

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF GERMANTOWN

SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY HANDBOOK

As amended by the Board of Trustees on October 24, 2023. Originally approved by the Ministry Executive Team, the Governance & Ministry Task Force, and Church Counsel, July 2017, and revised September 26, 2017 and June 12, 2018.

We know that religious communities are not immune to the dangers of physical and sexual abuse that can be damaging to a child. The Unitarian Society of Germantown (USG) has enacted a Safe Congregation Policy in order to ensure as best we can the safety of our children, and to provide guidance and protection to adults who work with our children. Everyone who attends USG is bound by this policy. All adults, but particularly adults who work with children, and parents of children who participate in USG programs or activities, are responsible for knowing what is in this policy and following its requirements. We also want parents to know what they can expect when they entrust their children to our care. The term “children” includes everyone under age 18.

This Handbook is intended to provide a convenient summary of the Safe Congregation Policy. If there is any difference between this Handbook and the policy, the policy governs.

All references to people who work with children, and to children, include only people who are participating in USG programs and activities. The policy does not seek to govern conduct unrelated to USG or its programs and activities.

What we require before our Child Spiritual Development teachers and assigned youth mentors are permitted to work with children

People who work with children must have been a member or friend of USG for at least 6 months, or a member in good standing at another Unitarian Universalist church for a year. They must be at least 18, although exceptions may be made. They must not have any history of abuse, conviction for a violent crime, or adjudication of sexual conduct. And they must have criminal and child abuse screenings, as required by Pennsylvania law. Religious Professionals are also subject to screening and other requirements.

What we do to keep the environment safe

Anyone who provides direct care or supervises USG children is subject to supervision and evaluation by the Minister and Director of Spiritual Development. Classrooms must be open

to parents, and any window coverings must be open for visibility. Parents will be informed of the nature and location of all USG activities with their children, including Child Spiritual Development classes. Children in second grade or younger will be released only to their parents or guardians unless prior arrangements have been made with the teacher or Director of Spiritual Development.

Each group, including Child Spiritual Development classes, childcare, and other groups, must have a minimum of two adults present. If one adult must be absent from the room, care will be taken to assure that the absence is as brief as possible and the setting is open to view.

For off-site USG activities, drivers must be a minimum of 25 years of age and have insurance. No driver should be alone in the car with a child to whom he or she is not related.

What conduct we require of people who work with children

Children must be treated with kindness and respect. Corporal punishment or abusive language is absolutely forbidden. There will be no romantic or sexual behavior with minors. Occasional hugs can be acceptable, but it is best to let the child initiate or **to** ask the child's permission, and hugs should not occur in private.

People who work with children shall not be alone in a private location with a child, and conversations should occur in a public place, even if the conversations are private. An exception may be made for pastoral care by a religious professional. If necessary, a religious professional may provide pastoral care in a separate room, provided that the door remains open.

Parents must be informed and provide permission before a person who works with children may seek contact with a child that is not directly part of an official church activity. It is the parent's responsibility to monitor such contacts.

Electronic communications between a person who works with children and a minor shall be viewed as not confidential. Any social media groups must have two adult administrators, one of whom is the Director of Spiritual Development, along with any youth administrators, and the existence of the group must be public, although the membership will not be public. This enables parents to know about the group, but does not allow predators to target children.

Minors may not use alcohol, illegal drugs, and cigarettes or e-cigarettes. Adult may not use alcohol or illegal drugs when working with children and must be discrete in any cigarette or e-cigarette use.

What education and training we require of people who work with children

All church members, friends, visitors and staff will comply with the Safe Congregation Policy and all ancillary procedures and instructions. The Safe Congregation Policy Handbook will be provided to all people who work with children, and parents of children enrolled in Child Spiritual Development, along with instructions on how to access the complete policy, or the policy itself. Child Spiritual Development teachers will receive annual training.

What happens if child abuse, or other conduct injurious to children, is suspected

The Safe Congregation Policy provides extensive procedures to be followed in the eventuality that child abuse, or other conduct injurious to children, is suspected. People who work with children are required, and USG members and friends (especially parents of children in Child Spiritual Development classes) are encouraged, to review the Safe Congregation Policy for more information.

Response to suspected misconduct is the responsibility of the Safe Congregation Ministry Team, which is comprised of the Minister, the Director of Spiritual Development, and the members of the Committee on Ministry. All Pennsylvania legal requirements will be followed. Adults need to be aware that people who work with children must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse. It is not necessary that the adult have witnessed the behavior. Additionally, a report must be made if a person aged 14 years or older makes a specific disclosure that he or she has committed child abuse. More information about Pennsylvania legal requirements can be found at <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/>. People who work with children will also immediately notify the person in charge at USG, which can be the Director of Spiritual Development, the Minister, another member of the Safe Congregation Ministry Team, or the President of the Board. If the person does not know who the lay individuals are, he or she can ask the Church Administrator or anyone else who might know.

Any questions that are not answered by the Safe Congregation Policy or the Safe Congregation Policy Handbook? Please ask anyone on the Safe Congregation Ministry Team, the Ministry Executive Team or the Board. If they can't answer your question, they will get it to the right people. And if you don't know who these people are, ask the Church Administrator or anyone else who might know.