

EMERSON UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Adopted by the Board of Trustees on October 12, 1998

Revised 1/27/11

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church, as a religious community, recognize with sadness and outrage the reality of the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children and youth.

We recognize its existence throughout all strata of society, including religious and its potentially devastating impact on our children and youth, our families, our congregation, district and continental associations, and on our wider communities.

We recognize that religious communities, which should be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all their members, 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.

We recognize the inherent importance in a religious community of those very factors of trust, welcome, and volunteer commitment, and the necessity to adopt "reasonable precaution" as the watchwords for any ensuing guidelines and requirements regarding the issue of abuse. We further realize that institutions operating in the best possible manner with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk free setting.

We recognize the painful nature of this situation, and we realize that to adequately address it will mean change and a sacrifice of some convenience to which we have become accustomed, yet we know our responsibility to respond to these realities. Our faith calls us to do all we can to make our world a better place to live.

In this spirit, we adopt this *Child and Youth Protection Policy (Policy)* and apply it to events conducted under the purview of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church. We urge our members and friends to confront the issue of abuse and its potential source in religious communities, to study this policy statement and other resource material, and to take appropriate action.

Doing so can help change the voices of denial that proclaim "it can't happen here!" to voices of affirmation that pledge, "We will do all we can to see that it won't happen here!"

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This policy will apply to all Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church sponsored events such as:

- Sunday Religious Education Programs and Activity Hour
- Youth programs, including Jr. High Youth, YRUU and YAC (Youth/Adult Committee) meetings
- Events for which child care is provided
- Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church youth field trips, lock-ins and rallies

I. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth

Workers who provide direct care or supervision to children or youth at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church events or programs must meet the following criteria:

- Advisors for youth and volunteer Religious Education teachers must be active participants at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church or another Southwest District Unitarian Universalist Church for at least six months. Active participants are church members or contributing friends who are involved with church committees, activities and/or events.
- Advisors for High School Youth must be at least 25 years old; advisors for Middle School Youth must be at least 21 years old and all other volunteer religious education teachers, nursery and childcare supervisors must be at least 18 years old.
- Workers under 18 years old may be used as paid helpers for event childcare as long as at least one has completed the Red Cross Babysitter's Training or equivalent course. An adult meeting the above criteria will supervise them throughout the event.
- All compensated workers and volunteer religious education teachers and volunteer youth advisors and sponsors must complete an application form and read the policy and sign the Code of Conduct included in this policy and submit to a criminal background check..
- Occasional volunteers, parents, or church members who serve as Guardian Angels or who substitute in the classroom or program occasionally, must read and sign the Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. The DRE(s) and volunteer religious education teachers will supervise these volunteers.
- All compensated workers must meet the Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church Personnel Policy requirements that include a criminal background check.

II. Definitions

A "group" is defined as those children who have been assigned to a nursery, pre-school, or individual elementary class or specific program or activity within the context of that class, as well as youth who are taking part in a planned, organized component of their program.

"Supervision" is defined as the reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and responsibility by adults working with their respective age groups, realizing that the immediacy of such direct supervision will vary with the ages of those in a group and the context of the activity.

III. Supervision Guidelines and Policies

There will be a minimum of two adults scheduled to supervise each group. The Director of Religious Education, DRE(s), may make exceptions to this two-adult rule on a case-by-case basis.

If any adult is alone with a group of children at the church, the DRE(s) or her/his designated representative will check-in with the group.

Corporal punishment or abusive language will not be used under any circumstances. Two adults will be present in the event a disciplinary meeting is necessary.

Disciplinary meetings between a teacher, adult sponsor, advisor or other volunteer and a child must include another worker or the Director of Religious Education. If such a meeting is necessary, the parents will be informed and the contents of the meeting will be discussed with them as soon as possible or when they pick up their child.

If an adult other than a parent, guardian, or approved COA Mentor (for "Counseling by Minister(s) or DRE(s)" refer to the section below), has a private on-site, one-on-one meeting with a child or youth, the Director of Religious Education or another member of the Religious Education Committee should be immediately notified of the meeting and its purpose. Such meetings are strongly discouraged and must be conducted in a room with a window or open door. At church-sponsored events, no adult volunteer or compensated employee, other than the parent or guardian, is to be alone with a child or youth off-site without parent approval.

Counseling by Minister(s) or DRE(s)

If Minister(s) or DRE(s) counsel children or youth they must inform one another, or if unavailable, the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee, of the counseling meeting and the name of the counseled. Advanced scheduling is strongly encouraged, but notice immediately after counseling is permissible if prior notice is impossible. Standard rules of ministerial confidentiality will be respected. Parents will be informed of the meeting, unless it is deemed that to do so would endanger the child or youth.

Transportation to, from and during Church or District Events

It is the responsibility of parents to provide safe transportation to and from Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church for Church and District events. Volunteers and compensated employees are not allowed to pick-up or drive children and youth home

from Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church or to be alone in a car with one child or youth except by prior parental arrangement and notification of DRE(s). All drivers must be at least 21 years of age and must provide proof of insurance. There must be enough seat belts for everyone and everyone must wear a seatbelt.

Special Cases

For children with special needs, it may not be possible to serve a child's needs through the classroom setting with two volunteers and other arrangements may be made. In such cases, the DRE(s) and the child's parents will work out a reasonable supervision arrangement. Such arrangement will be agreed to in writing between the DRE(s) and the child's parents. The Religious Education Committee will approve the arrangement.

IV. Conduct for Adults Working With Children and Youth

Adults who work with children and youth at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church are expected always to have the best interests of children and youth at heart. They are expected to nurture their physical, emotional and spiritual growth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and hopefully, fun. No one's enjoyment should ever be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. Their charge is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness. In this manner, we hope to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and as communities. To accomplish this there are specific expectations that Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church has for employees and volunteers.

"Friendship" With Youth

Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for friendship is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. A "friendship" is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. Therefore, it is the adult volunteer or compensated worker's responsibility to avoid or discourage inappropriate friendships.

Unofficial Contact with Youth

Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These relationships can be healthy and transformative for both. However, it is our concern that someone, who might not have the best interest of the youth at heart, could try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if an adult wishes to be in contact with a youth outside of the normal channels of church events, it is imperative that their behavior both *be and appear to be* above reproach. Any relationship developed between an adult and a youth outside of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church activities must be with the

knowledge and consent of the youth's parents. This is for the protection of the youth and the adult.

Sexualized Behavior

It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for instance, or to make "double entendres." Physical expressions of affection such as hugs certainly have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.

Confidentiality

Adults who work with children and youth under the aegis of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church are responsible first to the children and youth, but to the church as well. Sometimes an adult will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. It is Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church Policy that information be communicated to the Church's professional staff immediately. For this reason, please try never to give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. **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. However, when the information is of a major, crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. Consult with a person of greater authority in the church, the Minister(s) or the DRE(s), about an appropriate course of action.

Acceptance with this Policy and Code of Conduct

Any church employee or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the *Policy* or the *Code of Conduct* is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of the church, but must abide by the Code as written. Signing the Code indicates the signatory has read the *Policy* and the *Code* and agrees to abide by them. The signatory further acknowledges that failure to abide by the *Code* or the provisions of the *Policy* will result in dismissal from either paid or volunteer positions involving children and youth at EUUC.

V. Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church's Code of Conduct

Statement of Position: Adults and older youth in leadership roles in this congregation are in a position to 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 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.

VI. Reporting and Response Procedures

If a worker, volunteer, or any other adult suspects abuse of a minor attending an Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church program or event, the adult must immediately report it to the DRE(s) or the Minister(s). Texas State law requires that a person suspecting the abuse of a child report these suspicions to Child Protective Services (1-800-252-5400.) Workers or volunteers must report such suspicions to the DRE(s) or Minister(s) in addition to contacting the authorities.

