

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF GENEVA

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Approved by the Board of Directors on February 12, 2008

Revised and approved by the Board of Directors on November 8, 2011

Child abuse – whether sexual, physical, or psychological – is a problem faced by every community of faith. Ours is no exception. As a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we have covenanted to affirm and promote the equal worth and dignity of every person; justice, equality and compassion in human relations; and acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation. By virtue of this covenant and the deep moral commitments that underlie it, we are obligated to take reasonable steps to protect our community's most vulnerable members – particularly children and youth – from abuse within our church, and to care for those who have been victimized by abuse. Therefore, we strive to do the following:

- Provide age appropriate information about development, sexuality, and personal safety;
- Train and support members of our community, particularly our religious education teachers, youth leaders, and parents, in the areas of parenting skills, growth and development, sexuality-related issues, safety, and indicators of child abuse;
- Establish policies and procedures for safeguarding children from abuse;
- Promptly and appropriately respond to any reported incident of abuse within our community;
- Cooperate with law enforcement and child protection authorities;
- Comply with all applicable child abuse reporting requirements and support compliance by individual mandated reporters;
- Offer emotional and spiritual support and healing for victims of abuse.

While our obligation to safeguard vulnerable members of our community is paramount, our Unitarian Universalist principles include respect for the worth and dignity of *every* person – even those who have committed or are accused of committing abuse. Therefore, to the extent possible while maintaining safety and honoring the needs of those victimized by abuse, we will also strive to offer emotional and spiritual support to those who have engaged in past abuse but have committed not to repeat their crimes; who are struggling to overcome a predisposition to abuse; or who have been accused of abuse but maintain their innocence.

Implementation by the Caring Team

The Caring Team will be responsible for overseeing implementation of the policy and goals described above. In particular, the Caring Team will be responsible for advising the Board of Directors, committees, and other lay leaders on formation and implementation of practices and procedures consistent with the above goals, and cooperating with the LRE Committee,

Communications Committee, and appropriate others, to provide information, education, and training consistent with the goals set forth in this policy.

The Caring Team will also be responsible for receiving reports of suspected child abuse, contacting the appropriate authorities to report suspected abuse, and advising the Board regarding any other action that may be necessary to respond to suspected abuse.

If an allegation of child abuse is made against any professional clergy member or other member of the Caring Team, that individual will not participate as a member of the Team in any response regarding the matter.

While UUSG cannot provide professional counseling, legal advice or medical care, members of the Caring Team are always available to provide pastoral support and care to those affected by abuse.

Reporting Child Abuse

Child abuse can be stopped only if it is reported to someone in a position to do something about it. Anyone who **SUSPECTS** that a child has been or is in danger of being abused is strongly encouraged to notify the appropriate authorities. If you need assistance, you may contact any member of the Caring Team.

Any UUSG employee, officer, Board or Committee member, religious education teacher, youth advisor, and any other volunteer with responsibility for supervising children or youth, who **SUSPECTS** that any child or youth involved in any UUSG-sponsored program or activity has been or is in danger of being abused, **MUST** immediately report the suspected abuse to the professional clergy or another member of the Caring Team. Anyone affiliated with UUSG who believes that a child may be in imminent danger should immediately contact law enforcement authorities and then notify the professional clergy or another member of the Caring Team.

The names and telephone numbers of the members of the Caring Team will be posted on the "People You Should Know" bulletin board in the Common Room, or in a similar prominent location.

Anyone who is required to report child abuse to appropriate authorities under applicable law (i.e., who is a "mandated reporter") must also comply with their legal reporting obligations.

The Caring Team will assist anyone who reports suspected child abuse to report the suspected abuse to appropriate law enforcement authorities, and will take any immediate steps necessary to respond to the alleged abuse. This includes, but is not limited to, immediately suspending any individual accused of abuse from all volunteer or employment positions at UUSG, notifying the individual that he or she is barred from UUSG property and activities, and immediately notifying the President of the Board of Directors of the situation. The Caring Team will not investigate allegations of abuse. Rather, all investigations of alleged abuse will be entrusted to law enforcement officials and legal counsel. However, the Caring Team will coordinate with the relevant authorities, the Board of Directors and UUSG legal counsel to ensure that UUSG is taking appropriate steps in response to any allegation of abuse.

UUSG is not responsible for supervising contact between alleged victims and alleged offenders who attend the church, or for supervising an alleged offender's contacts with children in the church. However, UUSG may choose to hold a victim's right to safety as paramount and bar alleged offenders from church property and participation in church-sponsored activities. The Caring Team may take immediate action as needed to bar an alleged offender from UUSG property and UUSG-sponsored activities. Any decision to exclude an individual in this manner will be immediately reported to the President of the Board of Directors.

The President of the Board of Directors will keep the Board informed, on a confidential basis, of any reports received from the Caring Team under this Policy.

An individual who has been removed from any position with UUSG or barred from UUSG property or UUSG-sponsored activities in connection with an allegation of abuse will be allowed to return only upon approval by the Board of Directors acting upon the advice of legal counsel and appropriate child welfare and law enforcement authorities.

UUSG prohibits retaliation against any person for making a good-faith report of abuse or participating in good faith in an investigation of alleged abuse. Any person who believes he or she has been subjected to retaliation in violation of this policy should immediately report the retaliation to a member of the Caring Team or the Board of Directors.