

# **The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie**

## **Safe Congregation Policy And Procedures**

**Including:  
Right Relations  
Children and Youth Protection  
Limited Access Covenant**

**(\*Revised October 2019)**

### **Committee Members:**

**Mary Desmone**

**Donna Martin**

**Liz Yount, Contact Person**

**Julie Maguire, President Board of Trustees**

**Candace Williams, Director of Religious Education**

**Mary Lubowicki, Religious Education Committee Chair**

**Rev. Sunshine Wolfe, Central East Region Consultant**

\*This policy and its procedures will be reviewed every three years in its entirety. In the interim, minor modifications to procedures and forms may occur as deemed necessary by the SCC, Director of Religious Education (DRE), Chair of the Religious Education committee and Minister. The Board of Trustees will be informed of the changes, without requiring official approval.

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# **Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie Safe Congregation Policy and Procedures**

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Congregational Covenant with one another**

Unitarian Universalists choose to covenant with one another. Our covenant is not a creed or doctrine. It does not dictate correct or specific belief or dogma. It does describe our relationships 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 Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie, 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 a democratic process within our congregation compels us to try to create and maintain a safe environment that protects children and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual and/or personal growth.

### **Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie, Central East Region, and Unitarian Universalist Association**

We recognize that religious communities, which should be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all members, are vulnerable to incidents of mental, sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. Generally, congregations promote a high level of trust, a welcoming spirit, and a strong reliance on and need for volunteers, especially in child and youth programs. We realize that entities operating in the best possible manner, with all due concern, still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free setting, and thus we need to adopt policies and procedures of “reasonable precaution” regarding these potential incidents.

- The Unitarian Universalist Association and the **Central East Region** have policies that are intended to help prevent mental, sexual, physical, or emotional abuse in their communities and at congregation sponsored events.
- The UUCE has taken advantage of the recommendations of the UUA and of the support of an **Central East Region Consultant**, in the development of these procedures.

### **Rationale Congregational Responsibility**

In drafting this document, the Safe Congregation Committee (SCC) accepted the responsibility to develop recommendations to protect our congregation from 1) financial liability, and 2) even more importantly, from the emotional repercussions that could occur should we fail to do our best to provide a safe place for our children, youth, and adults.

#### **Scope:**

- I. Right Relations

- II. Child and Youth Protection
- III. Limited Access

## **I. Right Relations**

### **Introduction:**

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie (UUCE) strives to be an inclusive congregation, welcoming visitors and members to join us in the practice of our faith. Right Relations is a way to describe how we expect to interact with each other in our congregation. Recommendations are predicated on the regular practice of the UU Principles. The purpose of this document is to provide a covenant of right relations for our congregation that expands on our principles, to provide guidance for those experiencing conflict, and further to help with conflict resolution, if needed.

### **Covenant, Vision and Mission:**

The covenant is a written promise we make to treat one another with compassion and dignity. The Vision is a written dream for what we will become in the future. The Mission is a written plan for how we will realize our dreams. These statements were developed in the fall of 2012 and approved by the congregation in February, 2013. (See page 5.)

### **Reconciliation:**

When we are in conflict with someone in our congregation, we must challenge ourselves to look beyond our own concerns and work toward resolving our differences. Reconciliation requires those in conflict to engage in a direct process with each other. (Practice of Reconciliation by Paula Cole Jones. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/practice-reconciliation> )

### **Mediation:**

If the conflict continues, congregation sponsored mediation may be necessary: "... concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges of an individual. To the degree that *the conflict* compromises the health of the congregation, our actions must reflect our commitment to maintaining the safety of our community." If the conflict is "perceived to threaten the safety of any adult or child, is disruptive of church activities or diminishes the appeal of the congregation to its potential or existing members", the UUCE must deal with the inappropriate behavior directly. (Quotes are taken from the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus, OH.)

## **The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie Covenant of Right Relations**

### **COVENANT**

- We: \*Covenant to promote a culture of compassion and acceptance in our relations with each other.
- \*Promise to listen with the intent to understand and to communicate in an honest and respectful manner, even when we disagree.
  - \*Acknowledge that conflict is an opportunity for growth.

### **VISION**

- We will: \*Share the wisdom of our guiding principles and nurture all who come seeking personal and spiritual growth.
- \*Be a welcoming, inclusive, and expanding religious congregation with diverse ideas and beliefs reflected in our services and programs.
  - \*Establish ourselves as a strong presence in the region through greater community engagement.

