

**Safety Policy, Code of Ethics, and Background Check Release
for Religious Education Teachers and Youth Advisors
First Universalist Church of Minneapolis
2013-2014**

Welcome, and thank you for volunteering to teach our children. We have some policies in place to ensure a safe, respectful environment for people of all ages. Please read the following guidelines carefully.

In your role as a Religious Education Teacher or Youth Advisor:

- Remember that any teacher-student relationship has an initial phase. During this phase the child or youth is more interested in getting to know how “real” you are and how much he/she can trust you. Saying names in class, listening openly, and being responsive to the concerns of the group are all ways to build trust.
- Present information carefully without distortion and give all points of view a fair hearing. Listen carefully and offer suggestions or questions without passing judgment. Think of ways to problem solve together rather than lecturing or telling children or youth what to do.
- Respect the uniqueness and honor the integrity of our children and youth. Influence them through constructive feedback in the context of a caring relationship. Be alert for opportunities and teaching moments.
- Set realistic expectations and goals for your class and make plenty of room for humor, play, spontaneity, and fun. Remember there is a big difference between *encouraging* and *demanding*. Over a few weeks of intentional thoughtful intervention, Religious Education Teachers and Youth Advisors have a great deal of impact; it’s not always immediately evident. Look for signs such as more sharing in class, good relationships between your class members, good attendance and expressing appreciation.

Health and Safety:

- Do not use alcohol, tobacco or drugs during any church sponsored programming.
- Do not have firearms or weapons present while engaging in church programming.
- If transporting youth, always insist everyone wear seat belts while in the car.
- Have adequate personal liability and automobile insurance coverage. If you plan to transport children or youth, you must have a copy of your current driver’s license and insurance on file in the RE office.
- Do not leave child and youth unaccompanied during church programming.

- **Adult/Minor Ratios:** Every effort will be made to maintain the following ratios during all church sponsored events.

Infant (0-23 months) – 4 infants to 1 adult

Young child (24 months-5 years) – 6 children to 1 adult

School-age child (6-12 years) – 8 children to 1 adult

Youth (13-17 years) – 10 youth to 1 adult

- We ask that two adults are present in RE classrooms at all times. If you are in a classroom by yourself, ask a parent to stay until your another teacher arrives.

Congregational Care Concerns, Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting:

- **Congregational Care:** As an RE Teacher or Youth Advisor you have a very special relationship with our children and youth. Children or youth may share something in joys/concerns or check-in that seem appropriate to direct to RE staff, so that the church can provide additional support. For example: family divorce, deaths, illness or big victories and cause for celebration. Always ask the child or youth if you may share these issues with staff.
- **Confidentiality:** Let the children and youth know that what they say in class, stays there, unless an adult believes a child or youth is being physically, emotionally or sexually harmed by someone else. Self-harm is also a reason to break confidentiality. For example: teen cutting or other self-mutilation. Chances are, if a youth or child tells you they are being harmed they want you to do something about it. Invite them to talk with you and staff about the issue. *These types of concerns must be reported to staff immediately.*
- **Mandatory Reporting:** In Minnesota, there is a Mandatory Reporting Act that requires certain adults to report abuse or suspected abuse of minors to the authorities. As a volunteer at First Universalist, you are NOT a mandatory reporter, even if you are usually one in your professional role: teacher, therapist, social worker, etc. If there is suspected abuse, report this to staff at First Universalist. Staff, on behalf of the church, will decide if it is necessary and report this to the State.

Record Keeping:

First Universalist Church staff members will maintain information pertaining to volunteer selection, such as background check release forms, in a locked file cabinet for three years. We will then shred them. A new background check and ethics form must be signed every year. This information will never be made public.

Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth

Preamble

Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to a shared ministry of mutual caring, respect and right relations. The Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth at First Universalist Church of Minneapolis seeks to cultivate this shared ministry through professional and volunteer relationships that nurture trust, fairness, compassion and good stewardship.

Code of Ethics

I will **respect** the **diversity of spiritualities** in our faith community and will not make my personal form of spiritual expression normative.

I will **not speak disparagingly** of any other First Universalist congregants, ministers or staff in public. In conversations critical of others, I will speak responsibly and temperately.

I will **refrain** from the use of **alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs** at any church-sponsored program when I am working with children and youth.

I will **refrain** from engaging in **sexual, seductive or erotic behavior** with children and youth. Neither shall I sexually harass or engage in behavior with children and youth which constitute verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

I acknowledge that I may have access to **confidential information** and the power this gives me. I will **seek council** with church staff when I am concerned about the safety of an individual or a group.

I will actively **pursue** my own **faith development** and enrichment.

I shall be **informed** of the code of ethics and agree to it before assuming my role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I shall submit required information and agree to a **criminal background check** before volunteering with children and youth at First Universalist.

I have read the Code of Ethics, and agree to observe it.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Application and Background Check Release

Please fill out the following in **print**.

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____

Middle Name: _____

Maiden, Alias or Former: _____

Date of Birth (m/d/yy): _____ Sex: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Have you ever been **convicted of or plead guilty** to any activity involving **physical harm to or sexual abuse or harassment** of any person, or the threat of such conduct?

_____ Yes _____ No

Have you been **convicted of or plead guilty** to any other crimes or misdemeanors within the *past 15 years*?

_____ Yes _____ No

Have you **ever** been convicted of or plead guilty to a **felony**? _____ Yes _____ No

If you answered yes to either of the above questions, please explain:

Is there anything, apart from the above, that would **make it difficult for you** to work with children and youth or to maintain a safe environment for children and youth?

_____ Yes _____ No

*I authorize the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to **disclose my criminal history** record information to First Universalist Church of Minneapolis pursuant to Minnesota State Statute 123B.03 for the purpose of working with children and youth at this agency. I understand **that this form is not intended to create a contract** between me and First Universalist Church. I will **notify the church** of any arrest, charge, conviction, or other relevant information such as motor vehicle license revocation, in the future. **The expiration of this authorization shall be for a period of no longer than one year from the date of my signature.***

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____