

THE FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF ALBANY
TOWARD A SAFE CONGREGATION
*Policies for Prevention of Sexual Misconduct, Physical Abuse and Harassment
And Guidelines for Responding*

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I. SAFE CONGREGATION TASK FORCE PHILOSOPHY

Our Unitarian Universalist approach to religion puts great faith in our human potential. We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations. While we recognize there will be moments many of us fall short of this high aspiration, a few individuals will reject these principles for themselves and others. It is our obligation as a congregation to protect each other, particularly children, youth and vulnerable adults from those who would take advantage of them. Recognizing that exploitative and disrespectful relationships can exist in any population, we commit the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany to taking reasonable actions and precautions to prevent and stop abusive, disruptive and harassing behavior in our facilities and programming. This obligation to protect the vulnerable must be balanced with our mission to welcome everyone who feels drawn to Unitarian Universalism. Our welcome must extend to those who may experience rejection and discrimination by society including people of all ages, races, colors, national origins, disabilities, political and religious beliefs, and those who have been convicted of a crime. Agreement to, respect of, and compliance with this policy will guide the inclusion of every participant in our congregation. Those with histories of abusive, disruptive and harassing behavior may incur special restrictions on their participation in our congregation (including prohibitions on teaching children's classes, being a youth advisor, chaperoning events and trips with children and youth and mentoring youth.).

A variety of potential dangers are inherent in operating a congregation. These sources of concern include: the physical site (including buildings and grounds); the operation of the Religious Education (RE) program; transportation and supervision of children off-site; and instances of inappropriate behavior involving members, friends, and/or staff of the congregation; as well as protection of our congregation from ethical and legal liability.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership and teaching positions, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth. Those working with young people in the context of our Unitarian Universalist movement have a crucial and privileged role, one which carries with it a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, or in any other role, the volunteer has a special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways which are affirming and inspiring to all involved. Implementation of this policy will endeavor, as much as possible, to develop methods and solutions in harmony with the mission of our congregation to "strive to excite the human spirit and inspire its growth and development; to respond to moral and ethical issues in our local, national and world communities; and to sustain a vital and nurturing congregational life."

II. UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PRINIPLES AND SEXUAL ETHICS

Our Unitarian Universalist Principles can be restated in terms of sexual ethics. These appear in every age level of *Sexuality and Our Faith*, the companion volume to *Our Whole Lives*.

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person.
Every person's sexuality is sacred and is worthy of respect, and therefore, is not to be violated.
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relationships.
We treat others as we would want to be treated; therefore, sexual exploitation and interpersonal violence is wrong.
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation.
Accepting each other, as we are, means doing no harm and fostering well-being in one's self and others.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
In our relationship to others, our freedom of sexuality is as important as the responsibility for it.
- The right to conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregation and in society at large.
As a community and as an institution, we are responsible for creating a secure and safe environment.
- The goal of a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.
We have the opportunity to create the kind of environment that lends itself to peace, liberty and justice in human sexuality, and we can become a model for the rest of society.
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.
When we respect each person's sexual integrity, we honor the wholeness of life and we respect the web of all existence.

III. DEFINITIONS

The terms used in this document will have the following meanings:

- A. Abuse includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment; offensive physical or sexual contact, including physical or sexual abuse; physical or sexual harassment; physical or sexual molestation; or physical or sexual exploitation.
- B. Physical abuse includes offensive physical contact or activity that causes bodily injury.
- C. Sexual abuse means any sexual touching of anyone or any activity that causes a person to engage in any sexual act or conduct without that person's consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.
- D. Physical harassment means activity that places a person in fear of bodily injury by such acts as threatening or tormenting behavior, compelling a person by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which the person has a right to abstain, knowingly restricting the movements of another person without that other person's consent, communicating to a person a threat to commit an act against that person or another person or entity where the natural consequence of the threat is to place that person in fear or cause that person to engage in conduct in which that person otherwise would not engage, or similar offensive physical or verbal conduct.
- E. Sexual molestation and sexual exploitation means activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual contact to which that person would not voluntarily consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.
- F. Sexual harassment means making sexual advances or requests for sexual favor or contact to another person, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where the other person by words or conduct has indicated that such words or conduct are not desired, or where a reasonable person would expect that such words or conduct would not be desired.
- G. Inappropriate behavior means disruptive activity or behavior unsuitable for conduct in a faith community, specifically:
 1. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express their 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. This policy shall apply to members, friends or others who attend events at FUUSA. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - a. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
 - b. The disruption of church activities;
 - c. Diminishment of the appeal and comfort of the congregation to its potential and existing membership.

