

Policies and Guidelines Handbook for a Safer Congregation Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn

Revised and Adopted by the Board of Trustees,

Effective February, 24, 2025

Child Abuse Prevention Policies

Purpose – These policies have been written with the following objectives.

- To provide for the safety of children and youth, including to guard against the risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse while in the care of a staff person or volunteer.
- To provide guidelines in the selection, training and supervising of adult staff and volunteers.
- To provide an appropriate response to victims of abuse and to be caring in our approach.
- To provide guidelines in dealing with the report of abuse including communication with authorities and the press.
- To help reduce the church's risk and liability in conducting programs for children and youth.

1. Definition of Child Abuse

The following definitions may be found in the Department of Children and Families Regulations (DCF).

Abuse: the non-accidental commission of any act by a caretaker upon a child under age 18 which causes, or creates a substantial risk of, physical or emotional injury; or constitutes a sexual offense under the laws of the Commonwealth; or any sexual contact between a caretaker and a child under the care of that individual. This definition is not dependent upon location (i.e. abuse can occur while the child is in an out-of-home or in-home setting.) For definitions of the following forms of abuse and neglect, please refer to the website of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts below. The definitions found there include shaken baby syndrome, neglect, emotional injury, physical injury and institutional abuse or neglect.

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/child-abuse-neglect/>

2. Reporting Suspected Abuse – Mandated Reporter

A mandated reporter is, according to the website of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, one who in his/her professional capacity, has reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from: (i) abuse, inflicted upon him which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare, including sexual abuse; (ii) neglect, including malnutrition, (iii) physical dependence upon an addictive drug at birth

- (a) The Minister and the Religious Educator are regarded as mandated reporters.
- (b) If paid staff, volunteer teacher, advisor, or member of the church working with children, suspects abuse or neglect, that person should immediately report his/her suspicions to the Minister and/or the Religious Educator. The Minister is responsible for speaking to the President of the Board of Trustees about the suspected abuse.
- (c) The Minister and/or the Religious Educator are responsible for notifying the DCF in writing within 48 hours of being notified of the suspected abuse or neglect, if the reported suspected abuse or neglect is judged credible.
- (d) When a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is made to DCF, the President or designated Board official shall notify the Regional Lead for the New England Field Staff of the UUA, the UUA, and the congregation's insurance company within 24 hours of DCF notification of the suspected abuse or neglect.
- (e) The President of the congregation, in consultation with the Minister, Religious Educator and Board, will determine how information about an allegation of child abuse will be communicated to the congregation. Final wording is the decision of the Board President.
- (f) If an accusation of abuse is made against a Minister, the President of the Board of Trustees will notify the UUA Department of Ministry and the New England Regional Lead. If the President is not available, the Vice-President will make the contacts. The President or Vice-President will convene an emergency meeting of the Board as soon as possible to inform the Board of the allegations and decide on a

course of action. The Board may meet in session closed to the party who made the allegation.

- (g) If the allegation is against the Minister, a Board member, or the Religious Educator, the Board must follow up with the party who made the allegation to inform them of actions taken. The Board may meet in session closed to the party who made the allegation.
- (h) Anyone against whom a credible allegation of child abuse or neglect has been made, will not be permitted to have contact with children or youth of this congregation while on the UUCGL property, pending resolution of the allegation. Staff accused of abuse shall be immediately relieved of any responsibilities involving children or youth, and other responsibilities as determined by the Board of Trustees, and are forbidden to have any contact with the UUCGL children or youth on or off UUCGL property except for their own family members, pending resolution of the allegation.

