

Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church

Child and Youth Protection Procedures

Preamble

We, the Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church, hereinafter referred to as SWUU, as a religious community, recognize the importance of creating communities where everyone, and especially our children and youth, are safe. We recognize that religious communities--which should be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all their members--are particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, the welcoming spirit and the strong reliance and need for volunteers, especially in children and youth programs.

We recognize the importance in a religious community of those very factors of trust, welcome and volunteer commitment, and the necessity to adopt procedures to guard against incidents of abuse. We further realize that institutions operating in the best manner possible with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free environment.

As a people of faith, we look to our Unitarian Universalist Principles to guide our policy-making. We apply our affirmation of the worth and dignity of all people and our search for justice to these procedures which support our being together in community.

We recognize that to adequately address the need for safe environments, it will mean making changes and sacrificing some convenience, yet we know it is our responsibility to respond to the reality of our situation and to our children and youth.

We also recognize that Ohio teachers are mandated reporters of suspected abuse or neglect. It is our intent to conform to state guidelines regarding the issue of safety of our children, which can be found at <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2151.421>

In this spirit, we endorse the following procedures for church events.

Procedure Statement

The child and youth protection procedures contain the following sections:

1. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth
2. Supervision Requirements
3. Transporting Children and Youth
4. Procedures for Reporting, Response, and Removal of a Worker
5. Resources
 - Code of Conduct for Workers with Children and Youth
 - Information about Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect
 - Information on obtaining criminal background checks

These procedures will apply to all SWUU Church sponsored events such as:

Sunday Church School
Events sponsored by the Religious Education Committee, which include children

Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth

1. Qualifications: With the exception of parents assisting in their child's program as required or as requested, all other workers, defined as those persons both volunteer and compensated who provide direct care or supervision of children or youth at SWUU Church events, must have the following qualifications:

- ⌘ Adults who work with children and youth must be at least 25 years of age and have been active in SWUU Church for at least six months except for interns. Nursery workers must be at least 18 years old.
- ⌘ A special category of "intern" shall be created for youth and young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who are well known to the church and have been active in SWUU for at least two years. Upon application, including references, these youth can be considered to be the second "adult" in the classes from toddler age through age 12.
Upon agreement by the RE Chair these ages may be waived for certain Individuals or special circumstances.
- ⌘ Nursery workers, who are hired employees must complete an application and provide three references. These references should be people who have known the potential worker for at least three years, preferably in relation to previous work with children or youth. Government-issued photo identification, such as a driver's license, may be requested.
- ⌘ Potential workers with children and youth who have not been members for one year, and are not known to the church members, will be asked to complete an application form and supply three references. These references should be people who have known the potential worker for at least three years, preferably in relation to previous work with children or youth. Government issued photo identification, such as a driver's license, may be requested.

2. Criminal Background Check:

- ⌘ All compensated and volunteer workers will be asked to consent to a criminal background check and such check may be performed. The check will be to screen people who have had a child related or violent offense in the past. The R.E. Committee will develop procedures for screening these volunteers and keeping the information they obtain confidential. The R.E. Chair or President of SWUU Church *will be responsible for* ensuring this procedure occurs.

3. Code of Conduct:

⌘ All adults working with children and youth and youth working in positions of leadership must sign the SWUU Church Code of Conduct form. A copy of this form is included in the Resource section of this document.

Supervision Requirements:

Best practices for safety require that for children (under 12), there will be a minimum of two adults scheduled to supervise groups. For groups of children that exceed 18, the R.E. Chair will prescribe appropriate supervision. Exceptions for unexpected circumstances only may be made by the primary on-site adult leader. This policy protects both the children and the adult in that it minimizes the opportunity for abuse as well as minimizes the risk of false accusations.

For the purposes of these requirements a “group” is defined as those children and youth who have been assigned to a nursery, or individual class or specific program or activity within the context of that class, as well as youth who are taking part in a planned, organized component of their program.

Corporal punishment may not be used under any circumstances.

It is preferred that no worker be alone with a child or youth either on-site or off-site. If an occurrence arises such that a worker is alone with a child or youth, another worker in the program shall be notified about such occurrence, either before the meeting or promptly afterward. If a teacher finds him or herself with only one child to teach they should invite a parent to join them, return the child to the church service or give the child the choice of assisting with the preschool group.

At the end of class, teachers will deliver their classes (in a group) to the lobby area. At that point, parents are responsible for the supervision of their children.

