

Title: **Policy Concerning Child and Youth Protection**

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## 1.0 PURPOSE

To provide policies and procedures for USNH staff and members to ensure a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults, protecting them from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and exploitation.

## 2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

As a spiritual community we take seriously our responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all who participate. Adults working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that may carry with it a great deal of power and influence. Whether in the role of youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, mentor, choir leader, or any other capacity, 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.

While it is important that adults maintain meaningful relationships with the young people they work with, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and youth.

## 3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

Self-esteem and safety education will be woven into the CYRE curriculum and interactions. Every child and youth must experience physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual safety while participating in USNH activities. In addition, any child disclosing abuse will be met with support and appropriate advocacy.

## 4.0 PROVIDING A SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

### 4.1 Training and Screening.

4.1.1 **The DLRE and Ministers** will be trained in appropriate responses to disclosure of abuse by any individual within the USNH community.

4.1.2 **RE teachers, youth advisors and mentors** will be interviewed by the DLRE

4.1.3 **RE teachers, youth advisors and mentors** will attend an annual RE Orientation and Training Session.

4.1.4 **RE teachers, youth advisors and mentors** will be trained in the area of abuse prevention and intervention.

4.1.5 **“Our Whole Lives” (OWL).** USNH will offer this sexuality program. It includes sessions on sexual abuse prevention, assertiveness and non-violent communication as well as resources for children and youth.

4.1.6 **Code of Ethics.** See *appendix IV*. All CYRE volunteers shall sign and abide by the “Code of Ethics for Leaders of Children and Youth” per Appendix V of this procedure.

4.1.7 **Right Relations.** All volunteers working with children and youth shall annually read and sign USNH’s CYRE Right Relations Policy per Appendix IV of this procedure.

## **4.2 Background Checks.**

4.2.1 **Volunteers** in the CYRE program shall be subject to a criminal/sex offender background check.

4.2.2 **Limited Access Agreement.** USNH will require a Limited Access Agreement in cases of sexual or violent offenders as outlined in USNH SOP-0007, "Policies Concerning Behavior and Safety" section 9.0, *Responding to Sexual or Violent Behavior*.

## **4.3 Safe Environment.**

4.3.1 **Two Adults.** Every effort should be made to have a minimum of two volunteers and/or staff working at all Religious Education sponsored activities at all times. In the infrequent event that only one volunteer is available, the classroom door will remain open.

4.3.2 **Adult / Child Ratio.** The recommended ratio of volunteers to children is:

4.3.2.1 For on-site programs: 2 volunteers per 10 children

4.3.2.2 For off-site programs: 1 volunteer per 7 children with a minimum of 2 adults, ideally 3.

4.3.2.3 Note: At no time shall a single child be alone with an adult without DLRE and parental permission.

**4.4 Alcohol.** Please see *SOP 0012 Alcoholic Beverages* for policies concerning alcohol.

**4.5 Non-USNH Groups.** Non-USNH groups, whether affiliated with USNH or not, will abide by *SOP 0008 Policy Concerning Children and Youth Protection* while utilizing USNH facilities.

## **5.0 SUPERVISION OF SUNDAY CLASSES**

**5.1 Parents/guardians** are responsible for their children/youth at all times at USNH, including before and after CYRE classes, during worship services, on the grounds (including the playground), and at special USNH events (e.g., potluck suppers, performances, special events, etc.). Children are not permitted to roam unsupervised in the buildings or on USNH property.

**5.2 CYRE Teachers and Staff** are responsible for the children and youth from the time they leave the sanctuary until they are reunited with parents. Before and after that time the parent/guardian is responsible for the safety of their children.

**5.3 Parents/Guardians** must remain at USNH while their children are attending religious education classes. In the infrequent event that they are unable to be present, the teacher must be informed and provided with the name of a responsible adult on the premises. This does not apply to YRUU or high school OWL.

