

Healthy Congregation Policy Of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Beaufort, South Carolina

As Unitarian Universalists, we are bound together by covenants, promises we make to one another reflecting our highest ideals and how we intend to relate to each other and to our world. Our Unitarian Universalist Principles, our Living Tradition, our Congregational Mission and our Behavioral Covenant provide us with direction and support. We honor our commitments and promises to strengthen healthy relationships, thus creating a more intimate, loving, understanding, and accepting community in which to grow in spirit and service.

We understand that in a covenantal community each of us is empowered and has the responsibility to help each other maintain our covenant. We seek to uphold the common good and preserve the safety of body, mind and spirit of all who participate in our congregation. Therefore, UUFB institutes the following guidelines for Healthy Relations, Conflict Management and Disruptive Behavior Intervention.

I. A Healthy Relations Guide for the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Beaufort (UUFB).

I, as a member of the UUFB, acknowledge the need to promote healthy relationships in our congregation. To honor of that goal and to nurture communication and model our principles, I will observe these guidelines:

- A. I will use “I” statements when sharing my experiences, feelings and opinions.
- B. I will seek to understand and to listen with an open heart and open mind.
- C. I will withhold unsolicited personal judgements and will examine my assumptions and biases.
- D. I will speak my truth constructively and respectfully, and will consider how my communication style may affect others.
- E. I will, if I have a concern with someone, speak with that person directly and use the “Conflict Management Steps for a Healthy Congregation” provided by the Fellowship and include in this document to resolve conflict.
- F. I will acknowledge indications of pain, concern or discomfort in our community.
- G. I will be sensitive toward persons and groups that may be marginalized and oppressed, understanding that conflicts will arise and that clear solutions may not be reached.
- H. I will recognize that the work we do together can be difficult, and that it is important that we stay at the table together with patience and courage.
- I. I will treat others with love, compassion, dignity and respect, and I will practice healthy relations with all members of the UUFB community.
- J. I will acknowledge that this is a living document, intended to be improved as UUFB determines.

Seeking to bring joy, hope and justice to all I do as a member of this Fellowship, I will practice the letter and spirit of this Healthy Relations Guide with love, reverence and humility.

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II. Conflict Management Steps for a Healthy Congregation

Even in the healthiest and happiest of congregations, conflict will arise. While we love and respect each other, we are also human. Discord is always possible. The Conflict Management Steps described below are a clear way of addressing concerns before they become systemic. The steps are designed to help us keep our differences in perspective and to strengthen a healthy atmosphere at UUFB.

Steps	Actions	Implementation	Additional Information
Step 1	Personal reflection	<p>Work on yourself first.</p> <p>Examine your own role in the conflict. Ask "What, if anything, am I not noticing about my own role in the conflict?"</p> <p>Work on telling yourself a story that doesn't vilify the other person.</p> <p>Become curious rather than angry.</p>	
	Take time	Consider discussing the matter with a neutral party for a reality check. Sleep on it before acting rashly.	Focus on the behaviors, not people. Avoid mentioning names.
	Seek to understand the other person(s)	<p>Try to get to the essence of the problem by asking humanizing questions.</p> <p>"What sort of influences are acting on the person? What is causing the behavior? Do they have the ability to do their job? Are there barriers to be overcome?"</p>	
Step 2	Address the concern directly	Talk directly with the person (fellow member, minister, etc.) with whom you have the disagreement. Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk one-on-one and as soon as possible after the incident.	Use "I" statements in your discussion ("I feel...", not "You did..."); use active listening, reflect back what you've heard.
Step 3	Seek assistance if conflict remains unresolved	<p>Consult with the Minister or a Healthy Relations Team (HRT)* member for assistance and direction on taking the next appropriate step.</p> <p>If the conflict is less with a person than with how they are performing a job (staff, religious educator, etc.), address the concern to the proper supervisor or committee.</p> <p>If you feel that safety is an issue, use an appropriate third party or committee to provide a safe environment for the discussion.</p>	<p>Anonymous complaints are not healthy or acceptable. Be prepared to take responsibility for your concerns.</p> <p>*The HRT is comprised of 5 members appointed by the Board to staggered 3-year terms. The HRT works in 3-member teams.</p>

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III. Healthy Relations Team Organizational Structure

This Healthy Congregation Policy establishes a Healthy Relations Team (HRT) which is appointed by the Board of UUFB. The HRT has several authorities and responsibilities outlined below.

A. Healthy Relations Team (HRT)

1. Authority

The HRT is a committee appointed by the Board to implement the Healthy Relations Policy and Process.

