

HEALTHY CONGREGATION

Section A: Preamble

It is the intent of this religious community to encourage spiritual growth in a safe environment in which its members and friends can explore, experience and express that in life which they find meaningful.

As Unitarian Universalists, we strive to value the “inherent worth and dignity of every person”. One way to assure that we are always reaching for that goal is through efforts to make our church premises and activities always safe and civil, free from any behaviors, verbal or otherwise, which degrade, threaten, scare or harm other persons.

Healthy Communications

A healthy congregation must rely on healthy communications among its members, friends, visitors and staff. And so we covenant with one another as follows:

UUCA COVENANT

Recognizing we are individuals who need one another, we nurture individual search for meaning as we work together for freedom, justice and love.

We promise to:

- *Share the ministry of our congregation through our gifts of time, talent and money;*
- *Care for and support each other;*
- *Celebrate our intentional diversity with joy and gratitude;*
- *Attend to our differences with openness, compassion and trust;*
- *Create healing by listening and speaking in the spirit of love;*
- *Be steadfast in support of our community in times of disagreement;*
- *Strive to live our Unitarian Universalist principles and congregational mission.*

Our life together declares that the future of each depends on the good of all and the future of all depends on the good of each.

A Healthy Congregation will address, in a civil manner, conflict that may arise from time to time within its community. Several congregational documents address these types of disagreements, conflicts or grievances. A separate policy, Grievances, is the guide for selecting the right policy to apply in any specific situation.

Note that most instances of unhealthy communications begin with triangulation. That is the circumstance where Person A is having a conflict with Person B, but tells Person C instead of first going directly to Person B. Healthy communications would require that aggrieved parties talk to one another before including others.

Another form of unhealthy communications is the anonymous complaint. This congregation will not act or react to anonymous complaints, nor will much regard be paid to the complaint that begins, “People are saying...” or “I heard that....” as these are merely another form of anonymous complaint. The exception to this is any complaint requiring mandatory reporting per the State of North Carolina.

Anyone attending church-sponsored activities is entitled to a safe and secure atmosphere, free to safely express their beliefs or opinions without being disrupted or feeling threatened or greatly offended by the behavior of others in that activity. We deal with such unacceptable behavior in Section C: Addressing Unhealthy Communications or Behaviors.

Children and youth are among our most vulnerable, and are especially entitled to be safeguarded from perceived, threatened or actual harm. Section D: Child & Youth Protection Measures section of this policy is to be used for defining, preventing and reporting abuse, harassment and other inappropriate conduct directed toward children and youth under the age of 18 on church premises or during church-sponsored activities.

Finally, a safe and secure religious community must protect the gathering of members, friends, guests and staff from the hazards of natural and human-made disaster, including violent intrusion. Accordingly, the UU Congregation of Asheville has certain policies and procedures in place, or in preparation, for emergency responses to fire and other disastrous events in its separate Emergency Response Plan.

Section B: Establishment of a Healthy Communications Team

This policy requires that a Healthy Communications Team be a standing committee of the congregation. The Healthy Communications Team should consist of 5 members of the congregation, with each person’s term being 2 years (“A” members enter on even years, “B” members enter on odd years). The team is recruited by the Executive. Both the Lead Minister and the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) are also members of this team. The Healthy Communications Team should reflect the diversity of the congregation.

This team should reflect the diversity of the congregation. Candidates will be sought based on professional or volunteer experience in working with children and/or child abuse issues, understanding of this policy and other UUA "Safe Congregation" materials, and knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, including applicable North Carolina state laws.

The charge of this committee is:

To respond to all matters that this policy refers to, by either directly handling the matter or convening a separate Response Group to handle a single, specific situation, and annually review this policy and propose changes as may be needed.

If a member of the Healthy Communications Team is involved in a complaint, the member must be recused from responding to that complaint. If the incident or allegation involves the Lead Minister or Director of Lifespan Religious Education, then that staff person will be removed from the Healthy Congregation Team and the Board will be notified immediately.

