

Our Whole Lives Policies

POLICIES FOR THE *OUR WHOLE LIVES* (OWL) SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

AT First Unitarian Church of Des Moines

I. Structure of the Program

A. Registration and Fees

1. All legal parents/guardians of minor participants must sign the permission form. If divorced parents share legal custody, the congregation must obtain written permission from both parents. If divorced parents do not have joint custody, and the divorce agreement clearly stipulates that the custodial parent may make decisions regarding their child's education without consulting the non-custodial parent, then it is only necessary to get the written permission of the parent with sole legal custody. However, if the situation is unclear, or if there are persistent questions or concerns, and *especially* if there is a history of conflict between the divorced parents, it is wise for the participating parent to consult a lawyer for clarification of their agreement because even a parent without *physical* custody can still share *legal* custody and retain rights regarding decisions about the child, including decisions about education or religion.
2. It is strongly recommended, but not required, that *all* adults who are in an active parental/guardian role (e.g., step-parent) for the child sign the permission form, even if they technically don't have legal custody. This is both to satisfy legal requirements and to honor the diversity of family structures in our congregations.

II. Teaching

A. Class Coverage

1. Each class shall have at least 2 facilitators, although 3 to 4 are recommended to allow them to rotate. Each class session must have at least 2 facilitators during the entire class (except for brief periods when one facilitator is escorting a student to the bathroom or bringing equipment from the RE office, etc.). It is recommended, but not required, that each facilitator team represent a diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation.

B. Training Requirements

1. Facilitators must attend a UUA- or UCC-sanctioned training program to prepare for leading *Our Whole Lives*. A facilitator must have received training for the level being taught in order to be a lead teacher; however, those trained in other levels may co-teach and lead activities. While only those who have received training can teach, others may be present in the classroom to attend to the needs of participants (see Section IV).
2. If the trainers at the *Our Whole Lives* training program express reservations about a prospective facilitator, their recommendations must be followed.

C. Recruitment

1. *Our Whole Lives* facilitators are recruited by the RE Council, OWL committee members (if applicable), and RE Staff. Facilitators are then affirmed by the REC.
2. Given the unique nature of the *Our Whole Lives* curricula and the specialized knowledge necessary to cover the material and answer participants' questions, *Our*

Whole Lives facilitators need not be members of the congregation. However, they should ideally have been associated with the congregation for at least 3 to 6 months and have a relationship of trust with their fellow facilitators. (Please see the last page of this document for further information on choosing facilitators.)

3. Teachers will be asked to attend an interview, and submit to a criminal background check before they can be sent for training.
4. People who have already attended an approved *Our Whole Lives* facilitator training who are affiliated with some other religious organization may also serve as *Our Whole Lives* facilitators for a UCDSM *Our Whole Lives* class, at the discretion of the RE Staff, and the REC.

D. Age Requirements

1. Grades K-1, 4-6, and 7-9: Facilitators must be at least 21 to teach *Our Whole Lives* programs for children or junior high youth.
2. Grades 10-12: So that the boundary between youth and adult is clear, adult facilitators of *Our Whole Lives* for Grades 10-12 must be age 25 or over. However, a trained, qualified youth or young adult could co-lead a high school program in collaboration with a trained, qualified adult 25 or over.
3. Adult and Young Adult: Facilitators of *Our Whole Lives* for Adults and *Our Whole Lives* for Young Adults can be either young adults or older adults.

E. RE Program Requirements

1. All facilitators must be trained in (1) the safety policies and practices of the congregation and the RE Program and (2) teaching children and youth with special needs. To accomplish this, teacher training workshops will be offered each year, as needed. *Our Whole Lives* facilitator training, for this aspect of training only, may be co-convened with RE teacher training.
2. Teachers will be required to read and sign a Code of Ethics each academic year.

