

Note: The following policy document refers extensively to “Religious Education” at UCM. As of the 2018-2019 church year, we have adopted the language of “Spiritual Exploration” to describe our programming for children, youth, and adults that is focused on learning about Unitarian Universalism and world religions and on spiritual and faith development. The language has not been updated in this policy.

UNITARIAN CHURCH OF MONTPELIER

130 Main Street

Montpelier Vermont 05602

Sexual Abuse Prevention, Education, and Response Policy

Original Policy Approved by Executive Team, September 2013

Revisions Approved by Executive Team and Board, September, 2016

Acknowledgements

The Safe Congregation Task Force was established by UCM's Executive Committee in January, 2009, with the intent of reviewing UCM's current policies and practices in regard to safety. Given the breadth of safety concerns that are pertinent to a church community, the Executive Committee directed the Task Force to focus on child sexual abuse as an initial phase. The overall goal of the Task Force was to create a comprehensive policy for the prevention of child sexual abuse that would address prevention, education, and response to allegations of child sexual abuse within the UCM community.

We'd like to thank the following individuals for their involvement in the creation of this policy: Tina Ruth, Janet Poeton, Jenny Beaudin, and Ginnie Humphreys, members of the Safe Congregation Task Force; Rhoda Chickering served as the Executive Team Liaison; Peter Thoms assisted in the 2015-2016 revisions; and UCM staff members Sally Armstrong, Religious Education Director, Mara Dowdall (UCM Minister 2009-2013), Stephen Edington (UCM Interim Minister 2013-2015), and Joan Javier-Duval (UCM Minister 2015-present) also contributed significantly to the development of this document.

UNITARIAN CHURCH OF MONTPELIER

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION, EDUCATION AND RESPONSE POLICY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. UCM Philosophy for the Sexual Abuse, Prevention, Education, and Respose Policy
- II. Definitions
- III. Response Team
- IV. Supervision and Conduct of Staff and RE Volunteers
 - A. Hiring of Staff and Volunteers
 - B. Duties of DRE Related to Staff and Volunteer Supervision
 - C. Conduct of RE Staff and Volunteers when Working with Youth
- V. Responding and Reporting
 - A. Responding to Possible Sexual Abuse
 - B. Mandated Reporting Policy
 - C. Role of the Response Team
- VI. Restoration, Limited Access Agreement, and LAA Support Person
- VII. Training and Education
 - A. Educating Our Youth
 - B. Education and Training for Staff and Volunteers
 - C. Education and Training for the Congregation
- VIII. Appendix A. Policy Documents
 - A. Information Sheet for Adult Religious Education Volunteers
 - B. Information Sheet for Youth Religious Education Volunteers
 - C. Code of Ethics for Staff and Adult Volunteers Working with Children and Youth
 - D. Code of Ethics for Youth Working with Children
 - E. Code of Ethics for Coming of Age Parents
 - F. Limited Access Agreement Template
 - G. Overnight Guidelines

IX. Appendix B. Outside Resources

A. Resource List

B. *Suggested Reading for Children* – National Children’s Advocacy Center

C. *What is Child Sexual Abuse?* – OUR House

D. *Information Sheet* – OUR House

E. *Understanding and Coping with Sexual Behavior Problems in Children* –
National Child Traumatic Stress Network

X. Appendix C. Footnotes

XI. Appendix D. Bibliography

Unitarian Church of Montpelier

Sexual Abuse Prevention, Education, and Response Policy

I. UCM Philosophy for the Sexual Abuse Prevention, Education and Response Policy

We, the members and friends of the Unitarian Church of Montpelier (UCM), recognize, with sadness, the reality that children and young people today, including those in our congregation, are vulnerable to sexual abuse¹. As Unitarian Universalists, dedicated to the principles of the inherent dignity and worth of every person, and to justice and compassion, we are committed to creating in our congregation a safe environment that protects children and youth from harm, and promotes their spiritual growth.

