

Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting Policy
(UUCA Personnel Manual – Updated November 2011)

The Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta believes that our commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations, compels us to create a safe environment that protects children and youth from harm and promotes their spiritual growth. In adopting this policy, we accept the responsibility to educate ourselves about child abuse, and to take the steps that are necessary to assure the policy's successful implementation.

PREVENTION

What is Child Abuse?

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

There are four categories of child abuse according to UUA:

Physical Abuse: Deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child. Instances of child abuse include violent assault with hands, feet, a knife, or other implement, or burns, fractures, and bruises resulting from being beaten, shaken, or thrown.

Sexual Abuse: Engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child; using a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or other child. Any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of another person, abuse has occurred. The child is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. Sexual abuse can include fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, and exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution. Child sexual abuse is illegal regardless of whether the child "consents" or not. Consent is not an issue. The offender bears the entire responsibility for the abuse whatever form it takes.

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

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- Sexual Fondling
- Oral, genital, and/or anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments such as statements intended to seduce children;
- Pornographic videos
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse may be very difficult to identify and document. Emotional abuse deeply affects a child's self-esteem by subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It can include close confinement, inadequate nurturance, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse.

Neglect: Children have basic physical, nutritional, and environmental needs that must be supplied. Withholding of food, clothing, medication, and proper living quarters, as well as abandonment are all acts of neglect. Neglect can include physical, emotional, or educational neglect through such actions as inadequate supervision, health hazards in the home, refusing to seek treatment for illnesses, providing inadequate emotional nurturance, and deliberately permitting chronic truancy.

Prevention Through Training and Education

Greater understanding of the complexities of sexuality and abuse will help us to avoid situations of abuse. The Director of Religious Education (DRE) is responsible for working with the appropriate Councils to implement the following education program.

For our children and youth:

- Age appropriate information about development and sexuality. Our children must be empowered to protect themselves and report abuse. Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality training will be offered annually for all ages.

For RE teachers, paid childcare staff, Board members, Lay Ministers, Council Directors, all professional staff and volunteers working with children and youth:

- Annual training and written information designed to prevent child abuse, including this policy.

For the entire congregation:

- Information on child abuse including workshops, adult RE classes and/or written materials, including this policy.
- A copy of this policy will be included in all new member packets.

Prevention Through Screening and Supervision

All staff as well as RE teachers and others working with children and youth on a regular basis:

- will have been a member or friend for at least six months or have references from other churches that include a minister or DRE.
- will have completed a screening application and have been interviewed before assuming their duties. References will be requested and kept on file for new RE teachers and others working with children and youth.
- will have attended at least one training session on child abuse
- will have read, understood and signed the "Code of Behavior."

Any other volunteers (e.g. occasional helpers) will have read, understood and signed the "Code of Behavior."

Confidential criminal background checks will be conducted for all paid staff prior to hiring or signing of any contract and for teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth. In the case of paid staff, information will be shared with the Personnel Committee and Board of Directors as appropriate.

At least two adults should be present in each classroom on Sunday mornings, and on every outing, overnight and other church-related activity with groups of children. Exceptions to this guideline (for example to transport children from one location to another) require written permission from parents.

The DRE or designee will periodically observe volunteers working with children in the classrooms and other church programs and events.

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

This policy requires any member or friend who has been convicted of, is under current indictment for, or has been involved in any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or of child abuse to make him or herself known to the Senior Minister/designee and/or the DRE. Other members or friends of the congregation who become aware of such information should report this to the Senior Minister/designee, Board President or DRE, who will then decide how to handle the situation.

All persons with histories of sexual offenses will be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement (see Supplemental Policies). An individual in violation of the Limited Access Agreement will be asked to leave by the Senior Minister/designee, a member of the Response Team or Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.

Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting Policy

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Safe Congregation Panel

The DRE, in consultation with the Senior Minister/designee, will identify a Safe Congregation Panel of responsible and knowledgeable people who could be called upon to be on a Response Team .

The panel members will be qualified by their (1) professional or volunteer experience in working with children and/or child abuse issues or through other special training (2) understanding of this policy and other UUA "Safe Congregation" material; and (3) knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, including applicable Georgia state laws.

The DRE will keep an up-to-date list of the names and phone numbers of all members of the Safe Congregation Panel.

Reporting Within the Church

Anyone who has concerns about inappropriate behavior or suspected child abuse by teachers, childcare workers or other adults or youth in the congregation should report their concerns immediately to the Senior Minister/designee, DRE, or Board President. When an allegation of child abuse is reported, the responsible person receiving the allegation should take the necessary steps to:

- Abide by Georgia law on reporting child abuse
- Take appropriate action to assure protection of the children in the congregation
- Convene a meeting of a Response Team (see below for definition).

Response Team

In response to a specific situation, a Response Team will meet. The Response Team will consist of people not involved in the incident and will include the Senior Minister/designee (ex-officio), the DRE (ex-officio), the Board President and selected individuals from the Safe Congregation Panel. If the incident or allegation involves a staff person, that staff person will be removed from the Response Team and the Board will be notified immediately.

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

- Safety of the Children - The safety of the children in the church program should be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely actions should be taken to insure their safety

based upon the severity of the allegation and other pertinent factors. All allegations will be taken seriously.

- State Law - A copy of Georgia state law on child abuse should be kept in the child abuse policy notebook (maintained in the DRE's office) and should be referenced when an incident is reported. The Response Team designee will make appropriate and timely reporting to the Georgia Department of Family and Child Services (DFCS) and/or police. The current number will be posted in the office at all times.

DeKalb County Department of Family and Child Services
404-370-5000 (General Information)
404-370-5066 (Reporting and Night Emergencies)

DeKalb County Police
404-294-2512

- Professional Resources - The Response Team should call on or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within and outside the congregation.
- Only the person or persons designated in writing by the Response Team may comment on any incident to the congregation, press or public. Only those staff or members of the congregation specifically authorized in writing by the Response Team may contact any parties involved in the incident.
- Whom to Inform - Decisions about whom to inform about the incident (parents, teachers, the congregation, the child or children in question, classmates, the alleged perpetrator) and the information to be provided should be made in a careful but timely manner by the Response Team. The decision should be made based upon the individual situation in consultation with legal counsel and appropriate law enforcement officials. The congregation's insurance carrier should also be notified.
- Notification of Board and District Executive - If any action is taken or recommended by the Response Team, the President of the UUCA Board and the District Executive of the Mid South District will be notified 1) that a Response Team has been convened, 2) of the nature of the issue and 3) whether a report has been or will be made to DFCS. The President will report to the full board in a closed meeting at the earliest appropriate time.
- Confidentiality - Since these matters are sensitive, it is important that all persons involved, including the reporting person and the accused, maintain the level of confidentiality recommended by the Response Team.
- False Accusations -- The protection from false or mistaken allegations of volunteers who teach in the RE program or otherwise interact with children is also an important goal of this policy. A key way to prevent false or mistaken allegations is to abide by the prevention guidelines outlined in the Prevention portion of this policy. We should be sensitive to the disruption and damage a false accusation may cause to both the volunteers and the children involved. This is true even when the accusation is one due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what seems a child's straightforward report of an event.

Leave of Absence & Restrictions with Children

In order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk and to protect the accused from further suspicion, decisions about removing the alleged perpetrator from interacting with children in the RE program or other programs will be made by the Response Team. A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to the children and other factors that may relate to the situation. Actions other than removal from teaching will be given full consideration depending upon the situation. If a report is made to DFCS or law enforcement, or if deemed appropriate by the Response Team, this leave will be mandatory.

Other Inappropriate Behavior

Some incidents or allegations in the RE or programs may involve behavior that is not clearly child abuse, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate. In such cases, the DRE may call on the Response Team to review the situation and decide what action to take.

Additional Responsibilities of the UUCA Board and Safe Congregation Panel

The Senior Minister/designee, unless involved in the incident, will make the final determination of any additional consequences appropriate to the violation of this policy, including, but not limited to, termination of a staff person and any additional action in the case of volunteers beyond that for which the Response Team is authorized. The Board shall inform the following of any determination of serious violations by the professional staff of this policy:

- The Mid South District Executive
- The Director of the Professional Leadership Staff Group of the UUA
- The Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the UUA or comparable credentialing committee
- The appropriate professional organization

The DRE will be responsible for such duties as arranging training for the congregation and development of RE teacher training and screening materials. The Safe Congregation Panel will review this policy annually and report and recommend changes.