

Religious Development Council

Policy	Number
Announcements during Sunday Service	7.1.1
Safe Congregation Policies and Procedures for Children and Youth	7.2.1

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Policy on Announcements during Sunday Service

Policy adopted **April 20, 2005**

Purpose: Guidelines for announcements on Sunday Mornings

- Committees are asked to have announcements printed in the Order of Service if possible.
- Any announcements that must be spoken from the pulpit should be placed in the “announcements” mailbox in the church office no later than 15 minutes before the start of the service.
- If a committee wishes to have their own representative give the announcement (rather than have their announcement read with the other announcements), they will need to contact the Office Administrator in the church office no later than noon on the Thursday before the Sunday they wish to speak. This deadline is to give the Worship and Liturgy Committee and the Vice President of the Board time to make sure that the service schedule can accommodate these spoken announcements and their appropriateness.

**St. John's Unitarian
Universalist Church**

Safe Congregation
Policies and Procedures
for Children and Youth

Approved August 15, 2007 and **amended June 18, 2008**

St. John's is committed to
creating a safe and caring community,
working for social justice, and
celebrating beliefs that respect freedom of thought.

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These policies and procedures will apply to all St. John's Unitarian Universalist programs, services, activities and events, including all Religious Exploration and Youth Programs, youth/adult activities, events for which child care is provided, field trips and conferences.

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I. Purpose and Philosophy

We, the members of St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church, 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, St. John's 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 these Safe Congregations Policies and Procedures for Children and Youth.

For additional policies on Safe Congregation please read Policy on Sexual Harassment.

II. Screening and Selection

A. Education Workers

The Director of Religious Exploration (DRE or co DRE) is responsible for persons who are engaged in RE programs with St. John's children and youth whether they are paid or unpaid volunteers or parents, 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 Religious Exploration teachers must be active participants at St. John's 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 junior high groups must be at least 21 years of age; all other volunteer religious exploration teachers, infant and children supervisors must 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 education workers must complete the Application Form, must consent to such reference and/or background checks as St. John's, in

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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 St. John's employs new staff, the DRE or designee will provide training in the Safe Congregation Policies and Procedures.

B. Child Care Providers

By September 1 each year, the Director of Community Council, in consultation with the Director(s) of Religious Exploration, 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 accord 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 Form, must consent to such reference and/or background checks as St. John's, in its discretion, deems necessary, and must agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth in these policies and procedures.
- **Orientation.** The Director of Community Council 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

All workers are required to comply with the following requirements to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth:

General Supervision Requirements

All Education Workers and Child Care Providers are required to comply with the following requirements to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth.

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. The responsible adult or worker will remove a child or youth who behaves inappropriately and parents will be notified.
4. For children in the 6th grade and under, who are disruptive, a worker may remove a child from the classroom and the parent will be informed.
5. If any one adult is alone with a group of children, the window coverings and the door to the room should be open.

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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 Religious Development 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 1 student in any classroom, that student will be reassigned.
3. The DRE and/or a 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. If a meeting takes place it should be reported to the DRE.
5. A disciplinary meeting with a youth requires two adults. The parents and the DRE must be informed of any such meeting and its contents as soon as possible.

Additional Requirements for Child Care Providers

All Child Care Providers operate under the authority of the Director of the Community Council. The supervision is provided by the person responsible for conducting the activity (i.e. event organizer, Adult RE Committee, Board, etc.).

1. Only one person at least 14 years of age or older is required in a childcare situation.
2. It is recommended that whenever possible, the childcare be provided in proximity to the adult activity and definitely on the same floor of the building when there is only one childcare provider.
3. Due to the location of the restrooms and for safety concerns, when there are more than three children being cared for, preferably there should be two childcare providers.
4. All childcare providers, whether paid or volunteer, will be informed about the general supervision requirements.
5. There will be appropriate adult supervision if a childcare provider is under the age of 18.

Outings and Transportation Requirements

1. All outings must be pre-approved by the DRE or Religious Development Director. Participating children or youth must have a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian.
2. All drivers must be a minimum age of 21, carry a valid license and insurance.
3. Drivers, other than parents 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.
4. As mandated by law, everyone in the car must wear a seatbelt and all children four years of age and younger or less than 40 pounds must have a car seat. 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 St. John's are expected to always have the best interests of the children and youth at heart. Therefore, behavior must both *be* and *appear to be* above reproach. Education 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 must assume primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries between all participants of all ages and cultivate an atmosphere of health and trust.

