

Safety and Abuse Prevention Policy Pacific Unitarian Church

As Unitarian Universalists, we come together as a covenantal faith which outlines our relationship with one another. This faith is an expression of a voluntary and unconditional agreement to act in ways which express our Unitarian Universalist principles. Therefore:

We, the members of Pacific Unitarian Church (PUC), believe our commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations; spiritual growth; and the use of democratic process within our congregation, compels us to create a safe environment that seeks to protect children, youth and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves about issues of safety and abuse, and to abide by the policy and procedures outlined below to assure that our church is a safe and nurturing environment for all.

Toward this end, this policy is designed to:

1. Improve the safety of our children and youth by implementing preventative safety procedures and providing guidelines regarding appropriate behavior;
2. Provide guidance on how to effectively respond to emergencies and incidents that may occur;
3. Through prevention, reduce the risk of allegations against church volunteers.

Supervision Guidelines

Parents:

- All children/youth must have a parent or other responsible adult on the church grounds unless prior arrangements have been made with the Director of Religious Education (DRE).
- **Parents are responsible for their children before the worship service begins until they leave for their classes, and after the Religious Education Program sessions are ended.** The exception to this is when children are signed in to childcare, which is available from 10am-10:30am and 12pm-1pm.
- Drop off:
 - Infants and toddlers (6 months to 2 years) and pre-school group (Pixies) may be dropped off starting 10:00am. The childcare workers will direct the pre-school children to their class at 10:45am. Children at these levels must be signed in and out by parents or guardians.
 - Children 10 years old and younger may be dropped off in the nursery as early as 10:00am. At 10:30am when service begins, children kindergarten (5 years) and above are expected to attend the service. They are dismissed for class around 10:45am after the Time for All Ages.
 - Children over 10 years old begin the morning in service and are dismissed for class after the Time for All Ages.
- Pick up:
 - Infants, toddlers and preschoolers should be picked up immediately after the worship service is done. Children at these levels must be signed in and out by parents or guardians and remain under the supervision of their parents from the time the class is dismissed until they leave the church grounds, unless they are signed in to childcare during the available hours (10:00am-10:30am and 12:00pm-1:00pm)
 - Children in elementary school should be picked up immediately after the worship service is done and remain under the supervision of their parents from the time the class is dismissed until they leave the church grounds, unless they are signed in to childcare during the available hours (10:00am-10:30am and 12:00pm-1:00pm)
 - Youth in Middle School and High School will be dismissed to find their parents around 11:45am when their classes are finished.

- Parents/guardians may check in with childcare workers to see if they are available to supervise in the playground. If the childcare workers are otherwise engaged caring for younger children in the nursery, the playground should be supervised by parent volunteers working in rotation, but any child using the playground or in any other part of the church grounds is the responsibility of their parents, unless they are signed in to childcare.
- Parents/guardians are welcome to visit any class at any time.
- Parents/guardians are expected to supervise children in elementary school and younger in the food line. Children often need help knowing how much food and of what kind may have. Food Ministry and RE teaching volunteers are not available to provide supervision during this time.
- Walking is expected on all of the Church campus. Running is allowed only in the playground yard and may not be appropriate, given the ages and abilities of other children in the playground. Our congregation has members and visitors of all ages and abilities and using walking feet in main church areas helps us keep everyone safe.
- Behind the Hall, in the parking lot, and along the trail below the church are all places that are extremely important for children to have supervision by parents/guardians or another adult with the permission of parents/guardians.
- Children are expected to abide by religious education behavior guidelines according to their age/developmental stage and ability, as outlined here (in the Safety Policy), the Family Covenant and the posted Behavior Guidelines Based on our 7 UU Principles. Additionally, each classroom creates a specific covenant for their group at the beginning of the year. If a child/youth is regularly disruptive in a way that makes it difficult for the class to continue, the DRE may ask that parents/guardians accompany the child/youth to class and/or work with parents/guardians to develop a plan.

General:

- Religious Education (RE) groups will at all times be team taught (two adults/room).
- Classroom doors are to remain open under normal circumstances.
- The DRE or designated RE Contact Person will circulate to all classrooms during the Sunday morning RE program.
- Very young children may use the restroom facilities in the classrooms. When taking children to the church restroom, an adult will first assure the child is alone in the restroom, then the adult will remain outside. If the child needs assistance the parent should be brought in.
- Children may choose to participate in the RE program or join their parents in the worship service.
- All kitchen use by children and youth must be supervised by an adult.
- Corporal punishment will not be used under any circumstances.

