

UU Lansing Policy 1.1

**Unitarian Universalist Church
of Greater Lansing**

SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY



Approved by UU Lansing Board of Trustees 4/13/2013

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INTRODUCTION

I. Purpose

The purpose of the UUCL Safe Congregation Policy is to ensure that all who participate in the UUCL experience a safe, trustworthy and supportive community, free from spiritual, emotional, sexual, and physical threats.

II. Vision

For members of this church community to fully realize the benefits of belonging, the following features must be nurtured and sustained:

- Employees and volunteers act with freedom and confidence because their responsibilities are clear, preventive practices are routine, and they know how to respond to threats to the safety of this community.
- Members experiencing vulnerability find a trustworthy community that provides education about their concerns, support for participation in the church community and links to the resources of our larger Greater Lansing community.
- Parents of our children and youth are confident that church members entrusted with responsibilities for education and activities have been screened, trained and monitored to ensure safe, trustworthy relations.
- Children and youth are taught to have the highest expectations for safe, respectful engagement with other members of the church.

III. Safe Congregation Team

The purpose of the Safe Congregation Team is to review and update the Safe Congregation policies and procedures. The team shall meet semi-annually (November and June) and as needed to review implementation of the policies. Any suggested changes will be recommended to the board. Other duties of the Safe Congregation Team may include reviewing and advising on development of training and screening materials related to the policies, as well as review of incidents reported to the response team.

The Safe Congregation Team will be composed of the Director of Lifespan Faith Development (DLFD) and five individuals appointed by UUCL's Board of Trustees. The Senior Minister and the DLFD will make recommendations as to who will be appointed.

To the extent possible, the board will appoint members who reflect the diversity of the congregation in the composition of the Safe Congregation Team. Team members will be qualified by their:

- 1) Professional or volunteer experience in working with and/or protecting children or adults through other special training; health and wellness, injury prevention, etc.
- 2) Understanding of this policy and other UUA "Safe Congregation" material; and/or
- 3) Knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for abuse of children or adults, including applicable Michigan state laws.

IV. Standing Response Team

A group of individuals will be identified on an annual basis by the Senior Minister and DLFd with qualifications matching those of the Safe Congregation Team to serve as a Standing Response Team. Members of the Standing Response Team, who may also be members of the Safe Congregation Team, will be available to respond to a specific Safe Congregation issue by participating in an Incident Response Team as requested. This could include a specific complaint or allegation or other situations that may pose a risk to members or friends of the UUCGL.

V. Incident Response Team

In response to a specific complaint or allegation of a Safe Congregation Policy violation, the Senior Minister or DLFd will form a Response Team consisting of people not involved in the incident. The team will include the Senior Minister (ex-officio), the DLFd (ex-officio), three individuals from the Standing Response Team, and anyone else the Senior Minister feels would be helpful in effectively responding to the complaint or allegation. Under no circumstances will any person under an allegation, including a minister or staff, serve on the Response Team. The Board President will be informed that an incident response team is being formed.

The Response Team does not have the authority to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to ensure that all parties are treated with dignity and respect. The role of the Response Team is to gather only the information necessary to make recommendations for: appropriate action for keeping all parties safe; protecting privacy; determining appropriate referral to authorities and community services/supports; documenting allegations, actions taken and outcomes; and the handling of communication of relevant information.

PREVENTION PRACTICES

I. Building Safety

UUCL is a spiritual community that takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for everyone who participates in our congregation. This includes attending to the physical safety of members, friends, visitors and staff of UUCL.

A. Health and Safety

1. Illegal drugs and unauthorized flammables are prohibited on UUCL property. Firearms and weapons are prohibited except when carried by authorized law enforcement officers.
2. UUCL will maintain first aid kits throughout the building, including one in each classroom and in the kitchen.
3. UUCL will maintain a working Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) machine located in a conspicuous place. Members of UUCL staff and Lay Leaders will be trained in its operation. UUCL will make best efforts to provide annual refresher training.
4. UUCL will maintain all areas of the church building and grounds to assure reasonable levels of safety for all employees, congregants and visitors to our buildings and grounds.

B. Fire and Tornado Safety

1. UUCL will maintain fire security systems up to code in all areas of the UUCL buildings.
2. Emergency exit diagrams will be visibly posted in all areas of UUCL buildings, including in every classroom and in the kitchen.
3. Annual Religious Education (RE) Teacher training will include directions about where teachers should take their classes in response to a fire alarm or tornado warning. Parents/Guardians will be informed about these procedures when they register their children for RE classes.
4. UUCL and long-term tenants of our building will carry out regular emergency drills.

C. Accessibility

1. UUCL will comply with all applicable Americans with Disability Act (ADA) regulations.
2. UUCL will make best efforts to make our buildings and grounds as welcoming and accessible as possible to people with disabilities, which may include taking actions beyond those identified in the ADA.

II. Screening for Adult Employees and Volunteers

A. UUCL Employees

Consistent with our efforts to provide a Safe Congregation, each member of the Clergy and all employees will:

1. Undergo a reference check prior to offer of employment;
2. Agree to and undergo a criminal and sexual-offender background check prior to employment and at least once every three years.
3. Be subject to personnel policies as adopted by the Board of Trustees.

