

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport Safety Policies and Procedures 2023-24

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TUUCW Code of Ethics for Leaders of Children and Youth

Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperon, child-care worker, teacher, second adult in a classroom, or in any other role, adults have a great deal of power and influence over children and youth in their care. Children and youth suffer harm when adults in such leadership positions become involved with the young people within the scope of their influence. Individuals working in such roles must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their power and influence to fulfill their own needs when working with children and youth.

Therefore, adult 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.

Additionally, adult leaders will refrain from any private communication between themselves and any unrelated minor (18 years or younger) from within our congregation. This includes in-person conversations, phone calls, texts, or contact and messaging on social media platforms of any kind without a second adult present. Further, adult leaders will refrain from exchanging photographs with children and youth in their care. As well, adult leaders will refrain from taking photographs of children and youth in their care unless a second adult is present, and permission has been granted ahead of time by parents or caregivers.

Finally, volunteers for the Faith Formation program shall be subject to a criminal/sex offender background check, in accordance with TUUCW policy, before they may assume a leadership role. If a background check determines that a prospective volunteer has a history of sexual offense, that individual is ineligible to assume a leadership role in the TUUCW Faith Formation program.

TUUCW Children and Youth Protection Policies and Procedures

1. PURPOSE

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

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

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. (*See Code of Ethics)

3. POLICY STATEMENT

All children and youth must experience physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual safety while taking part in TUUCW Faith Formation programs and activities. Any child or parent/caregiver of a child disclosing inappropriate behavior, exploitation, or abuse of any kind will be met with support and appropriate advocacy in a timely manner.

4. PROVIDING A SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

- Faith Formation Leader and Ministers will receive mandated reporter training.
- Faith Formation volunteers, paid teachers, youth advisors, and chaperons will be vetted by the FF Leader.
- Volunteers, paid teachers, youth advisors, and chaperons will participate in an annual Orientation, and when offered, periodic safety training.
- Volunteers, paid teachers, youth advisors, and chaperons will be trained in the area of mandated reporter, abuse prevention and intervention.
- Volunteers, paid teachers, youth advisors, and chaperons shall read, understand, and sign the Code of Ethics.
- Volunteers, paid teachers, youth advisors, and chaperons shall be subject to a criminal/sex offender background check.

5. SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Two Adults. Every effort should be made to have a minimum of two adult volunteers and/or staff present during all Faith Formation programs and sponsored activities at all times. In the infrequent event that only one adult is available, the classroom door will remain open.
- At no time shall a single child be alone with an adult without Faith Formation Leader and parent/caregiver knowledge and permission.

6. ALCOHOL, DRUGS, VAPING DEVICES

- Alcoholic beverages, drugs, or vaping devices are prohibited from all Faith Formation programs, and sponsored events and activities.

- When children and youth are present at non-Faith Formation-sponsored events and activities where alcohol is served (i.e., Voices Café Concerts), the sponsor is responsible for assuring that children and youth do not have access to those alcoholic beverages.
- Alcoholic beverages may not be stored on the TUUCW premises (i.e., in refrigerators) after events and activities UNLESS access to those storage areas is locked and secured.

7. SUPERVISION OF SUNDAY FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMS

- Parents/guardians are responsible for their children/youth at TUUCW, including before and after Faith Formation classes, during worship services, on the grounds (including the playground), and at special TUUCW events (e.g., potluck dinners, performances, special events, etc.).
- Children are not permitted to roam unsupervised in the TUUCW buildings or on TUUCW campus.
- Teachers, volunteers, and staff are responsible for the children and youth during faith Formation programming, generally 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.
- Parents/Guardians/Caregivers must remain at TUUCW while their children are attending Faith Formation 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 middle school OWL and high school youth group retreats.

8. TRIPS

- Parental Permission. A signed permission form is required from a parent/caregiver of all participants for all programs that occur outside of the regular Faith Formation Sunday programs, such as youth group and middle school trips, and overnight retreats.

9. MANDATED REPORTING

- 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, volunteers, childcare workers, chaperons, or other adults or older youth in our congregational community shall report their concerns immediately to a Minister or the Faith Formation leader.
- Mandatory Reporting. The Faith Formation Leader and the Ministers are mandated to report any information they have about the abuse of a minor child (18 years and younger). In addition, 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 a Minister or the Faith Formation Leader.

10. SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY, PHOTOS AND VIDEOS CONSENT

- **Two Adults.** A text or email thread (for communication purposes) may be created between adults and children and youth participants from a Faith Formation program as long as two adults are included in the thread.
- **Parental Permission.** The registration form, available from the UU Westport website and from the Faith Formation Leader, has a place for parents and caregivers to give permission for their children and youth to be photographed or videotaped during TUUCW Faith Formation programs, events, and activities. Such photos and videos may be used by TUUCW for community building, publicity, or educational purposes.
- **Permission to Contact.** Adults will not contact children and youth via phone (call or text), email, or social media without permission from the Faith Formation Leader and parent. Any adult contacting a child/youth through the above means shall include a second adult (adviser, teacher, Faith Formation Leader, or parent) in the conversation.

TUUCW Safe Congregation Policy for Youth / Teen Programs

1. The members of the High School Youth Group shall create a new covenant each year, which must be signed by youth before participating in youth group meetings, events, and activities. The covenant shall include a list of prohibited behaviors: exclusive behavior (i.e., cliques), romantic or sexual behavior, use of drugs, alcohol, vaping devices, smoking of cigarettes or cigars, weapons, violence, and leaving community areas during youth group activities. Specific events, such as trips and overnights, shall be guided by additional covenantal items listed on individual permission forms. Youth participants who break covenant may be dismissed and/or not permitted to participate in future youth group activities.

2. Friends of youth group members who are not registered in TUUCW Faith Formation program(s) may participate in youth group meetings and activities. 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 youth group meetings on a consistent basis (i.e., more than three times) they will be asked to complete the TUUCW registration form to continue participating in the group. Those who have graduated high school are aged out of the TUUCW youth group and may not continue as members. That said, graduates of TUUCW Youth Group are welcome to occasionally visit during youth group meetings. These visits should be arranged in advance with advisors.

3. The recommended ratios of adults to youth are as follows:

³⁵₁₇ For on-site programs- 1 adult per 10 youth with a minimum of 2 adults

³⁵₁₇ For on-site overnight programs- 1 adult per 7 youth with a minimum of 2 adults; ideally 2-3

³⁵₁₇ For off-site programs: 1 adult per 7 youth with a minimum of 2 adults; ideally 3 (2 of whom must be members of TUUCW).

³⁵₁₇ For overnight programs, ideally there will be 4 adults, with at least 2 remaining awake as long as there are youth awake.

TUUCW Transportation Guidelines

General. All drivers transporting TUUCW children and youth shall:

- Own a driver's license and will present 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.
- Confirm that they are at least 25 years old, or if under 25 years of age, that they have TUUCW staff and parental approval to drive TUUCW children or youth.
- Verify 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.
- Agree to observe all posted speed limits while transporting children and youth.
- Agree to abstain from use of tobacco, alcohol, vaping devices, and nonprescription drugs (exceptions: Tylenol, Ibuprofen) 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.
- Agree to travel with a First Aid kit, medical, and travel release forms and contact information.

Two-Adults. There should be two adults present at all times in all vehicles transporting TUUCW children and youth.

Fatigue Safety. On extended trips, drivers will rotate every three hours.

No Cell Phone Use While Driving. Drivers shall not text, message, or make phone calls while driving, unless using a legal hands-free system.

Youth Drivers. A youth who is of legal driving age may drive another youth to or from an event only if the Faith Formation Leader receives written permission from the parents/caregivers 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.

TUUCW Behavior Policy for K-12th Grade Participants

The Faith Formation ministry at The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport (TUUCW) strives to create thoughtful communication and connections in a climate that promotes and affirms the values of our UU Principles. In this way, each adult and child/youth will experience a positive and rewarding learning experience.

