

# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax

## Religious Exploration Safety Policies and Agreements

Subject: Religious Exploration Safety Policies and Agreements    Number: IIE

Effective Date: 5.23.16

Approved by: Coordinating Team

### **Overview**

This document contains Safety Policies and Agreements that the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF) Religious Exploration (RE) volunteers are required to read and comply with. These policies and agreements help to ensure that our congregational environment is a safe and secure place for the children, youth and adults who are a part of the UUCF RE Program.

### **Definitions**

- *Child*: An individual from birth through Grade 6
- *Youth*: An individual from rising Grade 7 through graduation from Grade 12.
- *Chaperone, Advisor, or Mentor*: An individual who is 25 years or older with a signed RE Authorization for UUCF to conduct Confidential Screening and Criminal Background Investigations form.
- *Class Helper/Chapel Leader*: A supervised volunteer with a short-term RE role, usually one to three times.
- *Driver*: Chaperones, advisors, and mentors with current insurance and a valid driver's license on file at UUCF. In addition, youth 18 years old may drive self to off-site youth events. They may also drive younger siblings with the permission of their parents/guardians.
- *RE Staff*: Paid RE staff including the Director of Religious Exploration (DRE), the Youth Ministry Coordinator (YMC), the RE Assistant, the Childcare Coordinator and helpers, and the Nursery Coordinator and helpers.
- *RE Volunteer*: Anyone who regularly volunteers in the RE program in any capacity, including as a teacher, workshop leader, chaperone, advisor, mentor or greeter.

### **RE Volunteers**

Volunteers shall comply with these policies.

1. Generally, volunteers have participated in the life of the UUCF community for 6 months prior to volunteering in the RE Program. The DRE may make an exception, including if a person has previously volunteered at another Unitarian Universalist community, and provides contact information for references from the former DRE or minister of that community, or is a well-known person to the ministers or RE staff.
2. Each volunteer must complete and sign the last page of this document and return it to the RE office prior to beginning work with children or youth.
3. No person who has a history of crimes against children or pending legal action involving children may volunteer in the RE program.

4. A person who is subject to pending legal action for violent or belligerent behavior—whether or not at UUCF and whether or not involving children—may not volunteer in the RE program. Any current volunteers must disclose new or pending legal actions to the DRE and remove themselves from the program.
5. Volunteer mentors spending time individually with children or youth outside of the Sunday morning program should do so only with explicit parental permission.
6. The DRE, in consultation with the senior clergy staff, determines volunteer teams and strives to make decisions that promote a safe and nurturing environment for all.
7. All youth advisors must participate in UUCF activities for 6 months prior to advising and be willing to provide an institutional reference, preferably showing positive experiences with youth.

### ***Annual Volunteer Training Workshops***

All volunteers are expected to attend annual RE training (teachers have training twice each year) and are required to read the RE Program Guidelines, which are updated annually, provided by email and posted on the UUCF website. If unable to attend training, the volunteer must contact the DRE for information. Training includes safety procedures, standard practices related to the duties of the volunteer position and child development information.

### ***Safety Procedures***

RE Staff, including adult childcare staff and adult volunteers are encouraged to have up-to-date first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and AED training. All staff and volunteers are expected to know:

1. Evacuation procedures for fire, lockdown for intruders, tornado and shelter-in-place.
2. Location of fire extinguishers, first aid kits, lockdown switch and automated external defibrillator (AED).
3. Special needs and allergies for children in their care (as provided by parents and shared by RE staff).

### ***Reporting Abuse***

1. No minister, DRE, adult leader, childcare employee, RE volunteer, or other person working under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF) shall engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with young people under the age of 18 years; or sexually harass or engage in behavior with young people that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.
2. Any volunteer or RE staff member who suspects child abuse shall report their suspicions to a Minister, the DRE, or a member of the Board of Directors, who shall report to the DRE or senior clergy staff. In those cases where cause exists, make appropriate reports to the authorities as required by law. If the action involves a volunteer in the RE program, the volunteer will be dismissed.
3. All UUCF staff and volunteers must promptly notify the DRE of any suspected volunteer misconduct. The DRE shall inform a minister immediately to determine appropriate action.
4. Children and youth will be encouraged to report any concerns to RE staff or ministers.