In response to a specific incident or upon learning that a member or friend of the congregation has

been charged or convicted with child abuse or has been registered as a sex offender, the Healthy Congregation Team will be notified. The Healthy Congregation Team should meet within one week of the notification of an incident or allegation.

The Healthy Congregation Team does not have the legal authority or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. Its role is to research the complaint and, in consultation with the Lead Minister and Director of Lifespan Religious Education, decide the church's appropriate response to the allegations presented. The Healthy Congregation Team should endeavor to make its decision in a timely manner, based on the possible threat, the credibility and seriousness of the allegation and other factors as deemed appropriate. The Team's research should include the steps described in the appendix *Healthy Congregation Team Guidelines*, as well as any other information-gathering steps appropriate to the allegations. Possible actions in response to allegations of child abuse may include removal or forced leave of absence from teaching or other restrictions on church activities involving children. Any decision by the Healthy Congregation Team will be reported to and may be reviewed by the Board of Trustees.

Confidentiality

All reports except those concerning suspicion of child abuse (this case is addressed later in this document) will be considered confidential, meaning that the identity of the reporting person, the alleged perpetrator, the details of the allegation or concern and any other identifying information will be disclosed only to the Healthy Congregation Team unless the Lead Minister or Director of Lifespan Religious Education are involved, thereby involving the Board of Trustees.

Section C: Addressing Unhealthy Communications or Behaviors

To assure that our interactions with each other in this community honor the worth and dignity of every person and that a secure and safe atmosphere exists for all persons, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville will be guided by process for dealing with unhealthy, disruptive, offensive, and/or dangerous or threatening behavior.

Anyone attending church-sponsored activities is entitled to physical and/or emotional well-being and should feel free to safely express her/his beliefs or opinions. Should anyone attending a church activity feel threatened or aggrieved by the behavior of others in that activity, they are urged to notify a church staff member, or leader of the event, who is then directed to report the incident to the Lead Minister.

If any disruptive or dangerous behavior is deemed to require *immediate action* to protect the safety and well-being of others, such action may be taken by the Lead Minister, the leader of the church activity, or by anyone who perceives imminent danger. Their actions will be taken in a manner consistent with safety and with good and just reasoning:

1. An offending person may be asked to leave church grounds.
2. The police department may be contacted.

If the behavior is *not* considered in need of immediate action, the Lead Minister or his/her representative may follow up by referring the matter to the Healthy Congregation Team to collect and review all information pertaining to the incident and recommend an appropriate response that it

considers fair, equitable and safe. It is also possible that the first steps will be taken by the Lead Minister without involvement of the Healthy Congregation Team, depending on the circumstances.

The Lead Minister, his/her representative and/or the Healthy Congregation Team will *gather information* to determine whether the reported behavior was 1) **disruptive** in that the behavior disrupted programs and/or individual activities on the church grounds; 2) **offensive** in that the behavior was inappropriate for group or individual activities on church grounds; or 3) **dangerous** in that the individual was a threat to the safety and well-being of persons on church property or to church property itself.

A report of the event may be made at the appropriate level of response as follows:

1. **Disruptive Behavior—Communicate.** The Lead Minister and/or Healthy Congregation Team may meet with the offending person to communicate concern and to discuss remedies to the problem behavior.
2. **Offensive Behavior—Suspend.** The offending person may be suspended from the church grounds and activities for a determined period of time with a clear condition of return communicated in writing. A deadline may be set for compliance to suspension and the conditions of return, as well as a stipulation that failure of the offending person to comply with suspension and conditions of return will result in expulsion from the church grounds and community.
3. **Dangerous Behavior—Expel.** If the actions of the offending person are thus categorized, immediate expulsion from church activities and grounds may result.