**5.4 Behavior Issues.** Adult community members that are concerned about a child/youth's behavior should seek assistance from parents/guardians and/or the DLRE

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**5.5 Safe Congregation Guidelines.** Youth, parents/guardians, and youth advisors shall adhere to the Safe Congregation Policy for Youth / Teens Programs at USNH including guidelines for overnights and off-site events. See Appendix III of this procedure.

## **6.0 PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE REGULAR SUNDAY CLASSES**

**6.1 Parental Permission.** A signed permission slip is required from a parent/guardian for all programs that occur outside of the regular Religious Education classes, such as off-site trips or on-site overnights.

## **7.0 TRANSPORTATION**

**7.1 Adult Drivers.** Adults driving USNH or Waverly children and youth will complete a Driver Agreement, which includes the following:

7.1.1 Proof of Liability Insurance showing that they carry at least the minimum amount of liability insurance required by the State of Connecticut on the vehicle they will be driving.

7.1.2 Confirmation that they are at least 25 years old, or if under 25 years of age, that they have parental approval to drive children or youth.

7.1.3 Verification that their personal driving record reflects no citations other than minor violations, as defined by the State of Connecticut, and that their license has not been revoked or suspended in the past 5 years.

7.1.4 Agreement to observe all posted speed limits while transporting USNH or Waverly children and youth.

7.1.5 Agreement to abstain from use of tobacco, alcohol and other nonprescription drugs while on the trip. Abstinence includes the 12 hours preceding the trip in the case of alcohol and prescription and non-prescription drugs that may impair judgment while driving.

7.1.6 Agreement to travel with a First Aid kit, medical and travel release forms and contact information.

**7.2 Youth Drivers.** A youth that is of legal driving age may drive another youth to or from an event only if the DLRE and/or advisors receive written permission from the parents of both youths. All drivers must be in compliance with CT state driving laws, including applicable teen and newly licensed driver regulations, and abide by the above stipulations.

## **8.0 REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO SEXUAL ABUSE**

**8.1 General Guidelines.** Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple or straightforward. Religious leaders and congregational members should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting children. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations. Any person who has concerns about inappropriate behavior by teachers, childcare workers, or other adults or

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older youth in our church community should report their concerns immediately to a Minister or the DLRE.

**8.2 Mandatory Reporting.** The DLRE and the Ministers are mandated to report any information they have about the abuse of a child. They are also mandated to report a child/youth's expressed intent to harm themselves or others. The report goes to Child Protective Services (CPS).

**8.3 Reporting by Volunteer or Other.** We are all responsible for the safety of our children. Anyone who suspects that a child intends to harm themselves or others, or is being abused, physically, emotionally, or sexually, shall report such suspicions to the DLRE or ministers.

**8.4 Response Team.** A Response Team will be formed in the case of an incident of abuse of a child. It will consist of the DLRE, the Ministers, a board member, and the person coordinating insurance. Its purpose is to protect members of the USNH community, and ensure that the victim and the accused are treated with dignity and respect. If the abuse has occurred at USNH, follow USNH SOP-0007 "Policies Concerning Behavior and Safety", Section 9.0 *responding to sexual or violent behavior*.

## 9.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

**9.1 General.** All information about families will be kept confidential except in cases that require mandatory reporting. If in doubt, talk to the DLRE or Ministers.

### 9.2 Media / Technology / Privacy Releases.

**9.2.1 Parental Permission.** The registration form, available from the DLRE, has a place for parents to give permission for their child to be photographed or videotaped in scheduled USNH activities. Such photos may be used by USNH for community building, publicity or educational purposes.

**9.2.2 Permission to Contact.** Adults will not contact children and youth via phone (call or text), email, or social media without permission from the DLRE and parent. Any adult contacting a child/youth through the above means shall include a second responsible adult (adviser, teacher, DLRE or parent) in the conversation.

**Appendix I****Managing Child Behavior Problems  
Guidelines For Religious Education Volunteers**

\* For persons over 18 years old Refer to SOP-0007 "Policies Concerning Behavior and Safety."