### ***Supervision of Children and Youth***

1. There shall be at least two adults in any area with children or youth at all times. Volunteers shall immediately notify the DRE, RE Greeter, or other UUCF staff whenever there are not at least two adults so that RE staff can assist in providing a second adult or provide for merging of groups for that activity. When it is not possible for 2 adults to be present at a UUCF-sponsored event or meeting, parents/guardians must be notified and give written or oral approval.
2. Children engaging in RE activities on UUCF property, including at the playground or in the woods, shall also be adequately supervised. In an open area (i.e., for nature walks), one adult should lead the group and one should follow at the rear.
3. All volunteers are required to share concerns about children or youth with the DRE or YMC.
4. Parents are responsible for supervision of children and youth on UUCF property outside of organized RE classes and activities.
5. Volunteers may not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs when supervising children or youth.

### ***Communication***

1. All UUCF social media policies (link to policy) must be followed.
2. Youth advisors will participate in social media training that includes their responsibility of advising UUCF staff of any concerns that arise during one-on-one or other communication with youth. UUCF staff will report concerns to a supervisor.
3. Youth program registration will include a statement that allows parents to opt out of individual texting, email, messaging or other electronic communications.
4. Group communications, such as video conferencing or online chats will be announced, often through email, to applicable parents/guardians.
5. Adults, youth, and children will be encouraged to share any concerns they have with any UUCF staff or volunteers by discussing the concern with the Youth Ministry Coordinator, the staff member's supervisor or a minister.
6. Phone calls and other communication, including social media, from UUCF staff to youth or children will be concluded before 10 p.m. Staff will report aberrations to the DRE or a UUCF minister.
7. UUCF staff are expected to retain records of all email, text and social media communication with youth or children for a period of 3 years for inspection.

### ***Parent/Guardian Responsibilities***

All children on UUCF premises must be accompanied by a parent or guardian or enrolled in UUCF programs in accordance with the procedures below. Parents are solely responsible for the safety and supervision of children whose presence at UUCF is not in accordance with these procedures.

- A parent or guardian of children up to and including 6<sup>th</sup> grade must be on campus while the children participate in RE programs or are receiving nursery or child care, except in cases where the Director of Religious Exploration has been notified of and approved the absence of the parent or guardian.
- All minor children or youth who participate in RE activities on an on-going basis must be registered through the RE program.
- Unaccompanied youth of Middle School and High School age may attend UUCF events with their parents' or guardians' knowledge and permission.
- Children Grade 3 and younger must be dropped off and signed out at the end of class by a parent/guardian.

### ***Permission for Youth Conferences (Cons), Field Trips, and Overnights at UUCF***

1. The DRE must approve all off campus field trips and overnights. Approval will include the consideration of age and developmental stages, transportation, costs, and appropriately screened chaperones. If age restrictions preclude the entire group from attending, or the activity appears inappropriate, the field trip will not be approved. Volunteers must bring up potential conflicts when proposing a field trip to allow for full consideration by RE staff.
2. The RE staff prefers to receive information on all field trips and overnights involving children and youth 4 weeks in advance, but at a minimum at least 2 weeks in advance in order to vet, promote, and obtain permission forms from parents/guardians.
3. There must be a signed field-trip permission form for every child or youth under age 18 who will attend a field trip or stay overnight at UUCF. A youth who is 18 and older may provide their own emergency and medical information on a permission slip.
4. One copy of the permission slip shall be on file in the RE office. Chaperones shall carry a copy of the permission slips that contain emergency and medical information with them on any trip or overnight.

5. Volunteer/child or youth ratio for:

#### **Field trips:**

- Preschoolers      1 adult for every 3 children
- Gr. K-6            1 adult for every 5 children
- Gr. 7-12          1 adult for every 7 youth

#### **Joseph Priestly District-Sponsored Cons**

- Gr. 9-12          1 adult advisor for every 5 youth

6. Overnights are supervised by the number of required adults (see above), with adults taking shifts so that one adult is awake at all times.
7. If a person (an adult leader or youth) has been asked to not participate in our program, we will share that information with other UU affiliated children and youth- related programs such as Youth Cons.

