

## SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

1. We welcome religious education volunteers who have been attending our morning services at least six months. This allows individuals and families to gain an understanding of Unitarian Universalism and to integrate themselves into the life of the congregation. During this time, new and prospective members may act as a third volunteer in a classroom with two unrelated background-checked unrelated adults.
  
2. All current and potential staff and volunteers who will have formal contact with children (0-12th grade) in any on-site church-sanctioned or church-led program must complete a “screening form”, sign an “agreement to protect children”, and read and sign a “code of ethics form”. This would exclude church picnics, covenant meetings held in people’s homes, visitors that are guest programmers, etc. It would also exclude overnight activities and other off-site excursions.
  - a) These forms must be filled out and signed annually.
  - b) The Religious Education Coordinator (REC) or a trained Board of Trustees (BOT) appointed screener will evaluate the forms and will flag any that need more information or follow-up.
  - c) In the unlikely event that there are any serious concerns regarding the forms filled out by the volunteer or staff, the REC or BOT-appointed volunteer will consult with the minister. S/he will also consult a Unitarian Universalist (UUA) manual written by the Reverend Debra W. Haffner, “balancing acts: keeping children safe in congregations” for assistance in responding to these concerns.

3. The RE program will orient and train all volunteers that work with children regarding policies and expectations.
  - a) Medical/First Aid procedures.
  - b) Fire Safety (exits, drills, use of matches, etc.)
  - c) Behavior expectations of children and adults (see behavior policy)
  - d) Child abuse protection—how to recognize possible signs of physical abuse and neglect and sexual abuse.
  - e) When and how to report suspected child abuse and neglect.
  - f) Relevant information and resources will be provided in a volunteer folder.
  - g) Visitors or guest programmers do not need to be background checked or trained as long as there are 2 background-checked unrelated adults in the room. However, even if the visitor is related, but not a parent, they may not take a child to the bathroom without a checked and trained ASCC volunteer to accompany them.
  
4. All staff and volunteers who will have contact with children in any on-site church sanctioned or church-led program will have their criminal backgrounds checked with NSOR, State of Michigan's ICHAT, and/or other relevant states' or countries' law enforcement agencies.
  - a) These checks are only for current and potential staff and volunteers who will have care for children, not for everyone in the congregation. Teens and BOT-approved pre-teens may volunteer to work with kids as long as they are not being pulled from youth programming and with parent permission.
  - b) The background check will be performed before the staff/volunteer is allowed to volunteer with the children.
  - c) Background checks will be performed annually or as needed by a BOT-approved volunteer or by the REC.
  - d) The goal of the background check is to flag any prior behavior which may have a negative effect on the children, which include, but are not limited to,

child abuse or neglect, child sexual abuse or misconduct and sexual abuse or misconduct.

- e) In the unlikely event that there are any concerns regarding information revealed in the background check, the REC or trained BOT-appointed volunteer will consult with the minister. S/he will also consult a UUA manual written by the Reverend Debra W. Haffner, “Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations” for assistance in responding to these concerns (until further policies can be created in this regard).

5. Appropriately staffed classrooms and other activities.

- a) REC, or a designated person, must patrol the hallways during class time. In the case of a behavior issue or other emergency, when the usher or hall monitor is not available, use of a child helper in older grade may be used to help supervise the class while the teacher involved with the behavior incident finds the parent. (For example, grades 4–8, who will assist the one adult left behind.) The classroom door must remain open.
- b) Schedule at least two unrelated adults in each classroom, outside playground, break-away group or other on-site program. Two or more older children (7<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade) can be trusted to be alone with one adult as long as it is in a “transparent” room. (door–opened, window on door—with hall monitor)
- c) When it’s not possible or practical to have two unrelated adults in a classroom, the REC will attempt to recruit substitutes from the safe congregation’s checklist as soon as possible, or combine or cancel classes.

6. Create safe classrooms/programs.

- a) Implement the emergency evacuation procedure (scheduling practice drills at least twice a year, as required by State of Michigan law).
- b) All children will be registered or complete a “visitor’s card” which outlines special needs or medical concerns as well as parent location in building.

