

MURRAY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
SAFE CONGREGATION GUIDELINES

Prepared by the Safe Congregation Study Group
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Safe Congregation Guidelines

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
A. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth	2
B. Supervision Guidelines	2
1. Supervision	2
2. Restroom Use Guidelines	3
3. Necessary Forms	4
4. Transportation to, from and during church or District Events	4
C. Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth	4
1. Appropriate relationships with Youth	5
2. Confidentiality	5
3. Acceptance of the Policy and Code of Conduct	6
D. Safe Congregation Committee Guidelines	6
E. Reporting and Response Procedures	6
F. Responding to the Media	7
G. Awareness and Implementation	7

Addendum:

- Code of Ethics
- Application for Volunteer Workers with Children and Youth
- Sample Limited Access Agreements
- Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting – Guide for Mandated Reporters
- Community Resources

Safe Congregation Guidelines

Introduction

As Unitarian Universalists we covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. As a caring community, we are committed to ensuring everyone in our community feels valued, safe and secure. It is the intention of our religious community to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our membership. Murray Unitarian Universalist Church is dedicated to the creation of a safe environment for all members and friends and their children.

In this welcoming spirit, our commitment to each other is dedicated to adopting every reasonable precaution to prevent abuse and to provide a safe environment for both children and adults.

A. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth.

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

1. Advisors for youth and volunteer Religious Education teachers must be active participants at Murray Church for at least one year and have three references.
2. Advisors for Murray Youth Group must be at least 21 years old; advisors for Middle School Youth must be at least 21 years old and all other religious education teachers and volunteers must be at least 18 years old. Younger volunteers may serve as classroom assistants.
3. Workers under 18 years old may be used as paid helpers for event childcare as long as they have completed the Red Cross Babysitter's Training or Equivalent course and are on a Murray Church babysitters list. An adult meeting the above criteria will supervise them throughout the event.
4. All compensated workers and volunteer religious education teachers and volunteer youth advisors must complete an application form, read this policy and sign the Murray Church Code of Ethics included in this policy. A CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) may be included in this process.
5. Occasional volunteers, parents or church members who serve the religious education program must read and sign the Murray Church code of Ethics before assuming their duties. The DRE (Director of Religious Education) and religious education teachers will supervise these volunteers.

B. Supervision Guidelines

1. Supervision

There will be a minimum of two adults scheduled to supervise each group or class. The DRE or Minister may make exceptions to this two-adult rule on a case by case basis.

When two teachers or youth advisors are not present, the classroom door must remain open.

The top half of the nursery door must remain open whenever nursery care is being provided.

An RE Sunday Assistant (RESA) should be present each Sunday during the church year. The RESA will assist the childcare providers, teachers and youth advisers when needed.

A minimum of one male and one female chaperone over the age of 25 must be present during all church sleepover events.

Staff or volunteers will be trained to respond to children who are unable to cope with the classroom environment. Recommended techniques include providing a “quiet corner” in a class room or a quiet activity. If it is necessary for a child to be removed from the classroom setting for a time, the child should be escorted by an adult to the RE Office and the RESA or another appropriate volunteer or staff should be available to supervise. It is not our intention to punish the child, but to provide alternative activity until both the child and adult agree the child is ready to return to the classroom.

Murray Church’s teachers are volunteers and do not have training in special education. Parents of children with moderate or severe special needs are expected to remain in the classroom with their child during Sunday School.

A fire drill must be held at least once per year.

No alcohol, illegal drugs or tobacco products are to be present during any church activity geared for children, teens or families.

2. Restroom Use Guidelines

Toddlers: Toddlers who are toilet trained are supervised by the nursery care provider and use the small restroom adjacent to the nursery.

Preschoolers: Preschoolers are accompanied to the restroom by a teacher, DRE, RESA or parent. The main door to the restroom should remain ajar while the preschooler is in the restroom. In most cases, the adult, if other than the parent, should remain in the hallway and not accompany the child into the restroom. However, there will be cases where a preschooler may need assistance.

Kindergarten through Second Grade: A teacher, DRE, RESA or parent is in the hallway adjacent to the restrooms when in use by a child in this age group.

Third Grade and above: Children in third grade and above are permitted to use the restrooms on their own.

3. Necessary Forms

Signed permission slips will be required for all children and teens participating in church sponsored activities.