### **MISSION**

INSPIRE, CONNECT, ACT

We are a vibrant and inclusive religious community.

- We: \*INSPIRE personal and spiritual growth;  
\*CONNECT in fellowship and service;

\*ACT for peace and justice.

## **Child and Youth Protection**

### **Policy Scope**

Abuse of any kind cannot be tolerated within our congregation community. Of these, our children and youth are most vulnerable to abuse, and because of this, these procedures focus specifically on abuse of children and youth.

### **Section I. The Policy**

The members and friends of UUCE accept the responsibility to define abuse, educate our congregation about it, and implement policies and procedures that will create a climate of safety, love, and awareness.

#### **A. Defining Abuse of Children and Youth**

- Abuse can be mental, emotional, physical, or sexual. People may be guilty of abuse if they personally inflict the abuse, or if they cause or permit a child to be in a situation, or fail to do their best to protect a child from a situation that results in the abuse.
- A mental or emotional injury is one that "results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development or psychological functioning."
- A physical injury is one that results in substantial harm to the child.
- Sexual abuse is any sexual misconduct that is potentially harmful to a child's mental, emotional or physical welfare.

#### **B. Education**

The successful implementation of these procedures requires that we educate our congregation about what constitutes abuse, situations at our congregation that could put people at risk, and the rules and procedures that we have adopted. As we educate people, we need to make sure that we do so in a way that emphasizes love, awareness and action. It is important that we avoid creating an environment of fear or suspicion.

#### **The UUCE Board of Trustees:**

The Board of Trustees, in consultation with the minister and DRE, will appoint a Safe Congregation Committee of 3-5 qualified and knowledgeable people, selected by education/ experience and willingness to serve. Qualifications include:

1. Professional or volunteer experience in working with children and/or child abuse issues or through special training in said areas;

2. Knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, inclusive of applicable Pennsylvania State laws.

The Safe Congregation Committee is responsible to:

- Make available the current UUCE Safe Congregation Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures for the congregation library and each classroom.
- Provide a written overview of the procedures to the Membership Committee to be included in the new member packet
- Review screening and application documents and clearances and contact references.

### **C. Selection and Screening of Staff & Volunteers**

Religious Education (RE) teachers and regular volunteers and substitutes working with children and youth and nursery school children:

- Will be at least 25 years of age to work with high school youth.
  - Will be at least 21 years of age to teach other RE classes (an 18-20-year-old may teach as the second adult with someone who is 21 or older).
  - Will be at least 18 years of age to provide childcare in the nursery (**a 16-17-year-old may be the second adult with someone who is 18 or older**).
  - Will have been an active participant in UUCE for at least six months or have childcare references from the public or private sector.
  - Will meet with the Director of Religious Education (DRE) to discuss expectations.
  - Will have completed a screening form and applicant's statement (see Appendix 1).
  - Will have read, understood and signed the Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth (see Appendices 2).
  - Will have read, understood and signed the Possible Indicators of Child Abuse document (see Appendix 3).
  - Will have had two references checked (see Appendix 4).
  - Will have passed the state standard for PA criminal record and child abuse history clearances and if you have not lived in PA for the past 10 years, FBI criminal background check, including a set of fingerprints.
  - Submit new background checks every 36 months.
  - Will have read, understood and signed the 30-day Waiver form, if needed. (see Appendix 5)
  - Will have valid driver's licenses, liability insurance, and current state safety inspection stickers on their vehicles if they are to transport children/youth to congregation-sponsored activities.
  - Complete online "mandated reporter" training.
- 
- High school youth, wanting to assist in the RE classes or nursery will read, understand and sign the Code of Conduct for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children (see Appendix 6). These older youth are not required to meet the requirements identified above in Section C, as long as they are with 2 adults.

Paid staff members who work with children will also meet the above criteria.

#### **D. Supervision**

##### 1. Events where the congregation provides programs for children and youth and assumes responsibility for children and youth:

The “two adult rule” will be used and is defined as requiring at least two adults to be present during any activity where the congregation is taking responsibility for the care of children/youth. Religious Education teachers, nursery, and substitute volunteers must meet all of the requirements in Section C. For purposes of complying with the “two adult rule” adults who are willing to substitute are required to meet the criteria in Section C. The DRE,

or designee with clearances, may need to assist to ensure the implementation of the “two adult rule.” Classes may need to be combined to meet the requirements.

