

## **Safe-Congregation Policy**

### **A Policy for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct, Physical Abuse and Harassment**

#### **PHILOSOPHY**

Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to strive to create an environment that protects children and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

It is both uncomfortable and sad that we need to be thinking of potential danger, but too often we find out too late what we should have known or done to protect our congregation and ourselves.

We all want to believe that our fellowship is a place where everyone acts out of good will, believes in forgiveness, and where nothing bad ever happens. Unfortunately, injurious behavior does happen and our congregation has the potential to contain all the ills of our society.

A variety of potential dangers are inherent in operating a fellowship community. These include physical site, including buildings and grounds, operation of the religious education program, transportation and supervision of children off-site, and instances of disruptive behavior involving members and/or staff of the church.

We believe our church can respond effectively to this challenge. The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Beaufort (UUFB) highly values the ideals of community and the search for truth. We encourage personal growth and expression of personal truth, and support individuals and families in their efforts to build healthier lives and a safer society.

As a caring, intergenerational community, we can respond to those in need in broader, more flexible ways than can many other institutions. This policy is aimed at the prevention of sexual misconduct, physical abuse and harassment.

#### **RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT**

We, the members of the UUFB, are aware of the prevalence of sexual and physical abuse and harassment in our culture; it crosses gender, race and class lines. We hold that it is the responsibility of all members of our fellowship to be proactive in preventing such abuse. To this end, we ask the members of our congregation to accept the responsibility of educating ourselves and our children about sexual and physical abuse, molestation, harassment, and exploitation. We also ask church members to pledge to do our best to protect those who are at risk and to support those in crisis.

Regarding these issues we, the Board, pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner that conveys mutual respect and consideration and we seek support from the members of this congregation for this policy.

## DEFINITIONS

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

**Abuse** includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment, or offensive physical or sexual contact; including physical or sexual abuse, physical or sexual harassment, physical or sexual molestation, or physical or sexual exploitation.

**Physical abuse** includes activity that causes bodily injury or impairment or offensive physical contact.

**Sexual abuse** means any sexual touching of a child 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 the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

**Physical harassment** or **molestation** or **exploitation** 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 substantially 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 repeated offensive physical or verbal conduct.

**Sexual molestation** and **sexual exploitation** means activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual conduct 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 the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

**Sexual harassment** means making sexual advances or requests for sexual favors 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.

## SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, PHYSICAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

### PREVENTION PLAN

We acknowledge that preventing sexual misconduct, physical abuse and harassment in our church communities and in society is a complex goal. Prevention education, training, careful hiring, and safety procedures are concrete steps toward creating a safer environment for all concerned.

## A. Education and Training:

Education and training is critical to the creation of a safer congregational environment. Information, knowledge, and understanding support the development of healthy relationships based on self-esteem and respect for others. Greater understanding of sexuality and abuse will make us better able to avoid situations that could lead to abuse, and to move more effectively toward justice and healing for us all. To this end we believe it is important to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our adult membership. We will provide programs as follows:

1. The Religious Education Committee is responsible to:
  - a. Offer age and developmentally appropriate information for our children, youth, and adults drawing from the “Our Whole Lives” (OWL) program, including the lessons on sexual abuse.
  - b. Keep church workers, volunteers and parents informed of this policy and review it at least annually through the use of “The Code of Ethics for Those Working with Children and Youth at the UUFB”, herein identified as “The Code of Ethics”.
  - c. Implement safety Procedures, as described in Section D below, to create a safer space for everyone.
2. The Board takes responsibility to:
  - a. Promote congregational awareness about this policy. As part of this we will insure that all fellowship members are aware of The Code of Ethics for Those Working with Children and Youth at the UUFB.
  - b. Inform fellowship members and attendees regarding resources that address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

## B. Hiring

It is essential that recruitment and hiring procedures protect children, youth, adults and staff from injury as well as protect staff and volunteers from unfounded accusations and the fellowship from ethical and legal liability.