“Coming of Age” Program—Special Exception to the Safe Congregation Policy

It is acknowledged that participants in the St. John's “Coming of Age” program have special needs for privacy that differ from the Safe Congregation Policy. On January 16, 2008, the Board of Trustees approved a special Coming of Age Permission Form that requires parental approval for mentors/mentees meeting in public spaces.

On June 18, 2008, 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 Coming of Age 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 his/her thoughts with one adult in a safe environment with the approval of the parents.”*

The Coming of Age Permission Form, with the Addendum included, can be found on page 7.2.13.

Unofficial Contact with Youth

For the protection of the youth and the adult, any contact between an adult and a minor outside of St. John's 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

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youth to initiate the contact, and the adult must 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.

Confidentiality

While you can assure a child that you will respect the information that is shared and use it confidentially, Education 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 St. John's policy that this type of information be communicated to St. John's professional staff immediately. Additionally, it is always appropriate to encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other trusted authority.

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

Reporting. Ohio Revised Code Sec. 2151.421 requires 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 St. John's if any adult suspects abuse or neglect of a child that adult must immediately report the alleged abuse or neglect to the Minister, the President of the Board or DRE. The Minister and one of the other two people 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.

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If the reported abuse involves a Worker at St. John's, the supervisor of that person will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at St. John's until the matter is resolved.

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 and two members of the congregation selected for three year staggered terms by members of the Safe Congregation Committee in consultation of the DRE and approved by the Board of Trustees. 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 Congregations 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 Congregations Committee will aid in the process of filing a report to the appropriate agency. The Safe Congregations 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 Congregations 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.

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Media Response. If the media contacts St. John's about an alleged abusive situation involving St. John's, only the President of the Board of Trustees or his/her specific designee will speak for St. John's. 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 St. John's, 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 Director of Religious Development Council will provide announcements about the Safe Congregation Policy and Procedures (Policy) for the order of service and the Reporter twice a year and will make copies available on the web page.
- The Director of Religious Exploration will provide Parents and Education Workers a copy of this Policy. Each year at registration, or throughout the year when they enroll, they 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 volunteers" must read and sign Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. Forms will be kept on file in the DRE's office.
- The Religious Development Council Director will ensure that mandatory training on child abuse awareness and prevention will be conducted annually.
- This policy should be reviewed by the committee and amended as necessary, bi-annually, by the Board of Trustees.

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 Ohio.

Child Care Providers Persons responsible for temporary care of children at St. John's, whether they are paid or unpaid, while their parents or guardians are participating in

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events such as choir practice, church dinners and fundraisers, social events, adult religious exploration programs, etc.

DRE Director of Religious Exploration, including co-directors.

Education Workers Persons who are engaged in religious exploration programs with St. John's 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. Instances of sexual misconduct may be limited to a one time occurrence.

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 St. John's.

Youth Children enrolled in the 7th to 12th grade.

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St. John's 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 must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationships is to be realized. Respect on the leader's part must 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 St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregations Policies and Procedures all Workers are expected to adhere to the following behavior.

- All 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.
- All Education Workers and Child Care Providers will neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior or engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.
- All 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, St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church will take appropriate actions.

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 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 St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregations Policies and Procedures 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: _____

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**St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church
Application for Working with Children and Youth**

Name _____ Phone # _____
Email _____

Other names I have used:

Date of Birth _____ Social Security Number _____

Address _____
Street City State Zip Code

Are you a member of St. John's? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, since

If no, describe your relationship with St. John's or indicate if you are new to St. John's. If you have been attending St. John's, 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 St. John's.

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

I swear and affirm that these statements are true. I have read St. John's Safe Congregations policy and signed the Code of Conduct. I also understand that St. John's may require a finger print and criminal records check to work with children and youth.

Date _____

Signature _____

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PERMISSION TO MEET: St. John’s “Coming of Age Mentor and Mentee

The undersigned parents(s) guardian(s) of _____, do hereby give our permission for our daughter/son, _____, to meet directly and in a public space with _____, the mentor for our daughter/son under St. John’s Unitarian Universalist Church’s Coming of Age Program. We understand that we will be given prior notice by our daughter’s/son’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 St. John’s Safe Congregation Code of Conduct.

Coming of Age Mentor signature

Date: _____



Addendum: The Safe Congregation Policy requires that two adults be present when working with a child/youth during church activities. This Coming of Age 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 his/her thoughts with one adult in a safe environment with the approval of the parents.

Coming of Age Permission Form approved on 01.16.08
Addendum approved on 06.18.08