If the “two adult rule” is unable to be implemented, the RE class(es) and/or nursery will be cancelled for that day.

While our congregation is not responsible for screening members of other congregations, we do require that our safety policy of the “two adult rule” be followed.

Adults who accompany youth from other UU congregations to attend district youth activities held at UUCE will be screened by their home congregations according to their own policies.

Supervision shall be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

##### 2. Events where the parents provide programs or activities for their own children and youth:

The “two adult rule” does not apply to congregation events where the parents have responsibility for their own children and youth.

##### 3. Before and after congregation programs where parents assume responsibility for their children and youth:

The “two adult rule” does not apply to situations where the parents have responsibility for their own children and youth.

##### 4. Transporting children and youth:

With written parental consent, one adult driver, meeting the criteria above in Section C, may transport two or more children or youth to and from a congregation-sponsored event. The “two adult rule” still applies during the destination activity.

##### 5. Events where the congregation provides childcare:

Paid childcare staff will be responsible for the children in the nursery. Procedures shall be implemented for the nursery that clearly identifies the child and the child’s parent or guardian. Children shall only be released to a properly identified and authorized adult. In

order to comply with the 2 adult rule volunteers in the nursery will need to comply with Section C.

## **Section II. Implementation of Policy**

### **A. Education**

#### ***Documentation***

The Safe Congregation Committee must ensure that supporting documentation exists that teachers have read and signed the Code of Conduct and the “Possible Indicators of Child Abuse” documents. The documents can be scanned and kept in an electronic file or locked in the office. RE Director, Child Care staff, Teachers and child care volunteers and substitutes will provide documentation of completing PA free online “mandated reporter” training.

### **B. Selection and Screening of Staff and Volunteers**

#### ***Interview***

The DRE will meet with potential volunteers to describe the duties and screening requirements and determine the genuine interest of working with children and youth.

#### ***Documentation***

The Safe Congregation Committee must ensure supporting documentation exist demonstrating completion of required documents: Screening, Applicant’s Statement, Code of Conduct, Indicators of Child Abuse, PA clearances, and 30-day waiver, if needed.

#### ***Reference Checks***

Two personal and organizational references provided by the applicant will be contacted via phone, mail or email by the Safe Congregation Committee. A written record of each contact will be made which will include the following: the date and method of contact, the person making the contact, and a summary of the reference’s remarks. These records will be kept with the original application. The primary question to be explored is whether in the opinion of the reference, the applicant is suitable for working with youth and children.

#### **Criminal Background Check**

Confidential PA criminal record and child abuse background checks and Federal criminal background checks, including a set of fingerprints will be required in accordance with PA laws and regulations. For volunteers who have a financial need, clearances will be at the expense of the UUCE. The Safe Congregation Committee will review these background check reports to base approval status for each applicant. All relevant laws pertaining to confidentiality and destruction of documents will be strictly followed.

If a volunteer has a reviewed application, completed references form and criminal record check with no report, but has not yet received the child abuse history clearance, they may begin to work with children and youth if they have signed the UUCE Waiver. The volunteer

will be affirming that nothing will be found on the clearance when it is received. The waiver will be good for 30 calendar days from the date signed. If the child abuse history clearance is not received within the 30 days, the volunteer will have to stop their work with children until the clearance arrives and they are given the approval to work with children. Volunteers needing Federal fingerprinting, must have both PA criminal record and child abuse background checks and a signed waiver before they can volunteer.

### **Disqualifying offenses**

Any applicant who has ever been convicted of any disqualifying offense, or who is currently on probation or received deferred adjudication or who is presently pending any criminal charges for any disqualifying offense against a child or youth, will automatically be given a “non-approval” recommendation by the Safe Congregation Committee. (See list of disqualifying offenses in Appendix 1)

### **C. Supervision *Documentation***

The DRE and/or Minister will monitor the appropriateness of the volunteers’ interactions with the children or youth. This supervision includes high school youth working as assistants in RE classes or nursery.

## **III. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie Limited Access**

### **Introduction:**

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straightforward. Religious leaders and congregational members should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting the children and youth. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations.

### **State Law: Mandatory Reporter**

If a UUCE member or friend of the congregation has a suspicion that a child has been abused, either while involved in congregation programs, events, and activities, or at other times, that person must first report the incident to state authorities, defined in Pennsylvania as the Pennsylvania Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS) or law enforcement.