3. Managing Convicted Sex Offenders

- a) Any adult, youth, or child who is known to have a criminal charge pending against him/her or has pleaded guilty to or been convicted of the sexual or physical abuse of a child, and/or is required to register as a sex offender, will not be allowed to work with children or youth.
- b) If it becomes known that a person described in section 3(a) above is attending the church, or participating in any of the church's activities, the following steps will be taken.
 - i. The Minister will check with the local sex offender registry and meet with the person to discuss the issue of his/her inclusion on the sex registry.
 - ii. The individual will be asked to sign a release form to allow the Minister to speak with his/her offender treatment provider, current or former therapist, and/or his/her parole officer. These individuals will be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will reoffend and whether additional restrictions beyond a standard Limited Access Agreement ought to be placed on the person's participation in church. The individual may also be asked to participate in a professional assessment with a therapist who specializes in working with sex offenders. If the offender refuses permission for the church to contact the therapist or refuses to go for an assessment, the board may refuse participation in all congregational activities.
 - iii. If the assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and/or is not at risk for recidivism, the board will review the Limited Access Agreement (as provided by the UUA). Typically, a Limited Access Agreement will specify participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all-adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events as acceptable. If the professional assessment indicates that the person is at risk for reoffending, the person will be denied involvement in the faith community until treatment is successful.
 - iv. All persons with a history of sexual offenses, who have been determined not to be at risk for reoffending, will be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement. The Minister will meet with such individual(s) to review the terms of said Agreement and address concerns which the person may have. The church

reserves the right to require the person to sign a Limited Access Agreement annually.

4. Managing the Media

- a) The President of the congregation and the Minister will serve as contacts for the media. They should be in frequent contact with each other to determine what information will and won't be released to the media and to ensure consistency.

- b) Before a public statement is released, the Board should have the advice of the Regional Lead for the UUA Field Staff of the UUA, the UUA, and an attorney. All statements to the media should be factual and should avoid placing blame or speculating about the potential outcome of an investigation or prosecution.

- c) If the Minister is accused of child abuse, the President will be the contact person for the press and congregation. If the President is accused of child abuse, the Minister will be the contact person for the press and congregation.

5. Registration for Children and Youth in our Program

Parents/guardians are required to register their children for faith development programming. Having the proper information on file is the first step in keeping our children safe from harm.

6. Selection and Screening of Volunteers

It is the UUCGL's policy that anyone who has been convicted of a crime involving an infant, child or youth, or who has had the conviction expunged, will not be permitted to work with infants, children or youth. This includes crimes such as contributing to the delinquency of a minor and crimes of a non-sexual nature.

7. Volunteers

Primary Volunteer: This is an adult who is at least 18 years of age and works with our children as a volunteer on a regular basis within our programs such as teachers and youth advisors.

On-Call Volunteer: This is an adult who is at least 18 years of age and works with our children on an occasional basis within our programs such as child-care providers, substitute teachers, and chaperones.

- a) All primary volunteers must be active in the life of the congregation for at least six months before working with infants, children and youth. If a person new to our congregation wishes to volunteer, and has been active in faith development in another congregation, this policy can be waived upon a favorable reference by the minister or religious educator of the person's prior congregation.

- b) All staff and primary volunteers working with children must have a CORI or other appropriate criminal background check. These checks will be repeated every fourth year of a volunteer's service. The church will pay for the cost of the background check.
- c) Background checks are not required for anyone working with children or youth on an occasional basis if another adult, who is CORI checked, is volunteering in the classroom or event.
- d) Parents/guardians of children with special needs may be requested or required to attend classes with their child(ren) by a teacher or the Religious Educator. The parents/guardians' attendance is allowed within the confines of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy, without the requirement of a background and reference check, and with no expectation of a Separation Plan required. (A Separation Plan is a term used in special education in which parents/guardians are expected to eventually transition out of the classroom.)
- e) The Religious Educator provides the church Administrator the CORI forms that have been filled out by volunteers in the Faith Development Program. The church Administrator administers the security check. If the information obtained from the check is of a negative nature, the information obtained will be provided to the Minister and to the Religious Educator. The Religious Educator is responsible for making sure all primary volunteers undergo a security check and for being sure they are repeated every four years. Specific information from the CORI check will not be shared with any volunteers, other than the subject volunteer. The Religious Educator, in his/her discretion and with the confirmation from the Minister, is authorized to refuse a volunteer's offer of service based on the information received from the background check or additional information regarding the volunteer which the Religious Educator deems relevant. Prospective volunteers have the right to discuss the refusal of service with the Minister.
- f) Volunteers who are considered substitute teachers and assistant teachers will be required to have a CORI check.
- g) A teen from the congregation may help in the classroom if there is another adult in the classroom who has been CORI checked.

