

Religious Education Safety Procedures

General Purpose Statement:

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of UUCOM from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

These procedures apply to any person who provides care to children for any activity held under the auspices of UUCOM, including but not limited to Religious Education teachers or persons who care for children during a UUCOM program or event.

Definitions:

For purposes of this document, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

UUCOM means the Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland

Minister means UUCOM’s paid minister

DRE means UUCOM’s Director of Religious Education

RE means Religious Education

Selection of Workers:

All employees and all persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

- a. **Six Month Rule**
No volunteer will be allowed to work with children until s/he has been a member or regular attendee of UUCOM for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant working with children. This rule may be waived at the discretion of the Minister and DRE.
- b. **Written Application**
All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a Written application. The application will request basic information

From the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, involvement at UUCOM or other UU congregations, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file.

c. **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d. **Reference Checks**

Before and applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file.

e. **Criminal Background Check**

A criminal background check is required for all volunteers in the RE Program. Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing UUCOM to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Minister and DRE on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The criminal background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two vetted and approved adults will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

To clarify, “child abuse” is any action or lack of action, which endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical abuse—any injury to a child, which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burning and biting.
- Emotional abuse—emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse—any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest and pornography.
- Neglect—depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter and medical care.

RE Program volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at UUCOM becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to Child Protective Services, the Minister and DRE for further action, including reporting to Midland PD or FBI as mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at UUCOM or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified, unless they are the alleged abuser.
2. The worker/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or

misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.

3. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an Incident report.
4. We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
5. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children.
7. The Minister will be our spokesperson to the media concerning Incidents of abuse or neglect, unless s/he is alleged to be involved. All Other workers/volunteers should refrain from speaking to the media.
8. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers/volunteers:

- Teenage workers will be screened as specified above.
- Teenage workers must be under the supervision of an adult.

Restrooms

Children in grades 3 and under should be escorted to the nearest bathroom by an adult who shall wait outside for the child. In the event no adult is able to leave the classroom for safety reasons, children will be asked to go pairs to the restroom.

Sick Children

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at UUCOM. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not participate in the RE program:

- Fever, diarrhea or vomiting with the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose

- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers/volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up.

Medications

UUCOM will not administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Minister and DRE to develop a plan of action if one is not provided.

Discipline

UUCOM will not administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting or other physical discipline of children. Workers/volunteers should consult with the Minister or DRE if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. In addition, no person may use any of the following methods of discipline while acting as a childcare provider at UUCOM. Any such use shall be grounds for immediate termination.

- No child shall be subject to physical punishment, corporal punishment, verbal abuse or threats.
- No child or group of children shall be allowed to discipline another child.
- Unsupervised isolation of a child is never allowed.
- The withholding of food, water, nap or rest or bathroom facilities is never to be used as a punishment for a child.
- A child is never to be physically restricted in any way, unless his/her actions could bring harm to self or others.
- An adult shall never address a child with intimidation or ridicule.

Accidental Injuries to Children

Volunteers/workers shall report any injury of a child to the Minister and DRE no matter how insignificant it may seem and fill out an incident report, located in the classrooms. Parent must be notified if a child suffers an accident while in care.

All head injuries, or bites that break the skin must be reported to the parent

immediately. In the event that a child is injured while under our care the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes and bruises, workers will provide first aid (antiseptic, bandages, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's Parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be summoned. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an **incident report** will be completed for any/all injuries.

Training

UUCOM will provide training on child protection procedures to all RE Program volunteers and workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Misconduct

The following actions are examples of conduct that will not be tolerated. Any RE Program volunteer/worker engaging in such conduct while on duty could be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

- Marring or defacing walls, furniture or fixtures.
- Using obscene or profane language.
- Disrespectful conduct toward supervisory personnel.
- Possession of alcohol, drugs, firearms or other weapons, or pornography on church premises.
- Threatening the safety, health and/or well-being of himself/herself, a child, other staff members, parent, volunteer or church member.
- Sexually harassing a child, staff member, parent, volunteer or church member.
- Ignoring directions in this document, and/or causing stress or disruption to staff or operations.
- Intentionally committing acts of dishonesty or deception.
- Touching a child in an inappropriate manner.
- Any other behavior which could constitute a threat to a child or bring disrepute to UUCOM.

Education—General

The best atmosphere for learning is one of acceptance, mutual respect, pleasure, fairness, consistency, clear limits and encouragement. A predictable, organized environment with caring adults, clear expectations and appropriate consequences supports the whole child. The outdoor play environment is an extension of the classroom requiring the same level of adult planning, supervision and involvement with the children. **Parents and guardians must supervise their children on the playground after RE classes and activities.**

Families are considered an integral part of our program. Communication and collaboration between families and volunteers is encouraged. Effective communication with families strengthens the quality of the program.

Dress and Professional Behavior

Although the atmosphere at UUCOM is relaxed, staff and volunteers are expected to dress in appropriate attire. Very short shorts, micro mini-skirts, half shirts or clothing with offensive words or logos is not appropriate. Longer shorts, t-shirts, tennis shoes and jeans, if neat and clean, are appropriate. Professional behavior is expected at all times. Vulgar language and raucous behavior are prohibited.

Religious Education Program Rules

- ***Never leave a child alone on the playground or in a room for any reason.*** If you cannot follow this directive yourself, you must text the DRE or a member of the RE Committee for assistance.
- Encourage children to “do” things. Get them involved in an activity.
- All supplies, learning materials and books are to be returned to the proper place when you are finished using them.
- Leave the rooms in the same condition in which you found them. Do not leave messes on the floor. If a spill occurs, clean it up. If you are unable to clean the spill yourself, notify the DRE or a member of the RE Committee before you leave so the spill can be cleaned.
- Keep the playground gated closed and latched at all times.
- Treat children with respect.
- The classrooms and playground must be monitored for hazards regularly. Make sure to throw away any garbage or broken objects.
- Do not show movies or television unless it is part of the curriculum.

- An open door policy for families and staff to visit at any time shall be maintained. If a parent needs to discuss a problem or needs more detailed conversation, we ask that a conference time be set up with the child's caregiver and the Minister and/or DRE.
- Be kind and respectful to families. Give positive feedback to parents concerning their child/children.
- Use positive language and voice control at all times with children.
- Be positive and respectful of children and adults alike. Modeling appropriate behavior is part of your job.
- Encourage children to pick up and put away things as they finish with them.
- Use simple and clear directions. You may have to remind children more than once.
- Turn lights off before you leave.