B. UUCL Volunteers

Prospective volunteers who are interested in positions of responsibility will talk with a supervising staff member to discuss their volunteer interests and goals. This includes but is not limited to RE volunteers, chaperones, youth advisors, covenant group facilitators, pastoral assistants, and chairs of committees.

1. Volunteers who work directly with or near children and youth as Religious Education teachers, Youth Advisors, Coming of Age mentors, Trip Chaperones or in other capacities must agree to undergo a criminal and sexual-offender background check arranged by UUCL staff prior to beginning volunteer work.
2. Prospective Youth Advisors will also complete a Volunteer Candidate Questionnaire that includes questions about their interest in volunteer work, their motivations for seeking a volunteer role, and other relevant background information.
3. Small group facilitators and Pastoral Assistants will undergo a review process prior to selection.

C. Criminal Background Check (CBC)

1. UUCL will carry out CBCs that will identify past criminal convictions and inclusion in the national Sex Offender Registry, based on reported places of residence – counties or states. The Sex Offender Registry is a national database that reports registered sex offenders regardless of the offense jurisdiction.
 - a. UUCL will arrange for a CBC to be done for each volunteer no less than once every three years. The Safe Congregation Team will develop a schedule and sampling procedure. Volunteers must agree to a CBC every year, though they may or may not be checked each year.
2. Authorization forms and background check results will be kept strictly confidential. Only members of the Safe Congregation Team and the Senior Minister will have access to these forms, which will be kept in paper format in a dedicated, locked filing cabinet in the office of the Senior Minister. These forms (the signed authorization form, the completed results of the CBC, the original application or questionnaire) will be kept for seven years.
3. Each instance where a record is returned will be carefully considered. A documented criminal or sexually related conviction will serve to initiate a discussion with UUCL Senior Minister and other appropriate staff, and may result in the restriction or termination of employment or the exclusion of the person in question from work with children and youth or other individuals.
4. The Safe Congregation Team will review the process of maintaining these sensitive files annually to ensure the highest standards of confidentiality are being maintained.

III. Safe Congregation Policies in Practice

A. General Congregational Life

UUCL is a spiritual community that takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for everyone who participates in our congregation. Recognizing that the way we treat each other is a fundamental part of creating a safe, inviting space; and also a reflection of our values, we (children, youth, parents/guardians, teachers, volunteers, members, friends, ministers and staff) will strive to interact in ways that:

- embody our first UU principle, that every person has inherent worth and dignity;
- demonstrate our commitment to learning about each other;
- show respect for our diversity and different needs;
- foster empathy and an understanding of other people's perspectives;
- honor each other's time;
- communicate concerns directly with each other.

As we strive to interact in this way, we build a safe and nurturing environment in which we all have the opportunity to deepen our acceptance and understanding of one another, and in which personal transformation and spiritual growth are encouraged and supported in an atmosphere of civility, mutual respect, trust and kindness. We place a special emphasis on creating a safe congregation for the children, youth and those most vulnerable among us.

B. Guidelines for Working with Children and Youth

From the moment parents and guardians, children and youth walk through the doors of church, we want them to feel they are in a safe, inviting, and comfortable space. To this end, UUCL's staff will make their best efforts to provide developmentally appropriate curricula and programming for our children and youth. UUCL will make best efforts to provide children and youth with safe, appropriate spaces to learn, play, communicate and be active.

We ask that children, youth, parents/guardians, teachers, and staff follow these guidelines to ensure the safest and most nurturing environment for our children and youth.

1. Responsibilities of Children and Youth

- a. Children and youth will follow directions to ensure safety and to prevent harm.
- b. Children and youth will treat each other with kindness and respect.
- c. Children and youth will provide input about how to make this a safe congregation.

2. Responsibilities of Parents/Guardians

For this section, the term "Parents /Guardians" is meant to include adults whom parents have entrusted with the care of their children (including but not limited to grandparents or friends who have been given permission to bring children to church) while they are at UUCL or attending a UUCL-sponsored event.

- a. Parents/Guardians will complete UUCL Religious Education program.

- b. When registering, Parents/Guardians will share all information that is relevant to the safety of their children and youth, or to others (i.e. medical needs, allergies, special needs).
- c. When registering, Parents/Guardians will agree to abide by the guidelines within this Safe Congregation Policy.
- d. Parents/Guardians will speak with the Director of Lifespan Faith Development about any custody issues, and, upon request, put the most important facts in writing. The Director of Lifespan Faith Development (DLFD) will communicate that information with teachers as appropriate.
- e. If Parents/Guardians are concerned about their children's physical or emotional safety while at UUCL, or the physical or emotional safety of another child while at UUCL, Parents/Guardians will contact the Director of Lifespan Faith Development immediately. If the DLFD can't be reached, Parents/Guardians will contact a minister. Ministers and/or Staff will respond promptly and appropriately, engaging the Safe Congregation Team if warranted.

