

**First Unitarian Church of Des Moines**  
**Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy**

*I. Purpose*

As Unitarian Universalists, our commitments to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion compel us to create for our children a safe environment which protects their physical, mental and emotional well-being and promotes their spiritual growth.

We recognize that violence and child abuse are two of the most troubling issues our society faces today. The policies and procedures contained in this document were developed to reduce the risk of harm to our children and ensure that First Unitarian Church and its programs provide a safe haven for them. Issues of violence and sexual abuse will be addressed openly, honestly, and with care.

*II. Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy*

To safeguard its children and youth, as well as its staff and volunteers, First Unitarian church has adopted the following:

- A policy for staff and volunteer recruitment, selection, and conduct.
- Procedures for religious education program safety and supervision.
- Procedures for reporting and responding to concerns, complaints, and/or allegations regarding sexual misconduct or abuse.
- A commitment to ongoing congregational education and discussion about child protection issues.

It is the policy of the First Unitarian Church to take all allegations of improper conduct involving children and youth seriously. We recognize that allegations of abuse may be devastating to both the accuser and the accused. A team of Child Safety Directors comprised of the Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth, the Minister, the President of the Board of Trustees, and the Director of Congregational Life has been designated to handle concerns, complaints, or allegations of misconduct or abuse as they may arise. The Safety Directors will deal with all allegations with respect and dignity for all parties involved.

Any person with a history of sexually or physically abusing another individual will not be permitted to be involved in any way in our religious education program unless a specific exception is made by all of the Child Safety Directors. No person against whom a complaint of misconduct has been filed and who is under investigation will be permitted any unsupervised direct contact with children or youth at church or church sponsored activities.

We, the First Unitarian Church, accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about sexual misconduct and abuse and pledge to do our best to protect and support those who come to us either at risk or in crisis.

As a church wide preventative policy, it is understood that parents are responsible to supervise their children (up to age 18) at all times, except when children are attending activities sponsored by the Religious Education department.

This policy is a living document, and the congregation may in future years wish to amend it to reflect changing needs.

III. *Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth who are in Leadership roles with Children and Youth*

Leaders will not engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Leaders will also not be involved in sexual harassment or any other behavior with youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

Any person who is working with children and youth in any programs of First Unitarian Church is deemed to be a leader and is bound by this Code of Ethics statement. Adults and older youth 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 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 that children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care.

Leaders shall be informed of the code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

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I have read the Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth. I understand and agree to abide by the Code of Ethics as set forth by the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines throughout the duration of my involvement with the church and its community.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

#### IV. *Staff and Volunteer Selection*

In order to safeguard its children and youth, as well as its staff and volunteers, the First Unitarian Church will require staff and volunteers who work with children to meet these selection and qualification requirements.

##### A. Application Process

1. Both paid staff and volunteers who will have contact with children, either on the premises or in the programming of the First Unitarian Church must go through an application and screening process. Employees will be oriented to the church's personnel policies on sexual harassment.
2. The application and screening process will, at a minimum, include a formal written volunteer information form and checking of references. Personal interviews may also be conducted.
3. Applicants will be asked to consent to checks of the Department of Human Services Child Abuse Registry and the Department of Criminal Investigations criminal records. Checks will be made for all applicants for paid employment. Checks may be made for applicants for volunteer positions.
4. Volunteers who have been through the application and screening process will not be asked to do so again unless there is a change in circumstances.

##### B. Eligibility

1. Six Month Rule. Volunteers must have participated regularly in First Unitarian Church's congregational life for a period of at least six consecutive months before being eligible to work with children and youth.

##### Exceptions:

- a. An exception may be made by agreement of the Child Safety Directors for volunteers with appropriate references.
- b. An exception may also be made by agreement of the Child Safety Directors for volunteer activities at one time events which are held in a public setting, such as the Holiday Craft Fair.
- c. Parents are invited to visit and participate in their own children's classrooms and activities. However, if a parent has consented to his or her child's participation in a special Junior or Senior High class curriculum, such as the Our Whole Lives program, the parent may be asked not to visit the class while that curriculum is being taught in the interest of confidentiality and the comfort of the participants.

2. Prior Offense Rule. Adults who have been investigated for child abuse will not be eligible to work directly with children and youth unless a specific exception is made by all of the Child Safety Directors. These individuals may be offered opportunities to volunteer services in other areas of the church and pastoral guidance and counseling to help them understand the church's responsibility to provide the highest level of protection for its children.

#### *V. Religious Education Program and Supervision*

The Youth Religious Education Committee has instituted the following practices and policies to promote child safety in the supervision and program design of the religious education program for children and youth at the First Unitarian Church.

- A. Two Adult Rule. Teaching teams will be established for all children's religious education activities and classes. No individual will be assigned to be the only teacher or supervisor of a program or activity for children and youth.
- B. Visibility. The windows in the doors of the children's religious education classrooms will not be obstructed. Classroom activity should be open to view from the hallway at all times, unless youth are participating in a special curriculum or activity for which parents have given written consent.
- C. Adult Greeter. An adult greeter will be assigned to the downstairs hallway of the church just prior to, and during, regular Sunday morning Religious Education programming. The greeter will welcome guests and be aware of any safety issues for children.
- D. Nursery Visits. Because of the isolated location of the nursery, the Director of Religious Education will arrange for frequent, unscheduled visits to the nursery during regular Sunday morning programming.
- E. Annual Training. The Youth Religious Education Committee will provide annual training for religious education teachers about child sexual abuse in general, appropriate boundaries, roles and responsibilities, and the Child Safety Policy of the First Unitarian Church.
- F. Awareness. The Youth Religious Education Committee will develop and implement a plan for teaching children and youth about safety awareness.
- G. First Aid. A first aid kit will be readily available in the office of the Director of Religious Education.

- H. Fire/Disaster Drill. There will be an annual Sunday morning fire/disaster drill. An escape plan and the location of fire extinguishers will be posted near each classroom door.

## VI. *Incident Reporting and Response Procedures*

- A. Child Safety Directors. The following individuals are designated as the Child Safety Directors for the First Unitarian Church:
- **Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth**
  - **Minister**
  - **President of the Board of Trustees**
  - **Chairperson of the Youth Religious Education Committee**
  - **Director of Congregational Life**
- B. Maintenance of Records. Copies of all screening forms, reference checks, incident reports, DCI screening reports and Department of Human Services Child Abuse Registry reports will be kept in a place with restricted access in the office of the Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth.
- C. Duty to Report.
1. If any church staff member or any volunteer working with children or youth learns of or suspects an incident of improper behavior, physical abuse or sexual abuse within the church or in connection with any program or activity sponsored by the First Unitarian Church, the staff member or volunteer shall report the incident to one of the Child Safety Directors.
  2. Any employee or other adult is encouraged to report physical abuse or sexual abuse of a child or improper behavior toward a child to one of the Child Safety Directors.
  3. Any church employee or other adult should be alert to any situations that may result in allegations of abuse. They should report potential problems to a Child Safety Director in writing.
- D. Reporting Procedures
1. A verbal report should be made to a Child Safety Director as soon as possible and not later than 24 hours after an incident occurs.
    - a. If the incident involves one of the Child Safety Directors, it should be brought to the attention of one of the other Child Safety Directors.
    - b. In the event that one of the Child Safety Directors is not available, a written report should be filled out at once, and a Child Safety Director contacted as soon as possible.
  2. A verbal report should be followed by a written report as soon as possible and, in any event, within 72 hours. (See the attached Incident Report form.) Copies of these forms are available in the office of the Minister and the office of the Director of Religious Education for Children and

Youth. The written incident report should be given to one of the Child Safety Directors upon completion.

**E. Response Procedures.**

1. The Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth will document the receipt of any report of suspected abuse and all steps taken to deal with the situation.
2. The Safety Directors will confer and decide what actions need to be taken to ensure the safety of the possible victim, as well as all youth in the congregation. Providing the child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) is (are) not the alleged offender, the Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth will notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the incident.
3. If the Child Safety Directors determine that reasonable grounds exist to investigate whether abuse has occurred, and the alleged offender is not the child's parent or guardian, the Director of Religious Education will notify the following people:
  - a. The child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) who will also be encouraged to contact Child Protective Services or Law Enforcement.
  - b. The Iowa Department of Human Services Child Protective Services.
  - c. The church's attorney.
  - d. The church's insurance agent, but the agent will not be given the names of the victim or the alleged perpetrator unless a claim seems imminent.
4. If the alleged offender is the victim's parent or guardian, the child will be informed that a report will be made to the Iowa Department of Human Services and that someone from Child Protective Services will be meeting with the child to make sure he or she is safe.
5. The accused individual will be immediately removed from contact with children and youth by the Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth and will not be allowed any contact until the allegations have been investigated and the Child Safety Directors are assured it is safe for the alleged offender to have contact with children. The individual will be notified verbally and in writing that this No Contact rule is being invoked. The No Contact rule means the person will not be allowed to attend activities at church because children may be present.
6. If the accused is a paid staff person, he or she will be placed on involuntary paid leave until the Child Safety Directors have made a determination that the safety of all children can be reasonably assured and until the Board of Trustees, with input from the Personnel Committee, have made a determination about the individual's continued employment. Regardless of whether criminal charges are filed, the Board of Trustees will determine what is in the best interest of the Church.

7. A public statement will be prepared by the Child Safety Directors to inform and answer questions of the congregation, if it is deemed necessary to inform the congregation. Only the Minister or other designated spokesperson will talk with the press.
8. Pastoral care will be available to all involved.

## VII. *Reintegration Plan*

If the Board of Trustees determines there is sufficient evidence of abuse so as to require protection of the congregation, whether or not the child is affiliated with the church, the following steps will be taken.

- A. The individual believed to be the abuser will be treated with care and respect, but will not be permitted to have contact with any children until he or she has received sexual abuse treatment and until reintegration into the church community is recommended by his or her sexual abuse treatment professional. The individual will not be permitted to work in the Youth Religious Education program.
- B. At such time a recommendation for reintegration is received from the individual's abuse treatment professional, a reintegration safety plan will be developed.
  1. The plan will be developed by the individual, his or her abuse treatment professional, support people of the individual's choosing, and the church's Child Safety Directors.
  2. The plan will identify the individual's high risk situations and safeguards designed to deal with those risks. An example might be having another adult present who knows about the individual's risk factors whenever he or she is involved in activities where children or youth are present.
  3. The plan will include having the individual's abuse treatment professional and the church Child Safety Directors to share information so that safety can be monitored.
- C. It is a goal at First Unitarian Church to create an atmosphere of openness, where adults and children feel supported and safe to talk about abuse issues. Making child abuse a "secret" is harmful to victims, potential victims, and offenders. It is also a goal that adults and children be aware so that they can recognize potentially risky situations, both on and off church premises.

The existence of the safety plan will, therefore, be shared with parents and other appropriate members of the congregation. Parents will be encouraged and helped to talk with their children openly, honestly, and age appropriately. There may be discussions with children in religious education classes, and parents will be invited to participate. It

is important that children in the church be aware of the specific danger and of the individual's restrictions so that they can be safe.