These guidelines are intended to assist our teachers with handling behavior issues that may occur in the classroom. They are offered as a stepwise progression of interventions that can be tried to alleviate the situation.

We are asking all our teachers to add their suggestions to the list and to comment about these suggested procedures. We have gathered a few concrete suggestions here and we need your help with finding more for our list!

Thank you for teaching our children and choosing to spend your time teaching them and learning from them. There would be no religious education program for our children without you!

**When there is a classroom issue with one or more children:**

1. Consult with your co-teachers about ways they have attempted to handle problematic behaviors and brainstorm together (perhaps they have found strategies that are helpful on a Sunday that you were not present). The teacher who is not in the "lead" role will often take on the role of behavior management.
2. Talk privately (aka out in the hall) to the child/youth gently about how you can help them participate appropriately, trying not to place blame on the child. Comments that might help: "You seem unhappy/restless/distracted in class, how can we make things better for you?" Remember that many children do not have a choice about coming to RE, so finding small ways to empower them may aid in general compliance.
3. If talking to the child does not improve the behavior, you could find the DLRE or your CYRE liaison and ask for their support. The child's parent/guardian can also be called on to help "in the moment".
4. If the issue persists after these interventions then ask the DLRE, CYRE committee member, or a friend of the committee with child development expertise, to come and observe the child during class and to offer suggestions.
5. If recommended by the advisor in step 4, ask the parent to talk with the child about the classroom issue, with or without the teacher, whichever approach the parent thinks will be most effective in reaching the child.
6. If all else fails, ask the parent to sit in the class with the child to help him/her develop appropriate classroom behaviors. The DLRE may also invite the child and parent(s) to co-develop a behavior management plan, which will be shared with teachers

## Appendix II

### Managing Child Behavior Problems

#### Ideas for the classroom

- ❖ To keep conversations from becoming dominated by one or just a few children and allow a quieter child to participate, use a **“Talking object”** that is held by the child who “has the floor”.
- ❖ **Separate children** who have side conversations and/or consistent conflict, including having an adult sit between them.
- ❖ When things have gotten out of control and everyone is talking at once, use a **consistent method to regain attention such as “If you can hear my voice, clap once.... If you can hear my voice, clap twice.... etc” or turning off lights.**
- ❖ **Have quiet music on when the children enter the room** to start with listening behavior and calming sounds. Having the children help select the music that will be played, can be treated as a special privilege and treat, with group members all having turns to do this.
- ❖ Have as part of covenant that there are **“no flying objects in class ever”** because once a child starts this behavior things can begin to get out of control quickly.
- ❖ Invite children to place outside objects (toys, telephones, other electronics or items they bring in) into a bin by the door and to leave them there during class time.
- ❖ **Place any lit chalice away from children’s reach.** Have a pre-planned routine for who gets to light the chalice and when.
- ❖ Provide **doodling materials, or coloring sheets** related to the topic of the week for children who are restless during discussions. Some children also do well with other stimuli such as play-doh, squish balls, wikki sticks, etc. Talk with the DLRE for more specific info. These items are kept in the RE office.
- ❖ **Hold discussions or do a read-aloud during a snack** so that looking forward to the snack does not distract the children. Serve snacks at the same time each week.
- ❖ Ask disruptive children to be “special helpers” to encourage their positive participation.
- ❖ **Have all materials ready prior to class. Have systems in place to get materials to children quickly and efficiently. Only pass out materials after directions have been given, and when it’s actually time to do the activity.**