3. Responsibilities of Teachers and Religious Education Volunteers

For this section, the word "teachers" should be understood to include any person working with children in an UUCL classroom, children's program or event.

a. TRAINING AND SAFETY COVENANTS

- i. Before assuming a teaching role, all Religious Education volunteers will make their best efforts to attend an annual RE teachers' training session that includes coverage of UUCL's Safe Congregation Policy, positive discipline techniques, and appropriate accommodations for children with special needs.
- ii. The Religious Education Staff will make their best efforts to meet individually with volunteers who cannot attend the annual RE teachers' training to review training content.
- iii. Before assuming a teaching role, all volunteers will sign a covenant signifying that they understand, and are committed to, UUCL's Safe Congregation Policy, positive discipline techniques, and appropriate accommodations for children with special needs.
- iv. There will be no use of alcohol, illegal or intoxicating substances, or tobacco products by adults while leading field trips, overnights, retreats or any program for children and/or youth.

b. OPEN DOOR POLICY

- i. All classrooms, nursery through twelfth grade will be easily monitored at all times (open door and/or uncovered window).
- ii. Parents/Guardians are welcome in the classrooms at any time, with the exception of Our Whole Lives (OWL) classes.

c. TWO PERSON RULE

- i. UUCL staff will make their best efforts to ensure that a minimum of two teachers or childcare providers is present to supervise any and all Religious Education

Classes, children's worship services, or congregational events for children and youth.

- ii. At least one of these teachers must be 18 years old or older in nursery through Grade 5 classrooms. At least one of these people must be 23 years of age or older in classrooms and programs for middle school and high school youth. Childcare providers may be youth who have been vetted or trained by the RE staff.
- iii. Children and youth who volunteer to work with younger children in RE classrooms must always work together with an adult (see preceding section).
- iv. When a scheduled Religious Education teacher is unavailable, the RE staff and/or RE volunteers appointed by RE staff will make their best efforts to secure a trained substitute. If this is not possible, RE staff and/or RE volunteers appointed by RE staff, may work with present teachers to combine or cancel classes.
- v. If one of the two required teachers must temporarily leave their classroom or children's program, they will stay as close to the classroom as possible and return to the classroom as quickly as possible.

d. POSITIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

UUCL utilizes positive classroom management techniques. Teachers will make best efforts to establish clear expectations to provide rewards and incentives for acceptable behavior, and to use appropriate verbal redirection. In particular:

- i. Teachers will strive to manage with kindness and patience.
- ii. Teachers will discipline with actions and words designed to help children develop a sense of responsibility and self-control.
- iii. Teachers will support children in creating caring communities and happy learning experiences.
- iv. Teachers will be familiar with and use the UUCL RE Committee's Best Practices in Classroom Management plan.
- v. UUCL does not practice inappropriate discipline, including corporal punishment and punitive techniques that cause pain, or permit yelling, shaming, belittling, or bullying. UUCL discourages sarcasm, which is likely to be misunderstood by children. Physical restraint of children is only permitted to ensure the child's own safety or the safety of others.
- vi. Teachers will consult with RE Staff and children's Parents/Guardians to plan collaboratively how to improve problematic behavior.
- vii. If a child's behavior is disruptive and has not improved in response to a variety of positive management techniques, teachers will communicate with RE staff and may choose to enforce consequences as follows:
 - Break inside classroom: The child takes a break from participation, but remains inside the classroom. The child is but is directed to sit silently in an area apart from the activity. One teacher is available to supervise the break. The teacher briefly discusses the solution to the problem with the child when s/he is ready to rejoin the class activity.

- Break in hallway: A teacher accompanies a child outside the classroom for a break from participation in the hallway. They briefly discuss the problem and solution when the child is ready to go back in the classroom.
 - Break with RE staff: A teacher walks with the child to find RE Staff, and the child has a longer break in the company of RE Staff. The RE Staff discusses the problem with the child and works collaboratively to develop a plan or solution.
 - Parent/Guardian supervision & removal from a lesson: A teacher or RE staff person finds the parent or guardian of the child, and the parent or guardian is asked to supervise the child for the remainder of the class. The parent/guardian and teacher and/or staff member meet subsequently to discuss the problem and develop a plan.
- viii. Physical violence and bullying among children are not allowed. In the unlikely event that a child intentionally hurts someone, teachers will enforce one of the more serious consequences above.
- ix. In the event that a child's behavior is highly disruptive, dangerous, or repeatedly emotionally hurtful, the RE Staff may decide that the child needs to be excluded from some, or all, participation in the RE program or RE-sponsored events.
- e. **NAMETAGS**
- i. RE Staff will provide nametags to all people working with children. Teachers will wear these nametags whenever they are working with children.
 - ii. Teacher and Advisor nametags will include volunteers' full names and have the Church logo.
 - iii. Nametags for children will be available.
- f. **CLASSROOM ABSENCES FOR CHILDREN 5 YEARS AND OLDER**
- Every teacher will enforce the following three rules when Children and Youth leave a classroom during a class or event:
- i. Children and Youth need to let teachers know when they are leaving the classroom for bathroom visits, water breaks or other teacher-approved purposes.
 - ii. Children and Youth are expected to go straight to the bathroom, water fountain or approved destination and then return directly and promptly.
 - iii. Children and Youth will let teachers know when they have returned.

