one inch in height; and displayed in a conspicuous manner clearly visible to the public.

### **3.12) BRINGING ANIMALS IN TO CHURCH BUILDINGS**

In the interests of safety and hygiene, non-service animals are not allowed in church buildings. An exception to this rule can be made by the ministers for announced services such as the "blessing of the animals".

An "assistance animal" and "service animal" means a canine that is specially trained or equipped to help a person with a disability and that is used by a person with a disability.

A "Person with a disability" means a person who has:

- (A) a mental or physical disability;
- (B) an intellectual or developmental disability;
- (C) a hearing impairment;



- (D) deafness;
- (E) a speech impairment;
- (F) a visual impairment;
- (G) post-traumatic stress disorder; or
- (H) any health impairment that requires special ambulatory devices or services.

*The Welcome Team is the primary group dealing with this, and mostly with visitors.*

### **3.13) GUIDELINES FOR EMAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)**

The FUUCH encourages communications, verbal, written and virtual between and among congregants, members, staff and Ministers as needed to accomplish the work, goals and visions of the FUUCH. However, all communications should be necessary, respectful, direct and in compliance with the covenants of FUUCH. All communications other than those sent by staff, Board authorized committees or ministry teams should be sent only to those addressees who are directly involved with the communication. Carbon copies (CCs) should be sent only to those persons who need to be aware of the communication and its contents especially if the contents of the email are confidential, potentially embarrassing or could be disruptive. The use of BCC is to be avoided. No mass emails should ever be sent to congregants that include private, confidential, or potentially disruptive content.

Any member of the Board, a Committee, or a Team that has access to confidential information must use a private email address for communication related to the work of the Board, a Committee, or a Team. No email address that is shared with any other person (i.e. a joint address) may be used to send or receive confidential information. Other expectations include:

1. Keep newcomers in mind when posting or sending messages.
2. Use email to send agendas, minutes, or supporting documents.
3. Communicate directly with the person or group involved, refrain from gossip or negativity about others.
4. Respect the diversity of values and viewpoints of others with appreciation and curiosity.
5. Respect privacy: do not post private conversations or personal information of others without their permission.
6. Adhere to any prior agreements you have with church members or staff.
7. Assume that others act with good intentions. Minor corrections or clarifying questions are acceptable.
8. Be kind when others make mistakes but know we all have a stake in maintaining these guidelines.
9. Apologize when warranted and seek to make amends in person.
10. The FUUCH staff will identify photos of staff and leaders unless we hear from them otherwise.

11. The FUUCH staff has the right to delete any inappropriate content from social media pages.

**Things to Avoid:**

12. This is not a forum for airing grievances! To do that, go to the HCT.
13. Do not send mass emails when only a few people are likely to be interested.
14. Do not identify or “friend” minor children, without the explicit permission of their parents or guardians.
15. Avoid strings of email to schedule a meeting; use online scheduling such as Doodle or Meeting Wizard.
16. Avoid substantive discussions or decision-making with multiple people via email. Avoid emotionally loaded conversations on email or social media. Schedule a face-to-face meeting instead.
17. Electronic storage and transmission of member information is not permitted except by church staff.
18. Inappropriate content includes hateful or irrelevant content, attacks against an individual, financial solicitations, endorsements of a political candidate or party, or content that violates Facebook or other social media terms of use, code of conduct, or other policies.

# **Appendix 1**

## **Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a child, elderly, or adults with disabilities**

**The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) has a central place to report:**

- Child abuse and neglect.
- Abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation of the elderly or adults with disabilities living at home.
- Abuse of children in child-care facilities or treatment centers.
- Abuse of adults and children who live in state facilities or are being helped by programs for people with mental illness or intellectual disabilities. These are run by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) or Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS).

Texas law specifies anyone who thinks a child, or person 65 years or older, or an adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report it to DFPS.

A person who reports abuse in good faith is immune from civil or criminal liability. DFPS keeps the name of the person making the report confidential. Anyone who does not report suspected abuse can be held liable for a misdemeanor or felony.

Time frames for investigating reports are based on the severity of the allegations. Reporting suspected abuse makes it possible for a family to get help.

### **Report Abuse**

- **By Phone: 1-800-252-5400**
- **Online: [Texas Abuse Hotline - External Link \(https://www.txabusehotline.org/\)](https://www.txabusehotline.org/)**

Call our Abuse Hotline toll-free 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nationwide, or report with our secure website and get a response within 24 hours.

*We cannot accept email reports of suspected abuse or neglect.*

Copied from Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Web Page 11/28/2018

See Attached pages with more details.



## Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a Child in Texas: Reporting Basics

### How does reporting abuse or neglect of children in Texas work? What do I need to do to make a report?

State law requires anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect to report those suspicions to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or to a local law enforcement agency.