**In Pennsylvania, “a person having cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person shall immediately make a report...” As such, all persons are termed “mandatory reporters” by law and reports may be made anonymously to the state.** The Pennsylvania abuse/neglect hotline number is 800-932-0313. The congregation is also under the local law

enforcement jurisdiction of the Office of Children and Youth who may be contacted at 814-451-6600.

### **Reporting Within the Congregation:**

- a. If the person who made the report believes the abuse occurred during a congregation program, event or activity, the individual should report his or her allegation to the Minister, or the Director of Religious Education (DRE).
  
- b. Any person who has concerns about inappropriate behavior by teachers, childcare workers, or other adults or older youth in our congregation community should report their concerns immediately to the Minister, or the DRE. Inappropriate behavior may include such things as failure to follow the “two adult rule”, physical/verbal interaction with a child that could be construed as sexual in nature (e.g. an adult resting his/her hand on a child’s knee or youth-on-youth bullying). Such behavior, which may not in itself be abuse, is not in the best interest of our children and needs to be addressed, corrected and monitored in order to protect both the child and adult involved.

### **False Accusations**

The protection from false or mistaken allegations of adults who teach in the RE program or otherwise interact with children, or older youth who volunteer, is also an important goal of this policy. A key way to prevent false or mistaken allegations is to abide by the prevention guidelines outlined in the policy and procedures, as well as the Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth and the Code of Conduct for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children. We must be sensitive to the disruption and damage a false accusation may cause to both the adults and the children involved. This is true even when the accusation is one due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what seems a child’s straightforward report of an event.

### **I. Implementation:**

#### **A. Response to suspicious behavior:**

Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult staff member, volunteer worker or older youth and a child or youth shall be reported to the Minister, the DRE, or the President of the Board of Trustees. They will immediately investigate and provide prompt warnings, and corrections, and monitor closely. Pastoral counseling and support will be offered, when deemed appropriate. The volunteer’s services will be terminated immediately for a violation of such warnings and corrections.

#### **B. Response to an allegation of abuse:**

When an allegation of child abuse occurring during a UUCE program, event, or activity is reported, the responsible person receiving the allegation must take the following steps in order:

- Take immediate action to ensure the protection of the child or youth

- Immediately report the incident to the appropriate state or local authorities in accordance with Pennsylvania law.
- Report the incident to the Minister, DRE, President of the Board of Trustees, or, if they are not available, a member of the Safe Congregation Committee
- Document the allegation in writing using an Incident Form (see Appendix 7) and submit this to the Minister, or DRE.
- The Minister, or DRE, will notify and provide the Incident Form to the Response Team.

### **C. Response Team:**

When a specific situation arises the Board of Trustees will form a Response Team consisting of the Minister, the DRE and at least one individual from the Safe Congregation Committee. If the incident or allegations involve any of these individuals or their family members; they will not be members of the Response Team.

The Response Team does not have the legal authority, expertise or training to determine guilt or innocence. Its overall purpose is to protect children and youth, and to ensure that they and the accused are treated with dignity and respect.

The Response Team responding to the allegation will keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. **Safety of the Children** – The safety of the children in the congregation will be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely actions should be taken based on the reported allegation. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. **State Law** – A copy of the State Child and Youth Protection law and regulations will be kept in the office and shall be referenced when an incident is reported.
3. **Investigation** –The Response Team will conduct an internal investigation to gather information about the incident.
4. **Other Inappropriate Behaviors** – Some incidents or allegations in the RE or other child or youth programs may involve behaviors that are not clearly child abuse, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate by a parent, the Minister or DRE. In such cases, a Response Team may be called together to review the situation and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees.
5. **Who to Inform** – When the investigation is completed the Response Team will forward the report to the President of the Board of Trustees.

### **D. Board of Trustees**

1. **The President of the Board** will review the findings of the Response Team with the Board of Trustees, in a closed session, at the earliest time.

2. **Notification of Central East Region**– The President of the Board of Trustees will notify the **Congregation’s Central East Region consultant and CC the Operations Manager:**

- that a report has been made to appropriate law enforcement agencies;
- a Response Team has been convened, and
- the nature of the issue.

3. **Spokesperson** – The President of the Board will designate him/herself or one person to act as a spokesperson for the congregation. That will be the only person authorized to speak for the congregation regarding the situation.