IV. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINISTER AND CONGREGANTS

We as a community expect the Minister to abide by the Unitarian Universalist Minister Association's (UUMA) Code of Professional Practice, which acknowledges that ministers are the recipients of automatic trust, and comments directly on the issues of clergy sexual misconduct and the abuse of the trust congregations place in their ministers. In subscribing to this code, ministers agree not to exploit the powers inherent in their roles.

The complete text of the code is published in the UUMA Guidelines which is available in the Society library and/or office from the UUMA, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, or the UUMA website (<http://www.uuma.org/guidelines>).

In case of violation of this code, the Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT) will contact the St. Lawrence District Executive and Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) who will initiate an investigation. The SCRT will then work with the Board of Trustees to establish the most appropriate methods of communicating, counseling and responding to reactions within the congregation and the community.

V. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CONGREGANTS

We as a community, expect the Director of Religious Education (DRE) to abide by the Liberal Religious Educators Associations (LREDA) Code of Professional Practice, which acknowledges that religious educators are also the recipients of special trust. In subscribing to this code, professional religious educators agree not to exploit the powers inherent in their roles.

The complete text of the Code is published in the LREDA Guidelines and Code of Professional Practice which is available in the Society library and/or office, from LREDA, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Ma 02108, or at the LREDA website (www.uua.org/lreda/content/code.html).

In case of violation of this code, procedures outlined in this policy will be used.

VI. PREVENTING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, PHYSICAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

Prevention education, training and careful hiring, along with safety procedures are concrete steps toward creating a safer environment for all concerned.

A. Education and Training:

1. Information, knowledge and understanding support the development of healthy relationships based on self-esteem and respect for others. Greater understanding of both sexuality and abuse will make us better able to avoid situations that could lead to abuse. To this end we believe it is important to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children, our members and friends of the Society. We will provide programs as follows;

- a. The Director of Religious Education (DRE) and the Religious Education Council (REC) are responsible for:
 - i. Offering age-appropriate information about development and sexuality for our children, youth and adults on a regular basis, including sexual abuse prevention and
 - ii. Keeping employees, advisors and parents informed of this policy and reviewing it at least annually through the use of the following: The Code of Ethics for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders and RE Safety Procedures.
2. The Safe Congregation Task Force is taking short term responsibility for:
 - a. Promoting congregational awareness about this policy. This includes the idea that this policy is to be treated as a “living document” that may need to be amended to reflect changing needs.
 - b. Informing Society members and attendees on recognizing signs of sexual abuse, the responsibility of individuals to report suspicions and allegations of child abuse and complaints of sexual abuse and harassment occurring between adults to the Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT),
3. The SCRT recommends that the Board of Trustees take on the long-term responsibility to see that sections VI.A.2.a. and VI.A.2.b. are accomplished as necessary.

VII. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SAFETY PROCEDURES & CHILD CARE AT CONGREGATIONAL EVENTS

The prevention methods listed below are intended to protect the children and youth of our community and to provide guidelines for employees and staff in their interactions with children and youth.

A. Adult Volunteers

1. Volunteers in the Religious Education (RE) programs at The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany (FUUSA) must meet the following criteria:
 - a. Prior to participating in the RE and Youth Group programs, all adults 18 years old or older will agree to a yearly background check that includes two references.
 - b. Volunteers will be asked to complete an Application Form for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders (**Section XV, Appendix A**), the Agreement to Teach Form (**Section XV Appendix B**) and the Code of Ethics for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders (**Section XV, Appendix C**).
 - c. Volunteer teachers will attend an annual teacher training
2. A variety of supervisory methods are listed below to help Society leaders avoid setting up situations in which personal boundary issues can become a problem. These methods are intended to help leaders and teachers decrease the risk of misunderstandings and offer some support for

handling various concerns. Some of the supervisory methods we encourage are:

- a. Regular consultations with the DRE
- b. On-going training
- c. Parental permission whenever necessary
- d. Visible classroom activity
- e. Support for following the behavior guidelines of the Safe Congregation Policy

B. Working with Children and Youth

While it is important that volunteers be capable of maintaining meaningful friendships with the young people they work with, they must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and youth, and refrain from using young people to fulfill their own needs. Young people are in a vulnerable position when dealing with people older than themselves, and may find it difficult to speak out about any inappropriate behavior of their leaders, teachers, and caregivers. Young people are in a unique situation to observe behavior or be party to a conversation in which a possible abusive situation (either within or outside the Society) is revealed. In this situation, it is the adult's responsibility to report any concerns immediately to the Minister or DRE. The RE Council will provide regular training on dealing with suspected abuse or neglect.

