

# Safe Congregation, Abuse, Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Domestic Violence

*Policy Revised: January 2021*

## **A. Philosophy**

1. OUUC is aware of the existence of abuse, harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence in our society, that it crosses gender, race and class lines, and that we as a congregation need to address these issues.
2. Our commitment, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to create a safe environment that protects children, youth, and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.
3. We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children and youth about abuse, harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence. We also pledge to protect and support those who come to us either at risk or in crisis.

## **B. Intent of Policy**

1. This policy is intended to create an atmosphere in which safety is given high priority and is properly maintained. It is not intended to create an implied or expressed contract with any person. It is not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding representation.
2. This policy is written for all congregational participants, as well as for the minister and staff. For those employed by the congregation, the Personnel Policy Manual contains additional information about contractual obligations of employment that may relate to these matters.

## **C. Definitions :**

1. Behaviors addressed by this policy are defined below, for the purpose of this policy.
2. Abuse. Abuse can be physical, psychological, and/or sexual. Types of abuse addressed by this policy:
  - a. Physical – includes actual or threatened imminent harm, such as hitting or shoving, kicking or throwing things. The harm or threat thereof may also be against family members, pets, or belongings.
  - b. Psychological – includes being mistreated mentally and emotionally, such as being insulted, ridiculed, or threatened orally or in writing, including threats or damage to belongings.
  - c. Sexual – committing or allowing to be committed any sexual offense.

### **3. Harassment:**

- a. Harassment is conduct by any means that is severe, persistent, or pervasive, and is of such a nature that it would cause a reasonable person in the victim's position substantial emotional distress and undermine his or her ability to work, study, or participate in his or her regular life activities or participate in the activities of the university, and/or actually does cause the victim substantial emotional distress and undermines the victim's ability to work, study, or participate in the victim's regular life activities or participate in the activities of the congregation. This pertains to in person and online interactions.

### **4. Sexual Assault**

- a. Sexual Assault includes any type of sexual activity with a child or youth or any sexual activity that one does not affirmatively consent to.

- b. For the purposes of this policy, in addition to the criminal definition of sex crimes, sexual assault can be verbal, visual, or anything that forces or coerces a person into unwanted, non-consensual sexual contact or attention.

**5. Domestic Violence**

- a. When any of the above behaviors occur in the context of an intimate relationship with the purpose or effect being un-negotiated control of one person over another, it may be referred to as domestic violence.

**6. Threat of Harm to Self or Others**

- a. Threats of violence and harm to others. - Harm to others can be physical but can also include harassing behaviors, including stalking, cyberstalking, brandishing a weapon, making threats and menacing, actions which are purposefully intended to create a reasonable fear in someone. A threat to harm others is any written, verbal, physical or electronically transmitted expression of intent to physically injure or harm someone else. A threat may be communicated directly to the intended victim or communicated to a third party.
- b. Threats of Harm to Self - When a person expresses thoughts of suicide, or self harm, they need to be assessed by a mental health professional (MHP) to assess risk and develop a response plan. It is common for people who are suicidal to develop a safety plan with an MHP that includes support from people in their community. Support could include active listening, spending time with, or checking in with the person and removing lethal means from the person's access. If the person who is at-risk of self-harm is unable or unwilling to develop or abide by a safety plan, they may be hospitalized. Sometimes people will cause self-harm without a desire to die. This often is expressed by self-inflicted cuts or burns, restricting intake of food or water refusing shelter without adequate clothing, and extreme or continued intoxication. Many times, people who want to or attempt to harm themselves harm others in the process. All people who express self-harm need to be assessed and treated by a professional.

**D. Response to Abuse, Harassment, Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence**

- 1. As members of the OUUC, it is our goal to educate and prepare ourselves so that we can respond rationally, compassionately, and with unity of purpose should we suspect or be confronted with an incident or disclosure of abuse, harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence.
- 2. We wish to respond to victims in a spirit of support and understanding, and to further justice and healing, remembering that:
- 3. The sources and solutions of the problem are diverse and involve us all. We desire to protect the children and youth in our care, to support survivors and foster an environment within which they can continue to heal, and to support offenders engaged in treatment and healing. It is our sincere belief that by honoring these commitments we will make a substantial contribution to the creation of a spiritual community that reflects our highest ideals.