Members and friends of UCM acknowledge that preventing and responding to sexual abuse in our congregation and in society is a necessary and complex goal. Education, training, careful hiring, and safety procedures are concrete steps we can take toward creating a safer environment for all concerned.

We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about these potential harms. We pledge to do our best to protect and support those who are at risk or in crisis and to conduct ourselves in a manner that conveys mutual respect, consideration, and accountability.

By breaking the silence that too often surrounds this sensitive topic, and by providing a forum for addressing possible problems and concerns, we will carry out our commitment to provide a safe environment for all children, youth, staff, and volunteers who participate in church-sponsored activities.

We will achieve these goals by:

Prevention:

- Screening and training all RE volunteers who work with children and youth
- Screening and training all UCM staff
- Screening and training UCM Board and Executive Team members
- Supervising children and youth and those who work with them

Education:

- Making the congregation aware of these policies and procedures
- Consistently teaching the Our Whole Lives curriculum to youth and adults

Response:

- Responding to allegations of sexual abuse

We believe that all members and friends of the Unitarian Church of Montpelier are responsible for providing a safe and caring community in which children, youth and the congregation-at-large are:

- Respected and their self-worth affirmed, and
- Encouraged in their spiritual, social and emotional growth

We are committed to the safety of our children, volunteers, staff, and all members and friends of our congregation, and to the principles of fairness, kindness and forgiveness that have long been part of our religious tradition.

II. Definitions

Abuse is an act committed by person (including a parent, caregiver, or teacher) in a position of trust, who harms or threatens to harm a child.

Child means a person who is under the age of 12.

Church Member is defined in the bylaws in Article 2.2.

DRE means the Director of Religious Education.

Executive Team (ET) means the group that manages the operations and business of UCM as defined in Article 3.4 of the bylaws.

Field Trip means a special event that begins and ends at the church with one or more intermediate destinations.

Friend means a person who has participated in an activity of the congregation at any time during the preceding six months, but who has not joined the UCM per Article 2.2 of the bylaws.

Limited Access Agreement means a written and signed agreement between the UCM Response Team and a person who is alleged to have, admits to having, is being investigated for having, or has been charged with or convicted of having committed sexual abuse.

Mandated Reporter means any individual required by law to report abuse or neglect as defined by Vermont Statute, 33 V.S.A. 4913.

Off-site Event means any church involved or sponsored activity that begins and ends at any location other than the church.

On-site Event means any activity that begins and ends at the church. This may include a short walk off of the church grounds if proper permissions have been given via registration.

Overnight means a special event that involves spending the night at UCM or off-site at another location for a UCM sponsored event.

RE Group means those children 17 years old or younger who have been assigned to a nursery, pre-school, or other Religious Education (RE) class, or are participating in any UCM sponsored program or activity.

RE Volunteer means an adult or older youth who works with children and youth in Church School classes, RE groups and other Church sponsored and related events, including paid child care providers.

Sexual Abuse means “sexual abuse” as defined by Vermont law: “Sexual abuse” consists of any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including incest; prostitution; rape; sodomy; or lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child; aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child; viewing, possessing, or transmitting child pornography, with the exclusion of the exchange of images between mutually consenting minors, including the minor whose image is exchanged; human trafficking; sexual assault; voyeurism; luring a child; or obscenity. (33 V.S.A. 4912 (15))

Youth means a person who is from age 12 through age 17.

*NOTE: “Child” under Vermont Statute is defined as a minor under the age of 18 (33 V.S.A. 4912(3)). For the purposes of this policy, child refers to anyone through age 11 and youth refers to anyone from age 12 through age 17.

III. Response Team

A Response Team (RT) will be charged with ensuring and maintaining the safety of our children and youth from sexual abuse.

The RT consists of four members, to include:

- Minister
- DRE; and
- Two members or friends of UCM appointed by the ET

More members may be added to the Response Team as necessary, to manage specific tasks.

