

# Abuse Prevention

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# Abuse and Misconduct

Foothill Unitarian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all who engage in our community, with special care for the children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our program and activities. By implementing the practices described in this handbook, our goal is to protect our community from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

We strive to ensure the existence of a caring religious community, free from violence and abuse of all kinds including intimidation, coercion, sexual harassment and physical and sexual abuse. By adopting this policy, we declare our support and concerted effort to create a life-affirming culture and safe environment for children, youth and adults.

This policy has been written with the following objectives:

- To provide guidelines and procedures that will promote a safe and caring environment for all who participate in programs offered by Foothills Unitarian Universalist Church.
- To provide guidelines to decrease the risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse while an infant, child or youth is in the care of a Foothills Unitarian Universalist Church staff person or volunteer and for vulnerable adults who are visited or transported by volunteers.
- To provide guidelines and procedures regarding the selection, training and supervision of adult staff and volunteers.
- To provide a caring and appropriate response to victims of abuse. - To provide guidelines for dealing with a report of abuse and for communicating with authorities and with the press in such an event.
- To help reduce Foothills Unitarian Church's exposure to risk and liability in our programs.

# Classroom Set-Up

## Two Adult Classrooms

It is the policy of Foothills Unitarian Church that on-going activities and classes for children and youth shall be supervised by two screened and approved volunteers. Two adults will be present in each classroom or doors will be left open.

- In the event that an adult volunteer becomes incapacitated and unable to carry out assigned responsibilities the DRE, Parish Visitor Coordinator, or the person in charge of the program or activity shall be notified and appropriate arrangements shall be made for the care of the infants, children or youth in attendance.
- The Foothills Unitarian Church may choose to provide childcare for meetings, programs, classes, and other events that are a part of congregational activities, at the discretion of the DRE. If childcare is not arranged by Foothills Unitarian Church, parents or guardians may arrange with the DRE to use the facilities of Foothills Unitarian Church for childcare. The parents or guardians of these children are responsible for hiring and supervising the child caregivers for their children. The DRE will provide a list of screened child caregivers as a courtesy, but Foothills Unitarian Church accepts no responsibility for caregivers hired by the parents or guardians.
- If a staff person or primary volunteer wishes to meet with a child, youth or vulnerable adult one-on-one outside of normal classroom or program activities, the parent or guardian of that child or youth or vulnerable adult must give explicit permission for the meeting to occur. If the child or youth does not want the parent to be notified of the meeting, then a second staff person must be present for the meeting. In the case of high school youth, a second young person of the same gender as youth requesting the meeting may sit in.

## Open Classrooms

Classrooms will be arranged so that windows are not totally obstructed and dividers or curtains are partially open.

The DFM or someone appointed by the DFM to act in her/his place will observe classrooms without prior notification to the teachers each Sunday.

Parents and guardians are welcome to observe RE classrooms at any time. However, whenever possible, we strongly encourage parents to inform the teacher and/or DRE in advance, as unannounced visits can be disruptive.

# Definitions of Abuse

Colorado state law defines child abuse in these terms:

Abuse involves an injury to a person's life or health, or permitting them to be unreasonably placed in a situation that poses a threat of injury to their life or health, or engaging in a continued pattern of conduct that results in malnourishment, lack of proper medical care, cruel punishment, mistreatment, or an accumulation of injuries that ultimately results in the death of a that person or causes serious bodily injury. In this section, "child" means a person under the age of sixteen years. The law also says no person, other than the perpetrator, complicitor, coconspirator, or accessory, who reports an instance of abuse to law enforcement officials, shall be subjected to criminal or civil liability for any consequence of making such report unless he knows at the time of making it that it is untrue. Abuse may be physical, neglect, sexual, emotional or parental substance abuse.

The Colorado Department of Education defines:

- **Physical Abuse** - includes injuries of a non-accidental nature, including soft tissue damage, broken bones, burns, head injury, and the like.
- **Negligent Abuse** includes activities that threaten the person's health or welfare, for example, lack of adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical care; allowing inappropriate use of illegal or misprescribed substances; or putting a person at risk of a serious physical injury.
- **Sexual Abuse and Exploitation** - includes incest, indecent exposure, fondling, rape, pornography, and sexual exploitation.
- **Emotional or Mental Injury/Abuse** can occur when excessive or unrealistic demands are placed on a child. It includes verbal abuse, such as name-calling, yelling, criticism, and/or teasing.
- **Emotional neglect** results when a person does not receive personal warmth, attention, or supervision.
- **Parental Substance Abuse** includes child's exposure to harm prenatally due to mother's use of drug/illegal substance and/or manufacturing of controlled substances in child's presence or on premise with child.

No Minister, adult leader, parish visitor, child care employee, religious education program volunteer (RE Teacher, Youth Advisor, OWL Leader) nor any other person working in a paid or volunteer capacity for the Foothills Unitarian Church shall engage in sexualized behavior with persons under the age of eighteen.

Neither shall anyone engage in behavior with children, youth or adults, which constitutes sexual harassment, or verbal, emotional or physical abuse. It is also the policy of Foothills Unitarian Church that no one who has been convicted of any crime involving an infant, child or youth, or vulnerable adult who has had such a conviction expunged, will be permitted to work with children and youth. This would include crimes such as contributing to the delinquency of a minor, or other

non-sexual crimes.

# Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians have an important role to play in the prevention of sexual and physical abuse. To support parents and guardians as they educate and instruct their children about this issue, the Foothills Unitarian Church will offer information on the topic of sexual and physical abuse of children.

Parents may visit their child's class or act as an occasional substitute classroom assistants without undergoing a background check if a screened Primary Volunteer or RE staff person is present.

While parents are welcome to visit a classroom without notice, a parent's ongoing presence in the classroom is still subject to the Child Abuse Prevention Policy. The policy states that all adults involved in ongoing contact with minors in classrooms are required to have background and reference checks.

There is an expectation that a child will be able to be separate from his/her parents for a one hour class, in order for a child to be enrolled. However, it is recognized that children may experience separation anxiety in new classrooms, particularly in settings children, and is committed to helping children and parents through this transition, within the boundaries of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy.

Parents may attend a class, or a portion of a class, for three visits, to help the child transition. If further parental involvement is still required after three visits, the parent will meet with the DRE to jointly develop a transition plan. In this plan, the parent will leave the classroom for longer periods each week until the child is fully independent.

Should a child require parental involvement to ease separation anxiety at some future date after the initial transition has occurred; a new period of transition will begin, with the parent again able to attend classes for three visits, before a transition plan must be developed.

Parents of children with special needs may be requested or required to attend classes with their child(ren) by a teacher or DRE. This attendance is allowed within the confines of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy, without the requirement of a background and reference check, and with no expectation of separation, or transition plan, required.

# Selection, Screening, and Training of Volunteers

In order to meet the variety of needs and positions required to provide education and supervision for infants, children and youth while they are in the care of Foothills Unitarian Church, two different levels of volunteers will be selected and screened. These levels are described below.

1. **Primary Volunteer:** A primary volunteer is an adult who is at least 18 years of age and works with infants, children, or youth on a regular basis within Foothills Unitarian Churches approved and on-going programs. All youth advisors for our YRUU high school youth group must be a minimum of 25 years old. Examples of primary volunteers would be Parish Visitors, RE Group Leaders who are assigned to a group of children or YRUU advisors.
2. **On-call Volunteers:** An on-call volunteer is an adult who is at least 18 years old and works with infants, children, or youth on an occasional basis within FUUC's approved and on-going programs. Examples would be childcare volunteers for Foothills Unitarian Church events, volunteers providing transportation, chaperones for overnights, one day summer RE teachers, or substitute teachers.

All primary volunteers must be active participants in the life of the congregation for at least six months before being considered for any positions involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. This requirement may be waived if a potential volunteer has been active in another congregation and is given a favorable reference by the minister and/or religious education director of that congregation.

With the exception of parents assisting in their child's program as required or as requested, all staff and all volunteers assigned to work with vulnerable adults, infants, children and youth on an on-going basis must agree to a criminal background check by an agency approved by the Foothills Unitarian Universalist Church Board. The purpose of this check is to ascertain if a potential volunteer has ever been convicted of a crime involving abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. These checks will be repeated every third year and the congregation will bear the costs of this check. e. Background checks will be performed by an entity approved by our insurance carrier.

The background check reports will go directly to the Director of Religious Education (DRE) for RE Volunteers and to the Church Administrator for Parish Visitors. The specific information from the report will not be shared with any other volunteers. The DRE or Minister (s) have the authority to veto a volunteer on the basis of the information received from the background check or other confidential information regarding the volunteer. Volunteers have the right to discuss a veto with the Minister and to take action on their own behalf, which may include an appeal to the Board.

All volunteer RE Group Leaders will submit a Teaching Agreement, including two references and will have an interview with the DFM and others he or she may designate. The DFM or assistant will conduct reference checks and keep a written record of references.

Screened on-call volunteers will be utilized whenever possible to fill unexpected, one-time needs in our programs for children and youth. In the event that a screened on-call volunteer is not available to fill an unexpected, one-time need, a parent may be utilized to fill the vacancy, as long as the second adult present is a screened volunteer or another screened staff member or adult is in the vicinity. The DRE also has the discretion of using a screened teen assistant as the second volunteer. If a second volunteer is not available the children or youth will be placed in another classroom or returned to their parents or guardians.

In keeping with UUA best practices, RE group leaders or advisors who are married or involved in a romantic partnership may not serve as the sole two adult primary volunteers in The OWL (Our Whole Lives) Programs or in any program where RE Staff or other adults will not be present in the building.

## Training and Supervision of Volunteers and Staff working with Children and Youth

All primary volunteers who work with children and youth will be required to complete a training prior to volunteering with minors or vulnerable adults. All volunteers working with children are required to sign a Teaching Agreement before being approved to teach in our programs.

This training will cover the congregations' policies regarding relationships between adult volunteers and children or youth, information on child abuse and how to recognize child abuse, and how to handle and incidence of child abuse or the report of child abuse.

Nursery Care Staff must be trained in infant/child CPR and first aid. Church staff is required to be trained in infant/child CPR and first aid and with the AED (defibrillator located in the church foyer).

## Substitutes / Back-ups

If a substitute is required for a class or meeting, teachers and advisors should attempt to arrange for a substitute in this order:

- Other team members
- Substitute from the approved list
- Parents of child in the classroom or group, a child care staff member may be used as an assisting teacher.