**E. Safe Congregation Response Team:**

- a. It is essential that disclosures be met with an appropriate and supportive reaction on the part of the person receiving the disclosure and the community. Inappropriate

reactions or a lack of reaction can have the impact of repeating abuse for survivors and may inhibit survivors or offenders from seeking help in the future.

- b. With this in mind, we hereby authorize the creation of a Safe Congregation Response Team. This Response Team will be made known to the membership with the names and phone numbers of team members widely available to all members and friends of the OUUC. The Safe Congregation Response Team will be composed of five members and will include the Minister and the Director of Community and Faith Development. The Safe Congregation Response Team will develop a set of procedures to carry out this policy.
- c. Pastoral versus Executive nature of minister: We recognize that the relationship between the minister (who is a member of the Safe Congregation Response Team), and the person about whom allegations have been made will change. The team will provide a person about whom allegations have been made with ministry referrals as necessary. In addition, the team will ensure that the person about whom allegations have been made has the option of having a support person from within the congregation. This person will be included in the process.
- d. Members of the team will be well educated in this policy and will become knowledgeable about available resources for children, youth, and adults, and specific legal mandated reporting procedures for children and youth. Guided by the Philosophy Statement, their function, individually and collectively, will be to offer confidential support, advice, and counsel, with concern for the safety of all parties involved. They will be available to consult informally with members of the congregation about questions and concerns. The Safe Congregation Response Team may also assist the Minister or the Board in making personnel decisions when the allegation has been made against staff, or may assist the Minister and Board in making decisions about the role of a member in the congregation. As a part of this process, the Safe Congregation Response Team may defer assessments to trained perpetrator treatment professionals in the community and will consult with an attorney.
- e. The role of the Safe Congregation Response Team is not to establish facts or conduct criminal investigations, though the committee may make assessments about whether it is safe for a person about whom allegations have been made to continue participating in the congregation, and in what form that participation may take place. However, gathering available information including any information that has been established as fact (through, for example, a court) may be part of the team's work. In addition, the committee will inform and train the congregation on the policy and response to behaviors, and provide resources to congregational leaders.

**F. Known Sexual Offenders:**

1. If a person who is known to have a history involving possible or known criminal sexual offenses wishes to participate in the congregation, the Safe Congregation Response Team will meet and gather information to determine if it will be possible to safely integrate the individual into the congregation. Information collected will include an assessment by a trained perpetrator treatment professional in the community and consultation with an attorney. The information gathered will be kept confidential by the Safe Congregation Team.
2. If integration is possible, a contract or covenant will be developed with the individual

specifying appropriate and allowable types of participation, and requirements for this participation if applicable.

3. As a part of this contract or covenant, notification of congregation may be required.

#### **G. Procedure for Members and Staff Reporting Abuse, Harassment or Other Forms of Sexual Assault**

1. All reports of abuse, harassment, or sexual assault will be handled according to state and federal law and the provisions of this policy. Law enforcement officials will be contacted whenever there is reasonable suspicion of abuse against a minor.
2. Specifically, the following reporting guidelines will apply:

##### **a. Reports Involving Minors (Children or Youth)**

1. If you witness an adult physically or sexually abusing a minor, call 911 immediately. If a minor tells you his/her story, or if you have reasonable suspicion of abuse, take notes at the time or immediately after the interaction. Include in your notes, what was said or what you observed, with details such as names, dates, times, locations, and witnesses.
2. Without making any accusations, assure the minor that you understand him/her and that you will protect him/her.
3. Let the reporting minor know the procedure for your response and the next step in the process.
4. With the help of the Safe Congregation Response Team, make a verbal report to Child Protective Services or law enforcement as soon as possible. The matter should be reported to one of the members of the Safe Congregation Response Team as soon as possible but not later than twenty four (24) hours. Other than as indicated above, keep all information strictly confidential.
5. The Safe Congregation Response Team will provide ministerial services to the survivor's family and will make referrals to appropriate community services.
6. If you believe the minor would be endangered if s/he returns home, call 911 and at least one member of the Safe Congregation Response Team. If a complaint is made against the minister or staff the steps in Part Three (3) and Four (4) below will apply.

##### **b. Reports by Adults, not involving a minor**

1. If there is immediate danger, call 911 immediately, and then call one of the members of the Safe Congregation Response Team.
2. As soon as possible, report to a member of the Safe Congregation Response Team. They will provide you with support, information, and referrals.
3. Other than as above, keep all information strictly confidential.

