

## **First Unitarian Church of Des Moines 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 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. Misconduct Prevention and Safety Policy**

To safeguard its children, youth, congregants, staff, and volunteers, First Unitarian church has adopted this Safety Policy, which includes:

- Requirements for staff and volunteer recruitment, selection, and conduct.
- Procedures for safety and supervision in all faith formation programs for children and youth.
- Procedures for reporting and responding to concerns, complaints, and/or allegations regarding sexual misconduct or abuse or other forms of misconduct or harassment (“misconduct”).
- Requirements for ongoing congregational education and discussion about misconduct, child protection, and responsible behavior toward both children and adults.

It is the policy of the First Unitarian Church to take seriously all allegations of misconduct, especially allegations involving children and youth. We recognize that allegations of misconduct may be devastating to both the accuser and the accused. Consequently, we have created a Safety Response Team to handle concerns, complaints, or allegations of misconduct as they may arise (see Section VI). The Safety Response Team is expected to act in ways that respect the inherent worth and dignity of all the parties involved.

Any person with a history of sexually or physically abusing another individual is not permitted to be involved in any way in our faith formation program for children and youth unless a specific exception is made with the agreement of all members of the Safety Response Team. 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.

Depending on the content of the complaint of misconduct, a person may also be barred from leadership or participation in other church activities. For example, an adult accused of misconduct against another adult may be barred from activities until there has been a resolution of the complaint or a limited access agreement effective while the resolution is

pending.

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 churchwide 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 Faith Formation Ministry and supervised by members of that ministry team.

We recognize that this policy is a living document and the congregation may in future years wish to amend it to reflect changes in understanding or 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 mentors who play a key role in fostering spiritual development of individuals and our faith 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 this 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. Children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when church leaders become sexually involved with children and youth in their care or with adults with whom there is a relationship of trust and guidance.

Leaders shall be informed of this code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken. Signing the Affirmation Form below signifies that leaders have been informed of the Code of Ethics.

If an adult or older youth in a leadership role has not signed this form, that person is nonetheless responsible to honor this code of ethics, which is because not only a policy of this congregation but also inherent in the 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles and our understanding that we are in covenantal relationship with one another.

**Affirmation of Receipt of Code of Ethics**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

#### **IV. Selection of Staff and Volunteers Programs with Children and Youth**

To safeguard children and youth, as well as staff and volunteers, the First Unitarian Church requires staff and volunteers who work with children and youth to meet the following 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 misconduct.
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 they are eligible to work with children and youth. The following exceptions may apply:
  - a. An exception may be made by agreement of the Safety Response Team for volunteers with appropriate references.
  - b. An exception may be made by agreement of the Safety Response Team 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. But if a parent has consented to their child's participation in a special curriculum like the Our Whole Lives (in which parents do not participate so as to allow full discussion of the curriculum's content), then the classroom is not open to the parent except when invited.
2. *Prior Offense Rule.* An adult who has been convicted, arrested, or investigated for child abuse is not eligible to work directly with children and youth unless the Safety Response Team makes a specific exception (with all members in agreement). The Safety Response Team may encourage an adult barred from a role in the children and youth faith formation program to volunteer in other areas of congregational life. The Safety Response Team may recommend pastoral guidance and counseling to help the barred adult understand the church's responsibility to provide the highest level of protection for children and youth.

## V. Supervision in the Faith Formation Program for Children and Youth

The Faith Formation Ministry Team has instituted the following practices and policies to promote child safety in the supervision and program design of the faith formation 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, the regular Sunday morning faith formation program for children and youth. The greeter will welcome guests and be alert to safety issues.
- D. *Nursery Visits.* Because of the isolated location of the nursery, the Director of Faith Formation will arrange for frequent, unscheduled visits to the nursery during regular Sunday morning programming.
- E. *Annual Training.* The Director of Faith Formation, working with the Faith Formation Ministry Team, will provide annual training for Faith Formation teachers about child sexual abuse; appropriate boundaries, roles, and responsibilities; and this Safety Policy.
- F. *Awareness.* The Director of Faith Formation, working with the Faith Formation Ministry Team, 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 Faith Formation.
- H. *Display of Emergency Information.* The Director of Faith Formation is required to ensure that an escape plan and the location of fire extinguishers is posted near each classroom door.
- I. *Fire/Disaster Drill.* In consultation with the Senior Minister, the Director of Faith Formation will conduct a Sunday morning fire/disaster drill for children and youth at least once annually. This drill may be separate from or together with a drill that applies to adults engaged in Sunday morning activities.