Any recommendation of suspension or expulsion must be submitted for approval to the Board of Trustees, together with incident reports. Only action by the Board of Trustees may expel a Member or Friend of the congregation (Bylaws, Article IV. 4.d.).

Section D: Additional Protections for Children and Youth

The section of the policy is to be used for defining, preventing and reporting abuse, harassment and other inappropriate conduct directed toward children and youth under the age of 18 on church premises or during church-sponsored activities. (This section of the policy is specifically directed towards minor children and youth and is not intended to address abuse and harassment issues between adult members of the congregation, which falls under the previous section.)

Regarding Members/Friend/Visitors who have been accused of, charged with, or convicted of child abuse (as defined below) or of a crime that requires registration as a sex offender

Any “more than casual visitor” of this congregation who has been charged with or convicted of, or has been involved in any act of child abuse or a crime that requires registration as a sex offender is expected to make himself or herself known to the Minister(s). Other congregants who become aware of such information should consult with the Minister(s).

When concerns are raised about a member or friend or frequent visitor of the church who has been accused of, charged with, or convicted of child abuse (as defined below) or of a crime that requires registration as a sex offender, this person must follow certain guidelines regarding his or her activities at church. While we welcome all members and friends to our congregation and our membership, in cases that involve child abuse or crimes that require registration as a sex offender individuals' rights of participation will be limited to assure the safety of our children and youth, to reduce the church's and staff's liability, and to reduce the risk that the accused will be subjected to future unfounded accusations. Consequently, individuals who have been convicted of, are currently charged with, or self disclose crimes that require registration as a sex offender or any act of child abuse (as defined below) **are precluded from participation in the RE program and other children or youth church activities.**

Information about individuals with histories of sexual misconduct will be kept confidential. The Minister(s) and Director of Lifespan Religious Education reserve the right to investigate past accusations of sexual misconduct when no conviction occurred. These cases will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and kept confidential.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for purposes of this policy, which is solely focused on activities that occur on church property or as part of church-sponsored activities.

Child Abuse: The UUCA defines child abuse as “an act committed by a caregiver or person in a position of trust that harms or threatens to harm a child's well-being or physical or mental health.” Abuse, harassment and neglect can also occur between an older youth and younger child. There are four categories of child abuse according to UUCA.

Physical Abuse: Deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child. Instances of child abuse include violent assault with hands, feet, a knife or other implement, or burns, fractures, and bruises resulting from being beaten, shaken, or thrown. Physical abuse can also include less extreme behavior including slapping, pushing, and grabbing or touching with unnecessary force or threatening to do so.

Sexual Abuse: Engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child; using a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child. Any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of another person, abuse has occurred. Sexual abuse can include fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, and exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution. Child sexual abuse is illegal regardless of whether the child "consents" or not. According to law, consent is not an issue. The offender bears the entire responsibility for the abuse whatever form it takes.

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types of sexual abuse that involve touching include:

- Sexual Fondling
- Oral, genital, and/or anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal or electronic communications intended to seduce, demean or intimidate children;
- Pornographic videos involving children as actors or observers
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse deeply affects a child's self-esteem by subjecting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It can include close confinement, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse.

Neglect: Children have basic physical, nutritional, and environmental needs that must be supplied. Withholding of food, clothing, medication, as well as abandonment are all acts of neglect. Neglect can include physical, emotional, or educational neglect through such actions as inadequate supervision and refusing to seek treatment for illnesses.

Prevention through Training and Education

Greater understanding of the complexities of sexuality and the different types of abuse will help us to avoid situations that could lead to false accusations of abuse. The Lifespan Religious Education Director in conjunction with the Religious Education (RE) Committee will see to the implementation of the following education program. This training will be provided on an annual basis.