### ***Drivers for Field Trips, Cons, and other Activities***

1. Each driver for a field trip or Con must be at least 25 years of age, licensed, and covered by car insurance with a copy of the driver's license and the car insurance "wallet card" on file with the RE office to transport children or youth on a UUCF-sponsored field trip, Con, or other activity.
2. Young children must use an approved child safety seat in accordance with state law. Older children must use a seat belt when riding in cars. Children may not ride in the cargo area of trucks or other vehicles.
3. Youth may drive themselves and their siblings to events only with the approval of their parents/guardians. Youth are expected to ask their parent's permission prior to driving themselves or siblings to a UUCF event and must follow all Virginia State driving laws
4. Drivers who are 25 or older must complete an on-line driver registration form to specify how many youth they can transport and expectations around pick-up and drop-off. They must also provide a copy of their state driver's license and proof of auto insurance. They must follow all Virginia State Driving Laws (or the laws of the state in which they are driving), including texting while driving.
5. It is preferred to have two adults in a car with youth when possible.

### ***Confidential Screening and Criminal Background Investigations***

All volunteers shall authorize UUCF to conduct a search of the Sexual Offender Registry and a criminal background-investigation prior to working in the UUCF RE Program. This is not an employment application form.

By signing, you consent to UUCF conducting a sex-offender screening for any period during which you teach, chaperone, supervise, mentor, or attend to children in the UUCF RE Program.

By signing, you consent to UUCF permission to conduct a criminal-background investigation and agree with the sections outlined below. Background investigations are routinely conducted for anyone working with youth or in the OWL (Our Whole Lives) sexual education program. However, the DRE reserves the right to request a criminal-background investigation for anyone in the program.

Criminal-Background Investigation:

- Sec. I. I understand that an investigative report may be generated on me that may include information on my character; criminal-history records from any criminal-justice agency in any federal, state, city, and county jurisdictions; state Department of Motor Vehicle/Drivers' License Records, including traffic citations and registration; and Sex Offender and Crimes against Minors Registry. I understand that UUCF may request information from public and private sources about any of the above information, and I consent for UUCF to do so.
- Sec. II. I am entitled by law to know if the position for which I am applying is denied because of information obtained from this background investigation and UUCF shall inform me if that happens.
- Sec. III. I agree that a photocopy or telephonic facsimile of this authorization shall be as valid as the original. I understand that this release is valid for most federal, state and county agencies.
- Sec. IV. I agree that this authorization is good for any period during which I teach, supervise, chaperone or attend to children for the Religious Exploration program at UUCF (whether volunteer or paid).
- Sec. V. I authorize, without reservation, any one contacted by UUCF to furnish the information described in Section I.

***By signing and returning the next page of this document, I agree that:***

- I will comply with the UUCF RE Safety Policies and Authorizations;
- I authorize UUCF to conduct a sex-offender registry screening and a criminal-background investigation; UUCF may send me a link to an authorization form from the investigating agency or company, which I will promptly and fully complete.
- My application to volunteer in RE depends on the results of these investigation(s);
- Knowledge from other sources that is revealed during my tenure or application may affect my participation in the RE Program at UUCF;
- UUCF will consider the nature of any offense, relation to the position for which I am applying, time since conviction, and all other relevant facts and circumstances in determining whether to accept my application or terminate my volunteer position.

Please complete and print the next page. Return to [re@uucf.org](mailto:re@uucf.org) or RE Program Assistant, UUCF, Box 130, Oakton, VA 22124.

Print and return this page

## Authorization for UUCF to Conduct Confidential Screening and Criminal Background Investigations

Print Full Name (include middle name)

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Other names you have used

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### Date of Birth

Your date of birth is required in order to confirm your identity for purposes of completing a background investigation. Your birth date is not used in consideration of your application except to ensure that you are at least 25 years old if working with youth and in the OWL program.

If you answer "Yes" to any of the following questions, please include the city/state/county and the year the crime occurred for each conviction. Attach additional paper if needed.

1. Do you have any criminal convictions? No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

2. If yes, do you have any convictions for sexual abuse, molestation, or crimes involving children?

No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you ever been convicted of, or pleaded guilty or "no contest" to a crime?

No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you currently have a pending arrest awaiting trial?

No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and promise to comply with UUCF RE Safety Policies and I authorize UUCF to conduct the appropriate screenings/background checks as detailed in this document as appropriate during my tenure. If my status changes and changes my answers to any of the above questions, I will report this to the DRE before continuing to volunteer in the RE program. All information above is true to the best of my knowledge.

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

\*Parent/Guardian must also sign for minors (under 18) \_\_\_\_\_