##### **c. Reports made against the Minister**

1. The person making the report shall make a confidential statement, orally or in writing to a member of the Safe Congregation Response Team.
2. That member of the Safe Congregation Response Team shall then contact the President of the Board who will convene the Safe Congregation Response Team without the Minister.
3. The Safe Congregation Response Team will immediately take steps to convene to gather facts, evaluate, take action to assure the safety of anyone at risk, report to the Board with recommended actions, and provide a response to the person making the report.

**d. Reports made Against Staff**

1. The person making the report shall make a confidential statement, orally or in writing, to a member of the Safe Congregation Response Team.
  2. That member of the Safe Congregation Response Team shall contact the Minister who will arrange for a meeting of the Response Team. If the staff person is a member of the Response Team, the team will convene without him/her.
  3. The Safe Congregation Response Team will immediately take steps to convene to gather facts, evaluate, take action to assure the safety of anyone at risk, report to the Minister and the staff person's supervisor with recommended actions, and provide a response to the person making the report.
- e. **Reports made by Church Staff.** Staff members should refer to the Personnel Policy Manual for additional information when matters are related to their employment.

**H. Response to Disruptive/Offensive Behavior**

1. See the Non-Covenantal Behavior Policy

**I. Minors Within the Congregation**

1. The Safe Congregation Policy applies to all events, online or in person, that involve minors without their parents present (i.e. two-adult and background check rules).
2. Children and youth (minors)—which we will define for the purpose of this section as any person under the age of 18 or any person enrolled in our children or youth programs (abbreviated COYP)—are an especially vulnerable part of our community. Protecting them is a central part of congregational life.
3. Protecting our children and youth goes beyond having protective procedures in place. It also involves fostering the health, including sexual health, of congregants of all ages. As a part of programming, we will offer age appropriate information about development and sexuality to all congregants, and particularly our children and youth. In particular, whenever possible, we will offer Our Whole Lives to each of the age groups it was written for. In addition, we will seek to regularly offer training and support for our religious educators, youth advisors, and parents in areas such as parenting skills, growth and development, sexuality, and related issues.
4. Congregational protective measures for our children and youth will include:
  - a. Screening and hiring of staff, paid or volunteer:
    1. Hiring of paid staff will include, at minimum, all steps listed elsewhere in this policy.
    2. The Director of Religious Education must be informed whenever a volunteer agrees to work with our children or youth, whether on a one-time-basis or over a longer duration.
    3. Recruitment of volunteers who will work with children or youth on a more than one-time basis (or any paid COYP staff) must be approved by the Director of Religious Education, who will:
      - a. complete an interview of the volunteer candidate over the phone or in person, though the length and focus of the interview may vary depending on the volunteer position description, length of term, and responsibilities
      - b. complete reference checks of the volunteer candidate depending on the volunteer position description, length of term, and responsibilities
      - c. obtain a written application from the candidate to include at a minimum: personal identification (such as copy of driver's license), current address,

- current employer and volunteer positions, any criminal convictions, and signatures with date certifying that information provided is true and correct
- b. The Director of Community and Faith Development is authorized to make a final decision about the candidate's suitability for the work.
  - c. If the volunteer candidate is interested in working with high school youth, the Youth-Adult Committee will also interview and rule out candidates for whom the work is not a good match.
  - d. Except for some one-time volunteer positions, all volunteer candidates must be active participants in the congregation for at least six months before being considered for any work in the COYP. An exception to this may be persons who are coming from another Unitarian Universalist congregation where they have been involved in the church, provided the Director of Religious Education or minister at that congregation recommends them and that congregation has an acceptable Safe Congregation policy.
  - e. A background check will be completed on all volunteers who work with children or youth on a more than one-time basis. Any volunteer, short or long term, who has not yet completed a background check, must work within view of a volunteer or paid staff person for whom a background check has been completed. For as long as a volunteer continues to work in our COYP, background checks will be completed at least every two years.
  - f. All paid staff at the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation will receive a background check, which will be repeated every year. All background checks, whether completed for volunteers or paid staff, will be kept in secured storage. The Safe Congregation Response Team and the individual's supervisor will have access to the background checks. The administrator may have responsibility for obtaining the background checks.
  - g. If the results of a background check on a volunteer candidate indicate potential risks should the candidate work with children or youth, the Safe Congregation Response Team will together make a decision about the candidacy. If potential risks are indicated on a background check of a candidate for a paid position, the hiring authority may consult with the Safe Congregation Response Team before making a decision about hiring the candidate.
  - h. All volunteers working in the COYP and all paid staff will sign a copy of our Code of Ethics for leadership with children and youth. Additionally, all volunteers working in the COYP and all paid staff will receive a copy of this policy. The policy will be reviewed annually by staff at a staff meeting. The policy will also be reviewed annually by all volunteers along with the Director of Religious Education.
  - i. Because individuals cannot maintain responsibility without appropriate authority, authority is granted to program staff to require that a volunteer step down from a particular position based on staff discretion. Dismissal of paid staff will be conducted consistent to Personnel policies.
5. Procedures
- a. "The Two-Adult Rule"— No fewer than two adults will be present, for both in-person and online interaction, at all times during any COYP, subject to the following exceptions:
    1. for the purposes of the nursery, two paid nursery staff members who are also

youth may qualify to meet the two-“adult” requirements for the care of children 0-3 years old as long as there is a window into the nursery and a responsible adult—on church grounds— to whom the nursery staff report. However, if an adult (such as the parent of a nursery-age child or an adult staff person) is in the nursery along with the youth(s), other adults must be present in the building and again, there must be a window into the nursery.

2. In the cases of sensitive conversations between a child/youth and the Minister or Director of Religious Education, whenever possible this should occur in a room with an open door within view of others. However, if having the door open is not appropriate, as long as the room has a window to the outside or into the rest of the building, and as long as other adults are present in the building, the door may be closed. When conversations are held via electronic communication, a 2<sup>nd</sup> adult should be included or a recording can be made if a 2<sup>nd</sup> adult cannot be included.
  - b. The two-adult rule will be followed whenever possible for transportation. However, exceptions to the two-adult rule for the purposes of transportation will occasionally be approved by the program staff if necessary due to the length of travel, size of car, etc. In this case, the adult must transport more than one child or youth at a time, and preferably travel in a multi-vehicle caravan.
  - c. For children, the two adults must be present in the same room with the children. For middle or high school youth, there may be times when it is reasonable for the two adults to be in separate areas of the building for short periods. However, at overnight events for youth, during sleeping hours, two adults must be present in the room that any adult occupies with youth.
  - d. Off the church grounds for COYP, adults must follow the two-adult rule or, in certain circumstances, can be in a public location with a youth for predetermined, limited periods.
  - e. Phone access for 911 should be available during any COYP.
6. “The Five-Years Older Rule”— No one who is less than five years older than the oldest possible child/youth in the COYP will be allowed to be in a supervisory role. In addition, no one who is younger than thirteen years of age will be in a supervisory role.
  7. A window is located on all classroom doors. Windows shall remain uncovered while children or youth are present.
  8. “Advance Notice Rule”— Parents/guardians will be given advance notice and information regarding events in which their children/youth will be participating. Parents and program staff must be notified before the event if a volunteer or paid staff person will be alone with a child or youth; parents must give permission for their child/youth’s participation in such a situation.
  9. A written covenant of participation will be developed and remain available for COYP. The covenant will be a statement in which the participants and leaders agree to things such as taking part, giving their best efforts, respecting others, treating others as they wish to be treated, etc. For overnights, retreats, trips, and similar events, rules will be stated at the beginning of the event.

## **J. Boundaries and Touching**

1. Touch is important for us as human beings and can be very healthy. The purpose of this part of the policy is not to prevent touch, but to promote a positive, nurturing environment through healthy touch and healthy touch boundaries. While this aspect of

the policy primarily applies to how we approach touch with children and youth, it is also important to recognize that all of us have “touch boundaries.” We seek to become a congregation of “touch consent.” For example, we seek to be a congregation in which people can expect to be asked—verbally or nonverbally—if they would like a hug before they are hugged. For children or youth, however, adults always carry more power. Children or youth cannot—developmentally and legally—consent to particular types of touch.

