

# **Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Hillsborough**



## **“SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH” Approved by the COW on 6/17/07**

### **1. Policy Statement**

As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This includes the imperative to protect and support the most vulnerable among us, our children and youth, to ensure that everyone who comes here feels valued, safe, and secure.

We take seriously our responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment. UUCH recognizes the reality of child sexual and physical abuse in our society (congregations’ definition in Appendix A), its impact on children and families, and the need for responsible means of addressing this issue.

To do our best to ensure safety for our children and youth, we will:

1. Educate all congregation staff and volunteers who work with children concerning issues of abuse.
2. Supervise our children and those who work with them.
3. Provide a specific process by which allegations of abuse are addressed.
4. Treat all persons with dignity and respect.
5. Share the responsibility with every member of the congregation.

All procedures associated with this policy are to be found in the Appendices.

### **2. Selection and Training of Staff and Volunteers**

**2.1** UUCH will establish a UUCH Child Safety Response Team (CSRT) composed of the Minister, the DRE or RE Chairperson, the Moderator(s), and a parent of a minor child. All members of this team will receive:

- a copy of this document,
- all congregational policies and procedures that govern working with children or youth

**2.2** Minister(s) will attend a UUA Safe Congregation Workshop, or equivalent education.

**2.3** Youth Advisors, OWL leaders, religious education (RE) teachers, and volunteer nursery helpers will:

- sign the Code of Ethics Form, found in Appendix D
- be a congregant for at least 6 months, recommended by a congregant, or work with a longer-term congregant until a congregant for 6 months,
- be at least 25 years of age (for Youth Advisors).

**2.4** Paid Caregiver(s) will:

- take a certified baby-sitter course or have this requirement waived by the RE Committee, and be recommended by a local UU Congregation, a member or a friend of the congregation:
- if staff, be able to supply references of a number and type acceptable to the RE Committee,
- if substitute, will be supervised by adult congregants during their paid work.

**2.5 No one** with known criminal charges or who has a known criminal record of either child sexual or physical abuse will be allowed to work with children or youth.

- Members and friends who fall into the above category will be required to sign a Limited Access Covenant as a condition of their participation in UUCH. (See Appendix E.) Additional restrictions will be specified in the covenant.
- No person with a known child-related offense record may serve on a committee determining standards or programs involving children or youth. If he or she is serving on a committee that takes up business directly involving children or youth, the person may not participate in the discussion or decision-making.

**2.6** As part of their training, every RE teacher or assistant, caregiver, youth advisor, and RE committee member shall receive:

- a copy of this document,
- all congregational policies and procedures that govern working with children or youth.

**2.7** UUCH will educate all members and friends in UUCH about policy guidelines (Appendix C) and about procedures for Listening To and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect (Appendix B). After the adoption of this policy, this information will become a part of the New Member Packet.

### **3. Supervision of Children and Youth**

**3.1** At All Times:

- North Carolina law mandates that **all** adults report incidents of abuse involving children.
- Doors for rooms used as religious education classrooms will have windows.
- Adults supervising children and youth will:
  - Have prior parental or guardian permission for any child or youth who engages in UUCH activities. This will be accomplished by a signed registration form for participation of children and youth in church sponsored activities on site, and a signed permission slip for any activities off site. Visitors attending UUCH worship services will sign their children into the class they are attending. This will constitute permission for that morning's activities.
  - Have emergency contact information for all children and youth whose parents or guardians are off-premises.
  - Have information to provide for the special needs of a child or youth. **(RE teachers and the registration form for children and youth religious education programs and activities will ask parents and guardians for any special needs that a child has that should be considered to create a safe and successful environment for their child.)**

**3.2** In Vehicles and Off-Site:

- Prior parental permission is required for volunteers or staff to transport other congregants' children and youth to/from home to/from UUCH,
- Specified drivers for all functions must be approved by the RE Committee or RE Teachers,
- Every person transported in the vehicle must wear a seatbelt,
- Adults will carry permission slips with emergency contact and medical release information for each child or youth.

**3.3** On-Site:

- Children or youth will not meet with adults except for UUCH-approved programs or events.
- An approved church volunteer should be present at all times in congregation school classrooms and during any congregation-sponsored activity involving youth. Having two approved church volunteers is recommended.