g. CHANGING LOCATIONS

If teachers wish to move their class to a location outside of the classroom that is approved by the DLFD, they will post a sign or message in their classroom clearly indicating where they will be and when they will return.

h. TOUCH

Healthy, loving touch is a basic, human need. Common expressions include, but are not limited to, appreciation (high five), condolence (hand on shoulder), comforting and affection (hugs); affirmation (pats on the back); and physical care taking (face washing, etc.). These are all acceptable and encouraged as long as three guidelines are followed:

- i. Touch needs to be respectful and age appropriate.
- ii. Teachers will respect a child or youth's preference not to be touched and adjust activities accordingly.
- iii. Touch should always be non-sexual in nature. Teachers, youth advisors, nursery school supervisors and helpers shall not touch or interact with children or youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating or undertaken for purposes of sexual gratification.

i. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

We encourage the use of email for electronic communications among RE Teachers, Advisors, UUCL Staff, RE families, children and youth, subject to the following guidelines:

- i. Electronic Communication between RE Volunteers, UUCL staff and RE families, children and youth should be used to communicate facts and information relevant to Religious Education and in direct support of RE programs.
- ii. Adults shall not initiate personal or private interactions, or those not directly related to RE programs, with youth via social/electronic media. Parents need to have confidence that no conversation is being initiated by another adult without their knowledge.

4. Leaving UUCL with Children and Youth

a. FIELD TRIP/OFF-SITE GUIDELINES

- i. Permission slips: Parents/Guardians must sign permission slips prior to children and youth leaving the UUCL premises for UUCL sponsored field trips. If children and/or youth are being transported by private car, drivers must have a signed permission slip for each child in the car.
- ii. Participation requirements: If a child or youth does not have a signed permission from a parent or guardian, that child or youth will not be allowed to participate in the scheduled event.
- iii. Location: The destination and expected time of return must be posted in the UUCL building. All routes should BEGIN and END at UUCL unless other arrangements have been communicated to parent/guardians in advance.

- iv. **Leader Information:** Leaders must have a list of names, emergency contacts, medical conditions and a parent/guardian-signed emergency treatment authorization with them at all times.
- v. **Medications:** It is the responsibility of Parents/Guardians to disclose and to provide any medication that may need to be taken by their child during the trip to the RE volunteer staff member in charge of that trip. Parents/Guardians should provide in writing and talk directly with the UUCU volunteer responsible for the field trip to agree on appropriate procedures for administering emergency medication that their child may require during the field trip.
- vi. **Transportation Ratios:** It is recommended that children and youth be transported in groups, and, when possible, two adults shall be present to transport any child or children. In no circumstance will one adult transport only one child who is not his or her own unless the parent/guardian has made other arrangements.
- vii. **The offsite ratio of adults to youth will be at least 1:6, with a minimum of three adults required for the event to take place.**
- viii. **Safety:** An appropriately filled first aid kit is to be taken on all field trips, overnights and retreats.

b. DRIVERS AND DRIVING SAFETY

- i. All drivers for UUCU-sponsored field trips for children and youth must be at least 21 years of age.
- ii. Drivers must comply with all applicable state laws regarding the operation of motor vehicles, including the use of seatbelts for driver and all passengers.
- iii. Children must ride in car seats in compliance with Michigan state law.
- iv. If a trip requires more than one vehicle, each vehicle must have the necessary information to reach the destination. Drivers are not to caravan, i.e. follow the one person who knows the way.

C. Nursery and Children's Program

Following are guidelines specific to UUCU's programs for children in nursery through Grade 6.

1. Parents and Guardians

a. DROP OFFS & PICK UPS

- i. On Sundays, parents/guardians of infants, toddlers and preschoolers (newborn to approximately 5 years old) will drop off and pick up their children at the Nursery or classrooms. When dropping these young children off, parents/guardians will sign in with their names and cell phone number (if available).
- ii. Parents/guardians of children in grades K-2 will pick up their children at their classrooms immediately upon conclusion of the RE class, unless appropriate and safe alternative arrangements have been agreed upon in advance. Children in grades 3-6 are dismissed from their classroom.

b. ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPERVISION

- i. Parents/Guardians of infants and toddlers may remain in the Nursery or classroom with their children.
- ii. The nursery during the worship service is restricted to childcare providers and family members of the children.
- iii. Parents/Guardians of infants and toddlers will remain accessible during worship or special events. If possible, they will hold a cell phone set to vibrate, and give their cell phone number to their children's teachers or childcare providers. Parents/Guardians of infants and toddlers may be asked to return to the nursery or classroom if their children need comforting or a diaper change.
- iv. Parents/Guardians of pre-school and elementary school age children may join their children in their classrooms. If they choose to stay, Parents/Guardians of pre-school and elementary school age children will try to support the lesson and minimize any distraction their presence may create.
- v. Parents/Guardians of school age children will remain at UUCL while their children are participating in Sunday Religious Education programs, other children's worship programs, or other congregational events unless arrangements have been made with the DLF.
- vi. Parents/Guardians have responsibility for the supervision and guidance of their children when their children are in the UUCL building not attending Sunday school classes or RE-sponsored events (for example, before and after class, during meetings or choir practice).

2. Teachers and Staff

a. CHILDCARE

- i. Paid childcare providers must sign a form signifying that they understand, and are committed to, UUCL's Safe Congregation Policy and positive discipline techniques, before beginning work.
- ii. If two or fewer children are registered for childcare during a congregational event, and when this childcare is provided by paid childcare providers, RE staff may, at their discretion, decide to hire only one childcare provider as long as the child care takes place in visible proximity to responsible adults.

b. DIAPERS

When a child's diaper needs to be changed, provider will contact a parent/guardian so s/he can change the diaper.

c. POTTY TRAINING

- i. Teachers or childcare providers for children who are potty training will accompany children to the restroom leaving the door halfway open.
- ii. The teacher may stand just outside the restroom or wait inside the restroom, depending on the child's level of need.

- iii. If a child demonstrates a need for help with cleaning or dressing, the teacher will help, always ensuring that the door is halfway open. Teachers will not assume their assistance is needed.
- iv. Teachers will ensure that children wash their hands after using the bathroom, and they will thoroughly wash their own hands after offering any assistance.
- v. If an older child has special needs that require bathroom assistance, the teachers will work with the Director of Lifespan Faith Development and the child's parent/guardians to develop an individualized plan for how to provide that assistance.

D. Youth Program

Following are guidelines that apply to working with Middle School-aged and High School-aged Youth.

1. Training for Volunteers

- a. All Youth Advisors and teaching volunteers are encouraged to attend Heartland District's Basic Youth Advisor Training, (or equivalent) and Advanced Advisor Trainings when they are appropriate and available.
- b. Our Whole Lives facilitators (OWL) will successfully complete the mandatory OWL training.
- c. Coming of Age facilitators will attend an orientation/training with the DLFD.
- d. Volunteer teachers, youth advisors and facilitators will maintain regular contact with the Director of Lifespan Faith Development during any year in which they are volunteering.

2. Teaching Volunteer and Advisor Guidelines

- a. There must be a minimum of two adults present for youth group meetings and at other events involving youth of the congregation. There must be a minimum of three adults present for overnights, at least two of whom must be awake and in a supervisory capacity. If the required number of adults cannot be present, the event will be cancelled.
- b. The minimum age for adult volunteers working with youth is twenty-three (23).

3. Youth Group Events

Youth daytime and evening events and overnights are an integral part of UUCGL's youth program. To keep these experiences safe, nurturing, welcoming and enjoyable, UUCGL has established these guidelines:

a. ON-SITE EVENTS

- i. Only UUCL Youth Group members may participate in Youth Group Events unless express permission has been granted by the Director of Lifespan Faith Development for visitors to attend. Youth Group members are those youth who have registered for the RE program and have attended UUCL classes or events regularly. Walk-in visitors are not allowed.
- ii. The onsite ratio of adults to youth will be at least 1:10. A minimum of two adults is required for a daytime or evening-only event to take place; a minimum of three adults is required for an overnight to take place.

- iii. Youth leadership will communicate standard behavior guidelines to participants prior to each event.
- iv. For each event, youth and the leaders will jointly develop a behavioral covenant.
- v. Adult leaders and youth participants will treat each other with kindness and respect. Youth participants will respect the requests and requirements of adult leaders.
- vi. Behavior that could pose a risk of harm to self or others can warrant the youth being sent home without warning.
- vii. Youth will not go outside after dark unless accompanied by adult leaders or with an adult leader's permission. If this rule is violated, youth may be sent home without warning.
- viii. Youth will stay with the larger group, or with a designated smaller group. If this rule is violated, youth may be sent home after one warning.
- ix. No firearms, weapons, fireworks, illegal or intoxicating substances, including alcohol are allowed. If a youth participant violates this rule, he or she will be sent home immediately. The youth will stay under adult supervision until the parent/guardian arrives. The youth will not be able to participate in overnights, retreats, and field trips for one calendar year, and then may resume participation if approved by the DLFD.
- x. No smoking or tobacco products are allowed. If a youth participant violates this rule, the tobacco products will be confiscated, the youth's parent/guardians will be called, and the youth will be sent home. Further participation in overnights, retreats, and field trips will require a contract among the youth and adult leaders, the DLFD, and the youth's parent/guardians.
- xi. No sexual activity is allowed. Exclusionary and sexual behavior is inappropriate during a youth overnight, field trip or retreat. Sexual activity detracts from the group environment and the sense of group safety. If this rule is broken, the parent/guardians of the youth in question will be called, and the youth may be sent home. Further participation in overnights, retreats, and field trips will require a contract among the youth and adult leaders, the Director of Lifespan Faith Development, and the youth's parent/guardians.
- xii. Youth and Advisors will respect UUCL and others' property. If willful destruction of property occurs, the relevant parent/guardians will be notified, restitution will be required, and involved youth may be sent home. Further participation in overnights, retreats, and field trips will require a contract among the youth and adult leaders, the Director of Lifespan Faith Development, and the youth's parent/guardians.
- xiii. Youth participants will work together to clean up and restore the overnight space to a tidy and orderly condition.

b. OFF-SITE EVENTS

All of the above rules apply. In addition:

- i. The offsite ratio of adults to youth will be at least 1:6, with a minimum of three adults required for the event to take place.
- ii. Please see Section 4, "Leaving UUCL with Children and Youth," above for rules regarding permission slips and driving.