C. Religious Education Classes/Programs (Nursery – 12th Grade)

1. All classes including the nursery must be taught by a minimum of a two-person teaching team. Youth ages twelve to seventeen may assist the two-person team in the classrooms Nursery through Fourth Grade. This requirement applies to off-site FUUSA RE activity as well as on-site classes. Teams should consist of at least one adult who has been an active participant at FUUSA for at least one year or after six months if they have had previous teaching experience in a UU setting. Parents may serve as classroom aides or visit classes at any time. Teachers are subject to the approval of the RE Council. One individual may be briefly alone with a group when the other must leave as dictated by common sense and necessity for such purposes as bathroom breaks and escorting individual children away from the group.
2. For grades 7-12, the youth group teachers must be at least twenty-five years of age.

D. General Supervision Guidelines (Sunday Morning Programming)

1. Each child will have a registration form on file that includes information about special needs and permission to accompany their RE class and teachers on walks around the Society or neighborhood on Sunday mornings. All personal information is held confidential.
2. Parents or guardians are responsible for their children before the service begins and after the RE program has ended.
3. During services and classes, children must have a parent or another responsible adult on the premises unless prior arrangements have been made with the DRE.

4. The DRE, or designated supervisor, will do a walk through of all RE spaces to check in with teachers during classes. Exceptions to this procedure are discouraged; however there will occasionally be Sundays when it will not be possible for the DRE to do a walk through.
5. Nursery through Third Grade parents (or designee) must pick up their children from the RE program at the end of the service. The DRE or appropriate designee will locate parents (or designee) who fail to comply.
6. Volunteers in the Religious Education program may meet privately with a child or youth only with the prior approval of the DRE and the parents or guardians.

E. Childcare for Congregational Events

1. The Childcare Coordinator will maintain an up-to-date list of approved childcare providers. When feasible, childcare providers will be selected from this list. Other childcare workers must be approved by the DRE.
2. Persons who have been active adult participants of FUUSA for at least one year may also serve as childcare providers.
3. There will be at least two childcare providers for each event. If more than 10 children are anticipated, additional provider(s) will be scheduled.
4. If only two childcare providers are scheduled, they may not be related to each other by birth, marriage, or adoption, nor may they be in a committed relationship. If additional providers are scheduled, they may be related to one of the first two providers.
5. One childcare provider may be briefly alone with a group when the other must leave as dictated by common sense and necessity for such purposes as bathroom breaks and escorting individual children away from the group.

F. General Sleepover Guidelines

1. Adults supervising youth sleepovers must be active participants at FUUSA for at least one year or after six months if they have had previous youth group experience in a UU setting before volunteering at FUUSA. Exceptions may be made for parents who are staying over with their own youth.
2. There will always be a minimum of three adults present during sleeping hours regardless of the numbers of youth attending. Two of these three adults must remain awake during these sleeping hours. During a sleepover at FUUSA, there should be a minimum ratio of one adult to seven youth.
3. During sleepovers at the Society, all outside doors will be locked against entry once the last youth has arrived, and will remain locked until parents arrive for pick-up in the morning.
4. A Parent/Guardian Consent and Medical Release will be required for each youth at the sleepover.
5. Each youth will be required to complete and sign the Youth Code of Ethics for each sleepover event.
6. The adult supervisors will maintain a list of attendees.

G. Transportation To and From FUUSA Sanctioned Events

1. It is the responsibility of the FUUSA RE Program, or the parents, to provide safe transportation to and from FUUSA sanctioned events. The FUUSA RE Program requires the following:
 - a. When traveling to and from outings, conferences, meetings, and other Society activities, a parent/guardian signed permission slip is required for each child/youth participating or being driven to an off-site activity. In addition, each youth must sign the Youth Code of Ethics.
 - b. Drivers must be at least 25 years old and must sign the Code of Conduct. High school youth may not drive themselves or others to events.
 - c. Every person in the car will have a seatbelt and age appropriate seating arranged in reference to airbag safety rules.

No driver may consume alcohol or use any form of drug, which can affect physical or mental performance before or during the carrying out of his or her duty as a driver. It is acceptable to have only one adult in a car en route, but there must be a minimum of 2 adults, and a 1:7 ratio of adults to youths, upon arrival at the destination point.

A minimum of two adults must accompany a group going off-site. The primary on-site adult leader may make exceptions for exigent circumstances.

- d. Each driver must provide proof of license, registration, and insurance coverage.
- e. There will be a phone chain for parents of children on trips at the discretion of the DRE for arriving at destination and when leaving to return to home site.
- f. Copies of the documents referenced in paragraph (f) and the parental permission slips shall be filed in FUUSA's office for each off-site activity. Permission slips when required are to be kept on file for one year.