Registration forms must be completed for all young people participating in the RE program (Nursery, Sunday school and youth group.)

Visiting children need to have a guest form completed. Children unable to give their full name, parents' full names, address and phone number are required to have a parent or guardian accompany them to class and fill out a guest form.

4. Transportation to, from and during Church or District Events

It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to provide safe transportation to and from Murray Church for church and church-related events. Volunteers and staff are not allowed to pick-up or drive children and youth home from Murray Church or to be alone in a car with one child or youth except by prior parental/guardian arrangement and notification to the DRE or a designated representative.

Field trip drivers must be fully insured, possess an excellent driving record and be at least 25 years old. Everyone must be wearing a seatbelt or ride in a car seat or booster seat as required by law.

First aid kits will be issued to drivers during all church related field trips.

C. Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth

Adults who work with children and youth at Murray Church are expected to have the best interests of the children and youth at heart. They are expected to nurture their physical, emotional and spiritual growth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust and respect.

Corporal punishment or abusive language will not be used under any circumstances.

If any adult other than a parent or guardian has a private on-site, one-on-one meeting with a child or youth the door to the classroom will remain open and the DRE or his/her designated representative will check in during the meeting. Such meetings are strongly discouraged. No adult other than a parent or guardian is to be alone with a child or youth off-site without prior parental permission.

1. Appropriate Relationships with Youth

The adult should take the responsibility to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries and to cultivate a healthy atmosphere of trust.

Teachers and youth advisors may not engage in any verbal or non-verbal sexual innuendo or behavior.

Youth advisors are prohibited from dating members of the Youth Group.

In most circumstances the child should be the one to initiate physical affection such as hugs.

2. Confidentiality

Private information shared by children and youth should be held as confidential. This does not apply to a child or youth's disclosure of abuse or intent to harm themselves or others. This information should be shared as soon as possible with the DRE or Minister for appropriate handling.

3. Acceptance of the Policy and Code of Conduct

Any church employee or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the Policy or Code of Ethics is free to discuss this with Murray Church leadership, 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 Code of Ethics is attached – see Addendum Page 8.

D. Safe Congregation Committee

The Safe Congregation Committee is charged by the Board of Governors (BOG) with receiving and considering reports of alleged physical or sexual misconduct. Members will serve for 2 years. The Committee will be comprised of the Minister and the DRE along with 3 members to be appointed by the BOG in consultation with the Minister and DRE. Gender balance will be given consideration in appointments. In the event that either the Minister or the DRE are implicated in alleged abuse, the Moderator will serve temporarily in that person's place on the Committee. The findings will be as confidential as possible to ensure the safety of those who are vulnerable in the congregation

The Safe Congregation Committee will generally have the following responsibilities:

- a. The committee will review and revise the Safe Congregation Guidelines.
- b. Receive allegations of possible abuse.
- c. Appropriately make BOG or the congregation aware of confirmed misconduct when necessary.
- d. Keep current about community resources.
- e. Keep current about state laws regarding reporting and report abuse allegations as required by law.
- f. Be a resource for people to share their concerns.
- g. Be a resource for Religious Education staff and volunteers on issues, policies and procedures relevant to sexual/physical abuse.
- h. Work with the Religious Education Committee to make abuse prevention education available at each age level.
- i. Meet with alleged or convicted sex offenders to develop a Limited Access Agreement for participation in church activities. (See addendum pages 11-12 for examples.)
- j. The committee will offer a report at each annual meeting of the congregation.

E. Reporting and Response Procedures

If a worker, volunteer or any other adult suspects abuse of a minor during a Murray Church program or event, the first priority is to protect the child by removing the abusive adult or child from the situation, or any other steps necessary to protect the child.

The DRE or Minister should immediately be notified and they will alert the Moderator and the Safe Congregation Committee that an abuse situation has been reported. Otherwise, the situation is to remain confidential. Breaking confidentiality could interfere with prosecution, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputations of the individuals involved or endanger the child.

If the reported abuse involves a volunteer or staff person, that person will be relieved of any duties involving the care, supervision or teaching of children until the matter is resolved. The person's supervisor will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and the circumstances.

F. Responding to the Media

Only the Moderator or his/her specific designee will speak for Murray Church when the media contact Murray Church about an alleged abusive situation involving Murray Church. In general, the following guideline applies to 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.”