1. For our families enrolled in the children's and youth's RE program, UUCA will provide:
 - For parents, a summary of this policy.
 - For children and youth in RE, relevant information about child abuse will be part of the curriculum for OWL classes at developmentally appropriate levels.
2. For RE teachers, paid childcare staff and other volunteers working with children and youth UUCA will provide annual training and written information designed to educate and prevent child abuse on church premises and at church-sponsored activities. As part of that training, they will receive information about this policy.
3. For the entire congregation, UUCA will provide information regarding this policy. This may be accomplished through an article in the *Weekly eNews* and *Religious Education Weekly* and/or a brochure outlining the policy.

Prevention through Screening and Background Checks of Volunteers and Employees

Guiding Principles for screening and background checks include:

- Insuring the safety and well-being of our children and youth.
- Creating a sense of welcome and hospitality to our children and youth and the adults who minister with them.
- Developing screening standards that are appropriate to the level of interaction with children

and youth while at the same time minimizing the inconvenience to volunteers and their supervisors.

- Protecting volunteers by keeping information gathered during screening and background checks confidential.

At family/intergenerational and whole-community events (for example: worship, church picnics), when parents are expected to supervise their own children and youth, volunteers at these events would not be required to be screened. The exception is when specific supervision is provided for children and youth (i.e. nursery, age-specific programming). All children under the age of 12 are expected to be supervised by their parent or caregiver before and after age-specific programming (i.e. during coffee hour, on the playground after class. More specific information regarding supervision can be found in the section below entitled, "Supervision Policies of UUCA."

Parents do not require screening and background checks in order to participate in events or programs where their child(ren) participate. If they assume a volunteer role which would involve interaction with children other than their own as described below, they would be expected to participate in the appropriate level of screening. Our policy is to always have at least one background-checked adult as a lead teacher if an unexpected opening occurs for any given event. The normal policy is, of course, to have all adults interacting with children be background-checked.

Level of Interaction with Children and Youth and Background Checks

1. Unsupervised Interaction and all UUCA staff - An adult volunteer who leads or assists at a UUCA-sponsored event or program primarily for children or youth who would have regular and frequent unsupervised interaction, or supervises adult volunteers who interact with children and youth. Examples: Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE), LRE Assistant, LRE Coordinator, chaperones for overnight events, nursery staff, youth advisors, and mentors.

Level of Screening/Background: Will be required to provide personal information, sign sex abuse declarations, and agree to a criminal and sex offender's registry background check. The DLRE will complete this check annually.

2. Supervised - An adult volunteer who volunteers at a UUCA-sponsored event or program primarily for children or youth who would have regular and frequent interaction, but in a supervised capacity. Examples: RE teachers, child care volunteers, young adult volunteers (18-25 year olds).

Level of Screening/Background: Will be required to provide personal information and sign sexual abuse declarations. First-time volunteers or others not known to the church community for more than six months will also be required to provide references from other churches, civic, or other non-profit organizations.

Additional Safeguards

Before working with children, adult survivors of child abuse are strongly encouraged to meet with the Minister(s) or Director of Lifespan Religious Education.

UUCA will strive to have at least two adults present in each classroom on Sunday mornings, and on every outing, overnight, and other church-related activity with groups of children. In no situation may one volunteer adult and one unrelated minor be together alone (i.e., in a classroom with the door closed, in a car, or on a field trip. Exceptions to this include parent-authorized interactions like Coming of Age students and mentors, or time alone in transition between a supervised group and the child's parent or guardian. For example: a volunteer delivering a child to their parent from RE classroom or playground.)

Reporting and Response

Response Group

The Healthy Congregation Team, or a group appointed by them, will be available to hear confidential concerns about child abuse. These might be concerns about specific instances of inappropriate behavior or suspected child abuse, harassment or neglect by teachers, childcare workers, or other adults or youth in the church community or about potential interactions children in the church community with members, friends or visitors who have been charged with, convicted of, or have been involved in any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or of child abuse.

Reporting Within the Church

Anyone who has concerns about or who has witnessed inappropriate behavior or suspected child abuse, harassment or neglect by teachers, childcare workers, or other adults or youth in the church community, should report their concerns immediately to the Minister(s), DLRE, or President of the Board of Trustees. When an allegation occurs of child abuse on church property, during a church-sponsored activity, or in an environment outside of a church-related activity (such as but not limited to school or home) the Minister(s), DLRE and Board President will:

1. Take appropriate action to assure protection of the children in the church; and
2. Abide by North Carolina law on reporting child abuse. A copy of North Carolina state law on child abuse will be kept on file in the church office and should be referenced when an incident is reported.

Confidentiality Specific to Child Abuse

All reports concerning suspicion of child abuse will be considered confidential, meaning that the identity of the child and/or reporting person, the alleged perpetrator, the details of the allegation or concern and any other identifying information will be disclosed only to the Healthy Congregation Team, to the child's parents or legal guardians, and to the accused, except

- when the law requires or the Lead Minister and DLRE in consultation with the Healthy Congregation Team decide that others such the Buncombe County Department of Social Services or court and court-related professionals such as the alleged perpetrator's Parole Officer or Sex Offender Specific Treatment counselor must be informed, or when
- the Lead Minister and DLRE in consultation with the Healthy Congregation Team decide that informing the child's parents or legal guardians would put the child further at risk, or when
- the Lead Minister and DLRE in consultation with the Healthy Congregation Team conclude

that the reporting person and/or child has a well-grounded fear of retaliation or recrimination, in which case details of the allegation may be withheld.

Other Inappropriate Behavior

Some incidents or allegations may involve behavior that is not clearly child abuse, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate by a parent, by the DLRE or by the RE Committee. In such cases, the Lead Minister and the Director of Lifespan Religious Education have the discretion to contact the Healthy Congregation Team to review the situation and decide what action to take.

Additional Responsibilities of the UUCA Board and RE Committee

The Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville will make the final determination of any additional consequences appropriate to the violation of this policy, which may include but are not limited to termination of a staff person (except for a called Minister) and any additional action in the case of volunteers beyond that for which the Healthy Congregation Team is authorized. Violation of this policy by the Lead Minister, Associate Minister or Director of Lifespan Religious Education shall constitute good cause for discipline under the terms of their employment.

The Director of Lifespan Religious Education and the RE Committee are responsible for the development of RE teacher training and screening material as well as annual review of this policy, recommending changes deemed appropriate to the Lead Minister and Administrator.

Supervision Policies of UUCA

The RE Committee, in conjunction with the DLRE, will be responsible for conducting an annual audit of these policies and procedures.

Supervision of Children and Youth Before and After Events Sponsored by UUCA

Parents and other legal guardians are fully responsible for the supervision of their own children before and after the designated times for Religious Education meetings and all other UUCA-sponsored events. Volunteer leaders, paid childcare staff, and other members and staff of UUCA are not in any way responsible for the welfare of children or youth on or off of our premises, except during those hours specifically designated for RE programming for children, during childcare on Sundays, for meetings or workshops (when childcare is offered) or field trips.

Childcare is provided for most UUCA events as described in the Childcare at UUCA policy. Hours of childcare and Religious Education are to be clearly posted for each event that UUCA sponsors or hosts. Parents and guardians must take responsibility for understanding these hours whether or not they are posted, and must be on time to pick up their children or youth at the end of these hours.

If a child under the age of 12 is still in the care of a volunteer care worker or paid staff member after the designated pickup time, the care worker or staff member will bring the child or youth to the parent if they are in the building, or will make every effort to contact the parent. They will stay with the child or youth until the parent arrives or another legal guardian is able to take the child or youth into their care. Youth who are 12 and up are released from classes or programs on their own to rejoin their family members.

Requirements of Adult Leaders on Field Trips and Overnight Events

No one under the age of 25 may be an adult leader responsible for children or youth on UUCA-sponsored field trips or overnights. The Minister, DRE, and RE Committee have the discretion to make exceptions for adults aged 20-25, on a case-by-case basis.