Children and youth are encouraged to behave in a manner that fosters respect, cooperation, compassion, and responsibility for themselves and others. For children/youth who find it challenging to behave in a manner conducive to these ideals, the following steps will be taken:

- If a child/youth demonstrates disruptive behavior during a faith formation event or activity (a class, a children and youth chapel service, a field trip, a youth group trip), teacher/ adviser / volunteer will attempt to first redirect the child/youth's attention (*See classroom management strategies below).
- If this does not have the desired outcome, teacher/ adviser / volunteer will speak to the child/youth individually, ideally in private (after or outside class) to discuss the behavior of concern. Teacher/ adviser / volunteer will talk with the child/youth about their behavior and try to work out a reasonable way in which the child/youth can make different, more constructive choices.
- In the event the disruptive behavior continues, teacher/ adviser / volunteer will inform the parents/caregivers, as well as the Faith Formation lead, and request strategies from the parents/caregivers for how to best manage their unique child/youth.
- The FF lead and parents/caregivers will consider the option of keeping their child/youth with them during future FF activities/events. Alternatively, the parent/caregiver may join the FF activities/events with their children to help manage the behavior.

It is the goal of the FF Community that every child/youth in our ministry feels welcome and respected. To this end, it is our intent never to remove a child/youth from a classroom, event, or activity for disruptive behavior.

We welcome input from parents regarding strategies we can employ to support their child/youth. Understanding a child's individual learning style and physical or emotional challenges is helpful.

Classroom Management Strategies

1. **IGNORE:** An occasional disruption is frequently best overlooked. The children are not in school. The rules should not be the same. We want them to have fun. If they are a little noisy, excited, rambunctious, that is typical and perfectly fine. Try to be flexible and accepting of this.
2. **CALL NAME GENTLY:** If the child knows that he or she is being observed, their behavior may improve.
3. **INVOLVE CHILD IN THE LESSON:** Redirect the child by bringing them into the lesson. Ask a question or request their help. Be creative not controlling.
4. **PROXIMITY:** Move nearer the child. This may help them to settle down.
5. **CHANGE THE CHILD'S SEAT:** If necessary, move the child to a different spot. Offer a fidget toy such as a piece of string or play-doe.
6. **PRIVATE CONFERENCE:** Take the child aside (ideally still within the classroom yet quietly). Name the behavior that is distracting. Redirect their behavior by giving them a special task. Be creative. Avoid negative consequences.
7. **INVOLVE FAITH FORMATION TEAM AND CAREGIVERS:** If necessary, seek assistance from the Faith Formation Leader and the child's caregiver(s).
8. Removing a child from the classroom is not recommended.

Keep in mind, there is no substitute for a well-planned classroom experience. For younger children, the sharing circle, free-play, and one planned activity is enough. For 3-5th grade, the sharing circle, two planned activities, reflections, and discussions are appropriate.

TUUCW Sexual Abuse Prevention Information

1. Child sexual abuse is any “sexual act imposed upon a child who lacks emotional, maturational, and cognitive development. Authority, influence, and power enable a perpetrator, directly or indirectly, to coerce a child into sexual compliance. The influential position of the adult or older adolescent perpetrator is inherently in sharp contrast to the child’s age, dependency, and subordinate position.”

2. The abuse can be intrafamilial - between a child and a family member or person in the role of a family member - or extrafamilial - between a child and someone outside the family.

3. Sexual abusive behaviors range from nudity, disrobing, exhibitionism, to oral, anal, or vaginal sex.

4. Possible Signs of an Adult abuser. Do you know an adult who:

- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits?
- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection?
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen (e.g., talks repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating)?
- Manages to get time alone or insists on time alone with a child with no interruptions?
- Spends most of his/her spare time with children and has little interest in spending time with someone their own age?
- Regularly offers to baby-sit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone?
- Buys children expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

TUUCW Safety Policies:

- 2 adults in each Faith Formation classroom
- Faith Formation Volunteers must sign the Code of Ethics annually and submit to a background check screening every three years.
- Volunteers must notify the Faith Formation lead or one of the ministers immediately if abuse of a child in the congregation is suspected.

- Volunteers must notify the Faith Formation Lead or one of the ministers immediately in case of an accusation of abuse.

FOR SUSPECTED CASES OF ABUSE OUTSIDE OF CONGREGATION LIFE:

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) 800-842-2288
- STOP IT NOW! has a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or email for assistance on what to do if you are concerned about potential abuse but are unsure how to proceed: 1-888-PREVENT.