2. Composition

The HRT is composed of five members of the congregation. The Board will communicate to the congregation the names of those appointed to the HRT. HRT members will elect a chair annually. Three HRT members will constitute a working team.

HRT members should each be a member of the congregation who:

- A. Has been a member two years or more.
- B. Is respected by the membership.
- C. Has served in leadership positions.
- D. Has exhibited good listening skills.
- E. Has demonstrated the ability to seek fairness toward everyone involved in disputes.
- F. Has experience with best practices in conflict management or is willing to learn.
- G. Is not currently serving as a member of the Board nor as chair of a committee of the congregation.
- H. Has demonstrated a willingness to serve the entire congregation.

3. Term

HRT members will serve staggered terms of three years with the possibility of renewing for one additional term. Terms start at the beginning of the calendar year. Vacancies that occur during a calendar year will be filled by appointment of the Board. The Board will consult sitting members of the HRT in appointing new members.

4. Responsibilities

- A. The HRT oversees the conflict management process outlined in Section 1. It receives requests for assistance, determines what assistance and resources are needed, if any, and makes them available.
- B. The HRT oversees communication to the congregation regarding the conflict management process and policy. The HRT also oversees education and training in conflict management for the congregation and its leaders.
- C. HRT shall take part in new member orientation and education of new members in our healthy relation process.
- D. If the first two levels of conflict management process outlined in Section 2 are unsuccessful, the HRT is empowered to make recommendations for resolution, consistent with the UUFB Bylaws. It is also empowered to refer any conflicts for which a resolution cannot be reached to the Board for disposition.

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- E. The HRT may also be called upon to mediate different perspectives and varying viewpoints within the congregation. In doing so, the HRT will work to ensure that all voices are heard and that the best practices of conflict management are applied. The HRT will encourage the framing of these kinds of conflicts as opportunities for learning, healing and building community.

5. Operational Guidelines

The HRT will:

- A. Respond to each request for assistance, exercising independent judgment and guided by the UUFB Covenant, UU Principles, and the Healthy Relations Guidelines.
- B. Recuse themselves from any issue to which they are a party or a stakeholder. Any HRT member may declare a conflict to exist for themselves or for another member, and recusal will follow.
- C. Meet at least quarterly.
- D. Report activities of the team to the Board and congregation at least annually.
- E. Attend quarterly congregational meetings.
- F. Place information regarding healthy relations on the UUFB website.
- G. Submit an annual budget request to fund training, resources, and outside consultants.
- H. Develop additional procedures as needed.
- I. Recommend additions to the policy to the Board as needed.
- J. Maintain confidential records of referrals and dispositions.

IV. Disruptive Behavior Policy

Disruptive Behavior Intervention: Whenever anyone's physical safety or freedom to express beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed.

A. Identifying Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior includes:

- Behavior that is perceived to be a threat to the safety of any person.
- Behavior that disrupts UUFB activities.
- Behavior that is likely to drive away existing or prospective members.

B. Reporting Disruptive Behavior

Any person who believes that they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior or who becomes aware of disruptive behavior should report it to any of the following:

- The Minister
- A member of the Board
- A member of the Healthy Relations Team

If required by law or local ordinance, the Minister or a board member will immediately report the incident to the local law enforcement authorities.

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All Fellowship leaders and staff are required to immediately report to the Minister or the Board any knowledge of disruptive behavior, harassment, abuse or misconduct.

C. Managing Disruptive Behavior in the Moment

The Minister and/or facilitator of the group present will respond to disruptive or threatening behavior.

If disruptive behavior is occurring, a facilitator will initially use a gentle approach to redirect the behavior, recalling appropriate points from the Covenant for Meetings and UUFB Covenant as needed.

If disruptive behavior continues, the facilitator may request a pause in the event and invite the person(s) being disruptive to step out of the room to discuss their concerns, cause of disruption, etc. The person(s) who is being disruptive will be informed that their behavior is disruptive and asked to cease the disruptive behavior.

If the disruptive behavior continues:

1. The person(s) being disruptive may be asked to leave.
2. The meeting or activity may be suspended until it can safely be resumed.
3. The police department may be called if further assistance is required.

All situations requiring an immediate response will also be reported to the HRT by the group leader involved in the initial incident, the victim, perpetrator or any third party having knowledge of the incident. The HRT will discern whether and what additional response may be needed

Any time such actions are taken, the Minister, the President and the President Elect of the Board must be apprised of the details of the incident. The Congregation will be informed that an incident occurred and is being addressed according to the Healthy Congregation Policy.