III. Classes

A. Class Assignments

1. Children are assigned to classes by school grade.
2. Exceptions can be made by the OWL coordinator in consultation with the facilitators, parents, and possibly RE Staff. (See IV A)

B. Class Sizes

1. *Our Whole Lives* classes should ideally be taught with approximately 8-12 participants at the beginning of the class. UCDSM will cap classes at 12 participants with priority given to UCDSM member families.
2. If a substantially higher number of participants is expected, the DRE should investigate the possibility of opening a second class at the same age level, or otherwise expanding the program temporarily or long-term. In no case will an *Our Whole Lives* class for K-1, 4-6, 7-9, or 10-12 be allowed to exceed 12 participants.
3. A planned class may be cancelled if less than 4 participants are expected, but the assigned facilitators, in consultation with the OWL coordinator and RE Staff, may still choose to offer the class.
4. Parents should preregister their child/youth before the class (orientation session) begins. Acceptance of late registration will be determined by the *Our Whole Lives* facilitators (if possible, in consultation with the OWL coordinator) on a case-by-case basis.

C. Class Schedules

1. Timing of classes (number of sessions, days of the week, times of day) will be determined by the *Our Whole Lives* facilitator team and the OWL coordinator, and will be dependent on both pedagogical considerations and room availability. *Our Whole Lives* facilitators may consult parents of participants about scheduling changes that come up during the class.

IV. Inclusion of Participants With Special Needs

A. Class Assignments

1. Children and youth with special needs should not be excluded from *Our Whole Lives* classes because of their special needs. They should take *Our Whole Lives* classes at a stage that is appropriate to their individual development, which may not correspond with the usual age ranges for the program. For example, depending on the type of special need, it might be more effective for a child to take the 4th-6th grade *Our Whole Lives* class at a later biological age. When to have a particular child or youth participate in a particular level of *Our Whole Lives* will be determined through consultation among the *Our Whole Lives* facilitators, parents, OWL coordinator, and possibly RE Staff.
2. Parents should make every effort to notify *Our Whole Lives* facilitators, the OWL coordinator, or RE Staff of their wish for their child or youth with special needs to participate in *Our Whole Lives* class well before the class begins. If parents do not do so, it may not be possible to offer all accommodations, as recruiting the volunteers necessary for some accommodations requires a longer timeline. In extreme cases only, children or youth may be denied the chance to participate during a given year if there is not enough time to set up the necessary accommodations.

B. Accommodations

1. Accommodations should be made for children and youth with special needs to allow them and other students to benefit maximally from *Our Whole Lives* class. The accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis before the beginning of the *Our Whole Lives* class by the *Our Whole Lives* teachers, parents, OWL coordinator, and possibly RE Staff. Patton's work "Faith-Based Sexuality Education Guide for the Inclusion of Children and Youth With Special Needs" provides extensive guidance on this topic, and should be consulted. The accommodations suggested here are based on that work. Accommodations may include any of the following:
 - a. No accommodations (for mild special needs or those being successfully treated, as might be the case for ADD/ADHD or mild dyslexia).
 - b. Reduced use of reading/writing activities during class, and conversion of reading/writing activities in the curriculum to oral activities (implemented by the teachers, as needed).
 - c. Allowing a child/youth to sit out of activities and not participate, while still remaining in class.
 - d. Use of an Inclusion Committee throughout the time period of the class will be used to determine and implement the necessary accommodations. The committee may include at least one RE Staff member or the OWL coordinator, one *Our Whole Lives* teacher of the relevant class, and one parent of the child/youth)

- e. A separate meeting before the *Our Whole Lives* class begins between parents, the *Our Whole Lives* teachers for the class, and possibly an RE Staff member or the OWL coordinator, to discuss accommodations. A meeting that involves the child/youth with special needs may also be held.
 - f. Lending of a curriculum book to the child's/youth's parents, or advice that they buy a copy, so that the parents can pre-read or review lessons with the child/youth.
2. The need to include children and youth with special needs in *Our Whole Lives* classes does not mean that disruptive behavior that interferes seriously with the class is acceptable. Patton's work includes guidelines on making an agreement with the child/youth about what behavior is necessary in order to remain in the *Our Whole Lives* class. However, the Inclusion Committee should make every effort to find a solution before any child is excluded from *Our Whole Lives* class.
 3. Inclusion of adults with special needs in Young Adult and Adult *Our Whole Lives* classes: As part of the pre-registration process, an adult with special needs may request a meeting with the *Our Whole Lives* facilitators, and an RE Staff member or the OWL coordinator to discuss what accommodations, if any, are necessary.

