

Safe Congregation Guidelines
First Unitarian Church of Lynchburg

Our Living Covenant: Maintaining Right Relations for a Safe and Healthy Community

This church is a place of safety and dignity for each person's mind, body, and spirit.

Recognizing the inherent differences of interpersonal power between individuals, we strive to live in right relationship, refraining from exploiting each other's vulnerabilities, and nurturing the growth and happiness of everyone who receives our ministry.

Toward this vision, we covenant to affirm and promote:

- Honesty and authenticity in our relationships
- Words that are supportive and caring, not belittling or demeaning
- A welcoming and non-judgmental attitude
- Respect for each person's boundaries of mind, body, and spirit
- Listening to one another
- Appropriate displays of our emotional reality
- Structures for responding constructively to incidents of misconduct and safety concerns.

To support our efforts to live consistently into our vision of right relationship, we have created, and will continue to revise this document as a living collection of guidelines, to inform our life together.

Topics included herein:

- Religious Education Safety Policy
- Establishment and Role of Right Relations Response Team
- Conflict Resolution Process: Guidelines and Suggestions for Success
- Congregational Role as Employer
- Right Relations Covenants with Individuals
- Denial of Access to Ministry and Fellowship
- Building Safety: Fire, Medical, Emergency Contacts
- A referral list of committee chairs, officers and staff

Religious Education - Safety Policies

- No running on church campus or in church or Unitarian House buildings.
- Children under 12 must be accompanied by parents during non-RE time.
- Children must wear shoes at all times other than when specifically designated during RE time.
- Children are to stay on church premises unless accompanied by a parent or guardian unless participating in a designated field trip with parental permission.
- There are to be two RE teachers/helpers in each classroom at all times during RE.
- All participants in our RE program are to treat one another with respect and compassion. Bullying or any form of violence against another person will not be tolerated.
- Children under the age of 12 are not allowed on the elevator without an adult.
- Children are not to bring weapons or weapon-like toys to church at any time.

The RE Leadership Team suggests the following set of expectations for all of our church programming which involves children and youth:

- The relationship between youth and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if 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 own bodies and minds.
- Volunteers and staff will not engage in behavior with children or youth which constitutes any sort of verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

- Volunteers and staff will not engage in sexual, seductive, sexually harassing or erotic behavior with children or youth.
- Volunteers and staff will not allow the use of drugs, alcohol or any sort of illegal activities among children or youth.
- Corporal punishment may not be used under any circumstances.
- No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse) shall work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- All adult volunteers involved in the religious education program of our church must have been active in the congregation for at least three (preferably six) months.
- Adult volunteers and staff with children and youth during religious education sponsored events shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth in the RE area. On trips outdoors, children should be accompanied by two adults. Exceptions for exigent circumstances may be made by the primary on-site adult leader.
- All applicants for compensated positions must complete an application form and supply at least two references. These references should be people who have known the applicant for at least three years, preferably in relation to previous work with children or youth. A government-issued photo identification, such as a driver’s license, must be presented. All compensated workers must consent to a criminal background check and such check must be performed.
- All workers and volunteers will read and agree to abide by these expectations and policies before beginning their assignments.

Establishment and Role of Right Relations Response Team (RRRT)

There shall be a Right Relations Response Team (RRRT), appointed by the Board, for the purpose of responding to, and/or helping congregants respond to incidents of acute misconduct, destructive behaviors, or ongoing patterns of hurtful behaviors, with the intent of de-escalating situations of heightened emotional chaos, restoring right relations through accountability and helping individuals and groups set healthy boundaries.

For instance, the RRRT will help the congregation respond to disruptive or dangerous behavior in church events. If an individual or group interrupts any church function in a threatening, aggressive or disruptive manner such that a reasonable person might assess that they pose a potential threat to the safety of the community, that person will be asked to leave the church buildings. If they refuse to leave or fail to respond, we shall contact the police via the 911 emergency response system, and attempt to keep disruptor(s) engaged or distracted until the police arrive.

See article about UUNO 2014 incident “How to respond to intruders in worship” on uua.org

Other areas of RRRT interest:

- Know about community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors.
- Know about state laws regarding reporting abuse.
- Be a resource for people to share their concerns.
- Work with RE Committee to facilitate annual training for religious education staff and volunteers on issues, policies, and procedures relevant to sexual/physical abuse.
- Work with the Religious Education committee to assure that the sex abuse education sections of the Our Whole Lives curricula are offered at each age level.
- Meet with individuals who may require a Personalized Covenant for safe participation in church activities.
- Receive allegations of possible abuse, and develop a timely process for handling of such allegations. This committee will offer a report at each annual meeting of the congregation

- Engage resources for individuals impacted by incidents of trauma or abuse in the church

Members of the team will engage in ongoing study to continually develop best practices for conflict resolution and incident intervention.

