

# TUUC Safe Congregations Policy

## “Keeping Children Safe”

### Our principles

As Unitarian Universalists, we are bound together by covenant--promises we make to one another as to how we intend to relate to each other and to our world. Our Unitarian Universalist Principles and our Living Tradition, and our congregational Mission Covenant Statement provide us with direction and support.

It is our understanding, as a covenanted community, that each of us is empowered, and has the responsibility, to help each other maintain these covenants. We seek to uphold the common good and preserve safety for all who participate in our congregation.

### Keeping Children Safe at TUUC

Adults in leadership positions and those who teach children in our faith community play a key role in fostering spiritual development and wholeness. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and wholeness. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect and regard, with the adult leader assuring the safety and well being of the children at TUUC.

There are three prongs to TUUC's policies aimed at assuring the safety and well being of the children at TUUC: prevention, response and education. Definitions of key terms are contained in the procedures below.

#### TUUC Prevention Policies:

These policies affect all TUUC volunteers who take on **leadership** positions (“Tier One”) or who have direct ongoing contact with **children** (“Tier Two”).

These two volunteer groups will be screened for criminal background, personal references and to ensure they have been active at TUUC for at least 6 months. Criminal background screenings are more comprehensive for “Tier Two” volunteers.

The Director of Religious Exploration (DRE) must approve all field trips and overnights in advance, and must be informed of the adult/student ratio for such trips and the names of chaperones. Overnights must have at least two screened chaperones at all times.

There will be two adults (age 18 or older) assigned to every class so that no child or vulnerable adult is alone with an adult while engaged in church-sponsored activities.

Teachers will not drive individual children or vulnerable adults to or from church activities.

Teachers will not engage in any behavior or language with children or vulnerable adults that could be interpreted as sexual (**with the exception of OWL-related course material**), seductive, abusive, or erotic (including back rubs or massages or sexually inappropriate/dirty jokes).

Teachers will not share personal sexual or drug experiences with children.

Adults working with children are required to report suspected child abuse, including marks or bruises that are out of the ordinary and stories of abuse that are disclosed during RE. This information must be reported directly to the police or the Maryland Department of Social Services. The minister, DRE, or YRE Committee chair should also be notified.

#### TUUC Response Policies:

Individual cases will be forwarded to the “Safe Congregations Response Team” for investigation if:

- Someone does not “pass” TUUC’s screening (e.g., they cannot make listed assurances on page 2 of the Tier One Disclosure Agreement, answered “yes” to any of the question in the History section on page 2 of the Tier Two Disclosure Agreement, or whose background check reveals a criminal history or complaints of sexual abuse of a child.)
- It is discovered – at any time -- that a Tier One or Tier Two volunteer did not disclose a criminal history or complaints of sexual abuse of a child.
- There is a current complaint of misconduct of ANY kind by ANY individual with children.
- The person has violated the restrictions placed through an existing Limited Access Agreement.

The Safe Congregations Response Team (hereafter “SC Response Team”) will be comprised of the Minister, DRE, President of the Board of Trustees and a liaison from the Safe Congregations Ad Hoc Committee.

While the matter is under review, the SC Response Team will **suspend** the person’s involvement in the role, group or activity in which he or she is involved. The person will return building keys at this time.

Within two weeks, the SC Response Team will determine actions to take if any. Whenever complaints or violations are verified, a limited access agreement will be implemented or updated. The restrictions placed on the individual will be consistent with the risk posed to the church by the person’s background.

If the person does NOT agree to these restrictions, he or she will be, at minimum, asked to leave his or her role permanently. If necessary, the Board of Trustees will be also be consulted to determine whether the person’s membership should be terminated.

#### TUUC Education Activities:

The Board of Trustees and the Safe Congregations Committee will provide comprehensive education to the congregation about these safe congregations policies. The education strategy will include written and verbal communication, as well as documentation posted on the website.