

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport

Safer Congregations Protocol

Revised 04/16/2023

TUUCW shall have a standing Safer Congregations Committee, membership in which is defined by the Committee's Charter. The congregation will be advised annually of the members of the Committee. The names of the Committee members will appear in Soundings and on the website. The current Safer Congregations Committee is comprised of Dr. Wendy Levy, PsyD (chair) Rev. Dr. John Morehouse, Nate Pawelek (Lead for Youth Faith Formation) Luke Garvey, LCSW, Deborah Garskof, Esq, Dr. Mikaru Shichi Lasher, Ph.D, and Jay Lubin.

Any person in the congregation who has a concern or knowledge of sexual abuse or harassment, or mental health incidents involving a congregant or staff member of TUUCW, is urged to promptly contact a member of the Safer Congregations Committee. TUUCW is committed to being a congregation and workplace 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 regional lead and the UUA. The Safer Congregations Committee will also address any complaints pertaining to a disruptive person. The Committee may refer issues to the Senior Minister as appropriate.

All staff including the ministers will have background checks (which includes criminal and financial checks) on file. All new staff hiring will be subject to background checks and completion of the TUUCW screening form. Ordering and review of background checks will be the responsibility of the Congregational Administrator. New hires will be contingent upon clean reports about sexual offenses. Ministers and other appropriate staff will complete periodic training on sexual harassment and misconduct prevention, interpersonal violence, mandated reporter training, handling sexual attractions and boundaries, and offering pastoral responses to disclosure of past and present abuse.

Pastoral Care Chaplains shall complete at least training once every two years on abuse prevention. All Pastoral Care Chaplains will have background checks before starting their service and on a biannual basis thereafter. Any person with a history of criminal offenses, including but not limited to sexual offenses, will not be permitted to serve as a Pastoral Care Chaplain. Persons who are found to have significant financial issues will be obligated to discuss their situation with the Senior Minister and will be assessed about potential limitations on service.

All adult Family Faith Formation (FFF) teachers will complete the TUUCW screening form and sign the ethics policy before they begin volunteering. All adults who provide services to children in pre-K will have background checks. Other background checks will be done as needed. At all congregation activities with youth under age 18 (classroom, worship, children and teen choir, youth group, youth outing, etc.), best efforts will be used to have at least two adults present. FFF staff will rotate through classes during Sunday mornings.

Middle school and high school overnights held at TUUCW will follow UUA Guidelines for safety at such events, including a group covenant that intimate sexual behaviors are not to occur at such events. A staff person will work with advisors and 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.

Any social media where TUUCW has an official presence is only open to members, age 14 and above. Any youth group social media space will be moderated by a staff person; no sexual content will be allowed. Any communication between an adult and an unrelated minor must include a second adult. Parents must give permission for use or posting of any minors' photos in any venue; tagging of minor's photos is not allowed in any public venue. Parents shall provide (or deny) such consent, in writing, at the start of each congregation year. Teachers and volunteers shall use best efforts to restrict children's access to smart TVs, laptops and other electronic devices. Where possible, password protection and automatic time out shall be enabled on all electronics to which children may have access.

All drivers to FFF activities and Pastoral Care Chaplains must provide copies of driver's licenses and proof of insurance to the Congregational Administrator on an annual basis. Best efforts will be used to have two adults 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.

In the event a person is **accused** of a sexual offense, the Safer Congregation Committee will be convened within 7 days of such a person being made known to the minister, FFF staff, or any member of the Safer Congregations Committee. The SCC will investigate and, where determined appropriate, place the individual on a limited access agreement* without prejudice (which may be subsequently revised upon receipt of additional information). Any individual who refuses to sign such an agreement will be denied access to all programs and services at TUUCW. Until SCC makes its determination, the accused individual shall refrain from participating in TUUCW programs and services. Any limited access agreement will remain in effect until all accusations or charges are resolved. If the accusation is confirmed, the process set forth below will be followed.

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. A meeting of the Safer Congregations Committee will be convened within 7 days of such a person being made known to the minister or any member of the Safer Congregations Committee, to develop the limited access agreement; until the agreement is in effect, the individual shall not be permitted to participate in TUUCW programs and services. Any individual who refuses to sign such an agreement will be denied access to any programs and services at TUUCW. For further procedures on responding to a person accused, convicted, or with a history of known sexual offenses, TUUCW will follow the process outlined in *Becoming a Safer Congregation: A UU Guide to Effective Safety Policies and Practices*: <https://www.uua.org/safe/handbook>

These procedures will be posted on the TUUCW web site. The number of people, if any, currently attending TUUCW who have signed a limited access agreement will be presented in the Committee's Annual Report. All procedures will be reviewed annually by the Safer Congregation Committee and shared with all FFF volunteers and Pastoral Care Chaplains.

*The template for a limited access agreement can be found at <http://www.uua.org/safe/destructive-behavior-policies>
<https://www.uua.org/safe/destructive-behavior-policies/laa>