The RRRT will educate the congregation about ways of living our values in conflicted situations through a variety of venues (e.g., Nuusletter articles, flash tutorials in Sunday Services, workshops, printed materials)

Conflict Resolution Process

Within an atmosphere of mutual covenant, differences of opinion and their resolution through compromise or consensus can enhance a sense of community. However, differences or misunderstandings that go unresolved and descend into prolonged conflict can threaten the social fabric of our church. We recognize that conflict may arise from time to time and that, when it does, its management and resolution are paramount. We recognize that such conflict may occur between members, members and staff, members and minister, or staff and minister.

We preface these suggestions with the common sense wisdom that we all should adhere to the UU Principles and Purposes, exhibiting behaviors that enhance the dignity and inherent worth of all participants: expressing sincere appreciation; allowing for human fallibility; dealing directly with each other; speaking softly; being creative in problem solving; maintaining a sense of humor; actively listening and clarifying what we hear; letting others have their say; respecting boundaries that may differ from our own; respecting confidentiality; refraining from harmful gossip about others; and speaking honestly.

Each person, regardless of his or her role in the church, is expected to live this covenant within the context of their relationship with the church community.

The RRRT will utilize the following process for addressing conflicts which are brought to them for assistance. It is part of our commitment to be aware of and at all times try to follow the “Path of Right Relations”: to speak directly to one another, not about another, especially with concerns.

The “Path of Right Relations” is, as follows:

When Party A approaches a member of the RRRT with a behavioral/ relational concern about party B, the following evaluative process will be pursued.

Questions for Party A:

1. Have you spoken directly with Party B?
 - a. If Yes, Are there further unresolved issues? If yes, go to Step 2. If there are no issues and you still want to talk, I am available.
 - b. If you have not spoken directly with Party B, Go to Step 2
2. Do you feel comfortable going to Party B?
 - a. Yes: RRRT offers encouragement, coaching
 - b. No: Go to Step 3
3. Would you like for me to go to Party B with you?
 - a. Yes: A & RRRT arrange meeting with B for conversation.
 - b. No: Go to step 4
4. Do I have your permission to go to Party B to openly discuss your concerns, naming you and interpreting your concerns as best I can?
 - a. Yes: Arrange for open, honest conversation with Party B

b. No: Step 5

5. In that case, I can offer to listen attentively to your concerns and help you find some other constructive course of action.

Information shared with the RRRT will remain confidential within the RRRT except:

By permission of the participants

In extreme cases, such as identified threats to the safety and well-being of the church or any persons. If confidences are to be shared, the RRRT will ensure that participants know what will be shared with whom, how, and for what purpose, except when to reveal disclosure would further endanger any party.

Congregational Role as an Employer.

The congregation acknowledges and embraces its role as an employer, and though we do not have specific policies in place, we seek to embody our values in that role.

Right Relations Covenants with Individuals

We have a responsibility to respect the worth and dignity of every person, and to provide a congregational home to all who seek one, while honoring that there are other individuals who, for a variety of reasons may need to have clearly defined boundaries on their participation:

- Individuals who have a history of predatory or abusive behavior, and need to be kept away from situations where they could be tempted to abuse again, and to protect people in the church from such abuse.
- Individuals whose public record makes them vulnerable to false accusations, and so need to be protected from inappropriate situations.
- Individuals who are under probation and need to conform to the conditions of that probation

In such cases, the Right Relations Response Team will develop with said individuals a covenant for safe participation.

Denial of access to ministry and fellowship

If an individual's behavior is determined by the RRRT to represent a threat to the safety and health of the congregation, the RRRT may recommend to the Board that said individual be excluded from the life of the church.

A confidential file of information related to such incidents, and Individual Safety Covenants shall be maintained in the archives as "Sensitive Material".

Building Safety: Crisis, Fire, Medical, Emergency Contacts

(We must develop an evacuation plan, in consultation with the Fire Department, to be included here)

There are fire extinguishers in the following locations:

Unitarian House:

Hallway outside the Office

Terrace Level at the bottom of the stairs

Church/Addition

Hallway from Sanctuary to Fellowship Hall

Fellowship Hall Kitchen, near the door

First Aid Kits shall be maintained in these locations:

Religious Education Main Room, in cabinet outside Brazelton Nursery
Bathroom by the Church Office in Unitarian House
Kitchen Pantry off the Fellowship Hall

In case of fire:

Pull the fire alarm and evacuate the building
Call 911

In case of an active shooter crisis:

Run Away!

If you can't run, Hide – If they can't see you, you're not a target.

Fight only if you have no other recourse

Referral List

The church shall maintain a list of individuals people may contact regarding a variety of situations. As the individuals in these roles will continually change, we submit here the positions to which contact information should be shared. We will publish a list in the church directory, and post in various locations around the church.

Pastoral Emergencies: Minister

Incidents of Abuse, Misconduct or Unsafe Behavior: Right Relations Response Team

Church Policy Questions: Executive Board

Church Calendar and Building Reservations: Administrative Assistant

Building Maintenance issues: Chair of the Building Committee

Future steps in the life of this document

Present public draft to congregation via website, printed copies in Fellowship Hall

Hold a Town Hall Meeting

Board to appoint RRRT

Change bylaws concerning Committee on Ministry (Annual Meeting in May, 2018)

Our sincere thanks to the Safety Guidelines Team for all their hard work to create this document:

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Drafted 2018