Those serving on the RT will ideally have a mental health background or have other professional experience in physical, sexual, or emotional abuse issues of children and youth.

The RT will be responsible for the following:

- Meeting at least once per year and reporting to the ET and the congregation on its work, including adding any relevant updates to the annual report
- Reviewing this policy annually in the spring and considering pertinent changes to the document
- Making recommendations to the ET concerning this policy and related matters
- Supporting the DRE in assuring that criminal background checks are conducted for staff and volunteers as outlined in Section IV.
- Maintaining a library of resources, including a list of professionals experienced in working with sexual abuse issues
- Serving as liaisons to the religious education classes, youth groups and parents of children and youth involved in UCM's religious education programs
- Working together to respond to concerns of sexual abuse as outlined in Section V.
- Negotiating a Limited Access Agreement with UCM friends or members as outlined in Section VI.
- Regularly updating a policy brochure as outlined in Section VII.
- Supporting the DRE in implementation of annual trainings of staff and RE volunteers as outlined in Section VII.
- Ensuring the education of the congregation concerning this policy as outlined in Section VII.

See specific additional responsibilities described in Section V; Responding and Reporting.

Those serving on the RT will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure that information shared within the RT is kept confidential.

IV. Supervision and Conduct of Staff and RE Volunteers

A. Hiring of Staff and Volunteers

The DRE will participate in all hiring of staff and RE volunteers, paid or unpaid, who will be working with children and youth in the UCM.

Any applicants for staff or RE volunteer positions with a documented history of sexual abuse, or alleged or uninvestigated sexual abuse, may be prohibited from providing direct care or supervision of children or youth according to that individual's Limited Access Agreement (see VI, p. 17).

Before beginning their duties, all staff and adult volunteers working with children and youth will be required to undergo a Vermont criminal conviction background check, with additional checks from other states as deemed advisable. Such background checks will be conducted for all staff and adult volunteers every two years after the initial check.

All staff and adult RE volunteer applicants will be screened to determine whether they are listed on the Vermont Sex Offender Registry, or the registry of another state.

Any RE staff or volunteer (adult or youth) who participates in religious education on a regular basis will be trained about the Sexual Abuse Prevention, Education and Response Policy and will acknowledge his or her agreement to abide by the Policy on his or her Volunteer Information Sheet. Additionally, any RE staff or volunteer (adult or youth) who participates in religious education on a regular basis must read and sign the relevant Code of Ethics (Appendix A: C, D or E)

In addition to the above, all applicants wishing to provide religious education support at the UCM will be required to submit the following:

ALL UCM STAFF (in addition to other requirements for hiring UCM staff):

- Application and resume
- List of professional references
- Signed Code of Ethics form

RE VOLUNTEERS - Adults

- Information Sheet
- List of at least two personal and/or professional references who can speak to the individual's suitability to work with children
- Signed Code of Ethics form

Additionally, it is recommended that anyone wishing to work as an RE volunteer be a friend or member of the UCM congregation and have been attending services at the UCM for the previous six months.

RE VOLUNTEERS - Youth (18 years old and under)

- Information Sheet
- List of at least two personal references who can speak to the individual's suitability to work with children
- Signed Code of Ethics form

Youth volunteers will be required to complete an interview with the DRE before assuming any duties.

OCCASIONAL VOLUNTEERS

It is recognized that there are frequently individuals who volunteer who have direct contact with children or youth on an occasional basis, but who are not committing to a regular volunteer position. The DRE has discretion to determine whether occasional volunteers will be required to sign a Code of Ethics form and/or read the Sexual Abuse Prevention, Education and Response Policy before working with children or youth.

All Information Sheet forms, signed consents and background check reports shall be kept in a locked file secured by the DRE and Minister.

