

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF GERMANTOWN

QUICK GUIDE TO SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY

As amended by the Board of Trustees 2023.10.24. Originally approved by the Ministry Executive Team, the Governance & Ministry Task Force, and Church Counsel, August 2017, and revised September 26, 2017, June 12, 2018, and March 3, 2020.

This Quick Guide is intended to provide a summary list of the provisions of the Safe Congregation Policy (the Policy) approved by the Board of Trustees on July 25, 2017. Its purpose is to provide a quick reference and make it easier to locate the full provision in the Policy. This is not a complete statement of the Policy. If there is any difference between this Quick Guide and the Policy, the Policy governs.

DUTIES [Policy Section III]

A. Ministry Executive Team (MET)

1. Responsible for implementing the Policy and creating and maintaining training and reference materials, but may delegate duties.

B. Safe Congregation Ministry Team (Team)

1. Comprised of members of Committee on Ministry (COM), Minister and Director of Spiritual Development (DSD).
2. Assists Board in oversight by helping ensure proper implementation of the Policy.
3. Reviews relevant policies and procedures and makes recommendations to the Board.
4. Responds to violations of the Policy, as set forth in the Policy.

PREVENTION [Policy Section IV]

A. Requirements for those who provide Religious Education

1. Must be a member **or** a friend of USG for 6 months **OR** must be a member in good standing at a UU church for one year.
2. Must be at least 18.
3. Exceptions to the above can be made by the MET, which is responsible for implementing the Policy.
4. Must not have any history of abuse, violent crime conviction, or sexual misconduct adjudication.
5. Must consent to criminal conviction and child abuse screening if age 18 or over.
6. Religious Professionals must complete job application and criminal, child abuse and fingerprint screening and other state law requirements.

B. Requirements for Safe Environment

1. All Workers (paid or unpaid who provide direct care or supervise USG children and youth) are subject to the supervision of and evaluation by the Minister or DSD.
2. Classrooms must be open to parents and visible.
3. Each group, including Child Spiritual Development classes, childcare, and other groups, will have a minimum of 2 Workers (at least one adult).
4. For infants and toddlers, if there are more than eight children, the preferred ratio is one Worker for 4 children.
5. When a scheduled RE activity takes place, the DSD will be responsible to inform parents of the nature of the activity and the location of the children.
6. When car-pooling, drivers must be a minimum of 25 years of age (insured).
7. Two adults for every vehicle transporting children is preferred but may not always be possible. There should be two or more children or youth with one adult.
8. Children in 2nd grade or younger may only be released from class to a parent or guardian. If children in 3rd grade are grouped with children in 2nd grade or younger, this requirement applies to them as well.

C. Requirements for Proper Conduct

1. Appropriate boundaries must be maintained between Workers and children. Workers must understand the power differential in child/adult relationships.
2. Romantic relationships are prohibited.
3. There should be limitations on physical contact. Hugs are best initiated by the child, or the adult should at least ask permission. Such contact should never occur in private.
4. Private conversations should take place in a public place.
5. Religious Professionals may meet with children in separate rooms for pastoral care, provided the door remains open for the safety of the professional and the child.
6. Corporal punishment and abusive language is prohibited.
7. Workers should not have informal contact with children (contact that is not directly part of an official church activity) unless the parents have provided their advance consent.
8. Tobacco use, illegal drug use, and alcohol use are prohibited.
9. Electronic communications between adults and youth are not confidential. Parents shall be copied on all electronic communications with children below grade 9 in school. The DSD must be a member of any closed social media groups.

D. Requirements for Education

1. MET or its delegate will prepare a Safe Congregation Handbook.
2. Handbook will be provided to all Workers and parents of children in religious education program.
3. Annual training for Workers and Religious Professionals.

4. DSD is responsible for storing forms, consents, and background check documentation. in a locked file.

RESPONSE [Policy Sections V and VI]

A. Mandated Reporters

1. All “mandated reporters” (Workers, Religious Professionals and Staff) are required by PA state law to make an immediate and direct report to CHILDLINE if there is a reasonable suspicion of child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) or neglect of a child (withholding of necessities). The report can be by telephone (800-932-0313) or via the website (www.compass.stat.pa.us).
2. Workers must also notify the person in charge at USG, which shall be the Safe Congregational Ministry Team (the Minister, DSD, a member of the Committee on Ministry) or the Board President.

B. Response Procedures

1. The Team will notify other appropriate USG representatives.
2. The Religious Professional on the Team will notify the parents of any child who may be the victim of abuse. The Team will investigate the details of the incident that resulted in a ChildLine report.
3. The Team will communicate with law enforcement representatives, if required.
4. The Team will exercise due diligence during the investigation: e.g. checking sex offender registries, checking criminal records, interviewing witnesses.
5. The Team will prepare a written report of its findings.
6. The Team will attempt to interview the alleged offender and provide that person with the opportunity to make a statement.
7. The Team will develop a Plan of Action.
8. If a Religious Professional is the possible offender, the UUA shall be notified.