Outside of Sunday morning RE Program/ Childcare

- During church-sponsored events there will always be a minimum of two, non-related adults present with children.
- Adults in charge must remain onsite after events until all children have been picked up from an activity.
- Childcare givers must have received proper training.
- There will be a sign-in/sign-out list for childcare for all church-sponsored events.
- Safe ratios of children/caregiver will be observed as follows:
Under age two: one caregiver per up to three children
Age two –five: one caregiver per up to eight children
Age six and higher: one caregiver per up to twelve children

Field Trips, sleep-overs and off-site events

- At church-sponsored events, no adult volunteer other than the parent or guardian, is to be alone off-site with a child or youth without prior parent agreement AND notification of the DRE.
- Permission/liability release/medical release slips are mandatory for all events at which parents are not in attendance with their children/youth.

- Permission slips must include inherent risks and set forth behavior guidelines and consequences (especially for sleepovers/off-site events). Permission slips with behavior covenants must be signed by youth also.
- All permission slips are to be turned in to the DRE after the event.
- All drivers for church events must be age 25 or older and must be licensed and insured.
- All people in vehicles must use seat belts. State laws regarding car seats, booster seats, and location of smaller children in vehicle must be observed.
- Permission slips/medical release forms are to travel in the vehicle with the child/youth they pertain to.
- List of children, youth and adult chaperones away on field trips during Sunday morning RE time shall be left with DRE.
- There shall be a minimum of two adults for up to 12 children/youth; add one adult for each additional six children. Number of leaders should increase proportionately to specific activities risk levels.
- Ideally, at least one adult volunteer per event should be trained in first aid and CPR.

Health and Safety

Registration:

- All children and youth must submit a registration form annually. Allergies and special concerns are listed on the registration form and this information is conveyed to teaching teams and listed on the weekly role sheet as a reminder.
- Parents/guardians are expected to volunteer and participate in the RE Program as delineated on the back of the registration forms.
- All visiting families must fill out a Visitors Form and the RE Committee person at the RE table should communicate any allergies/special concerns to the appropriate teaching team.

Behavioral Guidelines:

- Behavior covenants are created every year by each RE group and are revisited periodically.
- Children should all sign the covenant (or acquiesce in an age-appropriate manner) and should help the group abide by the covenant.
- Children should be aware of consequences for breaking the covenant. Each group should develop their own guidelines with consequences based on age, but all should entail a warning (perhaps a second). If further action needs to be taken, the child should be walked to their parent for the balance of the RE time. Attending the worship service with their family is always an option for any child.
- If behavioral issues are ongoing, DRE shall be notified.
- Basic courtesy should be shown on the playground, in RE rooms and on general church grounds such as no hitting, pushing, rough-housing; and no skateboards, scooters, etc. are to be used on site.

First Aid:

- A first aid kit is located in the DRE office. Protective gloves should be available and used when giving First Aid to observe Universal Precaution guidelines.
- If a child is injured, proper First Aid will be started and parents immediately notified.
- In case of serious injury, nearest adult will call 911, then parent is immediately notified.
- An accident report (Ouch Report) shall be filled out for each incident and turned in to DRE. These are kept on the clipboards with the role sheets for each classroom.
- If a child becomes ill during RE time, their parent/guardian will be retrieved from the service. No child or staff with any symptom of infectious illness may attend class.

General:

- Proper hand washing technique will be followed by all before food handling, after using the restroom, and after contact with body fluid.
- No smoking is permitted on church grounds except in designated areas.
- Children's names or photographs will not be used in promotional materials without written consent of the parent or guardian.

Physical Plant Safety

RE space and playground facilities are inspected regularly for safety. As a California state-licensed preschool operates on our grounds during the week, regular safety inspections are performed by the Preschool staff as well as PUC's Facilities Committee.