Transporting Children and Youth

Transportation To and From SWUU Events

It is the responsibility of the parents or guardians to provide or arrange for safe transportation to and from SWUU Church events. If a child is transported by a member of the church, SWUU Church strongly recommends that all youth and children ride with adults who meet the requirements below.

Transportation during SWUU Events

All drivers of vehicles containing minors other than their own children must be at least 25 years of age and must provide proof of insurance and a valid driver's license.

There must be enough functioning seat belts for everyone and everyone must wear a seat belt. When transporting young children, the driver must follow the state's laws for the use of car seats and booster seats and its regulations as to where children should be seated in the vehicle. Whenever possible, and with children under 12 years old, it is recommended that there be two adults per vehicle. The need for seat belts supersedes the need for two adults to be in each vehicle, however upon arrival at the destination, a minimum of two adults must accompany a group of children or youth under 12 when off-site.

Written permission of the parent/guardian of all minor passengers will be obtained prior to being transported. This permission will include all relevant details pertaining to the event, such as date and location, name of driver(s) whenever possible, time of departure and time of return. Emergency contact information including name of physician, health insurance information and consent to treat in case of an emergency must accompany all minors who are being transported by adults other than their parents. During travel, the forms will be kept by the driver of the vehicle, or the responsible adult traveling with a group using an alternate form of transportation, i.e. bus or train.

Youth age 12 to 18 will have a Permission/Consent form and a Release/Waiver form on file for regular Sunday morning outings to local public places such as: Book and Bean, Metroparks. These

outings may be supervised by one adult, unless special circumstances warrant otherwise. An event related Permission/Consent form will be required for non-public activities such as trips to a member's home or distant off site events (more than 5 miles).

No driver may be sleep-deprived, consume alcohol or use any form of drug that can affect physical or mental performance during or before carrying out his/her duty as a driver.

Reporting of Incidents, Response, and Removal of a Worker with Children and Youth

Definition of Abuse - Those who work with children and youth on a regular basis should recognize that child abuse is generally defined as the following:

- ⌘ **Physical Abuse** – bodily injury to a person. This includes, but is not limited to hitting, biting, scalding, burning and strangulation or suffocation.
- ⌘ **Physical Neglect** - the failure to adequately provide the essentials of life, such as food, shelter, clothing, and medical care.
- ⌘ **Sexual Abuse** - the exploitation of a child or youth for the gratification of an adult. It includes, but is not limited to inappropriate touching, intercourse, incest, rape and sodomy as well as exhibitionism, voyeurism and use of children in pornography.
- ⌘ **Emotional maltreatment** - the failure to provide love, care, support and guidance necessary for healthy psychological development. This includes, but is not limited to verbal abuse, such as excessive teasing, belittling, and rejection.

In general, sexual contact with a minor less than 13 years of age, whether the age is known or unknown is considered a felony. If the complainant is four or more years younger than the sexual partner, a felony has occurred.

Mandatory Reporters - Definitions of persons required to report and what must be reported under the laws of the State of Ohio, and an explanation of procedures to follow when making a statutorily required report are found in the Resources section of this document.

Reporting Procedures- When an incident has occurred at a SWUU event, the following steps must be followed:

- ⌘ All persons affiliated with a SWUU Church event, including compensated workers, volunteers, adults or youth, who acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that one or more children or youth at a SWUU event has been sexually molested or exploited, injured or has been the victim of significant objectionable conduct shall:
 - i) Immediately report the incident to the person or persons in charge of the event and
 - ii) Complete an "Incident Report" form found in the Resources section of this document.("Incident Report" hereinafter referred to as incident report.)
- ⌘ The person in charge of an event to whom a report of molestation, injury or objectionable conduct is made shall submit a copy of the incident report as completed by the worker who reported the incident to the SWUU Church Minister, hereinafter referred to as the Minister, unless the incident involves the Minister, in which case the incident report should be submitted to the SWUU Board President, hereinafter referred to as the Board President. If indicated, the Minister will then assist the person who reported the incident in reporting the incident to the local authorities of the jurisdiction in which the incident occurred (in most cases, Child Protective Services, or the Department of Social Services). In all cases (except those allegations directly involving the Minister) the Minister should be kept informed of what is happening.
- ⌘ If indicated, reporting procedures must be implemented within the 24 hours following the incident. In the event that a person who is not part of the program in which the incident occurred, or is not part of the SWUU event in which an incident occurred, acquires knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that a child or youth at a SWUU Church event has been sexually molested or exploited, injured or been a victim of significant objectionable conduct, that person is asked to follow the procedure outlined above beginning with the first step, by reporting the incident to the person in charge of the event and completing a "Incident Report" form found in the Resources section of this document.