If the reported abuse involves a worker or volunteer at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church, the supervisor of that person will immediately relieve that person of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church until the matter is resolved. The supervisor will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and any circumstances.

If the DRE(s) or Minister(s) ascertains that a child or youth 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. The Minister(s) or DRE(s) will alert 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.

VII. Responding

If the media contact Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church about an alleged abusive situation involving Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church, only the President of the Board of Trustees or his/her specific designee will speak for Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church. In general, the following guidelines 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 Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church, particularly if litigation seems possible. The designated spokesperson will freely discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

VIII. Awareness and Implementation

The Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church Board of Trustees approved this policy on October 12, 1998. It will be communicated to the congregation and implemented as follows:

1. Parents, teachers, and volunteers will receive a copy of this *Policy* each year at registration and be asked to sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the *Policy*. As new children enroll in the RE program, their parents will receive copies of the policy and be asked to sign a form indicating that they

- have read the *Policy*. These forms will be kept in the DRE(s) office.
2. The *Policy* will be included in all new member information packets.
 3. The DRE(s) will discuss the *Policy* in her newsletter article in the month following its approval or revisions.
 4. The *Policy* will be made available throughout the year and discussed with all workers and volunteers who supervise or care for the children and youth of our community. New volunteer workers must complete an Application and sign the Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. Application forms will be kept in the DRE(s) office.
 5. The *Policy* will be provided to and discussed with all compensated and volunteer workers who supervise or care for the children and youth of our community. Criminal background checks will be required for all compensated and volunteer workers working with children and youth at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church and church-sponsored events. Application forms and background checks for compensated and volunteer workers will be kept in a locked file.
 6. The Religious Education Committee will notify the congregation when revisions are made to this *Policy*.

Job Descriptions for Religious Education Workers

Volunteer Religious Education Teachers

Volunteer Religious Education teachers have the responsibility to prepare for the Sunday morning religious education class they have volunteered to lead. This preparation will be in accordance with curricula and other activities selected, designed, or approved by the DRE(s) and/or the Religious Education Committee. They will attend teacher training workshops and teacher meetings; if they are unable to attend scheduled training and/or workshops, the DRE(s) will make arrangements to cover the topics with them. Teachers will receive on-going support and training from the DRE(s). In all aspects of their dealing with children attending Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church's religious education program, they are to comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church. The DRE(s) will be informed on a timely basis of all teaching absences. Should the volunteer teacher or the DRE(s) need to terminate this arrangement, timely notification shall be given, unless termination results from noncompliance with the Child and Youth Protection Policy, in which case termination will be immediate.

Volunteer Youth Advisors and Sponsors

Volunteer Youth Advisors shall pursue a leadership development program with the junior and senior high youth which will include participation in UUA District Youth events, and a meaningful program of local activities which may include outside service projects, social activities, fund-raising and religious education, using materials reviewed by the DRE(s). Youth Advisors will attend district training seminars, and will receive on-going support from the DRE(s). In all aspects of their dealing with youth attending the religious education program, they are to comply with the *Policy* of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church. The DRE(s) will be informed on a timely basis of all youth advisor absences. Should the Youth Advisor or the DRE(s) need to terminate this arrangement, timely notification shall be given, unless termination results from noncompliance with the *Policy*, in which case termination will be immediate.

Occasional Volunteers including Guardian Angels

Occasional Volunteers are parents, members, or friends (known by a church member for 6 months) of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church who volunteer to "fill in" on an emergency basis as a classroom teacher's aide, room parent, playground monitor or youth group advisor or sponsor. They assist regular classroom teachers or youth group sponsors or advisors as needed. Guardian Angels are parents, members, or friends (known by a church member for 6 months) of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church who volunteer to work as activity hour monitors on a one-time or occasional basis, are responsible for the safety and well being of the children in their charge and for enforcing the Activity Hour rules. These volunteers will be guided by scheduled volunteers and be under the supervision of the DRE. In all aspects of their dealing with youth attending Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church's religious education programs or events, they are to comply with

the *Policy*. Occasional Volunteers, including Guardian Angels, receive guidance, support, and supervision from the DRE and regular volunteer staff.

Coming of Age Mentors

Mentors are adult members of the congregation selected to serve in the capacity of assisting 8th grade youth throughout their Coming of Age year. Duties will be in accordance with program requirements, with the addition of other activities selected, designed, or approved by the DRE(s) and/or the Religious Education Committee. In all aspects of their dealing with children attending Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church's religious education program, they are to comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church.

Occasional Child Care/Baby Sitters for EUUC events

Childcare providers are arranged by Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church committees to care for the children of members and friends attending occasional daytime and evening church functions. In all aspects of their dealing with the children in their care, they will be expected to comply with the Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church *Policy*. They are expected to keep the nursery room clean and safe for the children under their care and provide the children with meaningful, age-appropriate experiences.

The adult church member who arranged the event, or a designee, will supervise these workers during the event. In all aspects of their dealing with children attending Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church's religious education program, they are to comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church.

Application Form for Volunteer Workers with Children and Youth

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any volunteer position involving the supervision of minors, excluding occasional volunteers as defined in this Policy. The purpose of this form is to help Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth that participate in programs sponsored by the church. Any information you provide here will be used solely for the purpose of determining your qualifications for working with minors.

Personal Data

Name:

Last

First

Middle

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Home Phone: _____ Other Phone: _____

Employer: _____ Work Phone: _____

Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY): _____ Driver' License #: _____

Social Security #: _____

Church History and Prior Work With Children and/or Youth

List of congregations you have attended regularly during the past three years and or references. Please begin with Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church.

Name of Congregation	City, State	Date of Membership/Attendance
Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church - Houston, Texas		

List previous church and non-church work involving children and/or youth: (please include the name of the church or organization and role or duties)

Please share information on your talents, callings, training, education, gifts or other resources that you can share with the children and youth at Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church:

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle One) Yes No

Has any civil judgment ever been made against you for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle One) Yes No

Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer because you were accused of sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle One) Yes No

Other than above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children and youth? (Circle One) Yes No

If you will be driving children and/or youth, please attach a copy of your current Driver's License and Certificate of Automobile Insurance. (We recommend personal injury liability insurance of \$100,000.00.)

Have you ever been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs? (Circle One) Yes No (If yes, please state date of conviction)

If you answered *YES* to any of the above questions, please explain (use back or attach a separate sheet).

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT:

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children or youth.

I have read and agree to be bound by the Child and Youth Protection Policy of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church. I understand that any information obtained about me through this application process will be kept in the strictest confidentiality among staff members of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church who will be screening applicants for compensated or volunteer positions. Any information obtained through this process which indicates that I may not have, in their opinion, the maturity or temperament to work with children or youth, will be sufficient grounds for denying this application.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CODE OF CONDUCT

Statement of Expectation of Behavior: As specified in the Emerson Unitarian *Child and Youth Protection Policy*, all compensated and volunteer staff are expected to adhere to the following behavior:

- Religious Education Workers shall 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.
- Religious Education Workers shall neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior nor engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.
- Religious Education Workers shall not allow the use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol or any illegal activities among children or youth.
- Religious Education Workers shall never consume alcoholic beverages during activities in which they are supervising minors. Alcoholic beverages left from a previous adult event must either be removed from the premises or remain locked up and out of sight.

Statement of Action: In the case of paid or volunteer workers failing to meet the above expectation, Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church will take appropriate actions.

Statement of Agreement: I have read and understand the Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church *Child and Youth Protection Policy* 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.

Name (Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____