



Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Safe Congregation Policy February 2005

Philosophy Statement

We, the members of ALUUC are aware of the prevalence of abuse, sexual abuse, and harassment in our culture; that it crosses gender, race and class lines; and that we as a congregation ought to address these issues. It is reasonable to assume that physical and sexual abuse has touched our congregation. Thus, we, as a congregation, have a responsibility to keep our children safe.

Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to create a safe environment that protects children and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

We believe our church is uniquely poised to respond to this challenge. ALUUC is a special place that highly values the ideals of community and the search for truth. It is a place that encourages personal growth, allows for personal truths, and supports individuals and families in their efforts to build better lives and a better society. As a caring, intergenerational community we can respond to those in need in broader, more flexible ways than many other institutions.

Definition of Terms

These definitions are provided as a guide to understanding the intent of the text, but are not intended to be exclusive or inclusive of all possible meanings. Similarly, other undefined terms in this document should be interpreted so as to convey the intent and purpose of the provision without necessarily following strict legal or technical definitions.

Child Abuse

- 1) Any non-accidental intentional act by an adult upon a child under the age of 18 years which results in any of the following:
 - Physical injury or a substantial risk of physical injury, or
 - Sexual contact or exploitation, or
 - Serious emotional distress; or
- 2) Any act which constitutes child abuse under the laws of the State of Illinois.

Sexual Abuse

Any sexual contact or sexual exploitation between a person age 18 or older and a child under the age of 18 years.

Sexual Misconduct

Any instance of:

- Undesired or inappropriate sexually oriented humor, language, questions, or comments, or
- Undesired or inappropriate physical contact, or
- Inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance, or
- Intimidation or hostile sexually orientated comments.

A one time occurrence may be sufficiently serious to constitute sexual misconduct.

Sexual Harassment

Repeated, ongoing, and unwanted incidents of sexual misconduct.

Background Check

The review of a person's background to determine if any factors are present indicating that it would be inappropriate for the person to participate in programs with our children or youth. The background check normally consist of a search of the Illinois Sex Offender Registry, The Illinois Department of Corrections inmate listings, and the Department of Children and Family Services Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System (CANTS). Individuals interested in participating in programs with our children or youth agree to cooperate in providing any information and releases that may be necessary to complete these searches. The ALUUC reserves the right to conduct other searches as may be determined appropriate.

Designations such as "Minister", "CRE", and "Committee on Ministry" refer to the terminology and congregational organization existing at the time of drafting. In the event positions are vacant or terminology changes, this document remains valid but should be read in the context of the current terms and assigned responsibilities.

Preventing Abuse

We at ALUUC acknowledge that preventing future sexual abuse and harassment and ensuring general safety in our church communities and in society is a complex goal. Preventive education, careful hiring procedures, and policies regarding the circumstances of youth and adult interactions are concrete steps toward creating a safe environment for all.

Education and Training

It is the intention of our religious education programs to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our adult membership. We will attempt to provide the following as part of the educational program:

1. Age appropriate programs about development and sexuality for our children, youth, and adults which are offered on a regular basis and include greater clarification and understanding of the complex aspects of sexuality, including a focus on sexual abuse prevention.
2. Specific training provided by the District and Congregation. All teachers are required to review and sign the Code of Ethics for Working with Children and Youth.
3. Maintain a list of resources within the community that address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse.
4. This policy is posted publicly and provided in print format periodically and is part of Board and Committee Chair orientation.

Procedures for Recruiting Volunteers and Hiring Staff

1. Employees of the Church working with children and youth:

- Will comply with all requirements for Religious Education teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth.
- Will be screened by the appropriate hiring committee who will contact references, record the contact, administer background checks as appropriate, and conduct a formal interview with the candidate.

The application forms including the background check results are considered confidential. They are kept in a locked file to be viewed only by the appropriate hiring committee, the Committee on Ministry, the Minister, and the President of the Board of Directors.

Persons already employed by the church but who have not already done so will be asked to complete **Document A: The Safe Congregation Employment Questionnaire** and sign **Document B: The Code of Ethics for Working with Children and Youth**.

1. Religious Education teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth:

- Will be at least 25 years of age to work with high school youth.
- Will be at least 21 years of age to teach other RE classes (an 18-20 year old may teach as the second adult with someone who is 21 or older).
- Will be at least 16 years of age to provide childcare.
- Will have been an active participant at the ALUUC for at least six months or have childcare references from the public or private sector.
- Will sign **Document A: The Safe Congregation Questionnaire**.

- Will sign **Document B: The Code of Ethics for Working with Children and Youth**.
- Will be approved by the Religious Education Committee.
- Will have passed a background check.
- Will have attended at least one training session on child abuse put on by the RE committee, the Coordinator of Religious Education, or another organization as approved by the Religious Education Committee.
- Will have received and understood a job description.
- Will have a valid driver's license, liability insurance, and current automobile registration and license plates on their vehicle if they are to transport children/youth to church-sponsored activities.

