

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax Religious Exploration Safety Policies and Agreements

Subject: Religious Exploration Safety Policies and Agreements
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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 who has been background checked by Trusted Employees.
- *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 Director of Religious Exploration (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 adult RE teacher, mentor, chaperone, driver, greeter, and childcare worker must complete the online application emailed by Trusted Employees and be background checked.
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 RE trainings. 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 child care 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).
4. Due to nut allergies, all UUCF classrooms are to be peanut and nut-free zones.
5. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on the UUCF campus.

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, the Youth Ministry Coordinator 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. If a youth is a class volunteer or working in the nursery, they are considered the second adult. 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 two adults to be present at a UUCF-sponsored event or meeting, parents/guardians must be notified and give written or oral approval.
2. Nursery and 2/3s will have a maximum ratio of 1:4. Parents/guardians will be asked to stay if needed.
3. 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.

4. All volunteers are required to share concerns about children or youth with the DRE or Youth Ministry Coordinator (YMC).
5. Parents are responsible for supervision of children and youth on UUCF property outside of organized RE classes and activities.
6. 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](#) 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 three 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 Grade 6 must be on campus while the children participate in RE programs or are receiving nursery or child care, except in cases where the DRE 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 ongoing 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 at the start of class and signed out at the end of class by a parent/guardian. They will not be allowed to leave unattended.

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 four weeks in advance, but at a minimum of two 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 for all trips beyond 50 miles. The enrollment form includes permission for trips up to 50 miles.

4. One copy of the permission slip will be on file in the RE office. Chaperones will 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

Unitarian Universalist Central East Region-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 not to 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 online Advisor/Chaperone/Driver 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 not texting while driving.
5. It is preferred to have two adults in a car with youth when possible.

This is a community of teachers, parents and change-makers and as such it is the responsibility of all congregants to uphold a shared covenant of expectations. Please help us all ensure that the following covenant is followed to make this a safe place for all, especially our children and youth.

- Respecting the people and property of UUCF.
- Keeping illegal drugs off campus and not abusing drugs, alcohol or legally prescribed drugs.
- Keeping weapons off campus.
- Remembering that the campus is a tobacco-free zone, which includes smoking and smokeless forms of tobacco (chew, vaping, e-cigarettes, etc.).
- Understanding that theft can and will be prosecuted (using county laws). Additionally, theft decays trust within groups and can be damaging to our programs as a whole.
- Staying on campus during a youth activity or while volunteering as a youth helper.
- Remembering that while sexual activity can be healthy and whole, during congregational or youth events, sexual activity and exclusive relationships are inappropriate. This includes unwanted touch and verbal sexual advances and any other form of sexualized behavior.
- Keeping sleeping covers to yourself and six inches of visible floor space between each person.

- Understanding that at overnight events, at least one adult will be awake at all times while youth are awake and at least three adults will be present in case of emergency during the night.
- Remembering that “No” means “No.” No in any form such as “Stop” or “Don’t do that” are recognizable signals for others to cease any and all behavior that may cause any and all participants to become uncomfortable or to feel threatened, either physically or emotionally.
- Recognizing that this is a safe space for all and helping to maintain that safe space through kind and loving language and behavior.

Confidential Criminal Background Check

UUCF requires that prior to volunteering in the RE Program, all adults who apply to teach, chaperone, mentor, or work/volunteer in our nursery or childcare settings must be background checked. UUCF uses the company, Trusted Employees, to check the Nationwide Criminal Supersearch, Social Security Trace Plus, and Nationwide Sex Offender Registry. Applicants receive an email from Trusted Employees (administrator@trustedemployees.com), which includes a link to the online application. Please read the information in the link carefully. It must be completed within seven days. By electronically signing the application, applicants give UUCF permission to conduct a background check. Applicants receive an email from Trusted Employees confirming that the background check has been completed along with an option to view their report. UUCF receives a report, to which RE staff has access. The report is valid for three years. If you have any concerns, please contact the Director of Religious Exploration.