4. **Confidentiality** – In order to ensure that the safety of our children and youth is our highest priority, we must encourage the responsible reporting of all concerns or suspicions of child abuse. To this end, all reports will be considered confidential. In this context, “confidential” means that the identity of the child or youth, the accused and the reporting person, the details of the concern or suspicions, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential among the Minister, DRE, members of the Response Team and the Board of Trustees. This information will **not** be disseminated to the congregation.

5. **Restrictions with Children** – In order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk and to protect the accused from further suspicion, decisions about removing the accused from interacting with children or youth in the RE program, or other congregation events and activities will be made by the Board of Trustees after review of the Response Team’s recommendations. A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to the child or youth, the credibility and seriousness of the allegation, and other related factors. A Confidential Limited Access Covenant will be signed by the person recommended by the Board for limited access (see Appendix 8).

## APPENDICES

1. Screening Form and Applicant Statement  
List of Disqualifying Offenses
2. Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Youth and Children
3. “Possible Indicators of Child Abuse”
4. Personal and Organizational Reference Form



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In what area of youth/child work are you interested? \_\_\_\_\_

What date would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_

Respond to the following with Yes or No:

Have you been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain.

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Have you ever committed, or has any civil action ever been filed against you for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain.

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Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain.

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Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that might call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children and youth? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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**CONGREGATION HISTORY AND PRIOR YOUTH WORK**

**(Please list organizations' names, addresses, and type of work performed and dates)**

Please list any congregations that you have attended regularly during the past 5 years.

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Describe any congregation volunteer work over the past 5 years.

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Describe any youth work (at congregations or other organizations) over the past 5 years.

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In what ways have you participated in the life of the UUCE over the past 6 months?

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Please list any training or education in youth-related work \_\_\_\_\_

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**PERSONAL and/or ORGANIZATIONAL REFERENCES** (not relatives) References will be contacted.

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ How they know you \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ How they know you \_\_\_\_\_

### **Applicant's Statement**

The information contained in this screening form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or congregations listed in this form to give UUCE any information, including opinions, that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this screening form by UUCE, I hereby release any individual, congregation, youth organization, charity, employer, reference or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization, excepting only the communication of knowingly false information.

I (check one):

waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

\_\_\_\_\_ do not waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct and policies of UUCE in the performance of my services on behalf of the congregation. I understand that UUCE will obtain information relating to my criminal history record. The criminal history record, as received from the reporting agencies, may include arrest and conviction data as well as plea bargains and deferred adjudication. I understand that this information will be used, in part, to determine my eligibility for an employment/volunteer position with this organization. I also understand that as long as I remain an employee or volunteer here, the criminal history records check may be repeated at any time. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review that criminal history and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received.

I the undersigned do, for myself, my heirs, executors and administrators, hereby remise, release and forever discharge and agree to indemnify the UUCE and each of their officers, directors, employees, and agents harmless from and against any and all causes of actions, suits, liabilities, costs, debts and sums of money, claims and demands whatsoever, and any and all related attorneys' fees, court costs, and other expenses resulting from the investigation of my background in connection with my application to become a volunteer or staff member. I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. This is a legally binding agreement, which I have read and understand.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**List of Disqualify Offenses  
(Taken from HR 435 Analysis Oct. 2014)**

“Currently, employers are prohibited from hiring anyone that is named on the Department of Welfare’s child abuse registry as a perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse within the prior five-year period.

A felony conviction under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act also results in a five-year ban on child care employment. The following convictions result in a permanent ban from child care employment:

- Criminal homicide
- Aggravated assault
- Stalking
- Kidnapping
- Unlawful restraint
- Rape
- Statutory sexual assault
- Involuntary deviant sexual intercourse
- Sexual assault
- Aggravated indecent assault
- Indecent assault
- Indecent exposure
- Incest
- Concealing the death of a child
- Endangering the welfare of children
- Dealing in infant children
- Felony prostitution
- Certain offenses related to obscene and other sexual materials and performances
- Corruption of minors
- Sexual abuse of children
- An attempt of solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the above crimes”

## **2. Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth**

### **UUCE Position Statement**

Adults working with children and youth, in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith, have a crucial and privileged role. To help our children grow up to be caring and responsible adults can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person. It is important to recognize that this role carries with it both power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, child-care worker, teacher, minister, mentor, or any other role, the adult has special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to the young people and to the adult. Adults who

work with children and youth at UUCE events are expected to always have the best interests of children and youth at heart.

### **Expectations**

Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. Our charge to children and youth workers is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness.

We intend to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and intellectual nature of their lives, both as individuals and communities. We expect that one person's enjoyment will not be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that the UUCE has of adults working with children and youth. They are as follows:

- **“Friendship” with Youth** – Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for “friendship” is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. 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. These can be not only healthy, but also transformative for both. However, it is our concern that a “predator,” who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart, will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of congregation sponsored events, it is imperative that your behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a youth outside of congregation-sponsored events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents. Furthermore, you should let the Director of Religious Education know what you are doing. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the parents and the Director of Religious Education informed of your actions.
- **Sexualized behavior** – Adults play an important part in helping our youth develop healthy identities as sexual beings. Children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care. It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth.

This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for example, or to make “double entendres.” Physical expressions of affections such as hugs have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.

- **Confidentiality** – Adults who work with children and youth under the auspices of the congregation are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the congregation as well. **Remember: you are acting both ethically and as an authorized agent of Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie.** Sometimes you will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. **YOU MUST NOT KEEP SUCH INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.** For this reason, never give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. **CONFIDENTIALITY IS NOT SECRET KEEPING.** For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when the information is of a major crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. In addition, you yourself **MUST** report the information to appropriate state or local agencies. After making the report, consult with the DRE, or the Minister, or a member of the Safe Congregation Committee to complete the UUCE process.

### **Accordance with This Code of Conduct**

Any UUCE staff or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the Safe Congregation Committee, the DRE or the Minister. However, until such time as the Board of Trustees chooses to alter any portion of its provisions, the worker must abide by the code as written.

By signing below, I indicate that I have read this Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it. Further, I agree to refrain from any conduct that may constitute verbal, emotional, sexual or physical abuse. If I violate any of these provisions, the congregation leadership will take appropriate action, and I may become ineligible to work with children or youth at UUCE.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Middle) (Last)  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Possible Indicators of Child Abuse**

Children do not always tell someone they are being abused. They may have been threatened into silence or be too embarrassed or horrified to talk about what is happening. They may exhibit extreme behaviors such as abusing animals, other children,



**Reference Checks**

All personal and organizational references provided by the applicant will be contacted via phone, mail or email by the Safe Congregation Committee. A written record of each contact will be made which will include the following: the date and method of contact, the person making the contact, and a summary of the reference's remarks. These records will be kept with the original screening form. The primary question to be explored is whether in the opinion of the reference, the applicant is suitable for working with youth and children and why.

Name of Caller: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reference 1:**

Name of Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of contact:    \_\_\_ Mail            \_\_\_ Email            \_\_\_ Phone

How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

In what capacity have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

In your opinion is the applicant suitable for working with children and youth? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Reference 2:**

Name of Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of contact:    \_\_\_ Mail            \_\_\_ Email            \_\_\_ Phone

How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

In what capacity have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

In your opinion is the applicant suitable for working with children and youth? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Caller: \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Child Abuse History Clearance Waiver

### I hereby swear and/or affirm that:

I have my PA State Police Criminal Record and have applied for  
(check all that are applicable):

PA Child Abuse History Clearance  
 Federal fingerprinting (if applicable)

1. Nothing found in the results will disqualify me from working with children and youth for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie.
2. I understand that this waiver is good for 30 calendar days of the date signed.
3. I understand that I am not to work alone with children or youth.
4. I have never been convicted of any of the provisions of
  - a. Title 18 of the PA Consolidated Statutes. (For a listing of the reportable offenses, please see the secretary).
  - b. A felony offense under the act of April 14, 1972 (PL 233, No. 64) known as “the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act.”
5. I have not been convicted of any felony offense of the first, second or third degree within 10 years after the date of expiration of the sentence for such offense.
6. I have not been convicted of any first-degree misdemeanor offense within 5 years after the date of expiration of the sentence for such offense.
7. I have not been convicted of a second offense of driving under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance, graded as a first-degree misdemeanor, within 3 years after the date of expiration of the sentence for the most recent offense.

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Volunteer's signature

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Date

## 6. **Code of Conduct for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children**

**Underlying Purpose:** Whenever we gather together as a congregation, we are each involved with our own spiritual and/or personal journeys as we strive to develop a healthy sense of self-worth, identity, and mutual respect. Older youth who are in leadership roles need to be aware of the underlying purpose that we have in our gatherings and the special responsibilities that come with their new role in the classroom.