**Appendix III****Safe Congregation Policy for Youth / Teens Programs at USNH**

1. The members of the Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU) create a new covenant each year, which must be signed by youth before participating in YRUU events. The covenant includes a list of behaviors that are prohibited such as: exclusive behavior, sexual behavior, use of drugs, alcohol, energy drinks, smoking, weapons, violence, leaving community areas during YRUU activities. Other items are covered specifically by the covenant for overnight retreats, and are listed on permission forms. Youth under 18 years old that break covenant are required to meet with the DLRE, parents/guardians and youth advisers to discuss a path forward for participation in CYRE activities. Youth 18 and older will be dismissed from the CYRE program and fall under the Adult Policies Concerning Behavior and Safety. (USNH SOP-0007)
2. Friends of YRUU members who are not registered in USNH religious education program(s) may participate in specific programs if prior arrangement is made with YRUU advisors. These guests must provide any necessary forms (parental permission slips and contact information, pertinent medical information, such as allergies etc.) and agree to follow guidelines written in the annual covenant. If guests attend YRUU meetings more than three times they will be asked to fill out the CYRE/YRUU registration form in order to continue participating in the group. Graduates of USNH YRUU are welcome to visit during a YRUU meeting once per semester and at the annual YRUU holiday reunion. Timing for this visit must be arranged in advance with the advisors.
3. The recommended ratios of adults to youth are as follows:
  - For on-site programs- 1 adult per 10 youth with a minimum of 2 adults
  - For on-site overnight programs- 1 adult per 7 youth with a minimum of 2 adults; ideally 2-3
  - For off-site programs: 1 adult per 7 youth with a minimum of 2 adults; ideally 3 (2 of whom must be members of USNH).

A list of USNH members vetted by the DLRE, the Minister and the YAC will be kept by BOTH the YAC (Youth Adult Council) and the DLRE. The people named on this list along with the current YRUU Advisors and Parents of YRUU members will be the pool of adults who are able to provide adult supervision for YRUU programs.
4. For overnight programs, ideally there will be 4 adults, with at least 2 remaining awake as long as there are youth awake.
5. USNH requires that drivers comply with the Transportation Guidelines per section 7 of this procedure. USNH further recommends that adults drive youth to and from YRUU events. However, if a youth is of legal driving age they may drive another youth to or from an event only if the DLRE and/or advisors receive written permission from the parents of both youths. All drivers must be in compliance with CT State driving laws, including applicable teen and newly licensed driver regulations.

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**Appendix IV****CYRE Right Relations Policy****Also providing a form for volunteers to verify that they have read and will comply.**

Adults working with children and youth in the context of Unitarian Universalist faith development have a crucial and privileged role, one that can carry a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, minister, or in any other role, adults have a special opportunity to interact with young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring.

Adults can be mentors, role models, and trusted friends to children and youth. They can be teachers, counselors, and ministers. To help our children grow up to be caring and responsible adults can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person.

While it is important that adults be capable of meaningful friendships with the young people with whom they work, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and young adults and refrain from using young people to fulfill their own needs. Young people are in a vulnerable position when dealing with adults and may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior by adults.

Adult leaders need to possess a special dedication to working with young people in ways that affirm the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregation's Principles. Good communication skills, self-awareness and understanding of others, sensitivity, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and a positive attitude are important attributes. Additionally, adult religious leaders need to be people who:

- Have a social network outside of their religious education responsibilities in which to meet their own needs for friendship, affirmation, and self-esteem.
- Are willing and able to seek assistance from colleagues and religious professionals when they become aware of a situation that requires expert help or intervention.

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.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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**Appendix V****Code of Ethics for Leaders of Children and Youth****Also providing a form for volunteers to authorize screening and background checks.**

All Religious Education volunteers shall read and sign this form below.

Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and the community. 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 a spirit of independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationship is to be realized.

There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth.

Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behaviors with children and youth that constitute verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Volunteers in the CYRE program shall be subject to a criminal/sex offender background check, in accordance with CYRE policy.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have read the above and agree to abide by this code of ethics for leaders of children and youth.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

SSN# \_\_\_\_\_

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**REVISION HISTORY**

Rev	By	Date	Changes Made
1	J. Hill	10/03/2018	Initial draft transcribed by J Hill from original document
2	J. Geist	11/17/2018	Edits, additions, inclusion of Appendices III, IV, V.
A	Management Team	01/23/2019	Minor edits and Approved Initial Release
B	Management Team	10/06/2023	Edits of sections 4.4 and 4.5