VIII. SAFE CONGREGATION RESPONSE TEAM

- A. A Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT) will be established and in place at all times, with the names and phone numbers of team members available to all members and friends of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany (FUUSA). The Team will be composed of the Minister, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) and two members of the Society who will be appointed annually by the Board of Trustees. It is preferable that all the members of the team be familiar with issues including, but not limited to:
child abuse, child abuse reporting requirements, sexual assault, sexual

harassment, relevant resources in the community, and related legal issues.

In cases of a conflict of interest, a Team member must be excused from participation and replaced by a suitable alternate. If an allegation involves the minister or a member of the minister's family, the President or Vice President of the congregation will replace the minister on the committee. There shall be at least one committee member of each gender at all times.

- B. Guided by the Philosophy Statement, the Safe Congregation Response Team will have the following responsibilities:
 - 1. To receive and respond to allegations of possible abuse.
 - 2. To have familiarity with state law regarding child abuse reporting
 - 3. To know about community resources for survivors of child abuse and treatment for sex offenders.
 - 4. To be a resource for people to share their concerns.
 - 5. To assist the Religious Education Council with planning implementing sexual abuse awareness training for RE teachers who will work to integrate sexual abuse information into the RE curriculum.
 - 6. To meet with convicted sex offenders/criminals and/or individual who have been accused of inappropriate behavior to develop a Limited Access Agreement (LAA) for participation in Society activities.

IX. RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS OF SEXUAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE OR HARASSMENT

- A. There are several situations that will prompt a response of the SCRT, including but not limited to:
 - 1. A child, youth or adult reports possible abuse by a Society official, member or attendee;
 - 2. A Society official, member, friend or attendee suspects that a child or youth is being abused;
 - 3. A child or youth reports possible abuse by a family member or other individual; or
 - 4. A Society official learns that a Society member, friend, or attendee (child, youth or adult) is under investigation for allegedly abusing others.
- B. The SCRT may ask an individual against whom a complaint of sexual or physical abuse or harassment has been made to negotiate a Limited Access Agreement.

X. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE TO COMMUNITY AUTHORTIES

Child abuse is directly addressed in New York State law. Reporting laws must be followed. When any of the situations described above is suspected or reported, it must immediately be brought to the attention of a member of the Safe Congregations Response Team.

- A. It is not the function of the Safe Congregation Response Team, the Minister, Director of Religious Education, the President of the Board of Trustees or any other member of the congregation to conduct an investigation into accusations

of child abuse. Rather it is both New York law and the policy of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany to immediately report any situation in which any person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected. Such a report must be made to the New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment at 800-342-3720 or 518-474-8740.

- B. Members and friends of FUUSA are asked to report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the Safe Congregation Response Team. Once a report is made, the Team will review the matter and report the allegations to the appropriate authorities on behalf of the Society. The Society will rely on the decisions of those authorities as to the validity of the complaint. The safe Congregation Response Team will formulate the Society's response to allegations and findings under these guidelines and develop any appropriate plan of action, as needed.
- C. In all cases, the Minister will also notify the President of the Board and the St. Lawrence District Executive, and seek their advice and counsel. Additionally, the President or their designee will notify the Society's insurance company. In the event the accused or alleged abuser is the Minister, reports will be filed by, and the notifications referenced above will be the responsibility of, the President of the Board of Trustees. All activities of the SCRT will be conducted discretely and with respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all parties. Investigations will, to the fullest extent possible, be conducted in a confidential fashion and will only be disclosed as necessary and appropriate as determined by the SCRT.

XI. HANDLING OF OTHER KINDS OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

- A. The Safe Congregation Response Team will receive and process: 1) complaints of sexual abuse and harassment occurring between adults and 2) allegations of child abuse not accepted for investigation by outside authorities. The Safe Congregation Response Team will formulate the Society's response under these guidelines and develop an appropriate plan of action, as needed.
- B. Incidents of alleged sexual or physical harassment of minors that are not accepted for investigation by the New York State Office of Children & Family Services shall be referred to the DRE and Minister who will consult and/or involve the Safe Congregation Response Team as necessary. A plan shall be developed to address and resolve these complaints. The parent(s)/guardian(s) of the minor(s) shall also be informed of this plan and involved, as appropriate, in its development.
- C. Incidents of alleged sexual or physical harassment between adults will be referred to the Safe Congregation Response Team. The Team will formulate an appropriate response involving all parties to the fullest extent possible. Members and friends of FUUSA may request the assistance and/or intervention of the Safe Congregation Response Team if they feel it is necessary or that it would be helpful.

