

# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF JACKSON

## Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy

Unitarian Universalism is a religious tradition that calls diverse people to join together in covenantal relationship for acceptance, support, and encouragement of personal and spiritual growth. As Unitarian Universalists, we the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jackson (UUCJ), are called to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and practice justice, equity and compassion in human relations. In keeping the bonds of covenantal relationships and ensuring just, equitable, and compassionate human relations that preserve the worth and dignity of all, we accept the responsibility to protect those entrusted to our care from harm in the form of abuse or neglect, and undertake the following actions to ensure that we provide a safe and secure environment for all who are served by our ministries.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to ensure all people, especially vulnerable populations, e.g., children, youth, or adults with cognitive impairments, who are in the care of employees or volunteers of the UUUCJ are protected from abuse or neglect and are provided a safe and secure environment in which they may pursue personal and spiritual growth.

**Scope:** This policy applies to all current and future employees and volunteers who supervise UUCJ-sponsored activities. This policy does not cover suspected child abuse or neglect as defined by Mississippi statutes that may occur outside of UUCJ-sponsored activities, such as in the homes of those attending UUCJ. This policy is not intended, however, to limit the personal and professional responsibilities of persons who are required to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the Mississippi Department of Human Services. These individuals are urged to report any such cases as dictated by their professional ethics.

### Definitions for the purpose of this policy:

Child	any individual age birth through twelve (12) years
Youth	any individual age thirteen (13) through seventeen (17) years
Vulnerable Adult	any individual age eighteen (18) years or older with cognitive, emotional, and/or other impairments with diminished ability to make fully informed decisions for him/herself, lacks basic life skills, requires assistance with daily living, and/or is at risk if assistance is not provided
Vulnerable Populations	includes any children, youth, and any vulnerable adults
Staff	any employee of UUCJ who is compensated for assigned and supervised

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Member	duties,not including any independent contractor who is self-employed or an employee of a company hired to provide a service
Supervisor	a staff member or volunteer with an <u>ongoing responsibility</u> of overseeing staff members or volunteers in the care and education of children and youth, not including a parent, guardian or custodian who provides supervision to their own child(ren)
Nursery Attendant	a staff member or volunteer with <u>ongoing or temporary responsibility</u> for providing care for children during UUCJ-sponsored activities
Religious Education Teacher (RE Teacher)	a staff member or volunteer with an <u>ongoing responsibility</u> for planning and leading religious education classes or activities for children or youth and who has regular supervised or unsupervised contact with children and youth ages six (6) through seventeen (17) years
Religious Education Assistant (RE Asst.)	a staff member or volunteer with an <u>ongoing or temporary responsibility</u> for assisting a Religious Education Teacher in planning and leading religious education classes or activities for children or youth and who has occasional supervised contact with children and youth ages six (6) through seventeen (17) years
Youth Leader	a staff member or volunteer with an <u>ongoing responsibility</u> for planning and leading religious education classes or activities for youth and who has regular supervised or unsupervised contact with youth ages thirteen (13) through seventeen (17) years
Youth Assistant	a staff member or volunteer with an ongoing or temporary responsibility for assisting a Youth Leader in planning and leading religious education classes or activities for youth and who has occasional supervised contact with youth ages thirteen (13) through seventeen (17) years
Child Abuse	behavior which causes or allows to be caused upon a child or youth maltreatment such as sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, nonaccidental physical injury or other maltreatment, but does not include physical restraint or punishment performed by a parent, guardian or custodian in a reasonable manner that is intended to be instructive or corrective in nature
Criminal Background Check	a procedure conducted by an authorized entity to check databases and other sources of information to determine if an employee or volunteer candidate has had records of criminal behavior

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- A. All staff members and volunteers who will work with vulnerable populations at or on the behalf of UUCJ are expected to have the following affiliations with UUCJ:
  - 1. *RE Teachers and Youth Leaders* must be members of UUCJ, as defined in the *UUCJ Bylaws and Policies & Procedures Handbook*, or a staff member.
  - 2. *Nursery Attendants, RE Assistants, and Youth Assistants* must be members or friends of UUCJ, as defined in the *UUCJ Bylaws and Policies & Procedures Handbook*, or a staff member.
  
- B. All staff members and volunteers who will work with vulnerable populations will be screened before they are allowed to supervise vulnerable populations at or on the behalf of UUCJ or for UUCJ-sponsored activities. This screening process will require the completion of an application, provision of identifiable information, and verification of information provided.
  
- C. All staff members and volunteers who will work with vulnerable populations are required to follow the policies and procedures of the UUCJ when they supervise vulnerable populations at or on the behalf of UUCJ or for UUCJ-sponsored activities. Failure to follow these policies or procedures may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including reporting of violations to appropriate authorities, as determined by the Board of Trustees.
  
- D. All members and friends, including staff members, volunteers, children and youth, and their parents, will be notified about policies and procedures of UUCJ to prevent abuse or neglect.
  
- E. All instances of suspected abuse or neglect by members and friends, including staff members and volunteers, will be reported to the Board of Trustees and referred to authorities for investigation and/or prosecution. The following are violations of the Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to a supervisor or Board of Trustee member after the safety of the child involved has been assured:
  - 1. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child.
  - 2. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child.
  - 3. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child.
  - 4. Infliction or physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child.
  - 5. Physical neglect of a child, including failure to provide adequate supervision in UUCJ activities.
  - 6. Mental or emotional injury to a child.