Protecting the interests of the child and Murray Church is important, particularly if litigation is possible. The designated spokesperson will freely discuss what steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

G. Awareness and Implementation

The Murray Church Board of Governors approved this policy on

_____.

Implementation will include an announcement in the Order of Service, copies of the Safe Congregation Guidelines will be available in the Foyer and Unity Room, copies will be permanently displayed on bulletin boards and copies will be distributed to teachers, youth group advisors and child care providers.

MURRAY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH CODE OF ETHICS

Statement of Position Adults and youth who are 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 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 All compensated and volunteer staff are expected to adhere to the following standards:

- Staff and volunteers 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.
- Staff and volunteers shall neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior nor engage in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children or youth.
- Staff and volunteers 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, Murray Unitarian Universalist Church will take appropriate action.

Statement of Agreement I have read and understood the Murray Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregation Guidelines and Code of Ethics and will honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this congregation.

Signature _____

Name (printed) _____

Date _____

Application 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 Murray Church provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in Murray Church sponsored programs.

Personal Data

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Other Phone: _____

Employer: _____ Work Phone: _____

Previous Address in Last Five Years _____

Personal Reference (1) Name _____

Address _____ Town _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Personal Reference (2) Name _____

Address _____ Town _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Church History and Prior Work with Children and Youth

Congregation: _____ Dates of Attendance: _____

Previous church or non-church work involving children or youth: _____

Have you ever been convicted or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense? YES NO

Has any civil judgment ever been made against you for reasons relating to sexual misconduct or child abuse? 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? YES NO

Other than above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question you being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children and youth? YES NO

If you will be driving children or youth, please attach a copy of your current driver's license and automobile registration.

Have you ever been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs? YES NO

If you answered YES to any of the above questions, please explain using a separate sheet of paper.

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 Murray Unitarian Universalist Church Safe Congregation Guidelines. I understand any information obtained about me through this application process will be kept in the strictest confidence among staff members of Murray Church who will be screening applicants for compensated or volunteer positions. Any information obtained through this process which indicates I may not have, in their opinion, the maturity or the temperament to work with children or youth, will be sufficient grounds for denying this application.

Signature

Date

Sample Limited Access Agreement in Cases of Allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Safe Congregation Committee. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Minister, the Religious Educator and the members of the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. It will be kept in a locked file in the office

You understand that you will not be allowed to volunteer or chaperone events for children and adolescents , including children’s religious education classes, talks with children/adolescents during worship, youth group, children’s and adolescents’ activities during intergenerational events, and driving children and young people.

The following activities checked "Yes" are activities that we feel are appropriate for your participation.

Worship services No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Coffee Hour: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Adult meetings with children in building, such as choir: No () Yes ()

Adult meetings without children in building: No () Yes ()

Have a key to the building: No () Yes ()

Intergenerational church activities No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Intergenerational group outings such as ice skating, baseball games, etc:
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Alone in building with minister or other staff: No () Yes ()

Access to church computer: No () Yes ()

Social activities in other member’s homes with children present:
No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Other:
_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

*A support person is a person who knows about your history/situation and has been designated by you with our approval to accompany you to activities where children and youth may be present.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITION IN CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Minister

Date

Director of Religious Education

Date

Moderator

Date

Sample Limited Access Agreement in Cases of Convicted Sex Offender:

Murray Church affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who choose to worship with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited in ways to ensure the safety of our children and to assure you will not be subject to future accusations.

You understand that you will not be allowed to volunteer or chaperone events for children and adolescents , including children’s religious education classes, talks with children/adolescents during worship, youth group, children’s and adolescents’ activities during intergenerational events, and driving children and young people.

The following activities checked "Yes" are activities that we feel are appropriate for your participation.

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Coffee Hour: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Adult meetings with children in building, such as choir: No () Yes ()

Adult meetings without children in building: No () Yes ()

Have a key to the building: No () Yes ()

Intergenerational church activities No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Intergenerational group outings such as ice skating, baseball games, etc:

No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Alone in building with minister or other staff: No () Yes ()

Access to church computer: No () Yes ()

Social activities in other member’s homes with children present:

No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Other:
_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

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I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Minister

Date

Director of Religious Education

Date

Moderator

Date