2. Touch should occur only when another adult is within the vicinity. This guideline is especially important, but not limited to, when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use a restroom. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrong doing. In ministry with children or youth, we must foster trust at all times; our behavior should be above reproach.
3. Touch should be appropriate for the developmental age of the child or youth. For example, young children may decide to sit on the laps of adult caregivers. However, the same behavior between an older child or youth and an adult leader would not be considered appropriate.
4. While adults may initiate appropriate, limited touching with a child or youth (putting a hand on a child’s shoulder for a moment to get his/her attention, for example), adults must respond to verbal or nonverbal feedback from the child about the touch and must immediately withdraw any touch which the child or youth seems to find uncomfortable.
5. In general, hugs, lap sitting, and similar touching should be initiated by the child or youth rather than the adult, and should never occur without consent. The adult should respond to the child or youth’s need for comforting, encouragement, or affection, and not base touching on their own emotional need.
6. When playing games as a part of a COYP activity, particularly those that involve touch (for example “touch someone wearing blue”), participants must always be able to opt to observe rather than participate, guidelines for appropriate touch (on someone’s shoulder vs. on their leg) should be provided, and adults should remain vigilant about ensuring that consent is continual.
7. Adults are responsible for protecting children and youth in their care from inappropriate touching by other children and youth in their care. For example, adults should take care that when two children are wrestling with one another on the playground, both children are genuinely consenting to this play.
8. Promptly discuss any questionable behavior by other adults interacting with children or youth with the Director of Religious Education or Minister.

#### **K. Administration of the Policy**

1. Annual Review of the Safe Congregation policy
2. Together with the whole team of paid staff, the Safe Congregation Response Team will review compliance with the Safe Congregation policy and potential risks annually. The Safe Congregation Response Team will report to the congregation at the conclusion of this review. As needed, the Safe Congregation Team will draft any necessary changes to the Safe Congregation policy, and the draft will be sent to the Minister for approval.

#### **L. Activities Covered by These Policies**

1. All activities of the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation are included within the scope of these policies.
2. Outside groups that use our church facilities (Girl Scouts, etc.) will be informed of this



policy as applicable and strongly encouraged to comply with sections of the policy that apply.

3. Those groups that use the building on a regularly scheduled basis will be required to comply with the policy as if they were a part of the congregation.
4. Online activities sponsored by OUUC
5. Members are strongly encouraged to maintain their covenantal relationship with one another in all their interactions, whether officially an OUUC activity or not.

#### **M. Waiver of Policy**

1. Church policies may be waived occasionally for exceptional circumstances. The goal of the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation is to maintain a high degree of safety. At times, practical considerations may change the level of protection possible. Policies will be waived only in exceptional circumstances and must be authorized by the program staff person in charge. All waivers will be documented in writing, and the Safe Congregation Response Team will be informed of the waivers as soon as possible.

#### **N. Online Communication**

1. This Safe Congregations Policy applies when interacting online through any type of chat or social media or electronic communication platform on behalf of OUUC. There is still potential for disruptive behavior (see Disruptive Behavior Policy), abuse, harassment and reports of assault, abuse or self-harm. These issues should be handled with the same guidelines outlined in this policy. Reported to the Safe Congregation Response Team
2. All electronic communication including minors will adhere to the same procedures in online formats such as Zoom rooms as they would for in-person gatherings. This specifically pertains to the “The Two-Adult Rule” (private messages are not allowed) and “The Five-Years Older Rule.” Additionally, parental permission must be obtained prior to their youth or child using an online platform for an OUUC event.
3. Disruptive Behavior Online-
  - a. Social Media (i.e. Facebook) and electronic communication - Should behavior be deemed disruptive, inappropriate, or offensive, it should be reported to the Safe Congregation Response Team, who will evaluate the material and determine the best course of action. It may be deleted and the next steps in the Disruptive Behavior Policy enacted.
  - b. Chat Rooms (i.e. Zoom)- Disruptive behavior in a chat room can be anything from dominating the conversation to exhibiting offensive material. If possible engage with the person and the same steps should be followed as if in person:
    1. Clearly and directly tell the person what action is disruptive and/or offensive.
    2. State that you expect the person to stop the disruptive/offensive behavior.
    3. Firmly tell the person that if his/her action persists, you will file a report with the Safe Congregation Response Team. Unresolved or chronic disruptions/offensive behavior will be reported to the Director of Community and Faith Development or the Minister.
    4. If engaging with the person is not appropriate (i.e. Zoom-bombing), they can be muted and kicked from the room. The room can then also be locked so they

cannot reenter. Any incidents of this type should be reported to the Safe Congregation Response Team.