B. Duties of DRE Related to RE Staff and Volunteer Supervision

It will be the responsibility of the DRE to:

- Ensure that all RE staff and volunteers are oriented to this policy
- Ensure that all RE staff and volunteers have read and signed a Code of Ethics form annually
- Ensure that all parents of children and youth enrolling in RE programs are oriented to this policy
- Conduct background checks every two years or more frequently if deemed necessary for all staff and volunteers as outlined above
- Circulate among classrooms during church services where RE classes are in session to offer assistance and be available to substitute in emergency situations

C. Conduct of Staff and RE Volunteers Working with Children and Youth

All RE staff and volunteers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the DRE and are required to comply with the following policies to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth.

IN THE CLASSROOM, FIELD TRIPS, OVERNIGHTS AND OFF-SITE AND ON-SITE EVENTS

For purposes of this policy, all field trips, overnights and church-based events begin and end at the church.

1. RE volunteers may not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse children and youth; nor shall they use corporal punishment or abusive language under any circumstances.
2. If a child discloses incident(s) that might constitute abuse or neglect, the RE volunteer should follow the procedures on reporting of abuse and neglect as outlined in Section V. In the event that a child makes a disclosure of abuse and the RE volunteer feels that there is an immediate danger to that child, the RE volunteer will stay with the child until the DRE or Minister has been contacted.
3. Each RE class, group, or event shall have at least two RE volunteers present at all times with at least one RE volunteer being an adult 18 years or older. The Minister or DRE shall determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group or activity and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis.
4. If two RE volunteers are not available for a class or group:
 - a. The class may be combined with another class;
 - b. The class may be cancelled; or
 - c. Under extraordinary circumstances, the class will be conducted with one volunteer and the classroom door will remain open during the entire class and the DRE or designee will check that class frequently.
5. In order to provide visibility into classrooms, door windows will be uncovered at all times.
6. The DRE and/or designee shall circulate among the RE classrooms and monitor classroom activities at random during regular RE classes.
7. When taking children third grade or younger to the restroom, the RE staff or volunteer shall stay out of the restroom until the child has finished. An RE volunteer should enter and assist only when necessary.
8. Children third grade and younger must be picked up after RE classes by a parent or guardian unless prior arrangements have been made with the DRE or teacher.
9. All field trips must be approved by the DRE and participating children and youth must have a signed permission of a parent or guardian.
10. Any UCM sponsored field trips will be chaperoned by volunteers approved by the DRE.
11. Anyone volunteering to drive children and youth for a UCM sponsored field trip will provide to the DRE a valid driver's license, proof of automobile insurance, and age appropriate car seats.
12. During a field trip or event (off-site or on-site), no child or youth will ride alone in a vehicle with a UCM RE staff/volunteer/chaperon.
13. Any UCM sponsored overnight will abide by the UCM Overnight Guidelines (Appendix A. G.).

14. Only parents and guardians will be allowed to pick up children and youth after a field trip or overnight unless other arrangements are made with the DRE or the Coordinator of the event.
15. Alcohol, tobacco and drugs may not be used on UCM property at any time. RE volunteers will not work with children and youth when under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs or in circumstances which impair one's judgment or one's ability to function effectively in a leadership role. These restrictions apply equally to RE field trips.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

1. RE volunteers will not engage in the use of social media (i. e., Facebook or Twitter) with children and youth who are under their care/supervision on an individual basis. The use of social media groups (i. e., Facebook) are permitted as long as all youth in the RE group are included and at least two adults are included on the list.
2. With the exception of Coming of Age or other similar mentoring programs, no RE staff or volunteer will maintain electronic or phone communication with an individual child or youth under their care in a UCM program. For the purposes of Coming of Age and similar mentoring programs, electronic communication can be utilized between mentor and mentee as long as the child's or youth's parents and the DRE are copied on all communications.
3. It is recognized that an RE volunteer may have a prior relationship with a child or youth with whom they have had or are likely to have individualized electronic or phone communication and that that child may be enrolled in the UCM RE programs. In the event that an RE volunteer is charged with the care of a child or youth (in the context of an RE program) where such a pre-existing relationship exists, the RE volunteer is required to disclose that relationship to the DRE.

