

UUCV Safe Congregation Policy

Purpose: Everyone who visits, works, or worships at the Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley (UUCV) is entitled to a safe atmosphere free from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or harassment, and free from physical hazards.

I. Hiring

A) Pennsylvania background checks will be completed on all staff and members of the Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT). All new staff hires will be subject to all state-mandated background checks. This will be the responsibility of the Church Administrator. Offers of employment will be contingent on clean reports about sexual offenses.

B) All staff members will repeat these background checks every 4 years during continued employment.

C) All employees are responsible for disclosing any new charges brought against them during their period of employment to the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister is responsible for disclosing such charges to the President of the Board.

D) Any criminal charges or investigations involving employees are covered separately in the Employee Manual.

II. Religious Education Program

All Religious Education (RE) volunteers who work with children or youth under the age of 18 will be subject to all state-mandated background checks, and required to sign an ethics policy. They are also considered mandated reporters of child abuse under Pennsylvania law, regardless of the nature or frequency of volunteering.

A) Training in sexual abuse prevention will be held annually for RE volunteers. All people who volunteer with children and youth under the age of 18 must be signatories to the behavioral Covenant of the church.

B) There will be two volunteers in all RE classrooms at all times.

C) All drivers to RE activities must provide copies of driver's licenses and insurance. Two unrelated adults will be in every car that transports minors not related to the driver.

D) The Director of Lifespan Faith Development (DLFD) or an appointed assistant will rotate through classes on Sunday mornings.

E) Information for children on child sexual abuse prevention will be included in all OWL classes. At least one OWL class for children, youth, and/or adults will be offered annually.

III. Reporting Abuse, Harassment, or Disruptive Behavior

A) Under Pennsylvania law, all adults are *permissive reporters* of any abuse of a minor. All staff, and any volunteers (paid or unpaid) who work with children under 18 are *mandatory reporters* of actual or suspected abuse of a minor. No policy in this document supersedes any individual's responsibility under the law, nor are they meant to act in the law's stead. These policies are supplemental to all legal actions.

B) Everyone at the Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley (UUCV) is encouraged to contact church leaders if they are ever concerned about, witness, or hear about actual or suspected harm to a child, youth or vulnerable adult in the church. If anyone witnesses criminal behavior, that person needs to immediately notify the police. In addition, any member or guest of UUCV is encouraged to speak up immediately without fear of reprisal if they witness, experience, or hear about situations involving abuse, harassment, exploitative, or disruptive behavior. Information about the concern, observation, or allegation can be given to a minister, DLFD, or any member of the SCRT.

C) All concerns and allegations shall be taken seriously and will trigger an action or response immediately, according to church policies such as the Policy on Disruptive Behavior, Child Safety, or Building Safety. Within 24 hours of a complaint being received, the SCRT will communicate to the respondent and complainant about any interim measures while the complaint is being investigated and resolved.

D) All specific policies shall be available at the church office.

E) The complainant[s] need not be the victim of the inappropriate behavior, but instead may be an observer, or someone who has been told information by a minor victim. Any committee of UUCV may also initiate the formal complaint process. Any person bringing a harassment or exploitation complaint, or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

F) Whoever is first told is not charged with investigating complaints; the primary role of this person is to listen actively. Make notes on what is said with as much detail as is communicated and report the information to the appropriate leader or committee for resolution—*unless* the concern involves suspicions of abuse, in which case, law enforcement and protective services/ChildLine must be contacted directly.

G) No church staff or member who is not currently serving on the SCRT should confront a respondent once a complaint has been made, or suggest any suspicion of child abuse to the child or youth in question. Rather, follow legal requirements and the procedures set out in this document.

H) Any congregant witnessing any potentially dangerous aspect of the physical plant of the Church property is responsible for reporting it to the SCRT, UUCV staff, or Property Committee so that it can be remedied.

IV Safe Congregation Response Team

A) The Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley will have a standing Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT) of 4-5 members, which will include the Director of

Lifespan Faith Development (DLFD), a member of the Board of Trustees, and at least two members of the congregation appointed by the committee. The minimum number of committee members required to make decisions is three. Members of the congregation will be advised of the members of the SCRT annually and invited to approach them, or the minister(s) about any concerns regarding misconduct or harassment by other members.