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7. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function for children which is attended by or sponsored by the UUCJ.
8. The presence, possession, and/or consumption of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol (including being under the influence of such substances) while leading or participating in any function for children which is attended by or sponsored by the UUCJ.

**Drafted February 2014**

**Adopted April 2014**

### Procedures

#### Screening Procedures

All staff members and volunteers who will work with vulnerable populations will be screened using the following process before they are allowed to supervise vulnerable populations at or on the behalf of UUCJ or for UUCJ-sponsored activities:

1. Persons wishing to become a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations must complete an application:
  - a. Persons wishing to become a staff member must complete an *Application for Employment* to provide information about previous employment, experience with children, references, criminal record information, and other pertinent details. [See *Application for Employment*]
  - b. Persons wishing to become a volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations must complete a *Volunteer Application* to provide information about criminal record information and other pertinent details. [See *Volunteer Application*]
2. Persons wishing to become a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations must provide photographic identification and/or consent to being photographed.
  - a. Closeup portrait photographs with clear details of the face of the applicant are only acceptable photographs for these purposes. Snapshots, group photos, or photographs focused on scenery are not acceptable.
  - b. If a photo is not provided with the application, a supervisor or a Board of Trustees member will take a photograph to be attached to the application and kept on file in the church office.

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3. Persons wishing to become a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations ages eighteen (18) years or older must provide fingerprints and/or consent to being fingerprinted.
  - a. Fingerprint cards may be obtained at the nearest Mississippi Highway Patrol office.
  - b. Fingerprints may be made at any police station, highway patrol office, or other law enforcement establishment.
4. Persons wishing to become a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations must undergo a criminal background check.
  - a. Using the information provided on a candidate application, a supervisor or member of the Board of Trustees will submit identifiable information to a service for conducting a criminal background check.
    - i. UUCJ has an account with SafeChurch® Shepherd's Watch (GP # 1472874), an online criminal background check service.
    - ii. A supervisor or member of the Board of Trustees will submit the information provided by the applicant and pay for the criminal background check by either paying and seeking reimbursement or by billing the UUCJ for the associated fee.
  - b. The resulting report will be reviewed and determined to be acceptable or unacceptable.
    - i. If the report shows no criminal history, the report will be deemed acceptable and filed with the person's application in the church office.
    - ii. If the report shows a criminal history of abuse or neglect of vulnerable populations, the report will be deemed unacceptable and filed with the person's application in the church office. In addition, the Board will be notified immediately for subsequent action, which may include the alerting of authorities of the attempt of a person with a criminal history of abuse or neglect of attempting to be employed or volunteer to work with vulnerable populations.
    - iii. If the report shows a criminal history of crimes other than abuse or neglect of vulnerable populations, the report will be referred to the Board of Trustees to further investigate and determine if the report will be deemed acceptable or unacceptable. The report and documentation of the subsequent decision by the Board of Trustees will be filed with the person's application in the church office.

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5. For persons wishing to become a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations with an acceptable criminal background check, a supervisor or member of the Board of Trustees will inquire with references provided on the application to verify the information provided and determine acceptability of the person for employment or volunteer status.
6. The names of persons completing the process outline above who are deemed acceptable applicants for becoming a staff member or volunteer who will work with vulnerable populations will be presented for approval to the Board of Trustees.

### **Training Procedures**

All staff members and volunteers who will work with vulnerable populations will be provided information and training annually on:

- a. Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy including procedures for reporting instances of suspected abuse and/or neglect; and
- b. Procedures for supervision of children and youth; and
- c. Procedures for documentation of supervision and/or incidents.

### **Supervision Procedures**

To reduce the likelihood of instances of abuse or neglect, the following procedures will be undertaken for the supervision of children and youth:

- a. A minimum of two, non-related Nursery Attendants, RE Teachers, RE Assistants, Youth Leaders and/or Youth Assistants must be present with children at all times.
- b. All activities for children and youth held on the premises of UUCJ must be held in highly visible locations, such as the UUCJ Sanctuary (main building), Religious Education building, and/or grounds.
- c. No activities for children and youth are to take place in private rooms, offices or isolated parts of a building, such as closets and unused or locked rooms. The small classrooms where children and youth are active should have an open door. (Note: small child gates may be used to limit the wandering of young children.)
- d. Supervisors should make frequent, unannounced visits to randomly monitor all children's and youth's activities.

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- e. Parents or guardians of a child are the only adults authorized to pick up a child who has been entrusted to the care of UUCJ.
- f. All suspicious behavior such as closed/locked doors and/or the presence of children or youth in remote or unassigned areas must be reported immediately to the supervisor and/or a Board of Trustees member.
  - i. The report of suspicious behavior will be investigated immediately upon notification.
  - ii. Any instances of suspected abuse or neglect by members and friends, including staff members and volunteers, will be reported to the Board of Trustees and referred to authorities for investigation and/or prosecution, as applicable.
- g. The following acts or omissions are violations of the Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to the Supervisor in charge after the safety of the child involved has been assured.
  - i. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child.
  - ii. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child.
  - iii. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child.
  - iv. Infliction or physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child.
  - v. Physical neglect of a child, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to activities of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jackson.
  - vi. Mental or emotional injury to a child.
  - vii. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function for children which is attended by or sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jackson.
  - viii. The presence, possession, and/or consumption of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol (including being under the influence of such substances) while leading or participating in any function for children which is attended by or sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jackson.

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