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Situations of suspected domestic or sexual violence, child abuse or youth maltreatment/neglect are seldom simple and straightforward. Congregational Leaders should be aware of the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations as well as the harm that can be done by not taking allegations seriously or addressing misconduct.

Our congregation is committed to the overriding priority of protecting members from harm. Anyone responding to an allegation should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- The safety of congregants is of primary importance.
- Reasonable and timely actions should be taken to ensure their safety based upon allegations and other pertinent factors.

I. Child Abuse

Anyone who observes or has concerns about maltreatment or suspected abuse of children or youth in the church community is encouraged to report those concerns to the Senior Minister, even if the actions occurred outside of church activities.

If the individual believes the abuse occurred during a church activity, he/she should report those concerns immediately to the Senior Minister, DLFD or their on-site representative.

In this instance, a Safe Congregation Report Form (see Appendix A) should be completed by the person observing signs of suspected abuse or neglect, with the assistance of the Senior Minister, DLFD, or their on-site representative, who is also responsible for taking the necessary steps to:

- 1) Abide by Michigan law for reporting child abuse;
- 2) Take appropriate action to assure protection of the children and youth in the church.

The Senior Minister or DLFD is also responsible for:

- 1) Convening a meeting of the Incident Response Team (see page 4).
- 2) Notifying the President of the Board of Trustees when such a report is filed.
- 3) Informing the appropriate member of the MidAmerica Regional Staff

The Board will determine whether such an incident report requires filing an insurance report or claim.

Reporting of child abuse to law enforcement or Child Protective Services is not mandatory for most adults, except for law enforcement, human services and healthcare workers. However, any person witnessing or having reasonable suspicion of injury, exploitation, objectionable conduct toward, or physical or sexual abuse of, any child or youth or other person at UUCGL may decide to report to external authorities in addition to appropriate staff.

The current number for Ingham County Child Protective Services will be posted with other emergency numbers at UUCL at all times.

UUCL Staff, members of the Safe Congregation Team, Board of Trustees, or other volunteers will not take any retaliatory action against any person making such a report. Every reasonable effort will be made to protect the privacy and rights of all persons involved.

Police will be notified if a child appears in imminent danger or the reporter has reason to believe that release of the child to his or her parent or guardian poses a significant risk to the child's health or well being.

A. State Law

Appendix B lists a link to the current Michigan Child Protection statute and reporting procedures available from Michigan Department of Human Services.

B. Professional Resources

The Response Team should call on or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within the church and the community.

C. Confidentiality

To ensure the safety of UUCL's children and youth, we must encourage the responsible disclosure of all concerns or suspicions of child abuse. All disclosures to the Response Team will be considered confidential. In this context, "confidential" means that the identity of the child victim and/or reporting person, the details of the allegation or concern, and any other identifying information, will be kept among the members of the Response Team. This information will not be disseminated to the congregation.

D. Reporting and Response

The strict confidentiality of the reporting person will be maintained at his or her request unless a child self-reports abuse that s/he has experienced and the Response Team determines that a report to Children's Protective Services is warranted. In this case, the child's name will be disclosed to Children's Protective Services. In accordance with Michigan's Child Protection state law, reporters of child abuse and/or youth maltreatment will not be identified to the accused.

The reporting person must communicate directly with a representative of the Standing Response Team to give a full report of her or his concern. The Response Team representative will use the Safe Congregation Report Form (Appendix A) and attempt to elicit all information necessary for completion of that form. The Standing Response Team will meet to determine whether an Incident Response Team should be convened. In order for the Incident Response Team to respond appropriately and fairly, all members of the Response Team are expected to be present for this meeting and make every effort to attend all subsequent meetings regarding this incident. All information related to the concern known to any one member, including the Minister and DLF, must be shared with the other Incident Response Team members. If the Standing Response Team determines that a report to Children's Protective Services is warranted, that action must be taken within 48 hours of receiving the initial disclosure. The Standing Response team will either complete the Safe Congregation Report Form or convene an Incident Response Team for further

follow-up, the results of which will be documented on the Safe Congregation Report Form. The Senior Minister will keep all Safe Congregation Report Forms and/or documents in locked files.

E. Accusations

The prevention guidelines of the Safe Congregation policy are designed to minimize the possibility of an RE adult volunteer being falsely or mistakenly accused of abuse. Failure to substantiate an allegation is not assumed to indicate that the allegation is false.

1. Unsubstantiated Accusations

In the event that an allegation referred to CPS is found to not warrant further legal action, the Standing Response Team will help the accuser find support for addressing his or her concerns and help the accused identify steps needed to avoid the conditions that led to the accusation. The Standing Response Team will make recommendations to the Minister and/or the Board to remedy any disruption to the church community.

2. False Accusations

The Standing Response Team will make every effort to remedy the harm done to the accused as well as anyone else involved in the situation, and assist the accuser in finding support to address his or her concerns.