During UUCA-sponsored field trips and overnight events, one adult shall be responsible for no more than seven children or youth. No fewer than two unrelated adults will be present and awake at all times that any number of children or youth are in their care and awake.

During overnight events, every effort will be made to discourage time spent alone by a child/youth and an adult leader. In cases where this is unavoidable, adult leaders will be expected to conduct all interactions in a location that can be observed by others. No child/youth may sleep alone with an unrelated adult in the same room.

Adult leaders must have a valid driver's license and current insurance covering injury and loss of life in order to drive to a field trip or overnight destination. They must also be in full compliance of the Cell Phone policy.

REVISION HISTORY	
Responsible Staff Member: Executive	
Date	Description of revision
June 2005	Safe and Civil Church Policy created
February 2008	Disruptive Persons Policy created
September 2009	Save and Civil Church Policy revised
September 2012	Disruptive Persons Policy revised
April 2016	Healthy Congregation policy created, combining previous Safe and Civil Church and Disruptive Persons policies and adding other information

APPENDIX I: HEALTHY CONGREGATION TEAM GUIDELINES SPECIFIC TO CHILD ABUSE

Legal Issues

The Healthy Congregation Team should gather information about the following legal issues in order to inform its discussion. The Team should also gather any other information it deems necessary to help it consider the allegations and recommend actions. The legal information is intended to help the Team understand what actions are possible and should not be viewed as determining what actions must be taken.

1. What are the current details of the applicable laws? (This may require consulting with a lawyer.)
2. If the accused person has recently been charged with sexual misconduct involving a child or of any other crime that requires registration as a sex offender, under what criminal statute was he or she charged? Are there any court-imposed restrictions on the person's behavior pending his or her final court date?
3. If the person is not currently charged with such an offense but has previously been convicted of sexual misconduct involving a child or of any other crime that requires registration as a sex offender, under what criminal statute was he or she charged?
4. If the person is currently on probation following conviction for sexual misconduct involving a child or of any other crime that requires registration as a sex offender, what restrictions are imposed by the Court or the probation officer or other post-conviction authority? If the Healthy Congregation Team wishes to consult with the person's probation officer, it should seek written permission from the accused person.
5. If the person is participating in court-ordered or voluntary Sex Offender Specific Treatment, the Healthy Congregation Team should request written permission to consult with the individual's counselor. (Counselors or therapists *must* have written permission from their client in order to consult with the Team.)

If the accused person is not and has not previously been charged with sexual misconduct involving a child or with any other crime that requires registration as a sex offender, but has made his or her involvement in such acts known to the Minister, the Healthy Congregation Team should consider asking whether the person is currently or has previously participated in counseling, therapy, 12-step groups, or other treatment for sexual misconduct behavior. If such treatment is ongoing, the Team should consider requesting written permission to consult with the appropriate counselor.

Possible Recommendations

If the Healthy Congregation Team members decide that it is warranted, they can recommend the accused person and the Minister sign an agreement which specifies guidelines within which the person may participate in UUCA's normal activities and non-church-sponsored events occurring on church property. The guidelines will restrict the person's contact with children on congregation property or during congregation-sponsored events. The agreement might include any or all of the following clauses, as well as any others that the Team considers appropriate.

1. Do not talk with children on congregation property or during congregation-sponsored events.
2. Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone, or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, and driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth to and from these events.
3. Remain in the presence of a same-sex adult who knows your situation at all times when participating in UUCA activities (a support person designated by the Healthy Congregation Team).
4. If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
5. Do not enter the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session (such as youth group).
6. Do not enter any religious education spaces of the building or playground without explicit permission to attend an adult activity in that area (such as a committee meeting), and be accompanied by a support person.
7. Accept that the following people will be told of this agreement and its underlying circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: [*names and/or positions within the congregation are inserted here*].