### **Responsibilities:**

#### **1. Respect.**

The children and youth in our care are still forming who they are and what they believe. As you enter into relationship with the children in your care, ensure that you bring respect of those around you and that you expect others to respect you, so that everyone's positive potential can be realized. When we are not respectful, we can end up being abusive. A person may be guilty of abuse if they personally inflict the abuse, or if they cause or permit a child to be in a situation that results in the abuse. Abuse can be mental, emotional, physical or sexual.

- A mental or emotional injury is one that "results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development or psychological functioning."
- A physical injury is one that results in substantial harm (or the genuine threat of substantial harm) to the child.
- Sexual abuse is any sexual conduct that is harmful mentally, emotionally or physically.

#### **2. Development**

Your actions and conversations have a direct impact on how others feel about themselves, how they feel about being at our congregation, what they value, and what they believe. Two key areas of personal growth are a) self-worth and b) a healthy identity as a sexual being. Research shows that children and youth suffer damaging effects when leaders or mentors become abusive or sexually involved with young persons in their care.

#### **3. Agreement:**

Therefore, I will not harass or engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Furthermore, I agree that I will not engage in sexual or seductive behavior with children or youth. I agree to be respectful of those around me, to expect others to be respectful of me, and to use my skills to be kind, truthful, and nurturing.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (First) \_\_\_\_\_ (Middle) \_\_\_\_\_ (Last) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Incident Report Form**

TODAY'S DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE AND TIME OF INCIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

WHO HAS BEEN NOTIFIED ABOUT THIS INCIDENT? (LIST STATE OR LOCAL AGENCY NAMES, DATES/TIMES, AND PHONE NUMBERS)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NAMES OF CHILD(REN) OR YOUTH AND ADULT(S) INVOLVED IN INCIDENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

WHERE DID THE INCIDENT OCCUR? (Be specific.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED (Use more paper if necessary)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

HAS THE SAFETY OF THE CHILD(REN) OR YOUTH BEEN ASSURED? HOW?

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## 8. Confidential Limited Access Covenant

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a congregation open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles.

However, we also have the responsibility to do our best to protect the health and safety of members and friends of the UUCE, especially our children and youth. Because of our commitment to the Safe Congregation Policy and procedures (including Right Relations, Child and Youth Protection, and Limited Access) we want to enter into a limited access covenant with you because: (check one of the following)

\_\_\_\_\_ A serious complaint or allegation has been made about you to the proper UUCE entity and an investigation is under way. In order to protect you from further suspicion and the children and/or youth from potential risk, you are required to sign the agreement, which will remain in effect until the complaint/allegation has been resolved.

\_\_\_\_\_ It has been brought to our attention that you have been involved with the legal system in situation(s) that we feel may compromise the health or safety of our children and/or youth. In order to continue to worship at the UUCE you are required to sign the Limited Access Covenant.

\_\_\_\_\_ You have shared with us issues/situations involving children and/or youth with which you struggle. We appreciate your honesty and desire to maintain the health and safety of our children or youth. In order to continue to worship at the UUCE you are required to sign the Limited Access Covenant.

This Limited Access Agreement is a **confidential** document.

This document will be made known only to the President of the Board of Trustees, Minister, Director of Religious Education, and applicable teachers. The document will be kept in a locked file in the office.

Within the requirements of the agreement, the UUCE welcomes your participation in adult worship services and activities, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, and supervised intergenerational events.

You are not to have contact with children and/or youth on the UUCE grounds or at any service or event.

Read the attached agreement and sign and date the form. Failure to abide by the agreement will cause your access to the UUCE functions and property to be denied. Thank you.

### **Confidential Limited Access Covenant**

(Continued)

I agree to avoid all contact with children or youth on UUCE property and/or during congregation sponsored services, activities or events. This includes the following:

- I will not talk to children and/or youth
  
- I will not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and/or 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.
  
- I will remain in the presence of an adult who knows my situation at all times when children are present. Name of adult of your choice \_\_\_\_\_.
  
- If a child or youth in the congregation approaches me, either at the UUCE or in a community place, I will politely and immediately excuse myself from the situation.
  
- I will not be in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.
  
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect children and/or youth for whom they care: President of Board of Trustees, Minister, Director of Religious Education, and applicable teachers.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this covenant, I will be denied access to future UUCE services, functions, and activities and to the property/grounds of the congregation.

I understand that this covenant will be reviewed each year and will remain in effect, as long as I am a member/friend of the UUCE.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Middle) (Last)

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

Board President's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Minister's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Director of RE's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_