Response to Media Inquiries

Only the Board President or the Minister should speak for SWUU Church. In general, the following requirements apply when a member of the media requests information about an allegation of abuse occurring at a SWUU event:

- ⌘ So long as the individual contacted has reason to believe that the incident has been reported to the proper authorities, he or she should refer the inquiry to the proper authorities for a substantive response to the inquiry.

- ⌘ Because of the issue of confidentiality, in the best interests of the child or youth, specific cases should not be discussed in a public context. The inquirer should always be referred to the proper authorities. If the individual being asked for information has reason to believe that the matter has not yet been reported to the proper authorities, a statement that the speaker wishes to protect the confidentiality of the apparent victim, and for that reason declines to add details, is the most appropriate response to further media inquiry.
- ⌘ The Board President or the Minister can freely discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.
- ⌘ In litigation, details provided by any person with even apparent authority of the SWUU Church may be used.

Removal of a Worker with Children or Youth

Should circumstances or events arise that indicate or cause reasonable suspicion that an adult worker is no longer a suitable person for working with children or youth at events hosted by the SWUU Church, steps will be taken to remove said adult from involvement or contact with children or youth. Any person with concerns about an adult worker shall contact the Board President, the Minister, or the RE Director--who will then assess the need for removal. The Board President, Minister, or the RE Director will consult with the necessary parties and determine if action is necessary. In taking such action, the SWUU Staff will afford the affected worker an opportunity to know the accusations against him or her, to know the evidence supporting such charges, and the right to reply to or rebut such charges. Our Unitarian Universalist principles, which call on us to apply fairness and compassion in our relationships with each other, will guide our actions and decisions.

It is understood that such action will be handled with due caution and discretion, and that the professional Staff of the SWUU Church has the full support of the congregation in following through on such action for removal.

Any person who is deemed to not be a suitable person to work with youth will be invited to participate in the church community in other activities. A person deemed to be a sexual offender whose offense involved children, will be prevented from involvement in all youth related activities.

Recommended by the Safety Team composed of: Ellen Stark, Michael Tucci, Sherry Spencer, Sandy McLean, Sara Davis, Mary Dellorso, Ellen Hansen-Ellis and Chris Neilson.

Resources

For the

Southwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Child and Youth Protection Procedures

Code of Conduct for Adults and Youth in Leadership Positions who Work with Children and Youth

Adults and youth in leadership positions who work with children and youth at The SWUU Church events are expected to always have the best interests of children and youth at heart. Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. No one's enjoyment should ever be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. Our charge to children and youth workers is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness.

In this manner, we intend to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and communities. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that SWUU has of adults and youth in leadership positions that work with children and youth. They are as follows:

- ⌘ **Sleep**--Workers at SWUU events are expected to get enough sleep so that they will be alert and able to maintain good judgment and clear thinking. We expect each worker to take individual responsibility for getting 'enough' or 'a reasonable amount' of sleep each night, so that they may perform their expected duties in a competent and professional manner.
- ⌘ **"Friendship" with Youth**--Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for "friendship" is not sufficiently mature to be in a supervisory position. A "friendship" is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. It is expected that relationships that an adult has with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitative.

- ⌘ **Unofficial Contact with Youth**--Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These can be not only healthy, but also transformative for both. However, it is our concern that a “predator,” who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart, will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of SWUU-sponsored events, it is imperative that your behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a youth outside of The SWUU Church events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents or guardians. Furthermore, you should let an appropriate member of the church know what you are doing (such as Board President, Minister, RE Committee). This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping SWUU and the parents and guardians aware of your actions.
- ⌘ **Sexualized Behavior**--It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for example, or to make “double entendres.” Physical expressions of affection such as hugs have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.
- ⌘ **Confidentiality**—Effective relationships between youth and the adults who work with youth, and youth who work with youth in leadership positions are established through trust, understanding, patience and the emotional bonds that develop. Confidentiality is an important component of this process, but there are limits to confidentiality and circumstances under which the confidential relationship must be broken. Sometimes you will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. **FOR THE SAFETY OF BOTH THE YOUTH AND YOURSELF, YOU MUST NOT KEEP SUCH INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.** For this reason, never give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when information is of a major crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. In addition, you yourself **MUST** consult with a person of greater authority in the church about an appropriate course of action. If in doubt, it is best to initiate this conversation. Adults and youth in leadership positions who work with children and youth under the aegis of SWUU are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the church as well. **Remember: you are acting both ethically and legally as an agent of the SWUU Church.**

Accordance with this Code of Conduct

Any SWUU Church person working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of the SWUU Church. However, until such time as the church chooses to alter any portion of its provisions, the worker must abide by the code as written.