Document A: The Safe Congregation Questionnaire, Document B: The Code of Ethics for Working with Children and Youth, and the background check is considered confidential, is kept in a locked file and reviewed only by the Chair of the Committee on Ministry, the Minister, and the President of the Board of Directors.

Documentation

The Religious Education Committee, along with the CRE, ensure supporting documentation exists verifying religious Education teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth have satisfied the requirements of this policy.

Reference Checks

When necessary, personal and organizational references provided by the applicant are contacted and interviewed by a member of the Religious Education Committee or CRE. A written record of each contact is filed with other records relating to the applicant.

Background Check

A background check will be conducted as defined in this policy. The background check is coordinated by a designee of the Religious Education Committee.

The Committee on Ministry will evaluate these background checks. If there is a questionable background check, the Committee on Ministry will discuss the results with the subject of the questionable report prior to making a determination as to the favorable or non-favorable status of the background report.

These background checks are kept in a locked file accessible by the Committee on Ministry Chairperson, the Minister, and the ALUUC board President.

Disqualifying Offenses

Any applicant who has been convicted of a disqualifying offense, been on probation or received deferred adjudication for a disqualifying offense, or has presently pending criminal charges of any disqualifying offense, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication, is considered ineligible to participate in programs with our children and youth. Any candidate who has four or more convictions regardless of nature excluding juvenile, expunged, and minor traffic violations is considered ineligible to participate in programs with our children and youth.

Guidelines for Determining Disqualification

The following or equivalent offenses are grounds for disqualification:

- Homicide, Battery, Assault, Kidnapping, Arson
- Sexual Assault
- Other Sex Offenses involving children
- Pornography
- Family Offenses:
 - Child neglect, cruelty, abandonment, or endangerment; Domestic Violence; Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor
- Weapons Offenses
- Drug Offenses:
 - Selling, distributing or possessing illegal drugs
- Traffic Offenses: (excludes candidate only from transporting children and youth)
 - Driving while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs; Reckless Driving; Hit and Run

Other offenses may be added to the screening criteria, and thus result in disqualification, at the discretion of the Committee on Ministry if they feel that an offense not listed above could compromise the safety of children or youth.

If a disqualifying offense is revealed in a candidate's background screen, the candidate may appeal the "unfavorable" result to the Committee on Ministry. Factors considered by the Committee on Ministry to determine disqualification include the nature and severity of the criminal conduct, the length of time since the offense occurred, the likelihood of rehabilitation and other factors that the Committee on Ministry may deem appropriate under the circumstances. If the "unfavorable" result is due to false information or mistaken identity, the candidate is directed to the source of the information to have the error corrected. Unless the "unfavorable" status is overturned by the Committee on Ministry, the applicant is not eligible to participate in programs with children or youth.

Supervision

Various supervision methods are detailed below to help leaders and teachers avoid creating situations in which personal boundary issues can become a problem.

Protection and Safety

1. Religious education volunteers shall review this policy, as well as information on sexual abuse and prevention, every year.
2. There must be a minimum of two adults present in the building, at youth group meetings, and at other events involving children and youth of the church. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Coordinator of Religious Education.
3. The nursery staff person shall release children only to their parents or guardian, unless previous arrangements have been made between the parents and volunteers.
4. Parents are expected to supervise children when children are not in R.E. classes.
5. No child may be disciplined corporally or corrected with abusive language.
6. We will abide by an open door and uncovered window policy. RE classrooms are always open to the CRE and parent, guardian and visitors.

Field Trips

1. Parents or guardians must be notified when children are leaving the church premises by vehicle, and parents or guardians must sign **Document F: Field Trip Permission Form**.
2. There must be a minimum of two adults with the group although exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Coordinator of Religious Education. There must be a ratio of one adult to five children.
3. Children must be secured safely in vehicles according to current state regulations for car seat restraint.
4. For youth conferences, we will adhere to the District Youth Conference Policy.

Building Safety

1. A first aid kit must be readily available in the R.E. classroom area.
2. A review of the fire escape plans must be part of teacher training.
3. The R.E. Committee must conduct a Sunday morning fire and tornado drill annually.
4. No guns or concealed weapons are allowed on church property except in the possession of an officer of the law.
5. Fire exits are kept clear and unlocked for opening out.
6. All accidents resulting in injury, whether to child or adult, should be reported on **Document E: Incident Report**.

Responding to Abuse

The Committee on Ministry will respond to any disclosures or allegations of violations of this policy. The Committee on Ministry and all others involved will maintain confidentiality to the greatest degree possible. Grievances related to confidentiality may be brought to the Board of Directors.