All paid employees and independent contractors of the UUFB will sign The Code of Ethics. They will be screened by the appropriate hiring committee, which will contact references (at least one of whom has known the applicant for a minimum of five years), record the contact, conduct a criminal history record check, and conduct a formal interview with the candidate. The employment application and reference material will be confidential and will be available only as required by law and to those responsible for screening, hiring, or investigating a sexual misconduct offense. All employees and independent contractors will sign the Code of Ethics annually.

These procedures address legal requirements and insurance obligations as well as help staff and volunteers avoid creating situations in which personal boundaries can become problematic. The various prevention methods listed below are specifically designed to protect the children and youth of our community.

1. All volunteer Religious Education teachers or others working with children and/or youth must have attended the UUFB for at least 6 months. This provision can be waived by the Minister when the individual in question has been an active member with experience volunteering with children or youth at another UU congregation or has a reference from a UUFB member.

2. The Chairperson of Religious Education will insure that all volunteers working with children or youth have read the Safety Policy, attended an orientation on this policy, and have signed the Code of Ethics.

3. At least two volunteers will be assigned and will be present in each classroom and youth group activity, including in-fellowship events and overnights, off-site retreats, conferences, and other fellowship-related activities. 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.

Exceptions to the two-volunteer policy are discouraged but may be approved by the Minister in an emergency situation.

4. If there is a foreseeable reason a teacher, advisor, or other volunteer will be alone with a child or youth, the written consent of the child's parent or guardian will be obtained in advance. The volunteers participating in special programs will meet the parents or guardians of the children or youth prior to the program.

5. When traveling to and from outings, conferences, meetings, or other church activities, no child or youth will be alone with one adult in a car unless it is that child or youth's parent. The SE District defines an adult as a person at least 25 years old.

6. Situations may arise involving individuals accused or convicted of sexually aggressive behavior. Those situations will be addressed as follows:

a. An individual who has been convicted of, plea bargained, or pled guilty, nolo contendere or "Alford" plea to a charge of sexual misconduct or who has been determined to have engaged in any form of child abuse in any civil, criminal, administrative or ecclesiastical forum or any forum, will not have contact with children or youth or the parties involved.

b. If an individual has been legally accused of sexual misconduct and is currently involved in civil or criminal litigation of such a charge, that individual will not have contact with children or youth or the parties involved until the outcome is determined.

c. In the event that a person has been convicted of a sexual offense and completed a term of

incarceration and seeks to enter the life of the UUFB, the Board, with recommendations from the Minister, will determine the ways in which the individual may be safely involved in the life of the congregation.

7. Any teacher, advisor, or parent who suspects or is made aware of an allegation of child abuse will report that concern to the Minister as soon as possible. If the Minister is not available, the concern should be reported to the President of the Board or the Committee on Shared Ministry.

8. In the event of allegations of child abuse or of perceived threats to children's safety within the Fellowship Community, the Minister and/or the President of the Board will convene a Response Team in accordance with procedures described below.

### **Responding to Complaints of Sexual or Physical Abuse or Harassment**

There are several situations that may prompt a response regarding a complaint or concern about sexual or physical abuse including but not limited to:

- A child, youth or adult reports possible abuse by a fellowship official, member or attendee;
- fellowship official, member or attendee suspects that a child or youth is being abused;
- child or youth reports possible abuse by a family member or other individual; or fellowship officials learn that a church member or attendee (child, youth or adult) is under investigation for alleged abuse.

When any of the situations described above is reported, the following procedure will be followed.

#### **A. Reporting Child Abuse to Community Authorities**

It is both S.C. law and the policy of the UUFB to immediately report any situation in which we have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be abused or neglected.

Once a report is made to the appropriate authorities, the fellowship will rely on the decisions of those authorities as to the validity of the complaint. It is not the function of the minister, RE Committee Chair, or Board to conduct an investigation into accusations of child abuse.

In all cases, the Minister will notify the SE District Executive, and seek her/his advice and counsel. Additionally, the Board President will notify the church's insurance company.