B) Members of SCRT will serve not more than two terms of one year before stepping down from the committee for at least one year. The SCRT shall be internally responsible for choosing and appointing replacements for members stepping down.

C) The SCRT will meet quarterly at minimum, or as needed to resolve concerns.

D) In addition to crafting and ensuring implementation and communication of safe

congregation procedures, the SCRT will address concerns about safety that are internal to the church. The Response Team will facilitate appropriate responses to any concern or allegation. This will include:

- investigating the complaint
- suggesting remedies to leadership
- assuring that pastoral care is extended to anyone affected by the complaint by the appropriate people, including victims, families, respondent (the individual accused of abuse, exploitation or harassment), the whole congregation, etc.
- monitoring the church's cooperation with law enforcement, the media, and insurance carriers, while maintaining confidentiality as much as possible

E) The SCRT will assure that one of several approaches are taken to address the complaint or concern:

1. If a member is accused of inappropriate behavior, the accused will be notified and may be suspended until an investigation is complete.
2. If a staff person is accused of inappropriate behavior, their immediate supervisor will be contacted.
3. The complainant has the option of resolving the matter directly with the respondent (the individual accused of abuse, exploitation or harassment), but this is entirely voluntary.
4. The complainant can report the incident to a minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally through mediation.
5. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:

a. The SCRT shall advise the minister(s) and Board officers of the receipt of all complaints, and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If the minister or Board officer is the subject of the complaint, the SCRT shall notify a Board officer who is not the subject of the complaint.

b. The SCRT shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged exploitation or harassment, including the respondent, and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to the Board of Trustees.

c. The Board of Trustees shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:

i. Finding that exploitation, abuse or harassment did not occur, then taking steps to carefully restore the individual's credibility.

ii. Finding that exploitation, abuse or harassment has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action accordingly. Such action may include one or more of the following:

o A formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;

o Recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment as a condition of continued involvement with the church;

o Probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;

o Dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer leadership position, and, in extreme cases, terminating affiliation with, or membership in, the church.

d. The SCRT may seek the advice of legal counsel or others for expert advice in performing its functions.

e. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes harassment or exploitation, consideration shall be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.

F) A written summary of the SCRT's proceedings will be maintained in the church office for a period of not less than 7 years. These records will be protected from anyone outside of the SCRT and those they deem are directly impacted.

G) Adequate care must be shown for the well-being of victims, respondents, and families involved, as well as the congregation itself. That care includes informing those involved in the situation of the steps that are being taken, and continuing to keep them advised of the status of the response process. Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. No victims will be blamed in any way, nor will their stories be minimized.

H) It is expected that a member of the congregation or a potential member/participant with a criminal history of interpersonal violence or active accusation of misconduct/abuse/sexual offense will make that history known to the minister. The minister will refer the matter to the SCRT, which will complete a Limited Access Agreement with the participant if appropriate.

I) Any accusation made against a member of the SCRT will trigger that member recusing themselves from the team until the complaint is resolved.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS:

ChildLine - A part of the Pennsylvania child protective services program, ChildLine receives reports 24/7 of child abuse and concerns the welfare of children. Reporting to ChildLine fulfills one's legal obligation as a mandated reporter of child abuse, and reports can be made by telephone at 1-800-932-0313 or through the Child Welfare Portal online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>

Complainant - The person making a complaint against another individual **DLFD** - Director of Lifespan Faith Development

Mandatory Reporter - Mandated reporters generally are people who come into contact with children as a part of their employment, practice of their profession and as volunteers in child-serving programs. Willful failure to report is a second degree misdemeanor in PA.

List of Mandated Reporters in PA:

<http://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Understanding-Mandated-Reporting/Who-are-Mandated-Reporters>

Responsibilities of Mandated Reporters: <http://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Understanding-Mandated-Reporting/What-are-a-Mandated-Reporters-Responsibilities>

Member - A participant in church activities or events, regardless of formal church membership

OWL - Our Whole Lives, the comprehensive sexuality education program offered by UUA

PA - Pennsylvania

Permissive Reporter - Anyone can and should report child abuse, but unless you fit in the category of a mandated reporter, by law you are not required to make a report

Respondent - The person against whom a complaint has been made

SCRT - Safe Congregations Response Team

UUCV - Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley