



**First Universalist Church of Auburn, Unitarian Universalist**

**Safe Congregation Policy When Working with Children & Youth**

## **Table of Contents:**

1. PHILOSOPHY	3
2. RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT	3
3. DEFINITIONS	3
4. SAFE CONGREGATION RESPONSE TEAM	4
5. SAFETY PROCEDURES	5
A. Adult Volunteers	5
B. Religious Education Coordinator	5
C. Working with Children and Youth	5
6. GUIDELINES INVOLVING INDIVIDUALS ACCUSED OR CONVICTED OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT	6
7. TYPES OF COMPLAINTS OF SEXUAL, PHYSICAL ABUSE OR HARASSMENT	7
8. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE TO COMMUNITY AUTHORITIES	7
9. SAFETY NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE	8
A. Interim Safety Plan	8
B. Permanent Safety Plan	8
10. PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE	9
11. SAFETY AND PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION: REGARDING REPORTS OF HARASSMENT	9
12. MEDICAL EMERGENCY POLICY	10
13. SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY	10
CODE OF ETHICS FOR THOSE WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH	11
MAINE MANDATORY REPORTING LAW REGARDING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT	13

## I. PHILOSOPHY

A variety of potential dangers are inherent in operating a church. These include physical site, including buildings and grounds, operation of the religious education program, transportation and supervision of children off-site, instances of disruptive behavior involving members and or staff of the church, and external threats

Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to strive to create an environment that protects children, youth, vulnerable adults, friends and all members of our congregation from harm, and promotes their spiritual growth.

We believe our church can respond effectively to this challenge. The First Universalist Church of Auburn, Unitarian Universalist highly values the ideals of community and the search for truth. We encourage personal growth, allow for personal truth, and support individuals and families in their efforts to build healthier lives and a safer society.

This document is intended to be a “living document” that works to ensure such safety and security. We are committed to periodic reviews and updates of the Policy.

## 2. RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT

As a caring community, we want everyone who comes here to feel valued, safe and secure. This congregation accepts responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about sexual misconduct, abuse, molestation, harassment, and exploitation. We pledge to do our best to protect and support those who come to us either at risk or in crisis.

First Universalist Church of Auburn, Unitarian Universalist (hereafter referred to as “Auburn UU”, “the Church” or “we”) holds that it is the responsibility of all members of our church community to work at preventing sexual and physical abuse and harassment. To this end, we ask the members of our congregation to accept the responsibility of educating ourselves and our children about sexual and physical abuse, molestation, harassment, and exploitation. We also ask church members to pledge to do our best to protect those who are at risk and to support those in crisis.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

The terms used in this document will have the following meanings:

1. **Abuse** includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment; offensive physical or sexual contact, including physical or sexual abuse; physical or sexual harassment; physical or sexual molestation; or physical or sexual exploitation.

2. **Physical abuse** includes offensive physical contact or activity that causes bodily injury.
3. **Sexual abuse** means any sexual touching of a child or any activity that causes a person to engage in any sexual act or conduct without that person's consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.
4. **Physical harassment or molestation or exploitation** means activity that places a person in fear of bodily injury by such acts as threatening or tormenting behavior, compelling a person by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which the person has a right to abstain, knowingly restricting substantially the movements of another person without that other person's consent, communicating to a person a threat to commit an act against that person or another person or entity where the natural consequence of the threat is to place that person in fear or cause that person to engage in conduct in which that person otherwise would not engage, or similar repeated offensive physical or verbal conduct.
5. **Sexual molestation and sexual exploitation** means activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual conduct to which that person would not voluntarily consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.
6. **Sexual harassment** means making sexual advances or requests for sexual favors to another person, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where the other person by words or conduct has indicated that such words or conduct are not desired, or where a reasonable person would expect that such words or conduct would not be desired.

#### **4. SAFE CONGREGATION RESPONSE TEAM**

When any such incident of suspected sexual or physical abuse is reported, an Ad Hoc Response Team called the Safe Congregation Response Team will be formed by the Minister or President. The Safe Congregation Response Team will normally consist of the Minister, the Religious Education Coordinator, the President of the Board of Directors and at least two other members of the congregation appointed by the President or otherwise designated Reporter. The President will maintain a list of congregants willing and able to serve in this capacity. While the Minister is seeing to the required reporting, the Safe Congregation Response Team will gather necessary information and develop a response plan for the situation.

This plan will be put in writing, be specific to the situation at hand, and include clearly delineated action items, time frames and responsibilities. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality to protect the alleged victim, the accused person and the reporter until the appropriate state or local authorities issue a finding or take action. This plan must address the safety and peace of mind of all parties to the incident; including the alleged victim, the accused (if a member or attendee of the Church), the reporter, and church staff and members and friends and particularly the parents of children in the church school. The response plan will be designed

first and foremost to address the needs of the victim. In constructing this plan, the Team will draw on the methods outlined in our [Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior](#), and may use the scale for assessing the nature and severity of the referred problem contained in that Policy. Additional meetings of the Safe Congregation Response Team will be scheduled as needed to monitor progress in carrying out the plan, for example at a six-month interval the Team might review a Response Plan, and consider revising, extending, or suspending the plan.

## **5. SAFETY PROCEDURES**

These procedures address legal requirements and insurance obligations as well as help staff, volunteers, teachers and youth advisors avoid creating situations in which personal boundaries can become problematic. The various prevention methods listed below are specifically designed to protect the children and youth of our community.

### **A. Adult Volunteers**

1. Long-term volunteer teachers and youth advisors must have attended the Auburn UU for at least six (6) months. This provision can be waived by the Minister and DRE, in consultation with each other, when the individual in question has been an active member with experience volunteering with children or youth at another UU church.

### **B. Religious Education Coordinator**

1. The Religious Education Coordinator will ensure that all teachers and advisors are informed of this policy and these safety procedures. First-time teachers and advisors must attend an orientation on these safety procedures prior to assuming their positions.

### **C. Working with Children and Youth**

1. Long-term volunteer teachers and youth advisors will read and sign The Code of Ethics as well as get a background check.
2. No person who has a history of crimes against children or pending legal action involving children may volunteer in the RE program.
3. The Religious Education Coordinator, or a designated substitute, may check in on all classes during the course of a Sunday morning.
4. At least two background checked volunteers will be assigned to and will be present in each classroom and youth group activity, including in-church events and overnights, off-site retreats, conferences, and other church-related activities, unless other Auburn UU adult members or staff are in the area. These volunteers must be unrelated to each other.

5. If there is a foreseeable reason a teacher, advisor, or other volunteer will be alone with a child or youth, the written consent of the child's parent or guardian will be obtained in advance. The volunteers participating in the Coming of Age Program or other special programs will meet the parents or guardians of the children or youth prior to the program.
6. At all times there shall be at least two unrelated RE staff or volunteers in any area with children or youth. This requirement applies to off-site activities as well as on-site classes.
7. Volunteers shall immediately notify the Religious Education Coordinator or member on duty or other UU staff whenever there are not at least two volunteers and/or staff present, to rectify the situation.
8. RE staff and volunteers should be aware of special needs and allergies of the children or youth in their care, as provided by parents and shared with the Religious Education Coordinator.
9. RE staff and volunteers should be aware of special needs and allergies of the children or youth in their care, as provided by parents and shared with the Religious Education Coordinator.
10. All RE volunteers and staff are required to share concerns about the children or youth with the DRE.
11. Parents, or legal guardians, are responsible for supervision of children and youth when outside of RE classes and events.
12. RE staff and volunteers may not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs when supervising children or youth. RE Staff and Volunteers are prohibited from working with or supervising children and youth when impaired by any substance (such as drugs or alcohol). Impairment of any kind is not acceptable.

## **6. GUIDELINES INVOLVING INDIVIDUALS ACCUSED OR CONVICTED OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

- A. Situations may occur involving individuals accused or convicted of sexually aggressive behavior. Those situations will be addressed as follows:
1. An individual who has been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty, nolo contendere or "Alford" plea to a charge of sexual misconduct or who has been determined to have engaged in any form of child abuse in any civil, criminal, administrative or ecclesiastical forum or any forum, will not have contact with children or youth or the parties involved.
  2. If an individual has been legally accused of sexual misconduct and is currently involved in civil or criminal litigation of such a charge, that individual will not have contact with children or youth or the parties involved.
  3. If the local District Attorney's office has dropped charges and/or the Maine Department of Human Services has neither opened a case or has closed the case as unsubstantiated, the accused shall still have no contact with children. In this situation, the Safe Congregation Response Team shall determine whether there are exceptional circumstances or irrefutable evidence that no sexually inappropriate behavior occurred. Should the Safe Congregation Response Team determine that this is so, this team can

make recommendations about whether or not and in what manner the accused can resume contact with children.

4. In the event that a person has been convicted of a sexual offense and completed a term of incarceration and seeks to enter the life of Auburn UU, the Safe Congregation Response Team will be formed to make a determination as to whether or not and the ways in which the individual may be safely involved in the life of the congregation.
5. Any volunteer, advisor or parent who suspects or is made aware of an allegation of child abuse must report that concern to the Religious Education Coordinator or the Minister as soon as possible. If neither the Minister nor DRE is available, the concern should be reported to the President of the Board of Directors.
6. In the event of allegations of child abuse or of perceived threats to children's safety within the Church Community, the Minister and/or the President of the Board of Directors will convene an Ad Hoc Response Team called the Safe Congregation Response Team in accordance with the response procedure described below.

## **7. TYPES OF COMPLAINTS OF SEXUAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE OR HARASSMENT**

There are several situations which may prompt a response regarding a complaint or concern about sexual or physical abuse, including but not limited to:

1. A child, youth or adult reports possible abuse by a church official, member or attendee;
2. A Church official, member or attendee suspects that a child or youth is being abused;
3. A Child or youth reports possible abuse by a family member or other individual; or
4. Church officials learn that a church member or attendee (child, youth or adult) is under investigation for alleged abuse.

## **8. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE TO COMMUNITY AUTHORITIES**

- A. It is not the function of the Minister, Religious Education Coordinator or President of the Board of Directors to conduct an investigation into accusations of child abuse. It is both Maine Law and the policy of Auburn UU to immediately report any situation in which we have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected. Such a report must be made to the Maine Department of Human Services at 1 (800) 452-1999. A report also must be made to the District Attorney's office in the county in which the alleged victim resides. In Androscoggin County the District Attorney's office can be reached at 207-783-7311, located at 71 Lisbon Street, Lewiston, ME 04240 ([www.androscoggincountymaine.gov](http://www.androscoggincountymaine.gov))
- B. Once a report is made to the appropriate authorities, the church may rely on the decisions of those authorities in the event of a finding for which there is a basis for the complaint. It is

also the church's responsibility under these guidelines to develop an appropriate plan of response to the allegations.

- C. In cases occurring at Auburn UU or within programming of the church (such as field trips), the Minister will also notify the Northeast District Executive, and seek their advice and counsel. Additionally, the Minister will notify the church's insurance company.
- D. In the event the accused abuser is the Minister, reports will be filed by and the notifications referenced above will be the responsibility of the President of the Board of Directors.

## **9. SAFETY NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE**

### **A. Interim Safety Plan**

1. When a report is filed by any person on behalf of any child and the suspected abuser is a church employee, member or attendee, the Safe Congregation Response Team will develop an interim safety plan during the investigation of abuse. This plan may include, but is not limited to, restricting attendance of the suspected abuser to adult-only church events, having an assigned companion with the alleged abuser at all church events, and refraining from any contact with children while attending a church function. The purpose of this plan is not only to safeguard our children, but also to provide protection to the accused abuser from further complaints. If the accused abuser is another youth, the plan must be developed with input from both sets of parents or guardians. The plan will be clearly communicated to the accused abuser or, if a minor, his or her parents or guardians, by the Safe Congregation Response Team. The Minister and/or DRE may implement similar steps while awaiting initial action of the Safe Congregation Response Team.

Given the time that may have passed, several Interim Safety Plans may need to be developed.

### **B. Permanent Safety Plan**

1. Upon disposition by the Court, a permanent plan of restricted contact will be developed by the Safe Congregation Response Team. This will follow the guidelines established above for Interim Safety Plans.

In all cases, the Safe Congregation Response Team, Minister, Religious Educator or President of the Board of Directors may seek legal counsel before proceeding with either a draft or permanent plan.



## **10. PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION REGARDING REPORTS OF ABUSE**

- A. Following a report of suspected abuse, the Safe Congregation Response Team will also develop a plan to address the pastoral needs of our congregation, including:
1. The person/child who has allegedly been sexually abused: This may include providing information about or referrals to appropriate professional, community, and Society or UU resources, as needed. Additionally, the Safe Congregation Response Team may assist in dealing with the DHS, the District Attorney or the Police Department.
  2. Other members and friends of our congregation:
    - a. Members, friends, or attendees immediately affected by the incident (such as family members or partners) whose needs we can help meet, either directly or indirectly;
    - b. The Minister (or other members of the Church staff) to aid in dealing with the pastoral needs of the victim or accused person;
    - c. Other members and friends of the congregation who witnessed one or more incidents or, who having heard about them, are reminded of their own concerns; and
    - d. Other congregation members and friends who are relied on to a great degree by the person/child who has allegedly been sexually abused or accused offender (or those connected to them).
  3. The accused person: Support may include helping the accused person access the appropriate professional, community, and spiritual resources. While there may be feelings of ill-will toward the accused person, if that individual is a part of our community, they also deserve our support; withdrawing it at this critical point in that person's life might have severe detrimental long-term effects on their behavior in the future. It remains the mission of this congregation to recognize and support the integrity and inherent worth and dignity of that person even though we do not condone inappropriate behaviors, and to treat them with compassion.
  4. Other persons/children who have allegedly been sexually abused and who have been reluctant to come forward: If warranted, the response plan will include a way of reaching out to these individuals in a manner that is non-threatening.

A. The plan established will be such that other individuals are not put at risk for further incidents.

## **11. SAFETY AND PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION: REGARDING REPORTS OF HARASSMENT**

- A. Incidents of alleged sexual or physical harassment of minors which do not warrant involvement of the DHS or DA shall be referred to the Religious Education Coordinator and Minister. They may request that the Safe Congregation Response Team be formed to investigate such allegations. A plan shall be developed to address and resolve these complaints which shall make clear to the accused person that this church will not tolerate harassment of any form, as well as provide information about appropriate counseling or other

resources for both the victim and the offender. The parents of the minor(s) shall also be informed of this plan and involved, as appropriate, in its development.

## **12. MEDICAL EMERGENCY POLICY**

The Church (Board and delegated Committees or Personnel) will maintain First Aid Kits including AED (Defibrillator) and Trauma Kits in the church facilities. We will also conduct training of selected persons on an annual basis regarding response to medical emergencies.

## **13. SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

- Adults will not “friend” on social media any unrelated minors without explicit permission of parents.
- Adults will not “text” minors without explicit permission of parents.
- Parents must give permission through the registration form for use or posting of any minor’s photos in any venue. “Tagging” of minors’ photos is not allowed in any public venue.
- Photographing of minors at congregational events is only by parental permission.

## **CODE OF ETHICS FOR THOSE WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH:**

The care and education of our children and youth is a sacred task. Those who teach and/or lead our children and youth play a key role in fostering their spiritual growth and character development. It is, therefore, crucial and essential that those in leadership positions provide the special nurturing care and support that will enable a positive sense of self, and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

Our church is a voluntary association of people who gather for the purpose of religious fellowship. The relationships which develop within our church thus more resemble friendships, with their attendant risks and rewards, than professional relationships. The potential for intergenerational friendship and learning at our church is unique and important to the spiritual life of all concerned--adults, children, and youth.

Since there is an inherent power differential between adults and young people, it is important for adults to exercise good judgment and maturity in their influence upon children and youth, and to refrain from using young people to inappropriately fulfill their own needs. Young people are vulnerable, in that they may find it difficult to speak out about the inappropriate behavior of adults or even to recognize such behavior as inappropriate.

Therefore, your signature on the reverse side of this page is a promise to:

1. Provide nurturing care and support to all children/youth.
2. Work to help children/youth develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence.
3. Respect the selfhood of each young person, including the absolute right to privacy of his or her own mind and body.
4. Not engage in any behavior with young people, which may constitute verbal, emotional or physical abuse.
5. Not engage in behavior or language, which is personally threatening or demeaning.
6. Not engage in any sexually harassing behavior, or any other sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children/youth.
7. Not encourage or condone any sort of illegal or unethical activity on the part of children/youth.
8. Not consume alcohol or use any form of drug or substance which can affect physical or mental performance before or during the carrying out of his/her responsibilities.

Leaders shall be informed of the Code of Ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I have read and understand **The Code of Ethics** for Those Working with children and youth. I agree to uphold these principles in my work with the Auburn UU's children, youth, and adults. I affirm that I have never been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty, nolo contendere or taken an "Alford" plea to a charge of sexual misconduct, or been determined to have engaged in any form of child abuse in any civil, criminal, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum, or any other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that might call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children or youth, I have met to review this information confidentially with the Minister and Religious Education Coordinator.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Minister or Religious Education Coordinator

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**MAINE MANDATORY REPORTING LAW REGARDING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

**Title 22, Chapter 1071, Section 4011-A**

- A. Required Reporting to the Department (of Human Services). The following adult persons shall immediately report or cause a report to be made to the Maine Department of Human Services when the person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected:
1. When acting in a professional capacity: (27) A clergy member acquiring the information as a result of clerical professional work except for information received during confidential communications.
  2. Any other person who has assumed full, intermittent or occasional responsibility for the care or custody of the child, whether or not the person receives compensation. Whenever a person is required to report in a capacity as a member of the staff of a medical or public or private institution, agency or facility, that person immediately shall notify either the person in charge of the institution, agency or facility or a designated agent who then shall cause a report to be made. The staff also may make a report directly to the department.
- B. Required report to District Attorney. When, while acting in a professional capacity, any person required to report under this section knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected by a person not responsible for the child, the person immediately shall report or cause a report to be made to the appropriate district attorney's office.
- C. Optional report. Any person may make a report if that person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected.