

SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

LAKE COUNTRY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

Winter 2016



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These policies and procedures will apply to all Lake Country Unitarian Universalist programs, services, activities and events, including all Religious Education and youth programs, youth/adult activities, events for which child care is provided, field trips, and conferences.

I. Purpose and Philosophy

We, the members of Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church (LCUUC), recognize with sadness the reality that our children and young people are vulnerable to the outrage of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. We acknowledge that when abuse occurs, it is a tragedy not only for the abused, but for their families, our congregation, and our wider community.

As it is the intention of our religious community to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our membership, LCUUC is dedicated to the creation of a safe environment for all members and friends and their children. We are particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, the welcoming spirit, and the strong reliance on and need for volunteers, especially in children and youth programs.

Because of the importance in our religious community of welcoming and trusting volunteer commitment, we are dedicated to adopting every reasonable precaution to prevent abuse and provide safety for both children and adults. It is in this spirit that we have adopted this Safe Congregation Policy for Children and Youth.

II. Screening and Selection

A. Education Workers

The Director of Religious Education (DRE, co DRE, MRE) is responsible for persons who are engaged in Religious Education (RE) programs with LCUUC children and youth whether they are paid or unpaid volunteers or parents/guardians, permanently assigned or occasional. All education workers who provide direct care or supervision to children or youth must meet the following criteria:

- **Affiliation Requirements.** All advisors for youth and all volunteer RE teachers must be active participants at LCUUC or a Unitarian Universalist church for at least six months prior to taking on any assigned group, committee, activity or event.
- **Age Requirements.** Advisors for high school groups must be at least 25 years of age; advisors for middle school groups must be at least 25 years of age; all other volunteer RE teachers, infant and children supervisors should be at least 18 years of age. Youth under the age of 18 may act as helpers with children with at least one supervisor present.
- **Application Requirements.** All RE workers must complete the Application Form, must consent to such reference and/or background checks as LCUUC, in its discretion, deems necessary, and must agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth in these policies and procedures.
- **Training Requirements.** Prior to assigning a new education worker to a program, and whenever LCUUC employs new staff, the DRE or designee will provide training in the Safe Congregation Policy.

B. Child Care Providers

By September 1 each year, the DRE will be responsible for designating, for the next 12 months, either a volunteer or a staff member to manage the screening, selection, and orientation of Child Care Providers in accordance with the following requirements:

- **Age Requirements.** All Child Care Providers must be at least 14 years of age. Youth under the age of 18 should receive appropriate adult supervision.
- **Application Requirements.** All Child Care Providers must complete the Application for Working with Children and Youth, must consent to such reference and/or background checks as LCUUC, in its discretion, deems necessary, and must agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth in these policies and procedures. Applicants under 16 also need to submit a work permit.²
- **Orientation.** The DRE or designee will be responsible for assuring that all Child Care Providers, prior to being assigned, are aware of the Safe Congregation Policy.

III. Supervision Requirements

General Supervision Requirements

All Education Workers and Child Care Providers are required to comply with the following requirements. Appropriate disciplinary action may be taken with a child or youth who behaves inappropriately by means outlined in the RE handbook.

1. Corporal punishment or abusive language may not be used under any circumstances. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
2. When taking children to the restroom, the education workers and child care providers are to enter and assist only when necessary.
3. If an adult is alone with a group of children at church, the door to the room and any window coverings should be open.
4. Children second grade and younger must be picked up by parent or guardian unless prior arrangements have been made with the DRE.

Additional Requirements for Education Workers

All Education Workers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the DRE and operate under the authority of the Lifespan Council.

1. There will be a minimum of two adults scheduled to supervise each group. The DRE, Minister, or adult designated event coordinator may make exception to this rule on a case-by-case basis. Exceptions should be reported to the DRE.
2. If there is only one student in any classroom, that student will be reassigned.
3. The DRE and/or designee will circulate among the RE classroom areas and monitor classroom activities randomly during regular RE classes.

4. If a worker has a church related, one-on-one meeting with a child or youth, the DRE should be notified immediately of the meeting and its purpose. One-on-one meetings with children and youth are strongly discouraged and must be conducted in a public open space.
5. A disciplinary meeting with a youth requires two adults. The parents/guardians and the DRE must be informed of any such meeting and its contents as soon as possible.
6. Overnight chaperones should not be significantly/personally involved with each other.

Additional Requirements for Child Care Providers

All Child Care Providers operate under the authority of the DRE and Minister. Supervision is provided by the person responsible for conducting the activity (i.e. RE Point Person, event organizer, committee member, Trustee, etc).

1. Only one person, at least 14 years of age or older, is required in a childcare situation. When there are more than three children being cared for, preferably there should be two childcare providers.
2. It is recommended that whenever possible, the childcare be provided in proximity to the adult activity, especially when there is only one childcare provider.
3. All childcare providers, whether paid or volunteer, will be informed about the General Supervision Requirements.
4. Appropriate adult supervision should be provided if a childcare provider is under the age of 18.

Outings and Transportation Requirements

1. All outings must be pre-approved by the DRE. Participating children or youth must have a signed permission slip from a parent/guardian.
2. All drivers must be a minimum age of 21 and must carry a valid driver's license and insurance.
3. Drivers, other than parents/guardians of a participating child, are to have two or more children in the car when transporting children/youth to and from activities. Alternatively, two adults may travel with a child. Married or partnered couples count as one person for the purposes of this policy and do not meet the requirement. A married or partnered couple must have two or more children in the car, or an additional non-related adult.
4. As mandated by law, everyone in the car must wear a seatbelt. Children must be restrained according to current State and Federal laws. It is recommended that all children 12 and under should sit in the back seat.

IV. Conduct for All Adults Working with Children and Youth

Adults who work with children and youth at LCUUC are expected to always have the best interests of the children and youth at heart. Therefore, the adults' behavior needs to both *be* and *appear to be* above reproach. RE workers and Child Care Providers are expected to nurture the physical, emotional and spiritual growth of the children and youth by fostering an

environment of kindness, trust, respect, and fun. Workers are charged to both model and 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 as part of a community.

Adult Relationships with Children and Youth

Adults have a responsibility to model appropriate relationships between each other, as well as refrain from and discourage inappropriate relationships, with any child under age 18, no matter how mature the individual. Adults should assume primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries between participants of all ages and cultivate an atmosphere of health and trust.

“Transitions” Program—Special Exception to the Safe Congregation Policy

It is acknowledged that participants in the LCUUC “Transitions” program have special needs for privacy that differ from the Safe Congregation Policy. There is a special Transitions Permission Form that requires parental/guardian approval for mentors/mentees meeting in public spaces.

The Board of Trustees approved adding an Addendum to the Permission Form that clearly states the reason for the special Permission Form and why it is needed. The *Addendum* reads as follows: *“The Safe Congregation Policy requires that two adults be present when working with a child/youth during church activities. This Transitions Permission Form allows the Mentee and Mentor to meet together without a second adult present in a public space. It allows the youth to explore their thoughts with one adult in a safe environment with the approval of the parents/guardians.”*

Unofficial Contact with Youth

For the protection of the youth and the adult, any contact between an adult and a minor outside of LCUUC must be with the knowledge and consent of the youth’s parents/guardians.

Sexualized Behavior

It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with, or in the presence of, a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to jokes with sexual context or to make “double entendres”. Physical expressions of affection, such as hugs, certainly have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate the contact, and the adult should be sensitive not to allow them to be too frequent or prolonged.

Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol & Other Illegal Behavior

Children are prohibited from using tobacco, drugs or alcohol, and are barred from exhibiting illegal behavior, while engaged in church-sanctioned activities. Adult supervisors of children are expected to model appropriate behavior in this regard.

Confidentiality

While you can assure a child that you will respect the information that is shared and use it confidentially, RE Workers and Child Care Providers should never give a child or youth the impression that they will keep secrets. *Confidentiality is not secret keeping*. For the most part a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence.

It is sometimes difficult to know when to report. Please use the following lens:

When the information has or has the *potential* of major consequences – *is or may be* of a crisis nature, adults must consult with the minister or the DRE about an appropriate course of action.

For example, you may learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug or alcohol problem, etc. It is LCUUC policy that this type of information be communicated to LCUUC professional staff immediately.

Additionally, it is always appropriate to encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent/guardian or other trusted authority.

V . Reporting and Response Procedures for Education Workers and Child Care Providers

Reporting.

Wisconsin's child abuse reporting law is set forth in s. 48.981, Stats. Under Wisconsin law, certain professionals must report suspected child abuse or neglect if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child seen in the course of professional duties has been abused or neglected or has been threatened with abuse or neglect that will occur. All people not specifically included as mandatory reporters are permitted to report suspected child abuse or neglect, including suspected abuse or neglect of unborn children. [s. 48.981 (2) (c) and (d), Stats.]

This means that any persons rendering spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religion, teacher or other school personnel, and day care provider who *suspects* the abuse or neglect of a child must report these suspicions to Child Protective Services, and any other person who suspects abuse or neglect may do so.

At LCUUC if any adult suspects abuse or neglect of a child, that adult must immediately report the alleged abuse or neglect to the Minister or DRE. The Minister along with one of either the DRE or the reporting adult will take up the allegation with the Safe Congregation Committee. A decision will then be made regarding reporting the situation to Child Protective Services.

When the DRE or the Minister ascertains that a child or youth at a church related event is in a situation of risk, the responsible person should immediately remove the allegedly abusive adult (or the child) from the situation and take any other steps necessary to protect the minor.

If the reported abuse involves a worker at LCUUC, the minister will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at LCUUC until the matter is resolved. If the reported abuse involves the minister, the President of the Board of Trustees will relieve the minister of all duties at the church until a Regional Staff person and Good Officer is notified. The Regional Staff person or Good Officer will instruct the President on how to proceed. During this time the minister will have no contact with any member of the church other than the President until instructed otherwise by the President or a member of the Regional Staff.

Documenting.

All persons engaged in the investigation of the allegations will keep a written record of all circumstances. Once the investigation is finalized, these reports will be kept on file with the Minister and passed on to successive ministers.

Confidentiality.

The Minister or the DRE will inform the President of the Board of Trustees that an abuse situation has been reported. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.

Responding.

A Safe Congregation Committee for children and youth will be in place at all times, with the names and phone numbers of the committee members available to all members of the congregation.

This Committee will be composed of the Minister, the DRE, the RE Committee Chair, and President of the Board. In cases of a conflict of interest, a team member may be excused from participation and replaced by a suitable alternate, in consultation with the DRE(s). Members of the Committee will be educated in the Policy and will be knowledgeable about available resources for adults and children and specific mandated reporting procedures for children and youth. Their function will be to offer confidential support, advice and counsel, with concern for the safety of all parties involved.

The Safe Congregation Committee serves two purposes. First, it serves as a source of general information about abuse and a link to available resources. The members will be available to consult informally with members of the staff and congregation about questions and concerns and will participate in the periodic revision of the Safe Congregation Policy.

Second, if a member of the congregation feels that a child or youth has been harassed or abused, or observes or has reasonable cause to suspect behavior they believe constitutes physical or sexual abuse of a child or youth, or if someone discloses such abuse, the Safe Congregation Committee will aid in the process of filing a report to the appropriate agency. The Safe Congregation Committee members do not have the legal authority or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed instead to protect members of the community, both

children and adults, both victims (potential and actual) and the accused. While the charges are being investigated, the Safe Congregation Committee will work to protect and support all involved parties, in a way that allows the community to go about its business in a non-persecutory but safe atmosphere.

Media Response.

If the media contacts LCUUC about an alleged abusive situation involving LCUUC, only the President of the Board of Trustees or the specific designee will speak for LCUUC. In general, the following requirements apply for these situations with the public media:

Because of the issue of confidentiality, in the best interests of the child, we cannot discuss specific cases in a public context. It is important that we protect the interests of the child and LCUUC, particularly if litigation seems possible. The designated spokesperson will freely discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

VI. Awareness and Implementation

- The DRE will periodically inform the congregation about the Safe Congregation Policy using any of the modes of communication used by LCUUC.
- The DRE will provide parents/guardians and Education Workers a copy of this policy. Each year at registration, or throughout the year when they enroll, parents/guardians will be asked to sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy.
- The policy will be provided and discussed with all Education Workers, Child Care Providers, and compensated employees who supervise or care for the children and youth of our community.
- New Education Workers and Child Care Providers must complete an application and sign the Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. Forms will be kept on file in the DRE's office.
- "Occasional" Education Workers must read and sign the Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. Forms will be kept on file in the DRE's office.
- The DRE will ensure that training on child abuse awareness and prevention is provided to Education Workers and Childcare Providers.
- It is recommended that this policy be reviewed every three years by the Safe Congregation Committee and amended, as necessary, by the Board of Trustees.

DISCLAIMER: By this policy we aim for perfection, in the hopes of achieving a high level of competence overall. We recognize that by aiming high, we will fail to achieve these goals from time to time. Failure to abide by any of the terms and conditions of this policy shall not constitute negligence nor otherwise constitute a basis for liability, because these are aspirational goals, not standards of care. Nothing herein is intended to create, nor should it be read as creating, a duty or standard of care that is higher than the duties and standards of care that apply pursuant to applicable governmental laws.

DEFINITIONS

Child: A person under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse: The injury of a child under the age of 18 years by an adult or older child that might not be intentional, but is not accidental, which results in any of the following: physical or substantial risk of physical injury, or sexual contact or exploitation; serious emotional distress; or any act which constitutes child abuse under the laws of the state of Wisconsin.

Child Care Providers: Persons responsible, whether paid or unpaid, for temporary care of children at LCUUC, while their parents/guardians are participating in events such as worship service, choir practice, church dinners and fundraisers, social events, adult religious education programs, etc.

DRE: Director of Religious Education, including co-directors.

Education Workers: Persons who are engaged in religious education programs with LCUUC children and youth, whether they are paid or unpaid, permanently assigned or occasional.

Group: Those children or youth under the age of 18 who have been assigned to an organized program, classroom, room or activity.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual contact or sexual exploitation between an adult and a child under the age of 18 years.

Sexual Misconduct: Any instance of undesired or inappropriate sexually orientated humor, language, questions, or comments; undesired or inappropriate physical contact; inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance; or intimidating or hostile sexually oriented comments.

Sexual Harassment: Occurs when one person subjects another to repeated, ongoing, and unwanted incidents of sexual misconduct.

Supervision: The reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and responsibility by adults working with an assigned group, realizing that what constitutes appropriate supervision will vary with the ages of those in the group and the context of the activity.

Unofficial Contact: Any contact between an adult and a minor outside of LCUUC events.

Youth: Children enrolled in the 6th to 12th grade.

LAKE COUNTRY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH



CODE OF CONDUCT

Statement of Position: Adults and older youth in leadership roles in this congregation are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders should be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationships is to be realized. Respect on the leader's part should include recognition of the absolute right of children and youth to the privacy of their bodies and minds.

Statement of Expectation of Behavior: As specified in the Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregation Policy all Workers are expected to adhere to the following behavior.

- Education Workers and Child Care Providers will not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse; this includes behavior or language that is personally threatening or demeaning.
- Education Workers and Child Care Providers will neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior nor engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with or in the presence of children or youth.
- Education Workers and Child Care Providers shall not allow the use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol or any illegal activities among children or youth.

Statement of Action: In the case of paid or volunteer workers failing to meet the above expectation, Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church will take appropriate actions in adherence to the LCUUC Safe Congregation Policy.

Statement of Agreement: I will not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug which would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively while in a leadership role with children or youth.

I will not engage in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with or in the presence of children and youth. I will not sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

I have read and understand the Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregation Policy and the Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by the provisions of this Policy and this Code of Conduct and to honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this congregation.

I will take responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries with children and youth under my supervision and will cultivate an atmosphere of health and trust.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

LAKE COUNTRY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH



APPLICATION FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH

Name _____ Phone # _____

Email _____

Other names used _____

Date of Birth _____ Social Security Number _____

Address _____

Street

City

State

Zip Code

Are you a member of LCUUC? ____ Yes ____ No If yes, since _____

If no, describe your relationship with LCUUC or indicate if you are new to LCUUC. If you have been attending LCUUC, include how long you have been attending.

Describe previous experiences working with children/youth.

Provide references: names and contact information for two persons familiar with your experiences that are relevant to the work you are interested in doing at LCUUC.

Have you ever been convicted of a crime? ___ Yes ___ No
If yes, provide details:

I swear and affirm that these statements are true. I have read Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church's Safe Congregation Policy and signed the Code of Conduct. I also understand that LCUUC may require a finger print and criminal records check to work with children and youth.

Date _____

Signature _____

LAKE COUNTRY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH



**PERMISSION FOR TRANSITIONS
MENTOR AND MENTEE TO MEET**

The undersigned parents(s)/guardian(s) of _____, do hereby give our permission for our youth, _____, to meet directly and in a public space with _____, the mentor for our child under Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church’s Transitions Program. We understand that we will be given prior notice by our youth’s mentor of each such meeting including the general time and date of the meeting as well as the place for the meeting.

Parent/Guardian signature

Parent/Guardian signature, if appropriate

Date: _____

Date: _____

MENTOR AGREEMENT

As mentor, I, _____, agree to keep the above parent(s)/guardian(s) informed in advance of all meetings with my mentee, and I have signed the Lake Country Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregation Code of Conduct.

Transitions Mentor signature

Date Date:

Addendum: The Safe Congregation Policy requires that two adults be present when working with a child/youth during church activities. This Transitions Permission Form allows the Mentee and Mentor to meet together without a second adult present in a public space. It allows the youth to explore their thoughts with one adult in a safe environment with the approval of the parents/guardians.