



Unity Church Unitarian Safe Church Policy – Ministry with Children and Youth

Recognizing the need for the safest possible environment for our children, youth and teachers, the Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) and Director of Religious Education (DRE) adhere to the following guidelines, approved by the church's Executive Team:

1. Staffing (Paid and Volunteer)

- All paid staff members who work with children and youth will be subject to state and national criminal background checks, including sexual criminal records.
- All volunteers who work with youth and may potentially be in a setting where only one adult is regularly present for a period of time will be subject to state and national criminal background checks, including sexual criminal records. This includes all advisors of the Grade 9 Our Whole Lives (OWL) and Coming of Age (COA) programs. OWL advisors are expected to maintain confidentiality within the boundaries of mandatory reporting (see below). Coming of Age mentors are not subject to criminal background checks as a prerequisite for volunteer service in their capacity. Families may choose to arrange meetings outside of church time during which mentors and youth are together unsupervised; this is at their discretion. All church-sponsored Coming of Age events involving mentors will adhere to the policies outlined in this document.
- All background checks are conducted at the expense of Unity Church – Unitarian, are held in confidentiality and are available for review by the subject of the check upon request.
- All volunteer teachers and paid staff are considered mandatory reporters under the laws of the State of Minnesota. If an adult has reason to believe that a child or youth is a victim of or at risk of becoming a victim of sexual abuse, physical abuse or neglect, the adult must report their observations and concerns to the Director of Religious Education in a private meeting or private communication. It is then the responsibility of the DRE to contact the appropriate local or state authorities.
- The ministers of the church may preclude the volunteer service of a person whom they believe to be a risk to the safety or well-being of self or others without being asked to violate confidentiality by disclosing their justification.

2. Church-sponsored Field Trips

- For the purposes of distinguishing between onsite events and offsite events, the grounds of Unity Church include the building, parking lots, adjacent sidewalks, the greenspace on Portland Avenue and the park across Grotto Street (owned by House of Hope). Parents must be notified and give written permission in the form of an initialed sign-in sheet for children to be taken over to the park. Adult to child ratios must be followed. However, excursions to the park are not considered 'field trips'.

- Any excursion beyond Unity Church – Unitarian and the park across Grotto Street is considered a 'field trip'. Parents must sign permission slips when children and youth are leaving the church premises by vehicle or on foot. The destination and expected time of return must be posted near the church entrance.
- The leaders must have a list of names, emergency contacts and signed medical release forms with them at all times.
- At a minimum, there must be two adults present and a 1 to 7 ratio of adults to children and youth maintained with all groups. Children and youth are ages 3 to 17, inclusive.
- At a minimum, there must be a 1 to 4 ratio of adults to infants and toddlers with all groups. Infants and toddlers are ages 6 months to 3 years.
- All drivers who provide transportation for church-sponsored events must be covered by their own car insurance. Proof of insurance coverage and a copy of drivers' license must be filed in the church office with the Director of Religious Education.
- Cars must have functional seat belts; adults, children and youth must wear them properly. All laws regarding car and booster seats must be followed.
- If a driver is under 21, children and youth can be driven only with written permission from the parent(s) of every occupant of the car.

3. Building Safety

- A first aid kit must be available in the nursery, preschool room, Art room, Science room, and Body room. An escape plan and the location of the fire extinguisher must be posted near each classroom door as well as next to each fire extinguisher.
- A review of universal precautions for dealing with bodily fluids and a review of fire escape plans must be part of teacher training.
- The Religious Education Ministry Team must conduct a Sunday fire drill annually for the children and youth program.
- Fire alarms and fire extinguishers will be tested on an annual basis.
- The basement hallways will be kept free of obstruction in accordance with local fire codes.
- Any storage areas, freezers, refrigerators, electrical equipment or any other potential hazards will be fitted with appropriate childproof safety equipment.

4. Protection and Safety of Children and Youth

➤ Sunday Religious Education Classes

- A parent, guardian or responsible adult must be in the church building during all Sunday Religious Education classes through Grade 8. OWL participants, Grade 9 COA participants and High School youth will have a medical release on file.
- Children through Grade 6 must only be released from class to the parent who brought him or her. Teachers must be notified in writing if other pick up arrangements are made.
- Children ages 3 to 5 use the classroom bathroom with the permission and help of the Spirit Play teacher. Children 6 to 12 go to the bathroom in pairs with the permission of the Workshop Rotation teacher or Journey Guide. Children ages 13 and over go to the bathroom with the permission of the teacher.
- There must be a minimum of two adults present in the building, at youth group meetings, and at other events involving children and youth of the church. Youth and child to adult ratios will be followed.
- A reasonable ratio of persons to space will be maintained during all MCY programming. The capacity of the Spirit Play classrooms has been set at 24 persons.

(Protection and Safety of Children and Youth, continued...)

The capacity of the Workshop Rotation rooms has been set at 16 persons. The capacity of the Junior High rooms has been set at 18 persons. The capacity of the COA/OWL room has been set at 30 persons.

- An established routine is in place for paid Religious Education staff and or Religious Education volunteers to observe classrooms on Sunday mornings to ensure volunteer teachers are present and windows are not covered.
- Some children with special needs may not be able to be safely and successfully accommodated within the two-volunteer arrangement. Other arrangements, including classroom aides, volunteer supervision, etc. will be made with families on a case-by-case basis.
- Families sometimes choose to make alternative transportation arrangements to and from church and church-sponsored events that involve non-family drivers, including drivers under the age of 21. These arrangements are at the discretion of the parent(s) and Unity will not be liable for damage or injury.

- Complaints of sexual harassment will be taken seriously and dealt with in a spirit of compassion and justice.
- There must be no use of alcohol or illegal drugs at MCY-sponsored events involving adults, children or youth.

5. Overnight Policy

- All overnights must be staffed by a minimum of two chaperones of different gender identities for mixed-gender groups.
- The ratio of adults to youth beyond the two required chaperones is 1:7.
- All attendees must have a medical release signed by a parent or guardian.
- Any youth who violates church policy by using alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs will be sent home with a parent, regardless of the time or location of the overnight. Individual covenants will be made with youth who violate overnight policies to allow for their continued participation and the reestablishment of a trusting, respectful relationship.

6. Youth Conference Policy

Unity Church – Unitarian does not assume responsibility for the safety of youth traveling to or participating in “youth conferences” at sites other than Unity Church, neither is the church responsible for due diligence in regard to conference sponsors selected by the youth and their families. The church strongly recommends that parents read the individual conference guidelines for the particular event. The church also recommends that parents be familiar with the youth’s sponsor, preferably an adult over the age of 25 from the Unity community and that a medical release be provided to that adult for the duration of the event.

In the event that Unity Church – Unitarian hosts a youth conference on site, all Unity Safe Church Policies supersede the event policies proposed by the district or the planning committee. Unity Church requires adult sponsors to remain with their youth at the conference at all times.