IN PERSON MEETINGS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Whenever possible, both the Minister and DRE should work together to counsel children or youth.
2. If the Minister or DRE counsels children or youth individually, each must inform the other prior to meeting with the child or youth. If unavailable, the Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee will be informed. Advanced scheduling is strongly encouraged, but notice immediately after counseling is permissible if prior notice is impossible. Additionally, whenever meeting with children or youth, door windows will be uncovered at all times to allow for visibility into the meeting space. 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.
3. For all other RE volunteers, two adults must be present when counseling youth or children on any personal situations, questions, or discussions.

V. Responding and Reporting

A. Responding to Possible Sexual Abuse

If a UCM member, friend, or staff member witnesses or hears something from a child or youth or someone else that leads him/her to suspect that a child or youth has been or is subject to sexual abuse, whether the alleged incident took place outside of the church or on church property, the member or friend should listen carefully to the child or youth, and affirm his or her courage in speaking up. **They should not ask investigative questions, which can affect official disposition of the matter at a later time. The individual should consult immediately with the Minister or, in the Minister's absence, with the DRE.**

If a UCM staff member, apart from the Minister, is suspected of sexual abuse, the RT will report immediately to the Board and make a recommendation for immediate suspension of that individual, pending the outcome of the assessment. The RT shall also follow the reporting procedures outlined below (V.B., page 15). If an RE volunteer is suspected of sexual abuse, the individual will be suspended immediately by the DRE after consultation with the RT, pending the outcome of the assessment.

If the minister is suspected of sexual abuse, the DRE and a member of the Board will be notified immediately and the reporting procedures outlined below (V.B., page 15) shall be followed. The Board, after careful review, shall have authority to suspend the minister under terms it shall specify pending the outcome of the assessment. In addition, the Board will take appropriate action within the Unitarian Universalist Association protocols.

If a Department for Children and Families (DCF) investigation substantiates that abuse has occurred, that individual's position within UCM will be terminated according to UCM Personnel Policies. If there is no DCF substantiation of sexual abuse, the RE volunteer or staff member may be reinstated.

The minister will reach out to the alleged victim(s) of abuse and their family when appropriate, to offer referrals for relevant support in the community including referrals to the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence's local programⁱⁱ. The Minister will be alert to offer support and ministry to *anyone* who is affected by the situation and who is in need.

B. Mandated Reporting Policy

If an individual witnesses or hears about an incident or incidents that rise to the level of "sexual abuse" as defined by Vermont law (33V.S.A. 4912 (15)) or that raises a question in that individual's mind of whether or not someone's behavior constitutes sexual abuse by Vermont law or as defined by this policy, the Department for Children and Families (DCF) should be consulted without delay.

If the individual who suspects child sexual abuse is a legally mandated reporter, as defined in 33V.S.A. 4913 (a), s/he must within 24 hours report their suspicions to the Family Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) on their 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free number, 1-800-649-5285.

It is important to remember that it is not the function of the congregation - neither the Minister, the DRE, a Board member, the Response Team, nor any member of the congregation - to conduct an investigation into possible child sexual abuse.

Our minister is a legally mandated reporter under Vermont statute (33 V.S.A. 4913 (a)(12) (exceptions noted in 4913 (j))). However, it is the policy of UCM that all RE volunteers and UCM staff are considered ethically mandated reporters.

Note: Those mandated to report abuse of children under Vermont law are also required to report any suspicions or evidence of non-sexual child abuse and/or neglect as outlined in 33 V.S.A. 4913. Although this UCM policy only focuses on child sexual abuse, we encourage any member, friend or staff of UCM who suspects physical and/or emotional abuse or neglect of a child to contact DCF immediately and make a report and/or contact the minister or DRE regarding the matter.