II. Domestic and Sexual Violence

When someone discloses domestic or sexual violence, there are important considerations for responding appropriately. For example:

- Believe them.
- Listen and avoid making judgments or comments that imply the victim is to blame in any way.
- Tell them the abuse is not their fault.
- Take their fears seriously.
- If you are concerned about safety, express your concern without judgment by saying, "Your situation sounds dangerous and I'm concerned for your safety."
- Support their decisions.
- Understand that a victim's "inaction" may very well be their best safety strategy at any given time.
- Remember there are risks attached to every decision. If you truly want to help, be patient and respectful, even if you don't agree.

Often, the best source of help and information is a local domestic and/or sexual violence program. In Ingham County the following agencies work with survivors of domestic and sexual violence:

- EVE Inc.
- MSU SafePlace
- Women's Center of Greater Lansing
- Listening Ear
- Sparrow Hospital Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner
- MSU Sexual Assault Program

For more information on local support services, please visit the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence website at: www.mcedsv.org .

You may also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or Rape Abuse Incest National Network at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673). Call toll free, 24 hours a day, anywhere in the U.S. Trained counselors provide confidential crisis intervention, support, information and referrals to local programs to victims of domestic and sexual violence, their families and friends.

III. Other Inappropriate Behavior

Some incidents or allegations may involve behavior that is not clearly abuse, but may in other ways be deemed inappropriate by a parent, by the DLF, a Minister, or a lay leader. In such cases, the Standing Response Team may be called together to review the situation and decide what action to take.

A. Leave of Absence and Restriction of Activities

1. To protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk and to protect the accused from further suspicion, a decision about removing the accused from interacting with children in the Religious Education program or other church programs will be made by the Response Team, including the DLF and the Minister regardless of whether or not a report has been made to CPS or any action taken by CPS.

A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to children and youth, the credibility and seriousness of the allegation, and other factors that may relate to the situation. Actions other than removal from volunteering will be given full consideration depending upon the situation. Alternative actions might include additional training, review of the policy, or changing classrooms.

2. If a report is made to Child Protective Services, this leave will be mandatory during their investigation.
3. The DLF may also determine, even without an accusation of abuse having been made, that there is reason for concern that a volunteer's contact with children or youth in our congregation potentially places either the volunteer or young persons at risk of incident or accusation. For this reason, the DLF is authorized to restrict an individual from teaching in the RE program or otherwise volunteering or chaperoning for children or youth events. The DLF will make this decision in consultation with the Standing Response Team.
4. If disputes arise out of the actions taken by the DLF, the Minister, or the Response Team, the matter may be taken to the Board.

IV. Restricting the Role of a Staff Person or Volunteers

Events may sometimes indicate that an adult staff member or volunteer or youth assistant is no longer able to work with children, youth or other church members in a safe and reliable way. This may occur when:

- a volunteer teacher or advisor, after instruction and/or feedback, fails to follow the policies and procedures for a safe congregation ;
- new information is returned on a Criminal Background Check;

- the individual's application disclosures are found to be inaccurate;
- the person's conduct is deemed inappropriate; or
- any other circumstances or events arise that cause significant concern by a member or members of the congregation, parents or guardians, volunteers, staff members or ministers.

Any person with an immediate concern about the behavior of an adult staff member or volunteer or youth assistant should contact the appropriate supervising staff member for guidance or intervention. The supervising staff person is responsible for reporting the concern to the Senior Minister or DLF.

In some situations there may not be an event that warrants immediate intervention, but there may be circumstances that warrant review by the Safe Congregation Standing Response Team. These concerns should be reported to the Senior Minister, DLF, or a member of the Safe Congregation Standing Response Team.

If the Safe Congregation Committee determines that it is necessary to remove a staff member or volunteer from a position, or to restrict in any way that person's role with children, youth, or other members of the congregation, the Safe Congregation Committee or a member representing the committee will recommend the action to the Board, who will provide the affected individual an opportunity:

- To know the complaints against him or her;
- To know the evidence supporting such complaints/allegations;
- To have the right to reply to such complaints/allegations.

It is not the right of the individual to know who made the complaint. This may be necessary in order to protect the person making the complaint. It is the responsibility of the Safe Church Committee to protect, as much as possible, the target of the complaint from groundless or distorted accusations.

If the restricted individual is a minor, all such communications will be made in the presence of the minor's parent or guardian.

V. Other Responsibilities of the Board

The Board of Trustees of UUCL will make the final determination of any additional consequences appropriate to the violation of this policy, including, but not limited to, termination of a staff person (except for the Minister who, according to church bylaws, can only be recalled by a vote of the congregation), and any additional action in the case of volunteers beyond that for which the Response Team is authorized.

Violation of this policy by a Minister or staff member shall constitute good cause for discipline under the terms of his/her contracts or letters of agreement.

The Board shall also inform the following of any determination of serious violation by a Minister of this policy:

- The Unitarian Universalist MidAmerica Regional Staff
- The Director of the Department of Ministry of the UUA
- The Good Offices member of the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

For other staff, the following will be contacted.