V. Parent Involvement

A. Orientation

1. Part of *Our Whole Lives*'s philosophy is that parents are their children's primary sexuality educators. For this reason, at least one parent/guardian must attend the Orientation. However, it is recommended that all parents/guardians/step-parents in a child's life attend.
2. Facilitators may arrange to meet with parents who are unable to attend orientation, provided that this meeting is held before the first session.
3. Childcare will be available during all orientations.
4. Parent Orientation for *Our Whole Lives* 7-9 and 10-12 must include the showing of the appropriate *Sexuality and Our Faith* DVDs. Parents must give written consent for their child(ren) to view the applicable DVD in class.

- B. Meals/Snack: Parents may be asked to contribute to the class by supplying meals or snacks for long sessions (i.e., for *Our Whole Lives* 7-9 and 10-12 classes).

VI. Multi-church Involvement

A. Outreach

1. Children/youth who are not associated with UCDSM, and whose parents/guardians are not members of UCDSM, may participate in *Our Whole Lives* classes at UCDSM. If there are more participants expected for an *Our Whole Lives* class than can be accommodated (see above), UCDSM will make efforts to accommodate all interested participants, but priority may be given to UCDSM member families, if necessary.
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The following was excerpted from Planning Guide for *Our Whole Lives* Trainings (revised and updated Fall 2007); It can also be found on UUA website in OWL FAQs (updated June 1, 2010):

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING *OUR WHOLE LIVES* LEADERS

The success of this program depends on the qualified and caring persons who are selected and trained to be *Our Whole Lives* facilitators. Keep the following criteria in mind when choosing your facilitators:

1. **A commitment to value-based, comprehensive sexuality education.** A facilitator needs to have values in harmony with the *Our Whole Lives* program and goals, and to feel comfortable with his or her own sexuality.
2. **Experienced, skilled, and comfortable with the specific age group and its developmental needs.** A facilitator needs to stimulate discussion by asking open-ended questions, encouraging communication among participants, and facilitating activities that foster experiential learning. A facilitator needs to use sexual terminology and age-appropriate language comfortably, relate well with the age group of the participants, and convey warmth and a sense of humor.
3. **Anti-bias awareness.** A facilitator needs to understand, appreciate, and celebrate diversity of race/ethnicity, culture, age, ability, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. A facilitator needs to have the skills to work with people of diverse backgrounds as well as the ability to create a safe and engaging learning environment.
4. **An advocate for sexual health and safety.** A facilitator needs knowledge and skills not only to educate about sexual health but to fulfill the trust inherent in the role of sexuality educator. This role includes the responsibility to recognize and report abuse. The facilitator must support your organization's safety-abuse policy and must follow your state's or province's process for reporting and investigating an alleged abuse.
5. **Ability to build relationships.** A facilitator needs to develop rapport with participants, and when the participants are children or youth, with parents and family as well. Facilitators need to build community in the classroom, uphold the Participation Guidelines, and develop relationships of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility within your organization and the wider community.
6. **Dedicated learner and facilitator.** A facilitator needs to be willing to become thoroughly familiar with the content of the program, to work with a co-facilitator or teaching team, and to listen to and learn from young people and parents.
7. **Appropriate boundaries.** Facilitators need to understand that the class is an opportunity for the participants to explore their sexuality and test boundaries and assumptions, which may occasionally involve self-disclosure from participants. Facilitators may be called upon to uphold boundaries on participants' sharing. Further, facilitators should not use class for their own personal exploration or self-disclosure. This is critically true for the children's and adolescent levels of *Our Whole Lives*, but it is also true for the peer-led Young Adult and Adult levels. Facilitators need to understand the ways that their own participation could compromise their effectiveness as facilitators.
8. **Person of faith.** When offering *Our Whole Lives* in a congregational context, a facilitator needs to be a person who is respected by the congregation and comfortable discussing the integration of sexuality and spirituality with members of their faith community. They should

be aware of their own spiritual or religious grounding, and should possess an ability to connect the program values with their religion's principles, traditions and history.

RE Policies for OWL