In the event the accused abuser is the Minister, all notifications referenced above and reports will be the responsibility of the President of the Board. The Southeastern Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association will be included in the process.

## **B. Convening a Response Team to Meet the Safety Needs of the Fellowship**

When any such incident of suspected sexual or physical abuse is reported, the Response Team will meet immediately. This Response Team will consist of the Minister, the President of the Board, and two other Board members appointed by the President.

1. The first step beyond reporting is cautionary counseling of the alleged responsible person (ARP) to ensure that, to the extent any allegations are true, such behavior will cease immediately. The Response Team will gather necessary information and develop a preliminary response plan for the situation. The following are offered as dimensions to be used in the development of the plan:
  - a. Dangerousness – Is the ARP a source of threat or harm to persons or property?
  - b. Disruptiveness – What is the extent of disruption to fellowship functions?
  - c. Congregational Integrity – How likely is it that existing or prospective fellowship members will be driven away by the alleged behavior?
  - d. Probability of Change – Can we determine whether the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
  - e. History - What has been the frequency and the degree of disruption caused by the individual in the past?

This Response Plan will be put in writing, be specific to the situation at hand, and include clearly delineated action items, time frames and responsibilities. This plan must consider the safety and peace of mind of all parties to the incident; including the alleged victim, the parents of involved children, and the ARP.

2. Interim Safety Plan: When a report of abuse or neglect is filed by any person on behalf of any child and the suspected ARP is a church employee, member or attendee, the Response Team will develop an interim safety plan during the period of investigation or inquiry. This plan may include, but is not limited to restricting attendance of the ARP to adult-only fellowship event, assigning a “buddy” to monitor the ARP at all fellowship events, and requiring the ARP to refrain from any contact with children while attending a fellowship function. The purpose of this plan is not only to safeguard our children, but also to provide protection to the accused abuser from further complaints and limit liability of the UUFB.
3. If the ARP is another youth, the plan must be developed with input from both sets of parents or guardians of any involved children. The plan will be clearly communicated by the Response Team to the ARP; or, if a minor, his or her parents or guardians.
4. Additional meetings of the Response Team will be scheduled as needed to monitor progress in carrying out the plan. Further, it may be necessary for the Response Team to craft a revised plan, once the findings of State and local authorities are made known.

### **C. Action Plan**

1. Upon disposition by the Court or other legal authority, or after a completion of an inquiry by the Response Team, the Response Team will develop an Action Plan that may expand or lessen the preliminary or interim measures already implemented. The Response Team will meet to assess the findings and decide on a course of action, with the following four levels of response recommended to them:
  - a. Level One: The Response Team contacts the person named as the source of the misconduct and informs them of the nature of the concern. The person's viewpoint of the matter will be elicited, valued, and documented. The Response Team then assesses the situation.
  - b. Level Two: If the basis of the original concern is determined to have validity, the finding will be discussed with the person in question and a contract for clearly defined behavioral change will be negotiated and signed within one week.
  - c. 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, the Response Team will refer the person in question to the Board for further action up to and including expulsion from the fellowship.
  - d. Level Four: The Board will permanently exclude the person in question from the fellowship and grounds with steps taken as needed to enforce this decision.
2. If appropriate, the Response Team may offer referrals for professional services.
3. In the event of imminent risk or actual harm to UUFB members, employees, or property, immediate action will be taken to secure the safety of persons and property.
4. All documentation developed in the course of investigating and resolving allegations of disruptive behavior will be kept confidential. The President of the Board will be responsible for determining access to such documentation and for ensuring its security.

### **D. Pastoral Needs of the Congregation Regarding Reports of Abuse**

The Response Team will develop, as appropriate, measures to address the needs of our congregation, including the victim, by providing information about or referrals to appropriate professional, community, and fellowship resources, as needed.

Additionally, the Response Team may assist in dealing with DSS or law enforcement agencies.

Support may also be provided to other members of our fellowship.

Finally, the Response Plan and actions will directly address the situation of the ARP. Support may include helping that person access the appropriate professional, community, and fellowship resources. If that individual is part of our community, withdrawing our support at this critical point in that person's life might have severe detrimental long-term effects on his or her behavior in the future. It remains the mission of this fellowship to recognize and support the integrity and inherent worth and dignity of that person, though we do not condone any of the alleged behaviors, and to treat him/her with compassion

#### **E. Guidelines Regarding Legally Accused or Convicted Sex Offenders**

1. If an individual has been legally accused of sexual misconduct and is currently involved in civil or criminal litigation of such a charge, that individual will not have contact with children or youth or the parties involved until the charges are resolved.
2. An individual who has been convicted of, plea bargained, or pled guilty, nolo contendere or "Alford" plea to a charge of sexual misconduct or who has been determined to have engaged in any form of child abuse in any civil, criminal, or administrative forum must inform the minister.
3. If allegations of abuse have been dropped and the SC Department of Social Services has neither opened or has closed the case as unsubstantiated, the Minister and Response Team will meet with the ARP to bring closure and promote reconciliation as the ARP returns to full participation in congregational life.
4. In the event that a person has been found "not guilty" of a sexual offense, the Minister and Response Team will meet with the ARP to bring closure and promote reconciliation as the ARP returns to full participation in congregational life.
5. In the event that a person who has been convicted of a sexual offense, completed a term of incarceration, and has made it known, based on the SC Department of Probation, Parole and Parson Services Standard Sex Offender Conditions, seeks to enter the life of UUFB, the Board, with recommendations from the Minister and the Response Team, will determine whether or not, and what ways the individual may be safely involved in the life of the congregation.

## **SAFETY POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

### **Religious Education**

#### **Purpose of the policy**

Improve the safety of our children in the congregation's programs by implementing preventative steps and by providing guidelines regarding appropriate behavior with the children and youth of our congregation:

Provide guidance on how to effectively respond to incidents that may occur whether it is, during a congregational activity or at other times. Through preventative steps and education, reduce the likelihood that allegations (true or false) will be made against congregation staff or volunteers.

#### **Underlying principles for this policy**

Unitarian Universalists have a covenant with one another. Our covenant is not a creed. It does not dictate correct doctrine or belief. It does not outline our relationship with one another. It is a voluntary and unconditional agreement to act in ways that express the values of our Unitarian Universalist Principles. We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Beaufort believe that our commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person justice equity and compassion in human relations, spiritual growth, and the use of the democratic process within our congregation compels us to create a safe environment that protects children and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

#### **Child protection and safety**

RE teachers or others working with children and youth:

will have been a congregant (friend or member) of the fellowship for at least six months, or have a reference from another member or UU congregation.

will have read, understood and signed the Code of Ethics.

There must be a minimum of two adults present at events involving children and youth of the congregation.

#### **Supervision of children**

Children shall be under the supervision of their parent(s) or guardian(s) at all times when they are not in class. Parent(s) are responsible for the safety of their children when the service or function ends. Parents are to promptly pick up their children (2<sup>nd</sup> grade or younger) from class.

**Implementation of the policy**

Announcements of the policy will be made in the order of service for two consecutive Sundays and copies will be made available to the congregation.

The policy will be included in any new member information packets.

A summary of the policy will be distributed to all members and friends through the newsletter.

The policy will be provided and discussed with all volunteers who supervise or care for the children of our congregation.

The RE committee will include information on this policy and its implementation as part of its annual report to the board and in an annual meeting with the parents, staff and volunteers.

The Board will conduct an annual review of the safety policy.

## CODE OF ETHICS FOR THOSE WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT THE UUFB

Based on the Code of Ethics developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association 2011

Adults 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 will be well qualified to provide the special nurture, 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 the 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 and research shows that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care.

Therefore I will not engage in any inappropriate behavior, be it sexual, physical or emotional with children or youth. I will not sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

I will not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug that would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively while in a leadership role with children or youth.

*I acknowledge receipt of the UUFB Religious Education Safety Policy plan. I understand that it is my responsibility to comply with its spirit and purpose.*

Name (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_