- D. The FUUSA Personnel Committee handles incidents of alleged sexual or physical harassment involving FUUSA staff.
- E. Review Procedures
1. Any member of the Safe Congregation Response Team may receive reports of abuse and harassment. It is requested that other members and friends of FUUSA refer such reports to a member of the Team.
 2. In the event of a report of abuse, the Safe Congregation Response Team will ensure that all parties involved in such a report will be appropriately treated within the context of an internal review. During such reviews, communication will be limited in order to facilitate a fair and objective review.
 3. It must be established that the situation is: i.) not one involving a child that requires reporting to authorities; and ii.) one that is too serious to be resolved informally.
 4. All complaints received by any member of the Team should be brought to the attention of the full Team, including the Minister and the Board President within 24 hours.
 5. One or more members of the Response Team will meet with the complainant as soon as possible to get an account of the complaint or concern and gather facts including: the action(s) complained of, place, date, time and persons observing the event, if any. One or more members of the response team will meet with and interview any persons observing the event. One or more members of the Response Team will meet with and interview the person whose behavior has been complained of. When the necessary information has been gathered, the response team will meet to discuss pertinent information and to determine facts.
 6. It is agreed that the more quickly allegations can be reviewed and complaints addressed, the less damage will occur to individuals and the society.
 7. In the time between the complaint and its resolution, it must be determined whether anything needs to be done to restrict the activities of the person whose behavior has been complained of to ensure that abuse is not repeated. For example, if a teacher is accused of inappropriate conduct toward a student, should the teacher be removed from teaching until the complaint is investigated and resolved? If a complaint involves the minister, should the minister stop preaching or stop having one-on-one meetings with congregants?
 - i. Restrictions, if any, must be appropriate to the complaint and the situation. The outcome of the review will determine if the accused person can return to their former activities.
 - ii. While FUUSA and the Safe Congregation Response Team will proceed with a presumption of innocence, the protection of friends and members of the society is of the highest importance.
 8. Once the facts have been reviewed, the Response Team shall meet separately with both the complainant and the person whose behavior was complained of, and inform them of the determination. The response team will, to the extent possible, involve both parties in determining remedial action to be taken, if any.
 9. The Response Team will document their findings and the outcome of the

process. The file should be sealed and stored where it is not generally accessible.

10. When a review is completed, the Response Team will report the findings and any action taken, as necessary and appropriate under the circumstances. For example, a report may be made to the President of the Board, the full Board or the Congregation, or all of the above, as required by the circumstances.
11. Once the review is completed, the Response Team will report the findings and the course of action to the Board. As it deems warranted and appropriate, the Board may advise the Response Team to disclose the findings and course of action to all parties, including the entire congregation.

These procedures are intended as guidelines and should be modified, as necessary under the circumstances.

XII. SAFETY NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE

In the event of a report of abuse, the Safe Congregation Response Team will ensure that all parties involved in such a report will be appropriately treated within the context of an internal review. Proper interventions will be implemented to ensure that the alleged abuse is not repeated. During such reviews, communication will be limited in order to facilitate fairness and objectivity.

XIII. PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE

- A. Following a report and review of suspected abuse, the Safe Congregation Response Team will also develop a plan to address the pastoral needs of those involved and of the congregation, if necessary.
- B. The protection of adults who teach in the RE program, or otherwise interact with children at FUUSA, from false or mistaken allegations is also an important goal of this policy. If after a review is completed, it is determined that the accused person was falsely accused, the Response Team will provide the appropriate means and support for restoring the status and personal comfort of the accused person to the fullest extent possible.

XIV. GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING SEX OFFENDERS

A key component of a commitment to keep children and adults safe in our congregation is developing policies and procedures to use when a person who is a known sex offender wants to be part of the congregation, or when an existing member is accused of a sexual offense. This policy and procedure can also be applicable to people who demonstrate other kinds of disruptive behavior. The message to the sex offender is that he or she can participate in adult worship, adult social, and adult educational activities and must covenant with the congregation to avoid all contact with children.

As a religious community, we strive to provide compassion, support and reconciliation to those who have indicated that they have changed and have taken responsibility for their actions. We will provide this with awareness and vigilance so that all are safe when those who have sexually offended join or return to our religious community. 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, as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of any one individual. If the presence of the offender or person exhibiting disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions must reflect our emphasis on safety.