The Committee on Ministry

The Committee on Ministry is a committee of elected individuals who are entrusted with the responsibility of serving our religious community in times of grievance or crisis. In cases of a conflict of interest, a member of the Committee on Ministry may be excused from participation.

When responding to suspected incidents of abuse, the Committee on Ministry serves two purposes. First, they serve as a source of general information about abuse and a link to available resources.

Second, if any person feels that they have been harassed or abused, or observes or has reasonable cause to suspect behavior they believe constitutes physical or sexual abuse of a child, or if someone discloses such abuse, the Committee on Ministry will aid the person who reported the incident in the process of filing a report to the appropriate agency. Accusations involving criminal conduct is reported to law enforcement officials. The Committee on Ministry will report adult non-criminal incidents to the Board. The Committee on Ministry does not have the legal authority, or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to assist members of the community, both children and adults, both victims (potential or actual) and the accused. While the incident is being investigated, the Committee on Ministry will work to protect and support all involved parties, in a way which allows the community to go about its business in a non-persecutory but safe atmosphere. The Committee on Ministry will alert the President of the Board that an abuse situation has been reported.

If an accusation of abuse of a child by a member of the community has been reported, the Committee on Ministry will ask the accused to sign **Document C: Interim Agreement Regarding Restrictions with Children**, which would restrict contact with children while the accusation is being investigated. It is designed to protect children from any possible risk, to protect the accused from further suspicion, and to facilitate confidentiality while the complaint is being resolved. This document is kept in a locked file in the Staff Office and is reviewed only by the Committee on Ministry and the President of the Board of Directors. If the accused is cleared of the accusations or if the complaint is withdrawn, the document is returned to him or her and the formal interim restrictions is terminated. If the accusations are found supported by the relevant authorities, the Committee on Ministry will ask the offender to sign **Document D: Agreement for Those Needing Restrictions with Children**.

Similarly, should the Committee on Ministry become aware that a member of the congregation has, in the past, sexually abused children or if any other reason exists to limit the person's contact with our children and youth, the Committee on Ministry will require the individual to sign **Document D: Agreement for Those Needing Restrictions with Children**. This document is kept in a locked file and reviewed only by the Committee on Ministry and the President of the Board of Directors. Such information is revealed to others on a need-to-know basis.

The Committee on Ministry will take responsibility for:

1. Coordinating support for all parties involved, including the person who reported the incident;
2. Overseeing a process in which all parties are treated with dignity and respect; and
3. Responding, through a single designate spokesperson, to questions from the public media if contacted by them. In general, because of the issue of confidentiality and in the best interests of the victim and accused, release of information to the public is restricted as much as possible. The designated spokesperson will discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

Reporting and Response Procedures

If a person feels that they have been the victim of, or observes, or has reasonable cause to suspect behavior in violation of this policy, that person should fill out **Document E: Incident Report** and report the incident to a member of the Committee on Ministry.

If the CRE or Minister ascertains that a child or youth is in a situation of risk, the responsible person should immediately remove the allegedly abusive adult (or the child) from the situation and take any other steps necessary to protect the minor.

If the reported abuse is by a worker or volunteer at ALUUC, the supervisor of that person will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care, or teaching of children and youth at ALUUC until the matter is resolved. The supervisor will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and any circumstances on **Document E: Incident Report**.

Documents

A. The Safe Congregation Questionnaire

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Date _____

Position Applying/Volunteering for _____

Please answer the following questions:

A. Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to a criminal offense

B. Have you ever committed, or has any civil action ever been filed against you for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

C. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, please explain:

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

If yes, please explain _____

I have been provided a copy of the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Congregation's Safe Congregation Policy and agree to comply with its terms.

Signature of Applicant

Date

References: (include name and telephone number)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Interim Agreement Regarding Restrictions with Children

CONFIDENTIAL

A complaint has been made to the Committee on Ministry which is now under investigation. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children in our programs from potential risk, to protect you from further suspicion, and to maintain confidentiality, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes an agreement with or acceptance of the accusations made. Instead, this interim restriction is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals. This document will be reviewed only by the Committee on Ministry and the President of the Board of Directors. If the accusations are unfounded or withdrawn, this document will be returned to you.

Within these guidelines, the church welcomes your participation in worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult discussion groups, adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. The guidelines are as follows:

1. Avoid all contact with children on church property or at church-sponsored events. This restriction includes the following:

Refrain from contact with children.

No volunteering or chaperoning for children's events (including children's religious education classes, talks with the children during worship services, specific children's activities at intergenerational events, and driving children to church activities).

Remain in the presence of another when children are present in the building or at church sponsored events.

Avoid conversations with children on church property or at church-sponsored events.

2. The church must provide safety for a variety of groups that use the building during the week. To that end, these guidelines apply to any activities on ALUUC property when children are present.
3. The church will attempt to keep this matter as confidential as possible, while ensuring the church remains a safe place for our children. Consider the Minister and the President of the Board of Directors as your contact persons should further questions arise.