## VI. Incident Reporting and Response Procedures

- A. *Safety Response Team.* The following individuals are designated as the Safety Response Team for the First Unitarian Church:
  - Director of Faith Formation
  - Senior Minister

- Associate Minister
  - Councilor for Congregational Life
  - President of the Board of Trustees
  - Faith Formation Ministry Team Leader (or person appointed by the Team Leader)
  - Two additional members appointed by the named members of the Safety Response Team.
- 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 Faith Formation.
- C. *Duty to Report.*
1. A volunteer in the Faith Formation program who becomes aware of or has reason to believe there has been an incident of misconduct either within the church or in connection with a program or activity sponsored by the church must report the incident to a Safety Response Team member.
  2. An employee who becomes aware of or has reason to suspect an incident of misconduct either within the church or in connection with any program or activity sponsored by the church is required to report the incident to a Safety Response Team member.
  3. Adult church members, volunteers in the Faith Formation program, and church staff are expected to be alert to circumstances likely to result in misconduct and are expected to report those circumstances to a Safety Response Team member.
- D. *Reporting Procedures*
1. A person with a reporting responsibility as stated in “C. Duty to Report” is required to make an oral report to a member of the Safety Response Team as soon as possible and not later than 24 hours after an incident occurs or after becoming aware of circumstances likely to result in misconduct.
  2. The report is to be made in the following manner:
    - a. If the incident involves a member of the Safety Response Team, the oral report should be made to a different member of the Safety Response Team.
    - b. In the event that a Safety Response Team member is not immediately available in person or by phone to receive an oral report, the person making the report must immediately text or email a brief written report to a member of the Safety Response Team.
    - c. An oral report or a brief written report should be followed as soon as possible by a written report and, in any event, within 72 hours. An Incident Report Form is included at the end of this Safety Policy and may be sent by email to or printed and placed in the church mailbox of any member of the Safety Response Team. (Paper copies of the Incident Report Form are available in

the church office and in the office of the Director of Faith Formation).

E. *Response Procedure in Situations of Misconduct Toward a Child or Youth*

1. Coordination of the Safety Response Team's response is ordinarily the responsibility of the Director of Faith Formation, unless the Director, with the consent of the team, delegates coordination responsibility to another team member. If the Director of Faith Formation is the person accused of misconduct, the Director must withdraw from the Safety Response Team until absolved of misconduct and the Safety Response Team will determine which of their members will coordinate the team's response. The person with coordination responsibility is the Response Coordinator.
2. The Response Coordinator must document the allegations of misconduct and the Safety Response Team's response.
3. The Safety Response Team must decide what actions need to be taken to ensure the safety of the alleged victim and other children and youth in the congregation and ensure that those actions are carried out.
4. If the Safety Response Team determines that reasonable grounds exist to investigate whether misconduct involving a child or youth has occurred, and the alleged offender is **not** a child's parent or guardian, the Response Coordinator must notify the following people:
  - a. The child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s), both to inform them of the alleged misconduct and to advise them 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.
5. If the alleged offender **is** a child or youth's parent or guardian, the Response Coordinator must **not** inform the alleged offender but instead must inform the child or youth that the church will report the alleged misconduct to the Iowa Department of Human Services and that someone from Child Protective Services will meet with the child or youth to make sure the child or youth is safe.
6. The Response Coordinator must immediately remove the alleged offender from contact with children and youth and not allow any contact with children or youth until the allegations have been investigated and the Safety Response Team is in agreement that it is safe for the alleged offender to have contact with children or youth. The alleged offender will be notified orally and in writing that this No Contact Rule is being invoked. The No Contact Rule means the alleged offender is not allowed to attend any activity at church at which children or youth may be present.
7. If the alleged offender is a paid staff member, that person will be placed on involuntary paid leave until (a) the Safety Response Team makes a determination

that the safety of children and youth can be reasonably assured and (b) the Senior Minister makes a determination allowing the individual's continued employment (or, if the alleged offender is the Senior Minister, until the Board of Trustees has makes a determination allowing the Senior Minister's continued employment). Regardless of whether criminal charges are filed, continuation of employment is based on the best interests of the church.

8. If the Safety Response Team determines that it is necessary to inform the congregation of the misconduct, the Safety Response Team will prepare a public statement to inform and answer questions that members of the congregation may have. Only the Senior Minister or other designated member of the Safety Response Team will make statements to congregation members or to the press.
9. If the misconduct becomes public, the Senior Minister or other designated member of the Safety Response Team will consult with the UU Trauma Response Ministry (UUTRM) and may consult UUTRM in determining whether to make the misconduct public.
10. The Safety Response Team will ensure that pastoral care is available to all parties involved and to other congregants in need of pastoral support.

