

## **SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY**

UPDATED September 2022

- 1.** We welcome religious education volunteers who have been attending our morning services for at least three 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 adults. Parents are always welcome to stay and observe classes. Minimum age of volunteers is 16. Those volunteers under 18 years old will need to provide one reference, those volunteers 18 and older will need to have a background check.
- 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 background check, 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.
  - 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.
- 3.** The RE program will orient and train all volunteers that work with children regarding policies and expectations.
  - a.** Medical/First Aid procedures. First Aid kits are located in the nursery and RE cabinet. AED located in the main hallway.
  - 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 folder or electronically.
- 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.** The background check 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 with responding to these concerns (until further policies can be created in this regard).

**f.** In the case that a potential staff person or volunteer has lived a significant portion of their lives outside of Michigan, a more extensive background check may need to be purchased to ensure the person is safe to be around children. This may be done with some deliberation between the REC, Minister, and BOT.

**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 and the hall monitor is not available, use of a child helper in an older grade may be used to help supervise the class while the teacher involved in 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, breakaway group or other on-site program. Two or more older children (7th-12th) 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, combine or cancel classes, or add one additional unrelated volunteer.

**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 contact information of the parents/guardians.

**c.** Any medical concerns, allergies, or special needs, will be kept in folders inside of locked clipboards that will be kept in the nursery and classrooms during the church service. The Minister, REC, Teachers, and the Nursery Attendant will have access to the key. At the end of the day the clipboards and keys will be stored separately to keep information private.

- d.** Volunteers will be trained in the Behavior Policy, Guidelines for Bathroom Visits, and the Safe Congregation policy. Copies of the Behavior Policy and Guidelines for Bathroom Visits will also be kept with each locking clipboard.
- e.** A First Aid kit will be centrally located and available to all volunteers.
- f.** Latex gloves will be available to the nursery caregiver and other volunteers.
- g.** Walkie talkies will be made available for the nursery, each classroom, and the hall monitor to ensure quick communication in case of an emergency.
- 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. The safe congregation checklist (list of those who have had background checks) will be kept in each locking clipboard.
  - 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 an adult gives such assistance, 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/herself. In the case that no hall monitor is available, nursery and youngest classroom-aged children should all go use the bathroom as a group.

**GRADES 1-3** Ideally, 1st-3rd graders should not visit the bathrooms alone. They should go in same sex pairs of two and an adult (typically the hall monitor) should accompany them. 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.

**YOUNG SOULS** In the case that all children are attending a Young Souls class (all ages are combined in one classroom) or there are only enough children for one classroom, children may use the bathrooms closest to the classroom they are using. Nursery age through 3rd grade should still use the RE hallway bathrooms whenever possible. This eliminates the possibility of being alone in the bathroom with an adult from the congregation. The gender neutral bathroom may also be used if taking turns.

**BEHAVIOR POLICIES** In order to facilitate the best possible experiences for the children in ASCC RE, the RE Board implements the following policy with the help and support of our RE parents.

- 1.** If your child has 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 teacher, we will make an effort to work with all different temperaments and try to explain the reason, if not obvious to the child.
- 4.** Whenever a child needs parent or guardian assistance, the hall monitor will be contacted. The parent will be asked by the hall monitor to come down to the classroom to meet with their child.
- 5.** We also ask that parents 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. We ask that cell phones are left off during instruction time.

Respectfully submitted by the RE Committee.