A person with a history of sex offenses has similar needs for a faith community as other members. But the sex offender needs more attention to assure that his or her involvement does not pose risks to the congregation and that standards are in place for protection against false allegations. Such involvement needs to include helping him or her manage his or her behavior and not get into situations which in the past led to offenses. We will allow the presence of the offender at society functions only if he or she truly wishes to participate in the life of the society, realizes the extent of his or her crime or offense, and the difficulty his or her presence may cause to attendees of the society. We believe that if he or she is truly committed to interacting safely and respectfully, he or she will understand and accept the need for the imposition of restrictions. We expect that he or she will demonstrate his or her desire to participate in the life of the congregation by signing and complying with a Limited Access Agreement. We believe that our support and watchfulness can help in his or her recovery. This policy of mindful inclusion lets the abuser know that members of the society are aware of his or her past and are watching his or her actions.

To maximize safety of all, FUUSA must assure that the convicted sex offender does not have the opportunity in our congregation to re-offend, and that he or she avoids situations where he or she can be accused falsely. A person with a history of sex offense against children should never be allowed to be with children, work with children or youth, or socialize with children at any FUUSA function. Any person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of, any sexual misconduct cannot be permitted to be involved in any religious education or youth group activities.

The core response of the Safe Congregation Response Team to a convicted or accused sex offender is to formulate a LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT (LAA, APPENDICES XVI, D.) This agreement invites the person with a history of sex offenses to participate in certain aspects of congregational life, setting clear boundaries, including what the individual will not do. Typically, an LAA will specify participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all-adult social events, and if appropriate, well-supervised intergenerational events. It requires the person to avoid all contact with children on FUUSA's property and at congregation-sponsored events. This includes not talking with children, not volunteering for or chaperoning children's events, including children's religious education classes, and not talking with children during worship or children's activities during intergenerational events. The LAA can require that a small group of members of the society be formed to offer support to the offender and accompaniment to him or her as deemed necessary. It can also require the person to remain in the presence of an adult who knows their situation at all times when children are present. The LAA denies the person access to keys to the building and requires he or

she never be in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as Sunday school or youth group. The sample LAA will be modified based on the feedback of the committee and the individual circumstances of the offender.

HOW A SEX OFFENDER BECOMES KNOWN TO A CONGREGATION

Ideally, a person with this background would come to the minister before he or she started coming to the congregation to discuss limits on his participation. Sex-offender-treatment specialists often encourage their clients to do just that. After attending a service or congregational activity, people may reveal their backgrounds to the minister. Or another congregant may have prior knowledge of or become aware of a congregant's history of sexual offenses. This includes names seen on the sex-offender registry and knowledge of a long-standing member of FUUSA who has been accused of a sexual offense. Education of the congregation regarding "Safe Congregation Policy" must include informing all congregants that in these cases they should inform the minister, who will inform and consult with the SCRT.

The SCRT will designate a staff or society member to examine the state sex-offender registry to check for matches with people participating in FUUSA activities.

STEPS TO TAKE

- 1) As soon as the presence of a sex offender becomes known to the minister or the SCRT, the minister should meet privately with the individual to discuss the concerns that have been raised. The Team can check the local sex-offender registry before meeting with the person. (If the minister is the one being accused, this manual and these steps do not apply. Instead, the SCRT should be contacted immediately and the president should contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA and/or the District Executive serving the congregation. If a family member of the minister is the accused, the president should be contacted to proceed with this policy.)
- 2) If the minister determines that there is cause for the concern, the person should then be asked to meet with the SCRT. At this point the society's insurance carrier will be contacted to keep them apprised of the situation. The individual should be asked the names of any helping professionals that have or have had responsibility for his or her supervision and/or treatment. This might include a therapist, parole or probation officer, doctor, group home staff, or other clergy. The individual may then be asked to sign a release form so that the minister or other SCRT member can contact any such care provider. As the SCRT deems appropriate, the Team will ask providers for their assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will re-offend and whether additional restrictions beyond the standard Limited Access Agreement are needed. It may be helpful to know the number, timing and nature of past offenses to allow consideration of different situations. The SCRT can ask the accused to go for a professional assessment with a therapist who specializes in working with sex offenders. The congregation may choose to provide the funding for this assessment. If the offender refuses permission to contact the therapist or refuses to go for an assessment, the congregation can refuse his participation in any congregational activity. If the assessment

indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, and will agree to avoid all contact with children, the Response Team should develop an individualized Limited Access Agreement. If the professional assessment indicates that the person is at high risk for re-offending, the Response Team will deny that person attendance at any FUUSA function.

