

The Unitarian Church in Westport Safer Congregation Practices and Policies

Revised and approved, May 18, 2015

TUCW will have a standing safer congregations committee, which will include one of the TUCW ministers, the Director of Religious Education (DRE), a member of the Board of Trustees, and at least two members of the congregation appointed by the chair of the committee. The congregation will be advised annually of the members of the committee. The names of the committee will appear in the newsletter, Soundings and on the website.

Any person in the congregation who has a concern or knowledge of sexual abuse or sexual harassment involving a congregant or staff member of TUCW is urged to contact a member of the safer congregations committee. TUCW is committed to being a workplace and a congregation free of sexual harassment of any kind. Concerns about professional sexual misconduct by one of the ministers should be brought to the attention of the committee, and the President of the Board of Trustees who will contact the District Executive and the UUA. The safer congregations committee will also handle any complaints about a disruptive person.

All staff including the ministers will have CT background checks on file. All new staff hiring will be subject to CT background checks and completion of the screening form. Background checks will be the responsibility of the Business Manager. New hires will be contingent upon clean reports about sexual offenses. Ministers and other appropriate staff will have training on sexual misconduct prevention, handling sexual attractions and boundaries, and offering pastoral responses to disclosure of past and present abuse.

All adult RE teachers will complete the screening form and sign the ethics policy before they begin teaching. All adults who provide services to children in pre-K and nursery classes will have background checks. Other background checks will be done as needed.

Minors who work in RE must attend an education session on child abuse prevention and sign the ethics form and will be supervised by an adult. Each year, the DRE will compile a list of youth who are approved to babysit at TUCW functions. All approved babysitters will also attend a session on child abuse prevention, sign the ethics form and complete a screening form. Only babysitters on the approved list will be paid by TUCW. Babysitters will also be encouraged to take a community babysitting course (*i.e. Red Cross*).

Only approved babysitters can babysit.

Training in sexual abuse prevention will be held each year for RE volunteers.

Volunteers for the RE program must attend TUCW for at least one year prior to their RE service, unless prior experience and recommendations allow the DRE in Consultation with the chair of the safer congregations committee to determine otherwise.

A workshop for adults on child sexual abuse prevention will be held every two years.

Information for children on child sexual abuse prevention will be included in K-2 and 5-6 OWL classes. Information will be included in the 8th grade OWL program and at least every other year in high school.

At all church activities with youth under age 18 (classroom, worship, children and teen choir, youth group, youth outing etc.) there will be two unrelated adults present. There will be two teachers in all RE classrooms at all times; this may necessitate a parent volunteer staying if one of the adult teachers is not present.

The DRE will rotate through all classes during Sunday mornings.

Middle school and high school lock-ins held at TUCW will follow UUA and/or District Guidelines for safety at such events, including a group covenant that intimate sexual behaviors are not to occur at such events. The Youth Program Director will work with the youth group each year in establishing a covenant that includes guidelines on romantic and sexual relationships within the group, physical displays of affection, and exclusive relationships within the youth group.

Pastoral Care Associates will receive at least biannual training on abuse prevention. All pastoral care associates will have Connecticut background checks (criminal and financial) at the start of their service and on a biannual basis. Any person with a history of criminal offenses, including but not limited to sexual offenses, will not be able to serve as a pastoral care associate. Persons who are found to have significant financial issues will be asked to discuss their situation with the senior minister and will be assessed individually about potential limitations on service.

Any social media where TUCW has an official presence is only open to members, age 14 and above. Any youth group social media space will be moderated by the adult Youth Program Director, and no sexual content will be allowed. Adults will not friend unrelated minors without explicit permission of parents. Parents must give written permission for use or posting of any minors photos in any venue; tagging of minors photos is not allowed in any public venue. Photographing of minors at TUCW events is only by parental permission.

All drivers to RE activities and pastoral care associates must provide copies of driver's licenses and insurance. Two unrelated adults must be in any car transporting unrelated minors. If this is not possible, there will be at least two unrelated children in a single driver's car, and rest stops will be coordinated with other drivers.

It is expected that members of the congregation, staff, renters or any other adults using the building or potential members/participants with a history or active accusation of sexual misconduct/abuse/sexual offense, will make that history or accusation known to one of the congregation ministers, who will follow the procedures below:

Any adult, adolescent or child *accused* of a sexual offense of any kind will be placed on a tailored limited access agreement* without prejudice. The safer congregations committee will be convened within 10 days of such a person being made known to the minister, the DRE, or any member of the Safer Congregations Committee to develop the agreement (which may be subsequently revised upon more information). The limited access agreement will remain in effect until all accusations or charges are dropped or confirmed (in which case see below.) Persons will not continue to attend or participate in any programs or services of TUCW until a limited access agreement is drawn up. Adolescents or children who are known to have sexually abused or sexually assaulted another youth or child will only be allowed adult-supervised participation in future religious education or youth group activities unless otherwise recommended by a therapist's evaluation.

Any person *convicted* of a sexual offense or with a history of known sexual offenses will be placed on a limited access agreement without prejudice. The safer congregations committee will be convened within 10 days of such a person being made known to the minister, the DRE, or any member of the safer congregations committee in order to develop the limited access agreement. This will be done upon consultation with the person's parole officer and/or treatment provider so it may be determined that they can safely participate in the adult life of the congregation.

Any person accused, convicted, or with a history of known sex offenses who will not sign the limited access agreement will be denied access to any programs or services at TUCW.

For further procedures on responding to a person accused, convicted, or with a history of known sex offenses; TUCW will follow the procedures outlined in Balancing Acts.

*The template for a limited access agreement can be found at <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/balancingacts/index.shtml>

These procedures will be posted on the TUCW web site and will be conveyed at the annual meeting. All procedures will be presented in the annual report to the congregation, including notice of the number of persons currently attending TUCW who have signed a limited access agreement. All procedures will be reviewed annually by the safer congregations committee and shared with all RE volunteers.