8. The Two Adult Standard

Except for those instances set out below and in the section on Child-Care for Meetings and Events, two adults or one adult and one teen should always be in the classroom.

- a) Evening youth group meetings or other classes for children or youth outside of worship time will have two adults present in the building
- b) If at any time during class an adult classroom volunteer becomes incapacitated, the Religious Educator or a classroom monitor will arrange for the continuation of the class.

EXCEPTIONS

- c) If a second teacher cannot be recruited to fulfill the two-adult standard in a Sunday morning classroom, and if the class is well under control, one teacher will suffice. However, the Religious Educator or monitor will endeavor to check into the class a few times. If the classroom teacher needs assistance, the Religious Educator, or monitor, will find a parent/guardian, or another adult to sit in on the class, or the Religious Educator or monitor will stay in the classroom. It is preferable to find a screened parent/guardian to assist, however, it is acceptable to recruit an unscreened parent/guardian or adult provided there is a screened staff person or volunteer in the classroom.
- d) One adult child-care provider will be recruited to be with babies, toddlers, and preschool children when Nursery care is provided. The Religious Educator and/or the monitor will check in once or twice an hour with the child-care provider. Depending on the ages of or the number of children in the care of the provider, the Religious Educator will find a parent/guardian, teen assistant, or another adult to stay in the classroom with the child-care provider if needed.

9. Child-Care for Meetings and Events

- a) If child-care is needed for a committee or ministry team meeting, the child-care provider must be at least 16 years of age. If the meeting room is close to the child-care room where parents/guardians can check in frequently, an exception can be made. In this case, a teen at least 14 years of age can be a child-care provider.
- b) If child-care and programming is needed for children at a church event, an adult who has been CORI checked, will be required to supervise teens who have volunteered for child-care.
- c) The UUCGL is not responsible for child-care if an outside organization uses the church.

10. Releasing Children from an Event or Classroom

- a) Children in our care will not be released to any adult if that adult is not known to the teacher or child-care provider. Parents/guardians must inform the teacher, child-care provider, or Religious Educator if someone other than the parent/guardian will be picking up a child. This can be done by email or phone. If a child or youth is old enough to care for themselves at home alone and in other public settings, get themselves to the church without a parent/guardian, and has a way to contact a parent/guardian in case of emergency, the Religious Educator, in conversation with the parent/guardian's approval and the child's approval, may approve their participation during Sunday morning program without a parent/guardian present. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to communicate the use of this arrangement to the Religious Educator ahead of time. During a class for children and youth held outside of Sunday morning worship time, parents/guardians are not required to be in the building unless it is deemed necessary by the Religious Educator and/or the Teachers of the class.
- b) Co-directors of youth programming or other volunteers will ensure that all youth are picked up by a parent/guardian or have permission to walk home after the youth group evening meetings. Parents/guardians will inform the Co-directors of Youth Programming if their youth is being driven home by another youth who has a legal driving license.
- c) Parents/guardians are responsible for the supervision of their children before and after religious education classes, inside and outside the UUCGL building, or anywhere on the grounds.

11. Confidential Information

Children share information in joys and sorrows or anytime during class. A child's confidentiality should be respected except under the following conditions.

- If a child is doing harm to himself or herself
- If a child is doing harm to another child
- If someone is doing harm to a child

Under the above circumstances, the Religious Educator and/or Minister should be informed immediately. The safety of the child/youth must be the primary concern. The Religious Educator and/or the Minister will obtain all the necessary information from the teacher and make the appropriate decisions about next steps.

If a volunteer is uncertain as to whether information should be shared, s/he should speak with the Religious Educator or Minister, who will maintain confidentiality unless it is determined that confidentiality should not be maintained. The final decision relative to maintaining confidentiality, or not, will be made by the Minister.

Youth advisors in our middle school and high school program, who are married or involved in a romantic partnership together, may not serve as the only two-adult primary volunteers in a classroom or youth program. If there are three or more adults volunteering, married or romantically involved adults can volunteer to be in the classroom together. A married or romantically involved couple may volunteer together if one of them is an on-call volunteer.

Except for the circumstances set out above in Confidential Information, the FDMT and Religious Educator believes that it is important to respect the privacy of older youth. Parents/guardians of youth in high school – grades 9 through 12 – will not be recruited as advisors but may serve as on-call volunteers with the approval of the Religious Educator. We will not recruit or approve parents/guardians as OWL teachers in grades 7 through 12 classes in which a parent/guardian's child is registered.

12. Visitor Policies for our Children and Youth Programming

- a) An adult without a child registered in one of our classrooms, who wishes to visit a classroom or youth program, must obtain approval from the Religious Educator.
- b) Requests to visit an Our Whole Lives(OWL) meeting or Youth Group

should be made to the Religious Educator. OWL facilitators may request that parents/guardians wait to enter the classroom until after a check-in has been completed. OWL is a covenanted community of adults and youth. We discourage adults coming into the classroom unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

- c) Friends of youth and children are encouraged to attend our programming. If a child or youth wants to attend on a regular basis, the parent/guardian of the child must fill out a registration form.

Behavioral Policies

Our goal at the UUCGL is to develop policies that affirm the Seven Principles. Children, youth, and adults are at various stages of development, and so we recognize that reasonable expectations as to their accountability will differ.

All volunteers in faith development are responsible for bringing serious behavioral violations to the attention of the Religious Educator or Minister. The following are prohibited during all our church activities:

- Sexualized behavior of any kind
- Possession and/or use of drugs or alcohol while participating in church programming
- If someone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they will be asked to leave the premises and call someone to pick them up.
- All forms of violence (physical, verbal, sexual, and otherwise)
- Weapons

1. Emergency Situations – Children, Youth and Adults

- a) If an adult is posing a danger to persons or property, he or she may be asked to leave the property; or be removed from the property. If a child or youth under 18 years of age is posing a danger to persons or property, the Religious Educator, Minister, and a parent/guardian will be informed and the child will be taken to a safe place under the supervision of two adults. (Or one adult if the door to the room remains open and there is human activity in the building.) The Religious Educator or Minister will inform the Board of this action. The President of the Board will determine what action to take if the person is a member of the Minister's family. The Administrator of the congregation will maintain a confidential record of such incidents.

2. Church Sleep-overs

- a) Church sleep-overs may be offered as part of the UUCGL Youth Program and all church guidelines and policies will be in effect.
- b) At least two advisors, or two CORI checked volunteers, must be present throughout the night in the area where youth are sleeping. There must be separation of at least 3 feet between an adult and youth.
- c) UUCGL children and youth may invite their friends to church and to planned activities. If friends come to church programming on a regular basis, they must be registered in the program. Friends of our

UUCGL youth must be registered in our program to attend a sleepover.

3. Community in Right Relations

- a) Our community is a covenanted community based on mutually respectful interpersonal relationships. In healthy community relationships, people resolve differences with each other through direct communication. If a person feels unable to talk to someone with whom they are in conflict, they should talk with the Minister or another appropriate staff member or leader in the congregation about how to proceed.

General Policies

1. Medical

- a) Parents/guardians are required to record their child's food allergies on their child's registration form.
- b) Parents/guardians are also required to record any medical information about their child which teachers should know for them to properly care for the child.
- c) The Religious Educator will inform the teachers of allergy information if known. All teachers should acquaint themselves with children's allergies.

2. Movie and Electronic Media

- a) The selection of movies for children and youth should be made with attention to the age, experience, and diversity within the classroom/group, and all selections should be respectful and inclusive. Anyone showing movies for children or adults should consult with the Religious Educator if the appropriateness of the movie is in question. The Religious Educator and parents/guardians will be informed, in advance, of any movies that someone wishes to show.
- b) Youth directors/advisors in senior high and facilitators of OWL are required to seek permission from the Religious Educator before showing an R-rated film. Parents/guardians will be notified if an R-Rated film has been chosen. Parents/guardians may choose to have their child opt out of viewing a film.