- c) Any medical concerns will be noted on the classroom attendance sheets located in the classroom bins.
  - d) Emergency “contact cards” for nursery and preschool and registration forms for other grades shall be available to all volunteers in the classroom bins.
  - e) Volunteers will be trained in the behavior policy, Guidelines for Bathroom Visits document and Safe Congregation policy.
  - f) A First Aid kit will be centrally located and available to all volunteers.
  - g) Latex gloves will be available to nursery caregiver and other volunteers.
7. The greatest possible care will be given to protect the privacy of the children and adults in the ASCC programs.
- a) All forms that include personal information, including background check information, applications, and registration forms, will be destroyed following the screening, with the safe congregation checklist kept in an on-site, locked location by the REC.
  - b) Only information which is relevant to working with the children will be shared with the RE Board or staff.
  - c) REC, BOT-appointed volunteer, and minister will work to protect the privacy of all children and adults in the program and will report all incidents of abuse and neglect as mentioned in Section 2, above.

#### BATHROOM VISITS

##### NURSERY:

Parents of nursery-aged children should not leave the church premises during the childcare period.

Diapers should be changed in the nursery, where two unrelated adults are present. Under no circumstances should one adult volunteer take a child into a bathroom or other separate room for a diaper change.

#### PRE-K AND K:

Parents should be encouraged to toilet their children before they drop them off for childcare.

Parents of Pre-K and Kindergarten-aged children should not leave the church premises during the childcare period.

Young children should not visit the bathrooms alone. An adult (typically the hallway monitor) should accompany children to the bathroom and then wait outside the closed door before the return trip. All bathroom visits must include two or more same-sex children. Only the RE bathrooms in the RE hallway may be used.

Some Pre-K children need help undressing to use the toilet. When such assistance is given by an adult, there should be a second adult present, and the undressing must be the minimum needed to get the job done. If two unrelated adults are not available, a single adult may use the “hand over hand” method of assistance: the adult places his/her hand over the child’s and uses the child’s hand to partially undress the child. The “hand over hand” method has the other advantage of actually teaching the child how to undress him/her self.

#### GRADES 1-3:

Ideally, 1st –3rd graders should not visit the bathrooms alone. An adult should be notified (typically the hallway monitor) and monitor the child(ren) in the bathroom. Only the RE bathrooms in the RE hallway may be used.

#### GRADES 4-6:

4th-6th graders can visit the bathrooms alone. After requesting permission, the child may walk to the bathrooms without direct supervision. The hallway monitor is always available for general supervision. Only the RE bathrooms in the RE hallway may be used.

## GRADES 7-12:

After requesting permission, youths may visit the bathrooms alone and unsupervised. The hallway monitor is always available for general supervision. Youths may use the RE bathrooms or the adult bathrooms in the main hallway.

## BEHAVIOR POLICIES

In order to facilitate the best possible experience for the children in ASCC RE, the RE Board would like to implement the following policy with the help and support of our RE parents.

1. If your child has any special needs with regard to behavior, please inform the classroom teacher upon dropping your child off.
2. Since all of our classroom teachers are volunteers who have willingly agreed to spend their time in the interest of creating a dynamic experience for children, we ask our RE parents to review and reinforce the aspects of good classroom behavior. This includes an emphasis on developing good (active) listeners, taking turns, showing respect for other kids (kids and adults), sharing and cleaning up after ourselves.
3. If there is a situation where the child misbehaves in a manner that disrupts the class, hurts property or feelings of others, or uses inappropriate physical behavior or language, we will rely upon the classroom assistant to give 3 verbal warnings to the child before removing them from the class. Please understand that as teachers we will make an effort to work with all different temperaments and try to explain the reason, if not obvious to the child. In some situations, it may be necessary to remove the child immediately.
4. Whenever a child is removed from a classroom the teacher will turn over the child to another RE volunteer who will alert one of the ushers in the sanctuary. An usher will then, as quietly as possible, ask that parent to come to the lobby to

meet with the child and the RE volunteer. We hope parents will understand why we might not turn an upset child loose into the sanctuary to find his/her own parents.

5. We also ask that parents do not drop off their children and then leave the premises without indicating to the instructor who the responsible on-site adult is.

6. With respect to having a positive experience for all, we ask that parents of small children leave valuable toys at home and make sure the child is rested, fed and healthy. For older children, we ask that all electronic devices, except cell phones, be left at home. We ask that cell phones are left off during instruction time.

It is our aim to create an atmosphere that enhances the spiritual growth of both our children and adult volunteers. If for some reason there is any concern about our policy or your child's behavior, we will be willing to work further with any parent to reach that goal.

Respectfully submitted by the RE Committee