F. *Response Procedure in Situations of Misconduct Toward an Adult*

1. If a member of the Safety Response Team receives a report of misconduct toward an adult, that team member must immediately inform the other Safety Response Team members.
2. Coordination of the Safety Response Team's response in the case of misconduct toward an adult is ordinarily the responsibility of the Senior Minister, who may delegate the responsibility of coordination to another team member. If the Senior Minister is the person accused of misconduct, the Senior Minister must withdraw from the Safety Response Team until absolved of misconduct and the Safety Response Team will determine which of their members will coordinate the team's response. The person with coordination responsibility is the Response Coordinator.
3. The Response Coordinator must document the allegations of misconduct and the Safety Response Team's response.
4. The Safety Response Team must decide what actions need to be taken to ensure the safety of the alleged victim and others in the congregation and ensure that those actions are carried out.
5. If the Safety Response Team determines that reasonable grounds exist to investigate whether misconduct has occurred, the Response Coordinator must notify the following persons of the of the allegations of misconduct: the alleged offender; the church's attorney; the church's insurer; and, if there is a continuing risk of harm to congregants, law enforcement.
6. In conducting an investigation, the Safety Response Team must schedule a time to talk separately with the reporter of and/or the victim of the alleged misconduct and with the alleged offender, along with others who may have relevant information.



7. If the alleged offender is a paid staff member, that person will be placed on involuntary paid leave until (a) the Safety Response Team makes a determination that the safety of congregants is reasonably assured and (b) the Senior Minister makes a determination allowing the individual's continued employment (or, if the alleged offender is the Senior Minister, until the Board of Trustees has makes a determination allowing the Senior Minister's continued employment). Regardless of whether criminal charges are filed, continuation of employment is based on the best interests of the church.
8. The Senior Minister, Board President, or other person the Safety Response Team designates may consult with the UU Trauma Response Ministry (UUTRM) about the misconduct at any stage of the response process and must consult UUTRM before informing the congregation of the misconduct.
9. If the Safety Response Team determines that it is necessary to inform the congregation of the misconduct, the Safety Response Team will prepare a written statement to share with members. Only the Senior Minister (or authorized delegate) has the authority to make additional oral or written statements to congregants or to the press. If the Senior Minister is the alleged offender, the Safety Response Team must designate another authorized spokesperson to make statements to congregants or to the press. The authorized spokesperson may be a UUTRM responder deployed to assist the church.
10. The Safety Response Team will ensure that pastoral care is available to all parties involved and to other congregants in need of pastoral support.

## **VII. Safety Plan and Limited Access Agreement**

- A. *Safety Plan.* If the Safety Response Team determines there is sufficient evidence of misconduct to require protection of the congregation (whether or not the victim of the misconduct is affiliated with the church), the team will treat all persons involved with care and respect and will take the following safety precautions:
  1. If the misconduct was toward a child or youth, the miscondactor will not be permitted to have contact with children or youth involved in church activities until the miscondactor has received appropriate treatment and the miscondactor's treatment professional recommends reintegration into the church community.
  2. If the Safety Response Team receives a reintegration recommendation from the miscondactor's treatment professional, the Safety Response Team may agree to a reintegration safety plan including, if appropriate, a limited access agreement; however, the Safety Response Team is not permitted to allow the miscondactor to work in the faith formation program for children and youth.
  3. The Safety Response Team will develop a reintegration safety plan in consultation with the miscondactor, the miscondactor's treatment professional, and support persons of the miscondactor's choosing.
    - a. The safety plan will identify the individual's high-risk situations and specify 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, youth, or potentially vulnerable adults are present.

- b. The safety plan must allow the individual's treatment professional and the church Safety Response Team to share information so that the team can take appropriate actions to monitor the safety of children, youth and adult congregants.
  - c. The safety plan must be in writing and must specify the ways in which the misconductor's access to people or activities is limited. It must be signed by the misconductor and by representative of the church (the Senior Minister, Board President, or other person designated by the Safety Response Team).
- B. *Safety Plan for Registered Sex Offender.* If a person wishing to participate in church activities is a registered sex offender, that person is required to meet with the Safety Response Team and enter into a safety plan with appropriate limitations on access. A registered sex offender's safety plan must at least meet the specifications of the safety plan in A. *Safety Plan.*
- C. *Open Discussion.* It is a goal at First Unitarian Church to create an atmosphere of openness so that adults and children feel supported and safe to talk about misconduct. Keeping secrets about misconduct (especially sexual misconduct) is harmful to victims, potential victims, the congregation, and the misconductor. Adults and children must be sufficiently aware so that they can recognize potentially risky situations both on and off church premises.
- a. The Safety Response Team will share the existence of a safety plan and limited access agreement with appropriate members of the congregation.
  - b. In cases involving misconduct toward a child or youth, the team will encourage parents or guardians to talk with their children openly and honestly (in an age-appropriate way).
  - c. To ensure the safety of children and youth, the Safety Response Team will ensure that children and youth are informed (in an age-appropriate way) of the specific danger a misconductor presents and the limitations on that person's access to children and youth.
  - d. As is appropriate, the Faith Formation Ministry Team may carry out discussions with children and youth in their faith formation classes (with parents invited to participate).