

**WESTSIDE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

SECTION 9

In the spirit of promoting trusting and caring relationships between children, youth and adults, we, the congregation, Minister and Director of Religious Education of Westside Unitarian Universalist Church, have adopted the following as our policy to safeguard our children, youth, adult volunteers and staff. This policy is our statement of commitment to the well being of our church community and our care for all of its members.

I. SELECTION PROCESS

The Director of Religious Education and/or the RE Committee will interview and select child and youth workers. Those selections and accompanying applications will be shared with the Chairperson of the Children's RE Committee and with the Minister before the worker is notified. If the Minister or said Chairperson strongly disagrees with a particular selection, they may veto that selection. In the event of serious conflict between the parties over a selection, the President of the Congregation shall be informed.

II. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF TEACHERS AND SPONSORS

Any adult, staff or volunteer, who serves as a church school teacher, youth sponsor, nursery worker, or anyone who serves in an on-going volunteer position within the child or youth programs of the church must meet the following screening criteria:

- A. Child and Youth Workers must have participated in the church for at least 6 months. Participation in another Unitarian Universalist church may be counted toward this requirement if the Director of Religious Education or the Religious Education Committee is confident of the accuracy of references from that church.
- B. All potential workers with child and youth must complete the ***APPLICATION FORM FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH***. A reported conviction for child abuse of any type automatically disqualifies anyone from working with children or youth. A reported plea bargain or deferred adjudication relating to child abuse of any type will also be reasons for disqualification. If the application form or references call into question someone's appropriateness to work as a teacher or sponsor, the Religious Education Committee will investigate and make a recommendation to the Board of Directors as to whether or not the applicant be permitted to work with children or youth. The final decision as to whether or not the applicant will be permitted to work with the children or youth will rest with the Board of Directors.

III. TEACHER GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

- A. Whenever possible, there will be two adults in a classroom for each session. At least one of the adults must be screened and approved. If there is a class where the teacher is alone in a classroom with one child or youth, the classroom door must be open.
- B. Teachers are cautioned about how they show affection to children. Appropriate touching and hugs are a natural part of the church school teacher-student relationship. However, teachers

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should be careful to avoid contact that might be perceived as inappropriate. ‘Sideways’ hugs are recommended.

- C. Teachers wishing to take their class out of the building must obtain the approval of the DRE or a member of the RE committee. There must be one adult for every five children. Any trip out of the church shopping center area requires a **PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM** signed by a parent or guardian.
- D. Anyone who drives children on a trip out of the church shopping center must have answered all the questions on the **APPLICATION FORM FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**. The Director of Religious Education or the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee must approve all drivers.
- E. Teachers and sponsors must carry a copy of the **PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM** at all times when accompanying youth on a trip. Drivers must also carry **PROOF OF AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE COVERAGE** as required by the State of Texas.

IV. Sponsor Guidelines and Policies

- A. Young Religious Unitarian Universalist (YRUU) sponsors will abide by Southwest Unitarian Universalist Conference rules when attending district events with youth.
- B. Anyone who drives youth to rallies or other events must have completed all the questions pertaining to drivers **APPLICATION FORM FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**. The Director of Religious Education or the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee must approve all drivers. No one under the age of 25 may drive youth to rallies.
- C. Two adult sponsors must accompany youth on trips to rallies or other district events. Exceptions to this policy may be made on a case-by-case basis by the Director of Religious Education (or in her/his absence, the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee) in consultation with the Minister.
- D. Sponsors must carry a copy of the **PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM** at all times when accompanying youth on a trip. Drivers must also carry **PROOF OF AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE COVERAGE** as required by the State of Texas.
- E. If a group activity involves an overnight stay, both a male and a female sponsor must be present. These sponsors may be from another congregation in the District as long as the Director of Religious Education or the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee is assured they have been similarly screened in their congregation and agree to the *Unitarian Universalist Association Guidelines for YRUU Activities*.
- F. Any youth participating in any activity which requires travel away from church property or an overnight stay, such as a lock-in, must have the Westside Unitarian Universalist Church **WRITTEN PERMISSION FORM** signed by his or her parent or legal guardian. The youth must also sign the **AGREEMENT TO RULES FORM**.

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- G. Sponsors are cautioned about how they show affection to children. Appropriate touching and hugs are a natural part of the sponsor-youth relationship. However, sponsors should be careful to avoid contact that might be perceived as inappropriate. ‘Sideways’ hugs are recommended.
- H. Sponsors must report to the Minister any meeting with a Westside Unitarian Universalist youth that occurs outside the context of a church or district event. In relations with youths, sponsors should avoid any appearance of impropriety.

V. REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

All reports of suspected child abuse made by any party shall be documented and reported to Child Protective Services or the Police. In the state of Texas, any adult who has reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred is required to make a verbal report to Child Protective Services or the Police as soon as possible but not later than 48 hours after first suspecting the possibility of abuse.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

1. A parent, teacher, youth or child should report any incident of suspected child abuse to Child Protective Services or the Police as soon as possible. A report number will be obtained from the enforcement agency and recorded. If a child or youth has reported the incident to an adult, the identity of that adult should be reported to the enforcement agency. The identity of all complainants will be protected by the enforcement agency.
2. The Minister shall be notified of all reports of suspected child abuse as soon as possible unless he or she is alleged to be involved in the abuse.
3. The Minister shall ensure that the alleged incident is properly reported (if this has not been done already) to the authorities. He or she will also ensure that the confidential report is properly noted on the Westside Unitarian Universalist Incident Report of Child or Youth Abuse.
4. All completed forms will be kept in a secure file cabinet.
5. The entire matter shall be kept completely confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution or could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused.
6. If child abuse is suspected, those involved shall be immediately relieved of any duties involving the supervision, care, or teaching of children and/or youth pending the outcome of the investigation.

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VI. CLOSING

Adults living and working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that can carry with it a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, minister, or in any other role, the adult has a special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to the young people and the adult. Adults can be mentors to, role models for, and trusted friends of children and youth. They can be teachers, counselors and ministers. Helping our children grow up as caring and responsible adults can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership positions, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth. Such a climate promises the greatest potential for growth and fulfillment of us all. It is our belief that by honoring these commitments we can make a substantial contribution to the creation of a spiritual community that reflects our highest ideals and goals.

**This policy approved by the 2001-2002 Board of Trustees
June 30, 2002**