3. Approved Driver

- a) Adults driving youth from church to events outside the church must be CORI checked or approved by the Religious Educator, the Minister, or the Religious Educator or Minister of a neighboring church. If there are two adults in the vehicle, one must be 25 years of age or older.
- b) One adult may drive a group of two or more youth to an event or trip off campus provided that two or more adults will be in attendance at the event. With the permission of the Religious Educator and of the parent/guardian, one youth may be driven in a car, under certain circumstances, with only one adult. For example, as the last youth in the group being dropped off at home.
- c) Adults attending events with youth must not be under the influence of any un-prescribed mood-altering substance.
- d) When parents/guardians of youth are arranging carpooling to an event location, transportation will be a personal decision between parents/guardians and not subject to UUCGL driving policies. Parents/guardians and their youth may arrange for their youth to arrive and/or depart from the church or another event location independently, i.e.. without an adult.

Policy Review

The FDMT should review the policy yearly and meet with the board if changes are needed. The Board of Trustees is responsible for the safe church policies. The FDMT is responsible for updating guidelines and to recommending additions or changes to the Safe Church Policies and Guidelines Handbook.

Guidelines for the Classroom and other Events at the UU Church of Greater Lynn

Massachusetts Childcare Regulations

Children 0 – 15 months

1 adult for 3 children and another adult for the next 4 children in groups no larger than 7.

Children 15 months to 2.9 years

1 adult for the first 4 children, and another adult for the next 5, in groups no larger than 9.

Preschool 2.9 – 5 years

1 adult for every 10 children in groups no larger than 20.

School Age Programs

1:13 ratio – not more than 13 years of age.

Multi-Age Groups

Use an appropriate ratio based on the age of the children attending.

1. UUCGL Events – Child Care Guidelines

- a) Requests for child-care from members of our congregation who are planning programs should be made to the Religious Educator. Every effort will be made to find child-care providers for church events. The parties hosting the event will be given child-care procedures by the Religious Educator to ensure the safety of all the children under their care.
- b) A group having an event will let the Religious Educator know about the event and will obtain the telephone numbers of teens, adults and/or young adults who might be available to provide childcare. Adult child-care providers must be security checked.
- c) Someone from the hosting group is responsible for calling the child-care provider and giving the provider all the necessary information about the event.
- d) Parents/guardians will be requested to put their cell phones on vibrate in case the child-care provider needs them for any reason. If parents/guardians do not have a cell phone, the child-care

provider must know where to find them.

- e) Children will not be released by the child-care provider to anyone other than the person who brought in the child unless different arrangements were made with the Religious Educator or person hosting the event. Any change in pick-up of a child will be communicated to the child-care provider.
- f) Child-care providers and the group hosting the event will make sure that the rooms used for child-care are left clean and arranged as they were when the event started.
- g) In mild weather children can play out of doors in the playground area with adult supervision. The indoor play space in the lower level can also be used, with adult supervision, and must be left the same way it was found.

2. Safety Rules - Guidelines for Parents/guardians

- a) Parents/guardians of children Pre-K and younger will pick up their children in their classrooms. Parents/guardians are responsible for being in the Parish Hall after the service to greet and supervise their children unless prior arrangements have been made in accordance with this policy. The classes end between approximately 11:00 am - 11:20 am each Sunday. If the children are working on a project, parents/guardians can come into the classroom and engage with their children while they finish up the activity or project.
- b) Children can play outside under supervision of an adult and/or parent.
- c) Elementary school and younger children are not allowed in the sanctuary unsupervised.
- d) Children are invited to play in the in-door play space in the lower level if there is an adult supervisor/parent in attendance.
- e) Children are asked to follow the same behavioral expectations at church as they do at school. For the safety of everyone, no running is allowed indoors except in the downstairs play space under supervision.
- f) During Sunday morning program, parents/guardians are generally not allowed to drop off their children at the church and leave the building unless they have identified another parent/guardian or

adult responsible for the child. A parent/guardian should contact the Religious Educator if their child is being accompanied by another adult other than the parent. However, if a child or youth is old enough to care for themselves at home alone and in other public settings, get themselves to the church without a parent/guardian, and has a way to contact a parent/guardian in case of emergency, the Religious Educator, in conversation with the parent/guardian's approval and the child's approval, may approve their participation during Sunday morning program without a parent/guardian present in the building. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to communicate the use of this arrangement to the Religious Educator ahead of time.

- g) During a class for children and youth held outside of Sunday morning worship time, parents/guardians are not required to be in the building unless it is deemed necessary by the Religious Educator and/or the Teachers of the class, such as for very young children or for children with special needs or medical conditions.

3. Parent/Guardian Guidelines for Classroom Participation

- a) Parents/guardians of children elementary school or younger, are welcome to join their children in their classroom. Once a child is comfortable in the class, the parent/guardian will be encouraged to separate from their child. Youth in middle school and high school are usually mature enough to participate in programming independently from their parents/guardians. If there are exceptions, parents/guardians should speak with the Religious Educator.
- b) Parents/guardians of very small children, children with special needs, or children with medical conditions sometimes need to stay in the classroom for extended periods of time to help their children adjust. Parents/guardians of these children might be asked to help in the classroom when appropriate.

4. Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers Working with Children and Youth

The UUCGL aspires to support teachers, advisors and volunteers in creating and sustaining safe, inclusive classroom and group experiences. The Faith Development Program is a partnership between the parents/guardians and church. Consistent communication among volunteers, paid staff, and parents/guardians is essential.

To help our staff and volunteers in their roles as caretakers of our children, we offer the following guidelines to ensure safety of all our children and youth.

- a) Classroom covenants will be made in the beginning of the year and

adhered to. Basic Covenants are the promises children and adults make with each other such as being kind to each other, listening to one another, respecting each other's personal space, leaving space for everyone to speak – anything having to do with basic respect for each other.

- b) Children up to Kindergarten age should be accompanied by an adult when using restrooms or leaving the classroom for any other reason.
- c) Children and youth grades 1 through 5 or 6 can leave their classrooms if a teacher or volunteer gives them permission. For example: using the bathroom or getting a coat from the sanctuary to go outside.
- d) Youth in Middle School through High School should check in with their advisors/teachers if they leave their classroom for any reason.
- e) Put-downs and disparaging comments will not be tolerated.

5. Substitute Teacher Guideline

If a teacher cannot find a substitute from within the team, they should contact the Religious Educator. The Religious Educator will have a list of substitute teachers and will make the arrangements. The Religious Educator will ask parents/guardians to step in when needed. Teen assistants and young adults may be asked to assist.

6. Guidelines for Adult Faith Development

- a) Ministry Teams and individuals outside the UUCGL, who want to sponsor a program or event at the UUCGL, should contact the Religious Educator who directs Lifespan Faith Development Programming under the direction of the Minister. The Minister and Religious Educator decide on programming that relates to the UU Principles, mission and/or Vision of Ministry.
- b) People or groups from outside of our congregation may use space in our building. These events may or may not require a fee.
- c) All programming is bound by the UUCGL Communication Policy.

7. Communication Guidelines for UUCGL Faith Development Programming

The Faith Development Ministry Team welcomes open communication between parents/guardians, members and/or friends of our congregation. If anyone wants to discuss any aspect of our program, the Religious Educator

and/or a member of the FDMT will welcome a conversation. Disputes with the decision of the FDMT and/or the Religious Educator may be taken to the Minister. Confidential information will be discussed only with the FDMT and/or the Minister and the Executive members on the Board of Trustees. Decisions made in Executive Session will be reflected in the minutes only if they do not violate confidentiality.

Crisis Plan

1. Evacuation Areas

Children will evacuate to the upper parking lot in case of emergencies. If the upper parking lot is not a safe place for the children, teachers should take the children to the Swampscott Elementary School field.

2. Fire

If our fire alarm goes off, everyone must evacuate the building. Teachers will be instructed on evacuation procedures. Teachers should be sure all children are accounted for during evacuation. Parents/guardians will be instructed to leave the building and not pick up their children in the classrooms. They will meet their children in the upper parking lot or Swampscott Elementary School field.

3. Weapon Threat

Violent acts are impossible to predict. Therefore, the UUCGL will contact a Safety Officer at the Swampscott Police Department to come into our congregation to talk with the Religious Educator, Staff and other church leaders about security issues regarding violence such as shooters at least every two years.