- The building will not be open to children or youth for any activity until at least one approved volunteer or staff adult is present. Parents are responsible for supervising their children or youth until an approved adult is present in the congregation building for any congregation-sponsored activity. Two adults are recommended.
- No child will be dismissed from religious education classes without an appropriate supervisory parent or guardian known to be on the premises.
- Congregation functions providing childcare require at minimum: an approved child caregiver, an unlocked classroom door, and the presence of adults on the premises.

#### **4. Responding to and Reporting Child-Related Offense Allegations against a staff member, minister, member, or attendee**

**4.1 If a congregant becomes aware of a prior child-related offense alleged or charged against an adult in the congregation,** he or she shall notify a member of the UUCH Child Safety Response Team who will inform the other members of the team.

The UUCH Child Safety Response Team will assess and take actions to best assure safety for the children and youth of the congregation. The alleged offender must disclose information requested by the CSRT as a condition for continuing participation in UUCH, and the CSRT will seek court records about all alleged offenses. The CSRT may enter into a covenant with the alleged offender that may include restricting the person from all activities involving children and youth. This information will be kept confidential beyond the members of the UUCH Child Safety Response Team if the Team determines that the offense has not been fully investigated or merits confidentiality. If a new person joins the Team, all information will be passed to the new member. When a person leaves the Team, he or she must keep confidential all such information received as a member of the Team.

**4.2 If prior offenses resulted in one or more convictions or guilty pleas,** the CSRT will determine whether the restriction should be partial or complete and how much to disclose to the congregation to assure the safety of children and youth.

**4.3 If a congregant becomes aware of a current allegation, he or she shall**

- Notify a member of the UUCH Child Safety Response Team immediately. Whoever receives the information will inform the others. If the charges involve a minister, the Team will notify the District Executive of the Thomas Jefferson District, or the UUA Department of Ministry. If the charges involve a congregant, the Team will notify the minister of every Unitarian Universalist congregation within 50 miles of UUCH and within 25 miles of the location of the alleged offense.
- Follow the procedures outlined in Appendix B, Procedures for Listening to and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect, to assess and take actions to best assure both safety and confidentiality for the children and youth in the congregation and the person alleged to have committed an uninvestigated occurrence.

**4.4 If the current alleged offense does not result in a plea of guilty or a conviction** of the alleged offender, the CSRT will follow the procedure described in 4.1.

**4.5 If the current alleged offense results in a plea of guilty or a conviction,** the CSRT will determine what information to disclose to the congregation to assure the safety of the children and youth. It will enter into a covenant with the offender restricting the offender from all activities involving children and youth and it will notify a CoCo and COW of the offense. Restrictions from the programs and building and grounds may be partial or complete, temporary or permanent. Only a COW may make the restrictions permanent.

**4.6 If a congregant who has previously pleaded guilty or been convicted of a child-related offense is charged with a further offense he or she must:**

- Notify the Child Safety Response Team within 72 hours of the charges or allegations against him or her regardless of where the alleged offense took place. A temporary complete restriction of the alleged offender will go into effect automatically and immediately. The alleged offender will not attend any programs at UUCH or visit the building or grounds until the Team notifies him or her that the restriction upon him or her has been lifted.
- The Team will hold a confidential hearing within 30 days to determine whether to recommend further action to the CoCo and the COW. That action could be permanent or temporary restriction of the alleged offender, or lifting of the restrictions.

**4.7 An alleged offender may appeal to a COW any decision of the CSRT to restrict his or her activity in UUCH programs or on UUCH property.** The alleged offender must make his or her appeal in writing to the Moderator of UUCH within 30 days of being notified in writing by the CSRT of their decision to restrict him or her. A COW must be held within 60 days to consider the appeal. All information about the alleged offense and any other current or prior alleged offenses must be fully disclosed to the COW by the alleged offender and the CSRT at the COW in which the appeal is made. A child against whom the offense is allegedly committed cannot be compelled to speak. There is no other appeal within the Congregation.

**5. Monitoring of Policies and Procedures.**

The RE Committee will conduct an annual review of the policy, assessing how well the program has met its goals.

**6. Resources**

**Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations** by Rev. Debra Haffner is available on the UUA Website. See Appendix E for where to find this document.

**Safe Congregations Handbook: Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in our Faith Communities**, edited by Revs. Patricia Hoerdoerfer and Fredric Muir (available at the UUA Bookstore). It is a wonderful resource on issues of power, leadership, and developing appropriated guidelines for congregation and youth groups. Included in it are a series of workshops appropriate for boards, RE committees, youth groups, and staffs.

The **TJ District Child & Youth Protection Requirements** were developed for all district-sponsored events involving the care of children or youth programming. Though these cannot be imposed on local congregations, they are a model and are recommended for practices for local congregations. Particularly if UUCH is hosting youth conferences and other similar activities, these recommendations can provide guidance and practices to protect the children, volunteers, paid staff, and the congregation. In addition, these requirements can be found at the TJ District Website at: <http://www.tjd.uua.org/re/cypr0405.pdf>

## **APPENDICES:**

### **Appendix A: Definition of Child Abuse**

#### **The definition that UUCH is using is:**

Child abuse is the nonaccidental injury, sexual abuse/exploitation or neglect, treatment, or maltreatment of a child by any person under circumstances that indicate the child's health, welfare, or safety is harmed.

In this document, "child" shall mean anyone aged from infancy to under 12 years and "youth" shall mean anyone aged 12 to 18 years.

### **Appendix B: Procedures for Listening To and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

1. The child/person tells his or her story to a teacher, minister, or friend, who...

- listens carefully
- provides an appropriate setting (takes the child out of a classroom; stays with the child/person)
- believes the child's story (affirms the child for his/her courage; is comfortable with silences and tears).

This is the first step to healing.

2. The hearer must not ask investigative questions; must write notes on what is said with names, dates, times, etc.; must report the story to the minister and/or moderator(s); and must report to the appropriate agency.

- Be honest, don't make promises you can't keep, but offer hope.
- Your notes will enable you to make an accurate report; you will need them if you are asked to testify.
- All interviews with a child must be done by a member of the Children's Protective Services (CPS) within the Department of Social Services.

3. The minister and/or moderators will assist the congregant in making a verbal report to Child Protective Services immediately. A written report must be sent to CPS within 36 hours. Copies of the written report should be given to the minister and/or moderators.

- All involved will keep the entire matter confidential until an official CPS or police investigation is complete.
- Remember you are not asked to determine whether a crime has been committed; the law states you are to report what a reasonable person would suspect to be abuse or neglect.

4. The congregation and the denomination can offer counseling and referrals for the victim and perpetrator, safe haven for the victim, follow-up services for the victim and/or family assistance with family reunification or restructuring, and healing and support services for the congregation.

- Ask for support for yourself; talk with the minister(s) or personal therapist about your own feelings.
- You are not alone!

### **Appendix C: Information About the Policy Stressed to all Adults in UUCH, Especially RE Teachers, Youth Advisors, and Child Care Providers**

North Carolina law mandates that **all** adults report incidents of abuse involving children.

If a child discloses physical or sexual abuse to **any adult at UUCH**, that adult must interact with the child as outlined in Appendix B, Procedures for Listening to and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect, steps 1 and 2, then contact the minister and/or moderator(s) immediately. They will help the adult through the process of following the church's Safe Congregation Policy and the reporting law of the State of North Carolina.

## **Appendix D: Codes of Conduct and Ethics for Leaders of Children and Youth**

### **Code of Ethics**

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the social nurture, care and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, leaders shall refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

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

*--adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1986*

### **Code of Conduct**

- 1. No minister, adult leader, child care employee, church school teacher, or any other person working in a paid or volunteer capacity under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Hillsborough will engage in sexualized behavior with persons under the age of 18 years.*
- 2. Neither shall anyone engage in behavior with children, youth, or adults that constitutes sexual harassment or verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.*
- 3. Neither shall they have been convicted of or had allegations of any prior behavior with children, youth, or adults that constitutes sexual harassment or verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.*

**I sign below, acknowledging that I have read the above Codes of Ethics and Conduct and will abide by them.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Limited Access Covenant**

The terms of this covenant will vary on a case-by-case basis. Samples of covenants can be found on the UUA Website at: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/balancingacts/index.shtml>.

This site refers to the document **Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations** by Rev. Debra Haffner, which draws upon the experiences of other churches that have dealt with these issues.

Two samples of Limited Access Agreements are on this site, which clearly outline issues to be considered in each case.