

# Staff & Family Participation in Congregational Groups and Programs Policy

## Purpose

Foothills Unitarian is committed to creating congregational spaces that are safe, trustworthy, and grounded in clear roles and healthy boundaries. Staff positions hold institutional authority, power, and visibility that cannot be set aside in shared spaces. This policy exists to clarify expectations for staff and staff family participation in congregational programs in order to reduce confusion, protect psychological safety, and support the wellbeing of congregants, volunteers, staff, and the institution as a whole.

## Guiding Principles

- Staff roles and power dynamics exist at all times and cannot be “undone,” even with good intentions or clear disclaimers
- Congregational spaces must prioritize the safety and freedom of congregants, particularly in vulnerable or tender settings
- Staff and their families are welcome in the life of the community, with additional care required to prevent real or perceived privilege, pressure, or confusion
- Clear boundaries are an act of care for everyone involved

## Staff Participation in Congregational Groups & Offerings

### General Expectations

- Staff participation in congregational programs is **never neutral** and requires heightened care.
- Even when participating in a personal capacity, staff presence may reasonably be received as representative of the institution.

- Staff must take responsibility for the impact of their presence, words, and relationships, regardless of intent.
- Staff may not rely on disclaimers or role clarification alone to mitigate power dynamics or perception.

## Spiritual Deepening Groups

Spiritual deepening groups often involve vulnerability, identity, and personal sharing. For this reason:

- Staff are **generally not permitted** to participate in spiritual deepening groups offered for the congregation.
- This restriction exists to protect congregants from confusion, pressure, or inhibited sharing, and to protect staff from being placed in dual-role situations.

## Exceptions

An exception may be granted **only** when all of the following are true:

1. The staff member formally requests an exception
2. The offering is unique in nature and comparable support cannot reasonably or easily be established outside the group
3. The Executive Team approves participation
4. The exception is **time-limited and program-specific**
5. The staff member signs a written covenant clarifying:
  - Their role as a participant, not an institutional representative
  - Expectations around restraint, confidentiality, and influence
  - That their presence does not carry authority within the group
6. The covenant is shared with group participants at the outset

The Executive Team retains discretion to revoke an exception if confusion, harm, or boundary strain emerges.

## Staff Expertise & Lived Experience

Staff may bring relevant lived experience or professional expertise into congregational spaces. However:

- Staff opinions, experiences, or perspectives must never be positioned as representative of Foothills Unitarian
- Staff must exercise particular care in vulnerable or identity-based groups, where impact may be heightened
- The potential for harm or offense to be associated with the institution — rather than the individual — must be taken seriously and proactively mitigated

# Staff Family & Child Participation

## Family Ministry Programs

Children of staff may participate fully in family ministry programming with the following understandings:

- Participation must not require additional or preferential resource management due to the child's relationship to staff
- Children with complex, neurodivergent, or higher support needs are **not excluded** from participation
- Children will not be treated differently — either favorably or unfavorably — than any other child with similar needs

## Expectations of Staff Parents

Staff parents are expected to:

- Follow the same communication, support, and feedback pathways as all families
- Avoid leveraging relational influence or institutional access
- Refrain from requesting accommodations, attention, or intervention beyond what is available to all families

The goal is **equity, not sameness**, and protection of volunteers and leaders from additional pressure.

## Resource Equity & Relational Boundaries

- Staff and staff families may not create real or perceived privilege within programs
- Volunteers and group leaders should not feel responsible for managing staff impact, boundaries, or repair
- If a concern arises related to staff or family participation, it should be addressed through staff supervision or the Executive Team, not through volunteer mediation

---

## Oversight, Care & Enforcement

- Concerns related to staff participation will be addressed directly and pastorally by supervisors or the Executive Team
- Exceptions may be modified or revoked if harm, confusion, or strain emerges
- The goal of enforcement is clarity, care, and repair — not punishment

Related to: [Employee Handbook - Employee Responsibilities](#)

---

Revision #1

Created 2026-01-14 20:05:57 CET by Katie Watkins

Updated 2026-01-14 20:12:56 CET by Katie Watkins