Before calling DCF, the reporting person should have, to the extent possible, the following information:

1. Names and address(es) of the child's parents or other persons responsible for the child's care
2. Name and age of the child
3. Nature and extent of the child's injuries together with any evidence of previous abuse and neglect of the child or the child's siblings
4. Any other information that might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries or reasons for the neglect as well as in protecting the child and assisting the family
5. Name and address and other contact information of the person making the report

Information in items 1 and 2 should be regularly gathered and available on the RE enrollment form at the beginning of the church year.

If the report is made verbally, the reporting person shall be asked by DCF to put what they have verbally reported in writing.

If the DRE, minister or individual are not sure whether a report to DCF is justified, the DRE, minister or individual should call DCF, describe the situation and ask their advice.

After reviewing the reporter's information, DCF will assess the situation and proceed as outlined in 33 V.S.A. 4915 and decide whether the report warrants an investigation. If so, they will begin an investigation within 72 hours.

Once an allegation of abuse has been made to the minister, s/he will notify the RT as soon as possible. If the minister is unavailable and the report has been made to the DRE, the DRE will be responsible for notifying the RT.

C. The Role of the Response Team

If convened, the RT will meet to discuss how best to support the congregation and those directly affected in each case. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality to protect the alleged victim, the accused person and the individual who initiated the report to DCF.

The Response Team should document all communications, including all telephone calls, and retain this documentation, along with any written reports on the matter, in a locked file maintained by the minister.

The minister and/or the RT will determine whether, and if so when, to seek legal counsel, to consult the UUA District, to notify the UCM insurance carrier, and/or to designate a spokesperson to represent UCM.

VI. Restoration

We know that religious communities are often unaware of being host to adult sex offenders. Research shows that congregations that ignore this fact and which create a culture of secrecy increase the likelihood of abuse. Additionally, research indicates that offenders who are supported by their community, able to maintain employment and have good social supports are less likely to recidivateⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, UCM is dedicated to collaborating with governmental and private agencies to help reintegrate offenders who have proven records of rehabilitation.

Limited Access Agreement

Limited Access Agreements (LAA) are intended to protect the Unitarian Church of Montpelier's children and youth from sexual abuse, and to help a person who has committed or been alleged to have committed sexual abuse be part of our spiritual community.

The LAA invites individuals who have committed or are alleged to have committed acts of sexual abuse to participate in certain aspects of congregational life, setting clear boundaries including what the individual will not do. The message to the individual is that he/she is both welcome to participate in adult worship, adult social and adult educational activities and that he/she must covenant with the congregation to abide by a plan that protects families of the congregation. Under no circumstances will such an agreement compromise the congregation's commitment to prevent child sexual abuse.

Those individuals who have committed or are alleged to have committed sexual abuse are expected to abide by a LAA created by the RT. Each LAA will be written specifically for a given individual and will specify what level of involvement that individual can have in the church community based on his or her criminal and/or behavioral history, as follows:

- If an individual is permanently listed on the sex offender registry, he or she will not be allowed to work directly with children and youth in any capacity.
- If an individual is listed on the sex offender registry for a set period of time, at the end of their required registration as a sex offender, and upon that individual's request for a change, the RT will meet to discuss whether or not that individual is suitable to work with children and youth in the congregation in any capacity. If applicable, the LAA for that individual will be updated to reflect any changes.
- If an individual has a criminal history, but is not required to register as a sex offender, the RT will decide what level of involvement, if any, is appropriate for that individual to have with children and youth.
- If an individual is under investigation for a sex related crime or sexual misconduct, he or she will not be allowed to work directly with children and/or youth until the matter is resolved. Upon completion of the investigation or resolution of accusations, the RT will meet to discuss what level of

involvement that individual may have, if any, with children and youth in the church community.

A LAA will also be required for anyone who has been involved in DCF where a report of child abuse has been made and substantiated against him or her.

If an individual refuses to sign the Limited Access Agreement, the RT will make it clear that she or he will be denied access to the congregation's functions and church property.

The RT should decide how often to meet with any individual with whom it has a LAA, to review the arrangement and address any concerns. In any case, each LAA will be reviewed at least annually, with participation of the participant as appropriate.