D. Disruptive Behavior Requiring Immediate Response

Two Board Members or the Minister will monitor Sunday services for intentional disruption or other disturbance (medical, etc.). At any point, the Minister can simply call for a member from the congregation and the member will respond (even if outside the meeting room.) During Sunday service, the Minister, Staff, Board Member, or a HRT Member are responsible for responding to disruptive persons. Although these procedures are written based on the persons being in the Sanctuary, the same procedures apply to other spaces on the campus except that someone may have to be sent to get the Board Member or HRT Member. Ministers are responsible for maintaining the atmosphere of the service and may choose to call for a song from the hymnal to drown out and/or distract from the disruptive persons. If necessary, Ministers should also ask congregation members to not provoke or respond to the disruptive persons. In the case of a guest minister, a Board Member or HRT Member may need to prompt, instruct, or facilitate the responsive actions. A Board Member or a HRT Member will address the disruptive individuals.

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Suggestions for addressing disruptive behavior (All steps may not be appropriate):

1. In a calm and even tone, ask the person to stop being disruptive and return to participating in the service in a way that allows others to benefit from the service.
2. In a calm and even tone, ask the person to step out into the hallway to discuss their concerns, cause of disruption, etc.
3. If the person is unwilling to leave the room, inform the person that if they continue to be disruptive, law enforcement will be called to escort them from the campus.
4. If the person at any time displays physical or verbal aggression, displays or implies they have a weapon, or threatens the safety of others, one of the responding Board Members or HRT Members should immediately contact law enforcement, preferably by utilizing the second Board Member or HRT Member to call 911.
5. If the persons continue to refuse to leave, the Minister should continue to improvise from the pulpit while the Board member or HRT Member on duty try to convince them to leave until law enforcement arrives.
6. If the person or group is willing to leave the room, the Board Member and the HRT Member should go with them (always at least two people). Once outside the room, a discussion can take place about the nature of the issue, If appropriate, and the expectations of non-disruptive behavior.
7. If the persons are unwilling to engage in a calm and/or meaningful discussion, they may be asked to leave and informed that they can call back to the UUFB office to set up a time for such a discussion with the Minister and other appropriate lay leaders.
8. Law enforcement should be notified if the persons display physical or verbal aggression, display or imply possession of a weapon, or threatens the safety of others, or leaves the room but remains on the campus.
9. If the persons leave, the Board Member and HRT Member should walk to the parking lot with the persons to ensure they actually leave the campus, and make a note of their vehicle and license plates.

Afterwards, the primary person handling the issue should document the details of the incident including any identifying information about the persons (including vehicles, license plates, etc.), nature of the disruption (include details observed about the issue), and who was involved in the incident. This information shall be delivered to the Minister, the President of the Board, the President Elect, and the HRT Chair.

E. Healthy Relationship Team Response to Disruptive Behavior Reports

When disruptive behavior is reported to the HRT, the Team will collect all necessary information. The Team will listen to a recounting of events by the person(s) identified as the disruptor(s), focused first on the observable behavior of the people involved, and then the motivations and feelings related to the event. Witnesses to the disruption may also be interviewed.

To aid in understanding and responding to the situation, the HRT will consider the following aspects:

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- **Danger** - Is the behavior posing a continuing threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **Disruption** - How much interference with Fellowship functions is occurring?
- **Offensiveness** - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away by the disruptive behavior?
- **Causes** - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition or mental illness?
- **History** - What is the frequency and degree of disruption in the past?
- **Probability of Change** - How likely is it that the disruptive behavior will diminish in time?

The HRT will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. Variations or allowances can be made for people who are known and not believed to be dangerous. However, the following levels of response will be observed:

Level One

The HRT will meet with the person(s) and other related parties to implement the Conflict Management process as it is described in this policy. The Congregation will be informed that a conflict has been referred to the HRT.

If the behavior cannot be resolved, the process will proceed to Level Two.

Level Two

The incident will be referred to the full Board. The Board may determine that the offending person(s) needs to be excluded from UUFB and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons for such action and the conditions of return made clear in a written notification. Once the written notification has been given to the offending person(s), the Congregation will be informed about the activities from which the offending person(s) has been excluded. When the excluded person(s) meets the conditions required by the Board, the Congregation will be informed.

Level Three

The Board, after careful consideration, may determine that the offending person(s) be excluded from the UUFB campus and all UUFB activities. Offending members will be removed from membership. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing and filed in HRT records.

The Board will communicate to the Congregation the name of the member(s) removed from membership and excluded from UUFB campus and activities. The names will be listed in the annual report with any previous members who have been removed from membership during the past year. The Board will communicate to the Congregation the name(s) of any nonmember(s) excluded from the UUFB campus and activities.

Respectfully submitted by the Healthy Relations task force.