By signing below, the signatory indicates that they have read this Code of Conduct and agrees to abide by it. If a worker violates any of its provisions, they may be removed as a worker at SWUU events.

Signature of Worker with Children and Youth Date

Printed name of worker

Information about Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

What follows is a summary of the Child Abuse and Neglect Statutes in effect in Ohio. Ohio designates individuals, typically by professional group, who are mandated by law to report child maltreatment. Any person, however, may report incidents of abuse or neglect. Statutes are constantly being revised and updated; therefore, the reader should not rely on this summary for legal advice. The source is *National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect* of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/sag/manda.pdf).

Ohio

Who Must Report

- ⌘ Physicians, including hospital interns or residents; dentists; podiatrists; practitioners of limited branches of medicine or surgery; registered nurses; licensed practical nurses; visiting nurses; other health care professionals; speech pathologists, audiologists; coroners;
- ⌘ Licensed school psychologists; administrators or employees of child day-care centers, certified child care agencies, or other public or private children services agencies; residential camps, or child day camps; school teachers; school employees; school authorities;
- ⌘ Licensed psychologists; independent marriage and family therapists or marriage and family therapists; persons engaged in social work or the practice of professional counseling; agents of county humane societies;
- ⌘ Persons rendering spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religion.

Circumstances

- ⌘ When they are acting in their official or professional capacities and know or suspect that a child under 18 years of age or a mentally retarded, developmentally disabled, or physically impaired child under 21 years of age has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates child abuse or neglect.

Privileged Communication

An attorney or a physician is not required to make a report concerning any communication made to him or her by one of his or her clients in the attorney-client relationship or the physician-patient relationship if the attorney or physician could not testify with respect to that communication in a civil or criminal proceeding, except that the client/patient is deemed to have waived any testimonial privilege with

respect to the communication and the attorney or physician shall make a report with respect to that communication , if all of the following apply:

- ⌘ The client or patient, at the time of the communication, is either a child under 18 years of age or a physically or mentally handicapped person under 21 years of age;
- ⌘ The attorney or physician knows or suspects, as a result of the communication or any observations made during that communication, that the client or patient has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of the client or patient; and
- ⌘ The attorney-client relationship or the physician-patient relationship does not arise out of the client or patient's attempt to have an abortion without the notification of her parents, guardian, or custodian.

The physician-patient privilege shall not be grounds for excluding evidence regarding a child's injuries, abuse, or neglect, or the cause of injuries, abuse, neglect, in any judicial proceeding resulting from a report submitted pursuant to the reporting laws.

Reports of abuse should be made to your local Children's Protective Services Agency or you may use this toll free numbers for reporting abuse:

Ohio 1-800-422-4453 (1-800-4 A CHILD)

Implementation and Education

Once the SWUU Board accepts the procedures, the procedures will be presented at Sunday Morning Church Service and a cover letter will be sent directly to the following parties from the SWUU Church:

The Minister.

All teachers in The RE program.

All members of the RE Department.

An article will be prepared by the board for the newsletter.

The Minister and/or R.E. Director will be responsible for developing procedures for implementation of this plan and education of the congregation and the R.E. teachers.

Many thanks go to the Ohio Meadville UUA, Olmsted UUC, Church Mutual, Live Oak UU Church and First UU Church of San Diego for sharing their Safety Documents personally or on line.

Information on Obtaining Criminal Background Checks

Through ChoicePoint:

ChoicePoint is the preferred vendor of the Ohio-Meadville District's insurance carrier for accessing each state's Sex Offender Registry Database. Contact the O-MD Staff to implement this screening mechanism. Further information may be found at www.churchmutal.com/screen.

Through the State Bureaus of Criminal Identification:

Ohio

Identification Division

Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation

1580 State Route 56

P.O. Box 365

London, OH 43140

740-852-2556 ext. 217

740-466-8204 ext. 217