LAA Support Person

Based on the circumstances of a particular case, the RT may determine that a Support Person needs to be appointed to an individual under a Limited Access Agreement. The RT will weigh any relevant factors of a specific case to determine whether or not a Support Person is appropriate and will consider, among other factors, the age and apparent responsibility of the alleged offender, the UCM activities that he or she participates in, and the ties that he or she has to the community.

A Support Person's duty is to help a LAA participant abide by the agreement, and thus to protect him or her from further problems, and to protect children and youth from sexual abuse. The Support Person may do this by helping the participant recognize when she or he is in a situation where he or she may be at risk of violating the LAA. It is then the Support Person's duty to warn the LAA participant and to do his or her best to prevent any violation.

If the RT requires the appointment of a Support Person, the Support Person must be aware of the history of the LAA participant, the situation leading to this agreement, and be fully knowledgeable of the restrictions the LAA imposes on the participant. Additionally, the Support Person is required to sign and date the LAA in the presence of an RT member.

The LAA participant may suggest a person to serve as a Support Person, but the selection must be approved by the RT.

VII. Training and Education

Education and training are critical to the creation of a safe church environment. Information, knowledge, and understanding support the development of healthy relationships based on self-esteem and respect for others. Greater understanding of sexuality and abuse will make us better able to avoid situations that could lead to abuse, and to move more effectively toward justice and healing for us all. All church leaders as well as the RT share in the responsibility for educating the congregation around issues of sexual abuse and the related policies of UCM.

A. Educating Our Youth

A high quality sexuality education program, such as Our Whole Lives (OWL) is one of the best methods for sexual abuse prevention. OWL teaches children that their bodies are good and that their sexuality is a gift. The curriculum helps youth explore how to make good decisions and gives them the language to communicate accurately and effectively about sexuality. Given this information, children and youth are better prepared to respond appropriately when faced with abusive behavior, to assert their right to control their own bodies and to tell an adult if such behaviors occur.

The DRE and Religious Education Committee are expected to offer age-appropriate programs on sexuality, sexual health and prevention of sexual abuse. This will be accomplished primarily through the offering of OWL classes on a regular basis.

B. Educating and Training for Staff and Volunteers

All staff, RE volunteers and Lay Pastoral Care volunteers, paid or unpaid, will be required to participate in an annual orientation to this policy. This orientation will serve to do the following:

- Introduce and review this policy
- Discuss mandated reporting obligations and procedures
- Review the Code of Ethics documents
- Present information about local resources for support in the Montpelier and Central Vermont community related to sexual abuse

This training will be offered yearly at least two different times, daytime and evening, prior to the start of each church year. If anyone is unable to attend, a member of the Response Team or the DRE will review this policy, including the UCM's policy on mandated reporting, with that individual prior to the individual leading a class, working with children or youth or being a caregiver. Additionally, a list of resources in the Montpelier community related to sexual abuse will be provided to that individual. See Appendixes A and B.

C. Educating and Training for the Congregation

A brochure will be available that summarizes this Policy, including UCM's policy on mandated reporting. This brochure will be available to any member of the congregation, will be included in the staff and volunteer training and will be distributed during every New Member class.

Additionally, the brochure will be included in the UCM Weekly Announcements, distributed with the Order of Service at least once per year, and will be available on the UCM website. The brochure will be updated annually and should include local resources for those seeking help or assistance.

Additionally, the UCM will make every effort to educate the greater congregation about child sexual abuse. Possible strategies for engaging in primary prevention within our congregation include but are not limited to: relevant order of service inserts, newsletter articles, developing relationships with local organizations and experts, related sermons on child sexual abuse or sexual assault, open congregation meetings, and special speakers.

