

Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we affirm that our congregation must maintain a safe and secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

There may be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building leads members to voice a concern about one or more of the following:

1. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
2. The disruption of church activities;
3. Diminishment of peace & security of the church to existing membership
4. Sexual harassment and/or creating an intimidating environment.

The following shall be the policy of The Unitarian Church in Westport in dealing with these issues:

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister(s), if available, and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required the Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) being present, the Minister(s) must be notified who will inform the Safer Congregations Committee. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister(s) to the offending party or parties.
2. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the Safer Congregations Committee. The committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:
 - a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
 - b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
 - c. The committee will collect all necessary information.
 - d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:

DANGEROUSNESS - Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?

DISRUPTIVENESS - How much interference with church functions is going on?

OFFENSIVENESS - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:

CAUSES - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?

HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?

PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

f. The committee will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:

LEVEL ONE - The committee shall inform the Minister(s) of the problem and either the Minister(s) and/or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.

LEVEL TWO -The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear. (Written notice is given to the individual, with a copy going into the Safer Congregation Committee files.)

g. Any action taken under item f. (above) may be appealed to the Board of Trustees

LEVEL THREE - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities by recommendation of the Safer Congregations Committee to the Board of Trustees. . If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister(s) explaining the expulsion.

The Unitarian Church in Westport strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.