- The Unitarian Universalist MidAmerica Regional Staff
- Appropriate Unitarian Universalist Professional Organization

DEFINITIONS

Access: The ability, right, or permission to approach, enter, speak with, or use.

Accessibility: When talking about accessibility, we mean much more than addressing physical barriers. UUCGL is striving for “attitudinal, environmental, and emotional safety;” a welcoming setting that is accessible for all. Attaining accessibility means considering how to provide meaningful supports that are unique to the person requesting assistance and change systems to recognize the barriers they may unintentionally create.

Children and Youth: People under the age of 18.

Child Abuse: Child abuse as defined by Michigan Child Protection Sections 722.621 — 722.638, (Michigan Compiled Laws) means harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher’s aide, or a member of the clergy.

All child abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child abuse is contrary to several UU principles, and is against the law. The offender bears the entire responsibility for the abuse whatever form it takes. Some examples of child abuse include:

- **Physical Abuse:** Deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child with hands, feet, a knife, or other implement, or causing burns, fractures, and bruises resulting from being beaten, shaken, or thrown.
- **Sexual Abuse:** (also see below) Engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child; using a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of an adult or another child. Sexual abuse can include fondling, sexual intercourse, oral, genital, and anal penetration, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, and exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution. Children/youth under the age of 16 cannot legally consent to any of these activities.

Sexual abuse that does not involve touching includes:

- Verbal comments such as statements intended to seduce children;
- Displaying pornographic materials to children or youth;
- Sexualized electronic communication (phone calls, emails, text);
- Engaging in sexualized behavior in the presence of children or youth

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse involves subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It can include close confinement, deliberately frightening experiences, and extreme discipline. Emotional abuse may be very difficult to identify and document.

Child Neglect: Child neglect involves failure of a parent guardian or other caregiver to provide for a child’s basic needs, and may include:

- Failure to provide necessary food or shelter
- Lack of appropriate supervision
- Failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment

- Failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
- Inattention to a child's emotional needs
- Permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse

Criminal Sexual Conduct: Sexual assault is any form of unwanted sexual contact obtained without consent and/or obtained through the use of force, threat of force, intimidation, or coercion. There are four degrees of Criminal Sexual Conduct (CSC) under Michigan law and they cover a range of sexual contact and levels of force or intimidation. Survivor resistance is not a factor in assessing CSC and the law is gender neutral. Marital rape has also been illegal in Michigan since 1988.

Discipline: Discipline includes actions and words used strategically to teach respect and caring; to clarify expectations for appropriate behavior in a particular setting; to try to modify another's behavior; and/or to assist others in developing self-control.

Domestic Violence: Domestic violence is behavior in which one person uses physical, sexual, and emotional/psychological abuse to control another person or persons. Besides using physical violence or threats of violence, other tactics can include: destruction of property, stalking, denying access to education, employment or finances, belittling religious or ethnic traditions or beliefs, isolating someone from friends or family, and limiting access to health care.

Positive Classroom Management: Positive Classroom management is characterized by techniques that consciously and consistently focus on positive behavior. Examples include but are not limited to: giving attention before a problem occurs; recognizing, praising, or rewarding behaviors that are caring, respectful, or helpful; honoring even small progress toward a goal; and/or clarifying expected behavior in response to a problem (rather than listing what not to do or describing all the things that are going wrong). When teachers use positive classroom management effectively, every student experiences far more positive interactions than negative.

Healthy Touch: Healthy touch is appropriate as long as others' personal wishes about being touched are honored. Common expressions of healthy touch include but are not limited to hugs of appreciation, condolence and affection; affirming pats on the back; and physical care-taking.

Sexual Assault: see Criminal Sexual Conduct and Child abuse definitions above

APPENDIX A: SAFE CONGREGATION REPORT FORM

Purpose: The purpose of this form is to provide the initial documentation of an event

Instructions: This form is to be completed by a Safe Congregations Standing Response Team member. The form is to be initiated within 24 hours of receiving information about the incident and completed within 48 hours of referral to external authorities or closure by the church. The form is to be filed in the church with access limited to the Senior Minister, Director of Lifespan Faith Education and Chairperson of the Safe Congregation Team.

Completed by: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____
Response Team membership:

Convened by: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Reports of the Incident(s):

Report 1:

Person(s) providing the information: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Location of event:

Factual account of the information provided, including the names of others present:

Report 2:

Person(s) providing the information: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Location of event:

Factual account of the information provided, include the names of others present:

Additional pages attached: yes no

Action steps:

Notify family members?

No Why:

Yes Name(s):

Date:

Time:

Notify external authorities?

Name:

Affiliation:

Date:

Time:

Other steps?

Describe:

Date:

Time:

Outcomes:

Describe outcomes pertinent to the church's interests.

Date:

Appendix B: Michigan Child Protection statute and reporting procedures

This information is available online from the Michigan Department of Human Services:

http://michigan.gov/dhs/0,4562,7-124-7119_50648_7193---,00.html

Anyone, including a child, who suspects child abuse or neglect, can make a report by calling **855-444-3911**. In addition, the [Child Protection Law](#) requires certain professionals to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Review the [Mandated Reporters](#) section of the DHS website for more details.