VIII. Appendix A. Policy Documents

- A. Information Sheet for Adult Religious Education Volunteers
- B. Information Sheet for Youth Religious Education Volunteers
- C. Code of Ethics for Staff and Adult Volunteers Working with Children and Youth
- D. Code of Ethics for Youth Working with Children
- E. Code of Ethics for Coming of Age Parents
- F. Limited Access Agreement Template
- G. Overnight Guidelines

IX. Appendix B. Outside Resources

- A. Resource List
- B. *Suggested Reading for Children* – National Children’s Advocacy Center
- C. *What is Child Sexual Abuse?* – OUR House
- D. *Information Sheet* – OUR House
- E. *Understanding and Coping with Sexual Behavior Problems in Children* – National Child Traumatic Stress Network

X. Appendix C. Footnotes

ⁱ According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be victims of sexual assault before the age of 18.

(www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/NSVRC_Publications_TalkingPoints_Understanding-Child-Sexual-Abuse-definitions-rates.pdf). The National Center for Crime Victim Services reports that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are victims of sexual assault. (www.victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/child-sexual-abuse-statistics). Discrepancies in data are due to reporting requirements and differing definitions. Regardless, we recognize that the incidents of sexual abuse for children are incredibly high and therefore warrant our attention.

ⁱⁱ The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence maintains a 24 hour hotline where individuals can speak to advocates about the situation. Vermont Network advocates are the only victim advocates in Vermont who are legally bound by confidentiality under 12 V.S.A. 1641. Anything said to them about a given situation must remain confidential unless the victim gives permission for them to share that information.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Corrections, The Essentials*; Chapter 6: Probation and community Corrections; Sage Publications; www.sagepub.com/upm-data/43447_6.pdf and *The Social Reintegration of Offenders and Crime Prevention* by Public Safety Canada; 2007; <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/soc-reint-eng.aspx#s3>.

XI. Appendix D. Bibliography

THE SAFE CONGREGATION HANDBOOK, Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in Our Faith Communities

Patricia Hoertdoerfer and Frederic Muir, Editors, Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), Boston, 2005

Contains multiple thoughtful and stimulating articles under the headings of Congregation and Culture, Transformational Leadership, Self-Care for Religious Leaders, Religious Education and Safety, and Congregational Justice Making, followed by outlines for workshops for each of those subjects and handouts to be copied. Contains several pages listing additional resources.

BALANCING ACTS - Keeping Children Safe in Congregations

Reverend Debra Haffner, download from the UUA website, uaa.org/leaders/library

A manual for setting up a safe congregation policy, balancing the following three tenets: ensuring the safety of children and youth in our congregations from sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment; treating with worth and dignity a person who has offended but seeks a spiritual home, while limiting such a person's activities; and educating ourselves about child sexual abuse and healthy childhood sexuality. Resources include a case study of a sex offender in church, and citations to resources on general information about child sexual abuse, information about sex offenders, organizations to which to refer for a treatment provider for an assessment, support for congregants, and for insurance issues.

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND DISTRICT'S SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Referring to the seven UUA Principles, the safety policy applies to District Annual Conferences, youth conferences, youth conference planning committees' (known as (DYC or YAC) meetings or retreats and youth trainings/workshops. The policy addresses the screening and selection of adults, supervision, on site safety practices, transportation to and from events, accountability, education and training, and offers many forms for use or adaption by congregations.

THE SAFE CONGREGATION HANDBOOK

The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia

The congregation's Safe Congregation policy, procedures and forms

TOWARD A SAFE CONGREGATION: A Policy for the Prevention of Community Breaking Behavior, Sexual Misconduct, Physical Abuse and Harassment

Community Congregation, Peaceful Valley, AL

The congregation's policy, procedures and forms

A SAFE CONGREGATION

Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society, Middlebury, VT.

**Untitled policy of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Upper Valley,
Norwich, VT.**

MMUUF SAFE CONGREGATIONS POLICY

Mount Mansfield Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Jericho, VT.

RESPONSIBLE STAFFING: Guidelines on Screening Practices for Use by Unitarian
Universalist Association Organizations When Adding Clergy, Professional Leaders, Staff
and Volunteers.