Fire:

- Matches will be kept out of reach of children.
- Chalice flames should be extinguished if the group leaves the area or if they are circulating around.
- Hair below shoulders should be pulled back in a pony-tail when lighting a chalice and dangling sleeves should be secured or pulled up.
- Smoke detectors will be checked quarterly and batteries replaced as needed.
- Fire drills/ emergency drills will be conducted annually. The designated meeting place is the parking lot.
- Fire extinguisher locations should be publicized and fire extinguishers should be re-charged annually.

Earthquake Safety:

- During an earthquake, all should take cover under tables, away from windows, heavy furniture, and heavy objects that could fall.
- After quake, check for injuries and give first aid as necessary.
- Above all, remain calm and reassure children.

Screening and Selection of Volunteers

Persons in any position to have proximity to children or youth must:

- Be members of the PUC community for a minimum of six months before volunteering for a position on a teaching team, or becoming a youth advisor, OWL facilitator or mentor. This requirement may be waived at the discretion of the DRE for members who come from another UU congregation and who can provide references from their previous congregation's minister and religious educator.
- Be a minimum of 25 years old to serve as facilitators or advisors for high school aged youth; be a minimum of 21 years old to serve as facilitators for middle school aged youth. Any exceptions must be approved by the DRE.
- Read, sign, and abide by the PUC Covenant of Ethics and the Safety and Abuse Prevention Policy. The Covenant of Ethics will be signed by all parents, RE teachers and volunteers (including occasional volunteers).
- Teachers must complete and sign the RE Volunteer application/screening form which includes a disclosure statement and a release for reference checks and background checks.
- Teachers must attend the annual RE Volunteer Training Workshop in September or in extenuating circumstances, have cleared non-attendance with the DRE ahead of time.
- All screening forms and signed Covenants will be kept in a locked file in the DRE's office.
- Background checks will be performed for all positions determined to be high-risk positions (OWL facilitators, Youth Advisors, Religious Education Committee, and Coming of Age mentors, and those working with children age six and under), with the option being reserved to perform background checks on any volunteer. Background checks will be expanded to include all adults working with children and youth over a several year process. Background checks will be kept in a secure location and viewed only to determine eligibility for working with children.
- Individuals who have been convicted of, are under current indictment for, or self-disclose any act of sexual misconduct involving a child or child abuse are precluded from participation as a RE Program volunteer and other church activities involving children and youth.

Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth

Adults who work with children and youth are expected always to have the best interests of children and youth at heart. They are expected to nurture their physical, emotional and spiritual growth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. In this manner, we hope 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 members of communities. To accomplish this, there are specific expectations that the PUC has for volunteers.

Youth-Adult Relationships

Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These relationships can be healthy and transformative for both. The adult in such a relationship assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating a healthy, trusting atmosphere. It is possible that an adult may try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if an adult wishes to be in contact with a youth outside of the normal channels of church events, it is imperative that their behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any such relationship must be with the full knowledge and consent of the youth's parents. This is for the protection of the youth and the adult. Adults will best protect themselves from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the parents informed of their actions.

Sexualized Behavior

It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for instance, 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, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.

Confidentiality

In the course of working with a child or youth under the aegis of PUC, an adult may learn that a child is a victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. This information must be communicated to the Director of Religious Education and/or the Lead Minister immediately. Please communicate clearly to the children and youth that confidentiality does not mean secret keeping. A covenant of confidentiality means that for the most part, you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. But when this information could cause harm to the child, youth or someone else, it is incumbent upon the adult to communicate with the Director of Religious Education and/or the Lead Minister so they can assist the child or youth to receive help.

Report and Response Procedures

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straightforward. Congregation members should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting our children and youth. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations.

The following report and response procedures should be followed for the protection of all:

An Abuse Response Team composed of the Lead Minister, Director of Religious Education, Board of Trustees President, and one member of the congregation with professional experience in related matters shall be formed at the beginning of each year (August/September). If a member of the congregation 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 allegations must be relayed to a member of the Abuse Response Team.

When an allegation of abuse occurring during a church program is reported to the Response Team, the following should occur:

1. The Response Team will abide by California law on reporting child abuse. Under California law, the Ministers and various volunteers are designated as "mandated reporters" and a report will be made to the California Department of Social Service/Child Protective Services.
2. If the Response Team ascertains that a child or youth is in a situation of risk, the responsible person should immediately remove the allegedly abusive person (or the child) from the situation, and take any other necessary steps to protect the minor child.

3. A detailed report must be completed and signed by a member of the Response Team. Every effort will be made to encourage the person making the allegation to sign the report. However, the Response team will take action even if the person chooses to remain anonymous.
4. Decisions about whom to inform about the incident (parents, volunteers, the Board, the Congregation, etc.) and the information to be provided should be made in a careful, but timely manner by the Response Team. The decision should be based on the individual situation (e.g., the severity and credibility of the allegation; does the threat to the safety of the children or congregation still exist, etc.)
5. If any action is taken or recommended, the Response Team will alert the District Executive that 1) the Response Team has been convened, 2) the nature of the issue and 3) whether a report has been or will be made to the CDSS. The President of the Board of Trustees will report to the full Board in a closed meeting at the earliest appropriate time.
6. Since these matters are sensitive, it is important that all persons involved, including the reporting person and the accused, maintain the level of confidentiality recommended by the Response Team. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.
7. If the reported abuse involves a worker or volunteer at PUC, the supervisor of that person will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at PUC until the matter is resolved. The supervisor will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and any related circumstances.
8. The Response Team should call on or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within the church and outside of the church.

The Response Team does not have legal authority or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. It is designed to protect members of the church community, both children and adults, both victims and the accused. While charges are being investigated, the Response Team will work to protect and support all parties.

Responding to Media

If anyone, including the media, contacts PUC about an alleged abusive situation, only the President of the Board or his/her designee will speak for the PUC.

Because of confidentiality issues, no one affiliated with PUC should discuss specific cases in a public context. It is important that we protect the interests of the child and PUC, particularly if litigation seems possible. The designated spokesperson is free to discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

Education and Training (suggestions)

- Once approved, this policy will be announced via the VIEW and other communication channels. Announcements will include a summary of the policy with information on availability of the complete policy. cA Sunday Service shall be devoted to the topic of right relations and our Safety and Abuse Prevention Policy.
- Copies of this policy will be available every Sunday on the RE table and in the church office.
- All RE teachers, volunteers and parents will receive a copy along with the relevant forms to fill out and sign. Parents, teachers and volunteers will be asked to sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy.
- This policy will be distributed to each family when they register their child/ren for the RE Program and they will be asked to sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy.
- This policy will be included in all informational and new member packets.
- RE volunteers will receive information on how to recognize abuse/neglect and actions that should be taken if abuse/neglect is suspected at the September Volunteer Training Workshop.
- Ongoing training for adults will be provided in areas such as First Aid/CPR, Child Abuse Protection, and emergency response procedures.

We are committed to reducing the vulnerability of our children and youth by providing the following:

- Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality Education Program, the UUA's comprehensive life-span sexuality education series, which addresses issues of sexual abuse in each of its six curricula. This proactive prevention education gives our children and youth information about abuse including how to recognize it, avoid it, and report it.
- Information regarding abuse will be incorporated into the RE program and provided for all children on an annual basis in an age appropriate method.
- Worship services which focus on the topic of sexuality and related issues.

We are committed to supporting our families by providing the following:

- OWL Parent Support Groups
- Parenting Classes
- Books for loan on topics of parenting, child development, and other related issues.

Acceptance of this Policy and Covenant of Ethics and Conduct

Any church employee or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of this policy or the Covenant of Ethics and Conduct is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of PUC, but must abide by the policies and Covenant as written. Signing indicates that the signatory has read the Policy and the Covenant and agrees to abide by them. The signatory further acknowledges that failure to abide by the Covenant or the provisions of the Policy will result in denial of participation in volunteer positions involving children and youth at the PUC or other actions as deemed appropriate. See attachments for copy of Covenant of Ethics and Conduct.

Policy created by Rev. Tamara Casanova Suzuki, Director of Religious Education, August 29, 2012.

Policy adopted by Board of Trustees, September 7, 2012

Policy updated August 26, 2017 by Claire Moss, Director of Religious Education

Pending adoption by the Board of Trustees

Sources used in creating the above Policy include:

“Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations”

Church Mutual Insurance Company

“Creating Safe Congregations”

Emerson Unitarian Church

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

Youth Safety Policy, Pacific Unitarian Church

“Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church”

“Responsible Staffing”

“Screening in Faith”

Unitarian Universalist Association, Safety/Abuse Clearinghouse

The Unitarian Universalist Society of Laconia