- 4) When it is determined that a LAA is appropriate, the individual will be required to sign this Limited Access Agreement. The Response Team should decide time intervals for evaluating compliance to the LAA and making adjustments as needed. After each evaluation, the offender will be required to sign the revised LAA. If he or she refuses to sign and comply, he or she can be denied access to congregation functions and FUUSA's property. An offender who refuses to sign an LAA should know that if he or she attends any FUUSA function, he or she will be asked to leave by a member of the Response Team or the Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, police will be called for assistance.
- 5) When the congregation changes ministers, Directors of Religious Education, or Presidents, the new official must be informed of this situation to ensure provision of pastoral support for the offender and the congregation, and for the continuity of enforcement of the LAA. In sharing information, both written and oral, confidentiality and privacy should be respected to the fullest extent possible. Copies of files including the Limited Access Agreement should be treated with care and kept in a secure file drawer.

If and when legal questions arise, the minister and/or President should contact a lawyer.

- 6) At a minimum, The Minister, the Director of Religious Education, the President, the Response Team and the small support group for the offender need to know that the person is attending functions at FUUSA, that he or she has agreed not to have contact with children, has signed a Limited Access Agreement, and that he or she should never be alone with children and adolescents.

The congregation will be educated about this policy, specifically, that its goal is to keep children and adults safe and that one of the methods is for the names of sexual offenders to be known to key people. As the Team deems appropriate, the minister, or another member of the SCRT will share the name of a particular individual with any person with legitimate reasons who requests it, in a private meeting.

XV. DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation, as expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles. We affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's physical or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express their beliefs is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and

promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the disruptive person or persons.

There may be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the society's building creates concern. These include perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child, and the disruption of church activities.

The following is of FUUSA's policy in dealing with these issues:

1. If an immediate response is required, it will be undertaken by the Minister or President, if available, or by the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the disruptive person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such time as it can be resumed without disruption. If further assistance is required the Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are taken without the Minister or President being present, the Minister and President must be notified. All plans for follow up must be referred to the SCRT.
2. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the Safe Congregation Response Team. The SCRT will respond observing the following;
 - a) The Team responds to situations as they arise. Determination of what behavior is acceptable will be made by the SCRT, guided by the philosophy and policies of this document.
 - b) One or more members of the Response Team will meet with the person describing the disruption as soon as possible to get an account of the event or concern and gather facts including: the allegedly disruptive action(s), place, date, time and persons observing the event, if any. One or more members of the response team will meet with and interview any persons observing the event. One or more members of the response team will meet with and interview the person whose behavior has been complained of. When the necessary information has been gathered, the SCRT will meet to discuss pertinent information and to determine facts, and to formulate an appropriate response.
 - c) Parents or guardians must be contacted immediately when the situation involves their child.
 - d) Once the facts have been reviewed, the response team shall meet separately with both the person describing disruptive events and the person whose behavior was allegedly disruptive and inform them of the determination. The response team will, to the extent possible, involve both parties in determining remedial action to be taken, if any.
 - e) The Response Team will document their findings and the outcome of the process. The file shall be sealed and stored where it is not generally accessible.

The committee will decide upon the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following four levels of response are recommended:

LEVEL ONE	Either the Minister or another member of the SCRT shall meet with the individual whose behavior was allegedly disruptive to communicate the concern. The person's viewpoint of the matter will be elicited, valued and documented. Team members will then assess the situation.
LEVEL TWO	If the basis of the original concern is determined to be valid, this finding will be clearly communicated to the person in question and a contract for remedial action clearly defined.
LEVEL THREE	If the person in question refuses to negotiate a contract, refuses to abide by a contract, or is engaging in behavior of sufficient severity, he or she may be excluded from the Society for a specific period of time.
LEVEL FOUR	The individual whose behavior was allegedly disruptive may be permanently excluded from the Society's premises and from all congregational activities.

3. Should the SCRT decide that Level Three or Four be initiated, they will consult the Board of Trustees prior to action being taken. The four levels of response recommended by this policy may be applied in the order determined by the SCRT and the Board of Trustees in their judgment.

XVI. APPENDICES

- A. Application Form for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders
- B. Agreement to Teach Form for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders
- C. Code of Ethics for Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders
- D. Limited Access Agreement

XVI. APPENDICES

A. APPLICATION FORM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS AND YOUTH GROUP LEADERS

Thank you for your interest in working with the children and youth of our congregation. Our congregation takes seriously our responsibility of assuring the safety of our youth.

Please fill out this form and give it to the Director of Religious Education. Thank you for your support in providing a safe and secure environment for all of the congregation's children and youth.

Name

First:

Middle:

Last:

Have you ever used a different name?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please list with dates:

How long have you been attending this congregation?

