

HIGH STREET UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SAFETY POLICY FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS

Affirmation of Principles

As a Unitarian Universalist religious community, our stated commitments to the inherent worth and dignity of every person; and to justice, equity and compassion in human relations, call us to responsibility for creating a safe environment that protects children and youth, promoting not only their development and spiritual growth, but by inclusion that of the congregation as a whole.

We pledge to do our best to support all those who participate in High Street programs and activities, especially those who come to us at risk or in crisis. Therefore we accept the responsibility to educate ourselves, and our children about misconduct, abuse, and exploitation, not limited to that of a sexual nature.

We affirm our commitment to maintaining an environment free of discrimination and harassment based on race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation. We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner that conveys mutual respect and compassionate consideration.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support this policy and to work with congregational leadership to address concerns and make appropriate responses.

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I. Sexual Misconduct, Abuse and Reporting

Policies and practices regarding sexual misconduct will emphasize prevention in ways that incorporate age-appropriate programs on human sexuality, i.e. the *Our Whole Lives* [OWL] curricula; training for religious education staff and volunteers; and information for the entire congregation on community resources that address issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Reporting. Georgia has a Child Abuse Reporting Statute. All church volunteers and staff who work with children and youth are mandatory reporters of child abuse. The High Street Board of Trustees expects the congregation's Minister, Board President, and Board members also to be mandatory reporters. Anyone in the High Street congregation who has knowledge that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child in the congregation has been the victim of abuse or neglect (whether it occurred during a church activity or not) is expected to report such evidence to 1-855-422-4453 no later. Georgia law makes it clear that clergy are not exempted under the majority of circumstances.

If a teacher, volunteer, or any other adult suspects abuse of a minor during a High Street activity, that adult must report to the **Safety Response Team**. Appropriate authorities must be contacted and all steps taken necessary to protect the minor. Other than notifying the **Safety Response Team**, the situation is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution, result in unwarranted damage to reputation of the accused, or endanger the child.

If the reported abuse involves a religious education worker or volunteer, that person will be relieved immediately of any duties involving the supervision, care, and teaching of children and youth until the matter is resolved.

As part of annual teacher and volunteer training, the Religious Education Committee will provide education relating to High Street's safety policy, reporting mechanism, **Code of Conduct**, and the congregation's overall need to create a safe environment for young people.

In cases of alleged misconduct or abuse, support, counsel, referral and promotion of healing will be available to all adults, youth and children of the High Street community via the Minister, Director of Religious Education and the Safety Response Team.

II. Safety Response Team

High Street Unitarian Universalist Church has a **Safety Response Team** in place to address allegations of inappropriate behavior. The **Safety Response Team** comprises the Minister, Director of Religious Education [DRE] and three members of the congregation appointed by the Board to serve a 3-year term. In case of conflict, a team member can be excused and replaced by a suitable alternate.

The purpose of the Safety Response Team is to:

- Aid in filing the mandated report
- Share information about appropriate resources
- Be openly available to discuss concerns regarding situations that have felt uncomfortable but may not (or not yet) constitute misconduct or abuse; and
- Help individuals clarify the source of their discomfort and to delineate possible means of resolving the problem.

The **Safety Response Team** has neither the legal authority nor the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. While charges are being investigated, the team will work to protect and support all involved parties in a way that allows High Street to function in a safe atmosphere, consulting with Unitarian Universalist Association resources if necessary.

Areas of special concern for Safety Response Team:

1. If the minister or any other church's leadership, paid or unpaid, is involved as alleged perpetrator or an alleged victim.
2. If a perpetrator within the High Street community discloses a current situation or past history.
3. If any adult within the High Street community alleges sexual harassment or misconduct from another adult member.

4. If any child within the community discloses fear, harassment, or abuse by a teacher, parent or other adult *within or outside of the community*.

III. Program and Classroom Policies

High Street's Religious Education [RE] Committee has drafted the following policies to ensure the well-being and safety of all children while they are on church premises or are engaged in Sunday religious education classes and church-sponsored activities:

1. Every religious education classroom will have at least two adults present with children during any class.
2. All Religious Education teachers are expected to attend yearly training in order to keep up-to-date on church policies as well as to understand curricula and pre-planned activities for the coming year.
3. Every religious education classroom will have at least two adults present with children during any class.
4. When a child under 11 needs a bathroom break, one adult will accompany the child to the bathroom door and wait outside until the child is ready to return to class. The adult will then accompany the child back to their classroom. A child eleven years or older may go to the bathroom alone. (At High Street, the restroom is within sight of the 11-12 year-old classroom.)
5. Individual classroom doors have a small window for viewing inside the room. If the door is closed, this window must be unobstructed so that a clear view inside is possible.
6. Registration forms for every child who regularly attends RE classes must be on file. NO CHILD may leave the church premises with an adult to play in the park or to go on a field trip without permission from legal guardians. The registration form gives permission for field trips for a specific church year. If a child is not registered but wants to leave the church with the class under adult supervision, written permission from the parent(s) is required before the child can participate.
7. Parents and guardians must disclose any court orders regarding custody and/or visitation rights or protective orders. In the event of a court order involving parental custody of a child of the church, we request that ALL RE teachers and/or volunteers pay attention to the facts presented at training regarding the case, and that ALL are vigilant on that child's behalf. In the case of new court orders that may arise during the RE year, the Director of Religious Education [DRE] will communicate the nature of the order to all teachers and/or activity volunteers as soon as they receive notice. With regard to protective orders, a plan to ensure the safety of the child will be agreed upon with parents or guardians, including a safe location where the child will be escorted if the need arises. This information will be shared with the **Safety Response Team**.
8. Registration forms for child/youth religious education classes have a space for notifying the DRE and Religious Education Committee of special situations, i.e.

allergies. The DRE will post a notice in your classroom reminding teachers [and hall monitors?] of the situation.

9. All young people are expected to be in a Religious Education class or in the sanctuary during Sunday morning services. Children and youth must remain in class until the class is over.
10. Sunday coffee hour is for all ages. Children are to remain in the fellowship hall during this time. Unsupervised classrooms are off limits.

IV. Volunteers and Staff

Young people may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior of leaders, teachers, and caretakers. Volunteers should not give children or youth the impression they will keep secrets for them. Confidentiality is not secret keeping. Adults do not repeat information told to them "in confidence" when what's told is of a major, crisis nature the child or youth should be encouraged to seek help from a parent or other [adult] authority figure [whom the child respects] while stating clearly the distinction between "keeping a secret" and withholding.

Volunteers and paid leadership

1. All adults engaged in Religious Education activities with young people under age 18, including the congregation's minister, must have a background check done by their local law enforcement office, A driver's license or a photo ID and a fee (about \$20.00) are required to obtain a background check from your local sheriff's office.
2. Religious education teachers must have been active participants at High Street for at least six months.
3. Volunteers working with middle and high school youth on a regular basis must be at least 21 years of age. Other regular teachers, monitors, nursery, childcare supervisors must be least 18.
4. Volunteers under 18 may act as helpers for event childcare and are encouraged to complete Red Cross Babysitter Training or equivalent course. An adult must be on the immediate premises at all times, available to assist if needed.
5. All compensated employees and regular RE volunteers must complete an application form, read this policy and sign Code of Conduct. Policy will be on the web.
6. Occasional volunteers, parents or church members who substitute in the classroom occasionally must read and sign code of conduct before assuming their duties. The Director of Religious Education [DRE] is authorized to supervise these volunteers.

V. Code of Conduct

Adults and older youth in leadership roles in this congregation play a key role in the community. It is important that they be qualified to provide the nurture, care and

support that will enable children and youth to develop a sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect.

1. Religious education workers shall not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. This includes behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
2. Religious education workers shall not engage in sexually harassing behavior or in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and youth.
3. Religious education workers shall not allow the use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol, or any illegal activities with children or youth.
4. In case of paid or volunteer workers failing to meet the above expectations, High Street will take appropriate action.

I have read and understand the High Street Religious Education policy and Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by its provisions and to honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this congregation.

Signed,

_____ Name and date

_____ Director of Religious Education or Minister