**Always call law enforcement first and the Texas Abuse Hotline second if you suspect that there is an immediate threat of harm or death to a child.**

Any person making a report to DFPS is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in good faith. The reporter's name is also confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee. *There are circumstances under which DFPS is required to disclose a reporter's identity to law enforcement, a court of law, or another state agency. Please see the section below on Confidentiality for more information.*

A person who suspects child abuse or neglect, but fails to report it, can be charged with a misdemeanor or state jail felony. Remember, reporting suspected child abuse or neglect makes it possible for a child to get help.

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### Report child abuse or neglect in two ways:

#### Telephone

You may call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 to report abuse or neglect. The hotline is answered by DFPS Intake Specialists (who are all degreed professionals) 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

You will be asked to provide your name and contact information.

You will be asked to explain your concerns. The Intake Specialist might ask additional questions to determine if the situation that you describe meets the Texas Family Code's definitions of abuse or neglect.

#### Internet

You may report your allegations to the Texas Abuse Hotline through the Internet at <http://www.txabusehotline.org>. This secure website provides a way to explain your concerns in writing.

You **must** provide your name and a valid e-mail address. Your identity remains confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee.

Once an Intake Specialist processes your report, you will receive a confirmation e-mail with a Call Identification Number. The e-mail will also tell you whether or not your report was forwarded to a local DFPS office for further investigation.

Please note that the Internet Reporting System is for ***non-urgent situations***. Receipt of internet reports may be delayed during times of high call volume to the Texas Abuse Hotline. The Internet Reporting System should NOT be used in urgent or emergency situations, including but not limited to:

- Injuries to a child age 5 or under or serious injuries to any age child
- Immediate need for medical care (including a suicidal child)
- Sexual abuse where the perpetrator has access or will have access to the child in the near future
- A child age 5 or younger who is alone or is likely to be left alone in the next 24 hours
- Any other situation you feel requires a response within 24 hours

**Call in reports about these (and similar situations) to the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400.**

**Always call local law enforcement first if a child is in imminent danger.**

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### **What information do I need when I make a report? What will I be asked to provide?**

Intake Specialists need specific information before they can forward a report of abuse or neglect to a local Child Protective Services (CPS) office for investigation. This information includes the alleged victim's address (or other information to help CPS contact the family) **and** an allegation that indicates abuse or neglect as defined by the Texas Family Code.

Not every allegation reported to DFPS will result in a CPS investigation. This is because not every situation involving concern for a child meets the legal definition for abuse or neglect under the Texas Family Code. It is crucial that you provide as many details as possible about the alleged abuse or neglect, as well as the family demographics, so that the Intake Specialist can make an accurate assessment of the situation.

Before making your report, please take a moment to gather any records or notes you have on the family so you have easy access to the necessary information. While you may not have all of the information noted below, providing as much of it as possible will allow DFPS to make the best decision about how to proceed.

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#### **Household Members**

All known persons living in the child's home (adults and children)

#### **Alleged Perpetrator(s)**

The person or persons suspected of abusing or neglecting the child. They may or may not be household members

#### **Collaterals**

Any other people who may have information about the situation. This may include school employees, neighbors, other relatives, medical staff, etc.

## INFORMATION REQUESTED FOR EACH PERSON

### Identification

- Name,
- Date of birth (preferred) or age
- Social Security number,
- Race/ethnicity
- Marital status
- Work
- School, or daycare name
- Address, phone number, hours in attendance, and grade level.

### Location

- Home address (including apartment name and number)
- Directions to the home
- Home phone number & cell phone number(s) functioning?

### Special Needs

- Do the child, parents, siblings, or alleged perpetrator have any special needs?
- If so, how do those needs affect their normal

**Note:** *Multiple forms of locating information are important so we can find the family as quickly as possible. For example, having only a school address is challenging if we need to locate the family quickly on a Saturday morning.*

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To send a report to CPS for investigation, an Intake Specialist also **must** have an allegation that meets the Texas Family Code definition of abuse or neglect. Giving as much detailed information as possible helps the Intake Specialist make as accurate an assessment as possible. *This is especially important with Internet reports because the Intake Specialist cannot ask follow-up questions.*

Learning to identify child abuse and neglect and deciding to make a report is very distressing for many people. However, DFPS can more accurately assess a situation if you frame your statements as objectively as possible. Clear and detailed information allows the Intake Specialist to make the most accurate assessment possible.

When you make your telephone or Internet report, you will be guided through a series of questions. The questions below are ones most commonly asked by our staff when assessing information.

## Allegation Information

### What happened?

- What led you to suspect abuse or neglect?
- Did you witness something?
- If so, what did you see?
- Where and when did it occur?
- Was anyone else present?
- If someone said something to you, who was it (the child or someone else)?
- What did the person say?
- When did the person tell you?
- Are you aware of anyone else who may have been told?

### Who abused or neglected the child?

- Do you know who may be abusing or neglecting the child?
- Does that person live in the home with the child?
- If not, how often does the perpetrator have access to the child or when will the person see the child again?
- Does the perpetrator have access to other children?

### What is the role of the parent/guardian?

- If the parent or guardian is not the perpetrator, is he or she aware of the concern?
- Do the parents or guardians seem protective?
- If they are not aware of the concern, will you tell them?
- How do you think they will react?

### What else is happening in the family?

- Are there factors at work that put additional stress on the family such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, gang activity, recent marital problems or job loss?
- Are there any issues that could pose a safety risk to our staff?
- Is anyone helping to support the family?
- Have there been any previous concerns?
- Do you know if they have been reported to our agency or another agency before?
- How is the family likely to react when we contact them?

## Questions Specific to Different Types of Abuse & Neglect

### Emotional Abuse

- How is the child being emotionally abused?
- If verbally, what is being said to the child?
- How is the child reacting to the abuse?
- Has the child demonstrated or verbalized any self-harming thoughts or behaviors?
- Is this child being treated differently than others in the home?

### Sexual Abuse

- What makes you think the child has been sexually abused?
- Has the child said anything?
- Are there physical indicators of sexual abuse (e.g., physical injury or sexually transmitted disease)?
- Has the child been examined by a medical professional?
- Is there a known sex offender in the home?

### Medical Care

- Does the child have medical needs (regular or acute) that are not being met?
- If so, what are those needs?
- Have these needs been determined by a doctor or other professional?
- What medicines should the child be taking and for what conditions are the medicines prescribed?
- What are the short term and long term consequences of not receiving care?

### Physical Care

- Are there concerns about the child's physical care?
- Does the child appear malnourished or seem to be losing weight?
- Is the child extremely dirty or inappropriately dressed for the weather?
- Is there a bug or rodent infestation in the home?
- Are there concerns about trash, rotting food, sewage, or animal waste in the home?
- Are there hazardous home conditions that pose a safety risk to the child (e.g., exposed wiring, broken glass, loose nails, or holes in the floor)?
- What effects (if any) have the home conditions or the cleanliness of the child had on the child's health (e.g., constant illness, rashes, etc.)?

### Supervision

- Is a young child being left alone or in the care of someone not capable of providing supervision (e.g., child is young; caregiver is intoxicated)?
- Are children living alone?
- Are very young children left outside unsupervised?

**Reminder: Call 911 if a child appears to need immediate medical attention or otherwise appears to be in immediate danger!**



If you have questions about a situation or are unsure if abuse or neglect is occurring, call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1800-252-5400. Our staff will help you determine if the situation needs to be reported.

# Appendix 2

## First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

### Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children

#### Agreement

Adults who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and 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 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 of their relationship is to be realized.

There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care. Leaders must be careful to protect the children they work with and to protect themselves and their church.

Therefore, we will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children. Neither shall we harass nor engage in behavior with children which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

Leaders will refrain from being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol or any other drugs which would impair their judgment or ability to function effectively in a leadership role with children. Leaders will be informed of this Code of Ethics and agree to it before assuming their roles. In cases of any violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I hereby agree to abide by this Code of Ethics.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Note: This Code of Ethics has been adapted from The Code of Ethics for Persons Working with Children and Youth in UUA Sponsored Programs and Events adopted by the UUA in 1986.

# Appendix 3

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

## Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Vulnerable Adults Agreement

Individuals who are working with vulnerable adults need to be well qualified to provide special nurture, care and support. The relationship between these individuals and the vulnerable adult must be one of mutual respect Workers must be careful to protect the vulnerable adults they work with and to protect themselves and FUUCH.

Therefore, in working with vulnerable adults, I will not engage in verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse. I will refrain from being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol or any other drugs which would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively while working with vulnerable adults,

I agree FUUCH may conduct a background and/or reference check on me and will provide the information necessary to accomplish this task.

I have read this Code of Ethics and agree to abide by it before assuming my role. I understand that in case of any violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# **Appendix 4**

## **NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR PROJECT OF FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON NURTURING CHILD CARE Policy for Care Giver Volunteers**

**The Nurturing Child Care Program (NCC)**, which provides childcare for the mothers in the Young Mothers Residential Program at Project Row Houses (PRH) creates this policy relating to volunteers serving NCC at PRH.

- The NCC will not discriminate in the selection of volunteers on the basis of race, color, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, creed, national origin, age, disability, marital status or military status.
- The NCC will adhere to the requirements of Section 1.1.a. (“Screening and Selection”) of the First UU Safe Congregation Policy, as it currently exists or may be amended, except for the six month requirement in 1.1.a.i. No NCC volunteer will be permitted to serve at PRH if the DRE determines he or she is disqualified based on the background check or references.
- The NCC will adhere to the requirements of Section 1.2.b. (“Supervision Guidelines and Policies”) of the First UU Safe Congregation Policy, except that
  - One of the workers at PRH may be the caregiver hired by PRH (the “PRH employee”) rather than a volunteer from FUUCH.
  - The NCC will strive to provide caregivers sufficient in number to meet the 3:1 ration of toddlers to caregivers.
  - The NCC caregiver teams reserve the right, in an emergency, to transport the children or any one of them to safety in an emergency upon notice to the PRH employee.
  - The PRH employee must be involved in every disciplinary meeting conducted with a child at PRH.
- In all other respects, NCC will adhere to the FUUCH Safe Congregation Policy.

# Appendix 5

## Limited Access Agreement

### First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

This congregation, consistent with principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association, affirms the dignity and worth of all persons, and is committed to acting as a religious community open to those who need worshipping and being among us, especially in times of serious personal troubles.

However, based on your background, there must be concerns about your contact with children and youth. This Limited Access Agreement, which will be revisited quarterly, sets forth behavioral guidelines which are designed to reduce the risk both to you and to them of an incident or accusation.

You are welcome among us, but in view of your history, your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth, and to assure that you will not be subject to accusations.

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all-adult social events, and supervised intergenerational events, only to the extent you agree to avoid all contact with children on church property or congregation-sponsored events. This general contact limitation includes the following specific items:

1. Please do not talk directly with children if you happen to be in their presence in public or private.
2. Please do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone, or participate in events for children and youth including such things as RE classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
3. Please remain in the presence of at least one (1) FUUCH adult at all times when children are present.
4. If a child of the congregation approaches you, either in the church building or in a community place, please politely excuse yourself from their presence and the situation as quickly as possible.
5. Please avoid being in the church building without another FUUCH adult in your presence when activities involving children are in session, such as the weekday nursery school or a youth group.

I \_\_\_\_\_ [Printed Name] accept that the following staff and officers of the FUUCH know of my circumstances so they may monitor the situation and protect the children/young people for whom they serve. I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I may be denied access to all FUUCH functions whether on the church property or elsewhere.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Minister \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Director of Religious Education \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Chair, Membership Team \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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President, Board of Trustees \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 6**

### **The Healthy Communications Process**

The purpose of the Healthy Communications Process (HCP) is to encourage congregants of FUUCH to speak up and out about their suggestions, and their positive or negative comments, feelings and concerns regarding:

1. The church and how it is functioning and meeting the needs of the congregants;
2. The ministries of the church and whether they are providing the assistance needed by the congregation and its congregants;
3. The Senior Minister and/or the administration of the church;
4. The staff and Assistant Ministers as to their providing the assistance to all; and/or
5. Personal Issues with other members, staff or ministers that may affect other congregants or the congregation in any way.

The Healthy Communications Team (HCT) is the conduit for all congregants who wish to express their affirmations and/or opinions or raise concerns about the church as indicated above. This process is the exclusive mechanism for insuring they are addressed appropriately, safely, and securely.

The HCP begins with a simple email, telephone call or written notation to a member of the HCT. Also, before and after services, a member of the HCT is usually stationed in Channing Hall with a notebook where comments and concerns may be inscribed. Any communications with HCT members may not be anonymous, including any written inscription in the notebook. The HCT member may review the communication and may ask questions if necessary, to make sure that the communication is completely understood.

Once received, the HCT member will transmit the communication to the other HCT members (for informational purposes only), the Senior Minister, the staff member best able to address the issue, and the Board. The Senior Minister will ensure necessary action will be assigned or directed to the person(s) who have the duty and responsibility to address the situation. A confirmatory responsive email will be sent to the communicant to inform him/her of the actions, if any, to be taken to address and resolve any issues, if possible. Oftentimes, for major facility or systemic issues, time, opportunity, and financial arrangements need to be made and will affect the timing and resolution of the issue.

Sometimes, the communication is a compliment which is directed to the person who is being complimented to respond to the communicant.

If there is a dispute among individuals, the HCT will first address the communicant and encourage them to directly meet with the offending person to mutually work to resolve the dispute. The member can also request that an HCT member arrange a meeting between the parties involved and attend as a neutral third party to try to assist in resolving the dispute, if possible.

A dispute with the Senior Minister will be handled in the same way as a dispute among members. If it is not resolved through the normal HCP, the Board will be informed and take appropriate action in accord with the Principles of Governance.

Note: Communications under the Healthy Communications Process may not be anonymous, but activities of the HCT will be conducted in a confidential fashion; as appropriate the communication and actions to resolve the situation will be kept on a “need to know basis” to the extent feasible.