Address/Employment

Street:

Town, State, Zip:

Number of years at current address:

If you have not lived at this address for at least 5 years, please list any previous addresses with dates:

What states have you lived in since you were 18 years old?

Home phone:

Work phone:

Place of work:

Number of years at current employment:

May we call your current employer for a character reference?

No () Yes ()

If not, please tell us why:

History

A. Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to any criminal offense?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please explain:

B. Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to any criminal offence as a result of having been charged with rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

C. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by any employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

D. Have you ever been convicted of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

E. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children and youth?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

Congregation History and Prior Work with Children and Youth:

List congregations you have attended during the past five years:

Name of congregation:

City, State:

When did attend:

List all previous work involving children and youth (list name, type of work performed, and person you were responsible to):

Please list two references who are not relatives who have known you for at least three years and who are familiar with your character as it pertain to your experience with children or youth:

1) Name:

Phone:

Address:

Relationship to you:

2) Name:

Phone:

Address:

Relationship to you:

I authorize the congregation to contact references and other congregations to obtain information about my background regarding my character and fitness for work with children and youth. I authorize references to provide such information about me. I hereby release and hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to release and hold harmless this congregation, its trustees, employees and volunteers.

Further, I understand that a member of the staff may check the sex offender registry and/or contact the local police or other agencies for more information about my background.

This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff or volunteers or participating in a response team, or as required by law.

My signature below indicates that I attest that the above information is true and correct.

Signature:

Date:

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B. AGREEMENT TO TEACH FORM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS AND
YOUTH GROUP LEADERS

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Cell phone:

Email:

I have read and understand FUUSA's Safe Congregation Policy

I agree to uphold these principles in my work with the children, youth, adults, and families of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany.

I have signed the Code of Ethics statement.

I affirm that I have never been, convicted as a result of, or pled guilty to any sexual crime. I have never engaged in any form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. I have never been determined to have engaged in any sexual offenses in any civil, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum or other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, I have met to review this information confidentially with the Minister and the Religious Educator.

Further, I agree to notify the Minister and the Director of Religious Education immediately should I be accused of sexual abuse, sexual offenses, sexual harassment, or other sexual improprieties in the time that I am working with children and youth in this congregation.

Signature:

Date:

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C. CODE OF ETHICS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS AND YOUTH GROUP LEADERS

Thank you for being a volunteer in our Religious Education Program. The contribution of your time and talents is much appreciated.

Please read both the attached FUUSA Safe Congregation Policy and the Code of Ethics and then sign below indicating that you have read them and agree to their provisions. Thank you very much.

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

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if positive potential 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 and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

“Friendship” with Youth – Although we hope that youth and adults will develop a genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for “friendship” is not sufficiently mature to be in a supervisory position. 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/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 relationships that an adult has with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitative.

Unofficial Contact with Youth – Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. Such relationships can be not only healthy, but sometimes transformative for both. It is our concern however, that in some cases a “predator,” who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart, may try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with one of our youth outside the normal channels of events sponsored by FUUSA, it is imperative that your behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a youth outside of FUUSA-sponsored events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents or guardians.

Furthermore, you must inform the DRE, minister or president of FUUSA what you are doing. This is for the protection of the youth, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the society and the parents and guardians aware of your actions.

Electronic Communications – Recognizing that the means for communication, especially electronic communication, are changing rapidly, FUUSA upholds the principle that parents are the final arbiters of how and when their child or youth should receive communication from adults. Electronic and phone communications to children or youth initiated by adults in the RE program or other programs at FUUSA will only be used for the purposes of conducting the business of the group involved (e.g. scheduling of upcoming events, distribution and discussion of minutes, announcements of schedule changes, etc.). Adults responding to communication from a child or youth, or communicating in online communities, will maintain appropriate boundaries and use discernment, always acting in the best interest of the safety and wellbeing of the child or youth.

Volunteers shall be informed of the Code of Ethics and Safe Congregation Policy and will agree to them before assuming their roles. In cases of violation of the Code of Ethics, appropriate action will be taken.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand both the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany Safe Congregation Policy and Code of Ethics, and will comply with them in all regards.

Signed _____ Date

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D. DRAFT LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT PROVISIONS CONFIDENTIAL

BACKGROUND

1. A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Safe Congregation Response Team. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Minister, the Director of Religious Education and the members of the Response Team (or other appropriate congregational entity). It will be kept in a locked file in the office.

2. The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are desire to worship with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited as described below to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to unfounded accusations.

Agreement:

Within the parameters of this agreement, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- Do not talk with children.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present. These adults include:_____
- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as Sunday school or youth group.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future society functions and society property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Date: