

Unitarian Universalist Church of St. Petersburg, Florida Safe Congregation Policy

(Approved by Board of Trustees May 13, 2009)

Preamble

We, the congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of St. Petersburg, recognize the importance of creating communities where everyone, including our very youngest to our oldest members, is safe. We recognize that our religious community is particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of our high level of trust, our welcoming spirit, and our strong reliance on volunteers in various programs.

We recognize the necessity to adopt guidelines to guard against incidents of abuse, exploitation or injury or victimization by significant objectionable conduct. We further realize that communities such as ours, operating in the best possible manner with all due concern, still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free environment.

We acknowledge that adequately addressing the need for a safe environment will mean change and the sacrifice of some convenience, yet we also know our responsibility to respond to reality and protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

In the spirit of affirming healthy relationships among adults, children and youth, we adopt the following guidelines relating to:

- The screening and selection of those who will work, on a voluntary or paid basis, with children and youth.
- Supervision of those working with children and youth.
- Reporting incidents and responding to such reports.
- Responding to issues related to members, friends and guests of the congregation related to sexual offenses.

Screening

All staff and volunteers who provide direct care, supervision or transportation of children or youth during regular Sunday services, special events or field trips must meet the following criteria:

- Religious Education assistants must be at least 18 years old.
- Nursery care workers must be at least 18 years old or, if younger teens are employed, there must be a supervising adult of at least 18 years of age present.
- All staff and volunteers working with children and youth will be asked to consent to a criminal background check.
- All staff and volunteers working with youth and children must complete an application form (attached) and supply two references. These references should be people who have known the applicant for at least three years, preferably in relation to previous work with children or youth. See Essential Questions for Persons Under Consideration (attached) which should be asked of the references provided by the applicant.
- The interviewer should also request that the applicant fill out the Voluntary Disclosure Statement (attached). A government issued photo identification, such as a driver's license or state identification card, must be presented to the congregational person conducting the interview.
- All staff and volunteers working with children and youth will sign a Code of Conduct form. (attached)
- Known sex offenders will NEVER have direct involvement with children and youth.
- All personal information collected for the above purposes will be kept confidential and stored in a locked file cabinet in the church offices.

Supervision Requirements

Supervising adults (staff and volunteers) will be responsible for the children from the time they leave the Sunday Service to attend Religious Education classes upstairs until a parent or guardian signs their child/children out from Religious Education. It is recommended that there always be at least two adults supervising children and youths per class room. An additional

supervising adult should be present for up to 10 elementary age children and up to 20 senior high youth, and so on.

Discipline:

- Corporal punishment may not be used under any circumstances.
- If a child or youth needs to be taken out of a classroom for serious behavior problems and returned to the parent or guardian during the Sunday Service, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) or Religious Education Committee Chair or Co-Chairs will be notified in order to follow up.

Transportation to and from events:

- If a child or youth will ride to or from a church event with an unrelated adult, that adult must have been screened and the parents of the child or youth must have signed a permission slip that specifies the date and purpose of the trip, the name of the child or youth, the name of the transporting adult and all necessary medical information, emergency numbers, etc. for the child/youth.
- All drivers must be at least 25 years of age and must provide proof of insurance and a valid driver's license.
- Everyone in the car must be wearing properly functioning seat belts. If necessary, depending on the age and height of the child/youth, car seats and booster seats will be used.
- No driver may be sleep-deprived or under the influence of alcohol or any drug which can affect physical or mental performance while driving.

Reporting:

Florida Statute Chapter 39.201 requires the reporting of known or suspected child abuse. Suspected abuse of vulnerable adults is addressed in Chapter 415. A report must be filed with the State of Florida through the Central Abuse Hotline at (800) 96ABUSE (962-2873). Be prepared to provide the following information:

1. Victim name, address or location, approximate age, race and sex;
2. Physical, mental or behavioral indications that the person is infirm or disabled;
3. Signs or indications of harm or injury, including a physical description if possible;

4. Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the victim, if possible. If the relationship is unknown, a report will still be taken if other reporting criteria are met

Any person attending church services or church events, who acquires knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that a child, youth or vulnerable adult has been exploited, intentionally injured, sexually molested shall report the incident to any officer or staff person in charge who must file a report in accordance with Florida Statutes.

In the case of an accident or other significant objectionable conduct, such as bullying, staff must complete an Accident or Incident report (attached). A copy of the completed "Accident or Incident Report" shall be given to the following:

1. Minister
2. Director of Religious Education
3. Religious Education Committee Chair or Co-Chairs
4. President of the Board
5. Parent or guardian of the alleged victim
6. If the alleged perpetrator is a minor, his or her parent or guardian
7. Law enforcement official, if applicable

Responding to Reports:

Should circumstances or events arise that indicate or cause reasonable suspicion that an adult worker is no longer a suitable person to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults, steps will be taken immediately to remove said adult from involvement or contact with them.

In taking such action, the Minister, Director of Religious Education, Board President and Religious Education Committee Chair or Co-Chairs, will afford the affected worker or volunteer an opportunity to know the charge against him or her, the evidence supporting such charges and the right to reply to or rebut the charges except in cases where abuse is alleged, which will be addressed by law enforcement.

Issues Involving Members, Friends or Guests of the Congregation Convicted sex offender who self-reports:

Offender shall meet with minister and provide information as to the nature and timing of their crime, legal status (probation, incarceration/parole), therapy/community monitoring compliance.

Minister will request permission to discuss offender's status with probation/parole officer, and therapist. If permission is not granted, offender will be advised that continued participation in the community will not be permitted.

The minister may continue to counsel the individual as they see fit so long as there is no risk on contact with children or other vulnerable members of the community, or may choose to end any relationship with the offender.

The minister shall advise the President of the Board of Trustees and other relevant individuals who will monitor attendance at worship services and church functions, reporting any violation to the proper authorities.

If the offender agrees to permit communication and signs a release form (generally provided by the therapist), the minister will notify the President of the Board of Trustees who will appoint a Safe Congregations Team to discuss the offender's request to remain in the community.

The team will investigate the facts as to the timing and nature of the offense, and gather the professional opinions of the therapist and probation/parole officer. Team members are advised to verify the qualifications of the treatment provider including membership in the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), education and experience.

The team will ask for professional opinions as to the risk for re-offending, and any special restrictions recommended for a limited access agreement, if the team recommends such an agreement.

If in the team's assessment, the person has completed or is successfully engaged in treatment, and has a low risk of recidivism, the team may choose to develop a Limited Access Agreement which shall require quarterly meetings with the offender and the committee and/or minister. The Agreement shall be reviewed annually.

If the offender refuses to sign the agreement they will be barred from the congregation and any violation will be reported to the proper authorities by any team member. The team may also elect not to offer a limited access agreement and proceed with informing the offender that they are not permitted on church property or at church functions held off-site, and the consequences of violating the directive.

Details of limited access agreements are to only be shared with persons who need to know about the offense as part of monitoring compliance, which may extend to staff or other individuals outside the Team. Anyone witnessing non-compliance shall report it to a member of the team for further action. Agreements will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and if stored in electronic format, will be password protected.

Convicted sex offender who does not self-report:

Anyone who discovers a convicted sex offender in the congregation should report that information to the Minister or the President of the Board of Trustees. The minister will contact the individual upon discovery of the conviction. The policy and procedures will be reviewed with the offender, and the same process as outlined above will be applied if the individual wishes to remain in the community.

If the individual does not wish to remain in the community, the minister shall advise the President of the Board of Trustees and other relevant individuals who will monitor attendance at worship services and church functions, reporting any violation to the proper authorities.

If the offender wishes to remain in the community, an additional step of gathering information regarding the reason for not self-reporting will be included in the team's work and used in their deliberations.

Existing member or friend of congregation who is charged with a sex offense:

The President of the Board of trustees will convene a Safe Congregations Team as soon as possible to review charges. The accused may be invited to meet with the committee, however legal representation may discourage this and refusal to meet with the committee on this basis should not be deemed

as an admission of guilt, or of being uncooperative with the church policy or process.

The accused shall be asked to temporarily and voluntarily discontinue attendance at church services or events while the legal process is unfolding. If this is not acceptable to the individual charged, a limited access agreement can be considered by a Safe Congregations team. The minister shall continue to offer pastoral support for the individual during this time if so requested.

No final decision regarding continued participation in the community will be made until the charges have been adjudicated. Anyone found not guilty of charges will require no additional interaction with the team and may continue to participate fully in the community.

If found guilty, the individual may be permitted to request a limited access agreement at any time in their rehabilitation process, however the team will strongly depend upon the guidance of the treatment professionals when determining the appropriateness and timing of such an agreement.

Education of Congregation

Education of church members regarding the existence of these policies will be provided at least annually, and to parents upon registration of children in religious education classes, and at UU 101 classes. Parents will be encouraged to review offender registries when someone befriends the family, and know what signs to look for if they suspect their child may have been or may be in danger of abuse by an adult.

Application for paid or volunteer employment

Date of application _____

Name _____ Birth Date ____ / ____ / ____
last first middle

Home Address _____
Street address City State Zip

Social Security # _____ - _____ - _____ E-mail _____ @ _____

Home Phone () _____ - _____ Alternative/Fax () _____ - _____

I can begin work: _____

What type of position or role are you applying for? _____

Salary desired (if paid employment)? _____

Past work history: Provide a full record of all employment – paid and volunteer – and explain any gaps in employment. (use a separate sheet if needed)

Dates	Employer/Supervisor	Address & Phone	Nature of Work	Reason for Leaving

Indicate any employer you do not wish us to contact, and the reason: _____

References: Give names and addresses of three persons [not relatives] having knowledge of your character, experience, work habits, and ability. (use a separate sheet if needed)

Name	Address	Phone

Education: Beyond High School

Year	School	City and State	Degree Granted

Answer these questions *only* if applying for a position requiring driving:

Do you have a valid driver's license? Yes No State _____

Do you have a current chauffeur's-type license? Yes No

Do you have a commercial driver's license? Yes No

Criminal Record: Have you ever been convicted of a crime, other than a minor traffic offense?

If yes please describe. (note: a prior conviction is not an automatic bar to employment. The type of conviction and when it occurred will be evaluated by the congregation before any decision is made.)

Yes No – Explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

Applicant's Statement and Release

I certify that the information in the Application for Paid or Voluntary Employment and in the Voluntary Disclosure Statement is true and complete and I understand that misrepresentation and/or withholding of information will result in the rejection of this application or my discharge if discovered after employment begins. I authorize the Unitarian Universalist congregation or related organization to make inquiries regarding my history and character of prior employers, schools, etc. and hereby release employers, schools or individuals from all liability in responding to inquiry in connection with my application and release the employer from all liability with respect to such inquiries.

I understand that if employed, and unless my employment is under a contract or agreement or covenant that indicates otherwise, I will be an employee "at will" and may terminate my employment at any time with or without cause or notice and that the employer also has that right. I also understand that no representative of the congregation or related organization, other than _____, has any authority to enter into any agreement for employment for any specified period of time or to make any agreement contrary to the foregoing and that such agreement must be in writing. If I am employed, I agree to abide by the employer's policies, rules and procedures and any changes thereto.

Applicant signature _____ Date _____

Essential and Recommended Questions

Essential Questions for Persons Under Consideration for Positions in Ministry Religious Education, Church Music, Church Administration, and Contact with Vulnerable People

Adapt, as appropriate, if talking with a *personal* reference versus an *employment* reference.

Hello. My name is _____. I'm a member of (name of congregation). (Name of candidate) has applied for the position of (name of position) within our congregation. I have the responsibility to contact individuals who know (him / her) to better understand if (he / she) is a good match for the job.

May I ask you some questions?

1. What is your relationship with (name of candidate)?
2. How long have you known him/her?
3. Describe the work for which he/she was responsible?
4. On a scale of 10 with 10 being the highest, how well did he/she perform in the job?

Please elaborate, sharing his/her strongest attributes and areas in which he/she could have performed better.

5. What was/is his/her reason for leaving your employ?
6. Would you consider rehiring (name of candidate), if the occasion arose?

If no, please explain why?

7. To your knowledge, has he/she ever been accused of any behaviors that would be considered unethical, inappropriate, illegal?

Please explain:

8. (Name of candidate) will be working with children. Is there any reason to believe that children would not be safe with him/her?

If yes, please explain:

Additional *Recommended* Questions for *Non-Ministerial* Candidates:

1. How would you describe the applicant's relationship with others? (If talking with a former employer, you might ask specifically about relationships with coworkers, subordinates (if applicable), and with supervisor.
2. Does the candidate have a positive or a negative attitude?

Please elaborate:

3. The position for which he/she is being considered is (elaborate). How well would you expect him/her to perform in this role?
4. Are there any other comments you wish to make about this candidate?

Additional *Recommended* Questions for *Ministerial* Candidates:

(adapted from the [Ministerial Settlement Resources Guide](#) (PDF) of the UUA)

1. As far as you know does _____ have clear personal and professional boundaries? i.e. can they say no when too many demands are put upon her/his personal time?
2. Does _____ tend to have a strong support system?
3. Does _____ have strong family ties?
4. Is _____ warm and available to her/his congregants?
5. Is _____ a strong leader?

6. Does _____ implement the vision of the congregation with clarity?
7. Is _____ strong on pastoral care? Describe please.
8. Have you known of a personal life crisis that _____ has had and how did he/she handle it?
9. Have you experienced or do you have a perception of how _____ would handle a difference of opinion issues with a congregant?
10. Have you experienced or do you have a perception of how _____ would handle a difficult pastoral care issue?
11. What is the most significant contribution that _____ has made to the UU ministry?
12. What has been the greatest challenge presented to _____ ?
13. Is there anything in his/her personal and professional life that we should know?
14. Would you want _____ as your minister?
15. At this point ask the Reference to add whatever they wish.

Voluntary Disclosure Statement

Date of application _____

Name _____ Birth Date ____ / ____ / ____
last first middle

Home Address _____
Street address City State Zip

Social Security # ____ - ____ - ____ Other names used (e.g. birth name) _____

Home Phone () ____ - ____ Alternative () ____ - ____

Drivers Lic. # _____ State issued _____ Expiration ____ / ____ / ____

1. Previous residence(s) for last 7 years (include college and home residences):

Address _____	State _____	Years _____
Address _____	State _____	Years _____
Address _____	State _____	Years _____
Address _____	State _____	Years _____

(continue on a separate sheet if needed)

2. Have you ever been convicted of any crime relating in any manner to children, youth, or vulnerable adults and/or your conduct with them?

Yes No If yes, please explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

3. Have you ever been convicted of any crime whatsoever involving children, youth or vulnerable adults? Yes No If yes, please explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

4. Have you ever been adjudged liable for civil penalties or damages involving sexual or physical abuse of children, youth, or vulnerable adults? Yes No

If yes, please explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

5. Are you now or have you ever been subject to any court order involving sexual or physical abuse of a minor, youth, or vulnerable adult, including, but not limited to a domestic order for protection? Yes No If yes, please explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

6. Have your parental rights ever been terminated for reasons involving sexual or physical abuse of children? Yes No If yes, please explain: (use a separate sheet if needed.)

I understand that:

- a. The congregation may deny employment, paid or volunteer, to any person who answers “yes” to any one of questions 2-6. If hired and the congregation later discovers circumstances that would indicate a “yes” answer to any of the above questions, employment may be terminated immediately.**
- b. The congregation may terminate employment or volunteer services of any person if that person is found, regardless of when discovered, to:
 - 1) have a history of complaints of abuse of a minor;**
 - 2) have resigned, been terminated or been asked to resign from a position whether paid or unpaid, due to complaint(s) of sexual abuse of a minor, youth, or vulnerable adult; and/or**
 - 3) have falsified or omitted information in this disclosure statement.****
- c. The information provided on this form is subject to verification, which may include a criminal history check and request from any central registry of child abusers.**
- d. This disclosure must be updated yearly.**

Signed _____ Date _____

Signed by Minor’s Parent or Guardian _____ Date _____

Code of Conduct of Adults Working with Children and Youth

Adults who work with children and youth under the ages of the church are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the Church as well.

Remember: you are acting both ethically and legally as an agent of the Unitarian Universalist Church of St. Petersburg.

Adults who work with children and youth at the church or any church-sponsored events are expected to always have the best interests of children and youth at heart. Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. Our charge to children and youth workers is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness. In this manner, we hope to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and communities. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that the church has of adults working with children and youth. They are as follows:

“Friendship” with Children and youth—Although we hope that children/youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to children/ youth for “friendship” is not significantly mature to be in a position of authority or responsibility over them. A “friendship” is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/child/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. It is expected that any relationships adults may form with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitative.

Unofficial Contact with Children/youth—Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a child/ youth and adult. These can be not only healthy, but also transformative for both. However, the potential does exist for a person who does not have the best interest of a child or youth at heart will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a child/youth as a mentoring relationship.

If you wish to be in contact with a child/ youth outside the normal channels of church-sponsored events, it is imperative that your behavior both be, and appear to be, above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a child/ youth outside of church-sponsored events must be with the full knowledge and consent of the parents or guardians. You should let the Minister, the Board President, Director of Religious Education and Religious Education Committee Chair or Co-Chairs know about the nature and extent of any unofficial contact with a child or of misconduct by keeping the church and the parent/guardians aware of your actions.

Sexualized Behavior—It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative and/or overly affectionate behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content or to make “double entendres.” Physical expressions of affections, such as hugs, have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them and the adult must not allow them to be prolonged or pressured.

Confidentiality—For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when information is of a major crisis nature (such as that the child/youth is a victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious problem with drugs, etc.) or that leads you to believe the child/ youth will be a danger to him/herself or others, you must not keep such information to yourself.

Encourage the child/youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure, and inform them that it is your duty to report this information. (Do not give a child or youth the impression that you will keep a harmful secret for them.) For the safety of the child/youth, yourself and the church, you must consult with a person of greater authority in the church about an appropriate course of action. Whenever there is any doubt, it is best to initiate such a consultation.

Accordance with This Code of Conduct

Any person in the church who disagrees with any provision of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of the church. However, until such time as the church chooses to alter any portion of its provisions, those who work with children or youth must abide by the code as written.

By signing below, the signatory indicates that they have read this Code of Conduct and agrees to abide by it. If a worker violates any of its provisions, they may be removed as a worker at church events.

Signature of Worker with Children or youth

Date

Printed Name of Worker _____

A. ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORT

Name of Injured Person _____

Date: _____

Type of Injury _____

Response: _____

Activity during which injury occurred: _____

Location where injury occurred: _____

How did injury occur: _____

Who was present: _____

What could be done in the future to prevent similar injuries? _____

Signature of Adult Completing Report _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Religious Educator or RE Committee Member _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Appropriate Authorities Contacted: (circle all that apply)

Fire Department Police Division of Youth and Family Services Not Required

Name _____ Date _____