Failure to abide by this agreement may result in termination of your membership and/or refusal of access to church property and events.

Agreement

I have reviewed this **Interim Agreement Regarding Restrictions with Children** and agree to abide by it.

Signature

Date

C. Agreement for Those Needing Restrictions with Children

CONFIDENTIAL

As we have discussed, the Committee on Ministry has serious reasons for concern that your contact with children and youth in our congregation potentially places both you and them at risk of incident or accusation. For this type of situation we have developed the following guidelines.

Within these guidelines, the church welcomes your participation in worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult discussion groups, adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. The guidelines are as follows:

1. Avoid all contact with children on church property or at church-sponsored events. This restriction includes the following:

Refrain from contact with children.

No volunteering or chaperoning for children's events (including children's religious education classes, talks with the children during worship services, specific children's activities at intergenerational events, and driving children to church activities).

Remain in the presence of an adult designated by the Board and within hearing distance at all times when children are in the building or at church sponsored events.

Avoid conversations with children on church property or at church-sponsored events.

2. The church must provide safety for church affiliated groups that use the building during the week. To that end, avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session.
3. The church will attempt to keep this matter as confidential as possible, while ensuring the church remains a safe place for our children. Consider the Minister and the Committee on Ministry Chairperson as your contact persons should further questions arise.
4. Inform a member of the Committee on Ministry of any further developments which may influence our concerns about your possible impact on the well-being of the children in this church.

Failure to abide by this agreement may result in termination of your membership and/or refusal of access to church property and events.

Special Note: In the event due to the seriousness of the circumstances, these guidelines are determined insufficient, the individual may lose his or her right to be a member of this congregation and may be refused access to church property and events.

Agreement

I have reviewed this **Agreement for Those Needing Restrictions with Children** and agree to abide by it.

Signature

Date

D. Incident Report

Date of Report: _____

Name of **person reporting incident**: _____

Person affected by incident: Name: _____

Address (street, city, state, zip): _____

Is age of person affected less than 18? yes no

Location of incident (please be specific): _____

Date of incident: _____ **Time** of incident: _____

Describe exactly **what happened**: _____

Property or equipment involved: _____

Owner of property or equipment: _____

Witness (name, address, phone) _____

Witness (name, address, phone) _____

Injury / Treatment

If injury, describe: _____

Referred for treatment (please circle one):

none private physician emergency department ambulance

Insurance Company Contacted (please provide details): _____

Action Taken (use additional sheet of paper, if necessary)

Resolution (use additional sheet of paper, if necessary)

F: Field Trip Permission Form

Your child's Religious Education class will be going on a field trip to

On _____ from _____ to _____ o'clock.

The purpose of the trip is _____

Transportation will be provided by _____

Adults responsible for this trip are _____

Please feel free to contact them for further information.

If your child has a medical condition or other concern that we need to be aware of for this trip, let us know.

Your signature gives us permission to take your child on the above mentioned field trip. Feel free to accompany your child on this trip.

Child's name _____

Phone number where you can be reached at the time of the field trip: _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Date _____

G: YRUU Medical Care Release Form

Youth's Name _____ Soc Sec # ____ - ____ - ____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone # (____) _____ Church _____
DATE OF BIRTH _____

Mother/Guardian's Name _____
Address (if different) _____ City _____ St ____ Zip _____
HOME PHONE (____) _____ WORK PHONE (____) _____
Father/Guardian's Name _____
Address (if different) _____ City _____ St ____ Zip _____
HOME PHONE (____) _____ WORK PHONE (____) _____

Contact persons – In case of emergency or illness and parents / guardians cannot be reached, the following people may be contacted:

1) Name _____ Phone # (____) _____
Address _____ Relationship _____
2) Name _____ Phone # (____) _____
Address _____ Relationship _____

Name of Health Insurance Carrier _____
SUBSCRIBER # _____ FILE # _____ Effective Date _____
Physician's Name _____ Phone # (____) _____

Youth Medical History:

DRUG ALLERGIES: _____
OTHER ALLERGIES: (FOODS, PETS, POLLENS, ...) _____

MEDICATIONS (used regularly or as needed – include inhalers, Epi-pen,...)

Date of last tetanus injection _____

I give permission for _____ (name of youth) to receive any needed medical care or treatment required in my absence. I understand I will be responsible for the payment of any care provided that insurance does not cover.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN _____

DATE: _____

ADVISORS AND DRIVERS: Please keep this signed form with you at all times – to, from and during the conference. It should travel in the same vehicle as the named youth. You may even want to fill one out for yourself and give it to a youth riding in the car with you!! In addition, everyone who has an insurance card is encouraged to carry it to the conference, although, of course, it would be kept by the insured, not the advisor or driver.