

RRUUC Safe Congregation Policy Adopted by the Board of Trustees River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation May 15, 2018

RRUUC is a spiritual community committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for everyone who participates in our congregation, placing a special emphasis on meeting the unique needs of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

RRUUC's Safe Congregation Policy (SCP) is intended to help create and support a safe environment, in which we may deepen our acceptance and understanding of one another, and in which personal transformation and spiritual growth are supported in an atmosphere of civility, mutual respect, trust and kindness.

Our commitment to creating a Safe Congregation is grounded firmly in the seven Principles affirmed and promoted by Unitarian Universalist congregations, especially in our abiding affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person. **We affirm the right of each person who participates in our congregation to seek and find spiritual, emotional and physical safety and acceptance at RRUUC. This includes safety from physical, sexual and emotional abuse.**

Our SCP reflects the guiding principles articulated by the Unitarian Universalist Association, including consideration of responsible staffing and supervision; screening of volunteers and staff; careful incident reporting; provisions to remove staff and volunteers from positions working with children and youth when necessary; and safe building practices. This policy replaces a previous policy that did not conform to the principles of policy governance.

Our SCP applies to RRUUC clergy, employees, adult members and friends, the children and youth of RRUUC, volunteers, and visitors of all ages. Our SCP applies to RRUUC-sponsored activities on our church property, as well as all activities undertaken by or sponsored by RRUUC off-site. This policy will be maintained and updated annually by the Safe Congregation Committee, which is a Board Committee. We require those participating in our rental program to acknowledge that they have read our Safe Congregation Policy and Procedures as part of their rental agreements.

For critical information about how to report abuse or neglect of a child, youth or vulnerable adult, see the following page.

I. Definitions Used in this Policy

Children and Youth: People under the age of 18.

Child Abuse: Child abuse includes but is not necessarily limited to the physical, mental or emotional injury of a child or youth by another person who has permanent or temporary custody or responsibility for the care and/or supervision of the child or youth.

Congregational Companion: A congregation member appointed by the Senior Minister or SCBC as appropriate, who accompanies a member charged or convicted of a sex offense or other abusive offences while the member takes part in congregational activities.

Limited Access Agreement: Such an agreement invites the person with a history of sex or other abusive offenses to participate in certain aspects of congregational life, setting clear boundaries including what the individual will not do. Typically a Limited Access Agreement will specify as acceptable participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all-adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. It asks the person to avoid all contact with children or vulnerable adults on congregation property or at congregation-sponsored events.

MCDHHS, CPS: Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services is where a report of child abuse, neglect or sex abuse is made. The 24-hour line is 240-777-4417.

MCAPS: Montgomery County Adult Protective Services, 240-777-3000, for reporting any issues affecting vulnerable adults.

SCBC: Safe Congregation Board Committee

SCP: Safe Congregation Policy

Sexual Abuse: Activity of a sexual nature between an adult and a child or youth, or between a child or youth and an older youth, *including but not limited to* molestation or exploitation of a child or youth, by any person responsible for the child's or youth's permanent or temporary care and/or custody. For purposes of this SCP, sexual abuse includes touching and non-physical interactions between a child or youth and one or more adults undertaken for the purpose of the adult's sexual stimulation or sexual gratification. Such behavior is always considered unacceptable and non-consensual when the interaction involves a child or youth, even if the child or youth has indicated his or her consent verbally or otherwise. Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to fondling, kissing and all other sexual behavior. Other inappropriate behavior may include, but not be limited to, sexual remarks and the misuse of pornographic or sexually suggestive images.

Teacher: The term teacher refers to any roles being performed by adults that can be construed as teaching, including Guides and Leaders, Advisors and/or Mentors. Any adult working with children in a learning environment is considered a teacher for the purposes of this policy.

Vulnerable Adult: An individual, 18 years or older, who because of age, developmental disability, past traumatic experiences, mental illness, physical handicap or other condition requires supervision or personal care.

I. Safe Congregation Board Committee (SCBC)

The Safe Congregation Board Committee (SCBC) is responsible for developing and maintaining a Safe Congregation Policy. This policy is related to the physical safety of all congregants and the specific safety for children and youth in a multigenerational environment. The Committee will meet at least annually to monitor the Safe Congregation practices as they relate to the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults and physical safety of the entire congregation.

The Safe Congregation Board Committee (SCBC) will be composed of the following members:

- A Board Trustee who serves as Chair of the SCBC; and
- Lifespan Religious Educator (LRE) or Religious Educator for Youth (REY)
- Congregational Administrator or the Building Manager
- The Senior Minister, who serves ex officio.

The SCBC member from the Board of Trustees will be selected by the Board from within the Board. The SCBC, for purposes of advice and counsel, may seek guidance and information from congregants with related professional experience (family lawyer, social worker, counselor, etc.).

The implementing groups are:

- **Building Safety Implementation Group**
 - Congregational Administrator
 - Building Manager
 - Member of the Building Committee
- **Children and Youth Religious Education Implementation Group**
 - Lifespan Religious Educator (LRE)
 - Religious Educator for Youth (REY)
 - Religious Education Committee Chair

The Implementation Groups will establish procedures and guidelines and ensure their implementation. They will report changes to the SCBC in alternating years or do so by request of the SCBC, and they may propose policy changes to the SCBC.

The SCBC is required to meet once a year to review implementation procedures, issues and training. It may also be assembled at any time to respond to incidents relating to the emotional or physical safety of any person in our congregation or to provide guidance/assistance to clergy, staff and volunteers. Any person included in this policy may contact the SCBC Chair to request that the Committee meet in response to an actual or potential problem covered by the policy.

The SCBC is responsible for:

- Reviewing and proposing revisions of this policy as needed to the Board of Trustees.
- Monitoring that implementation procedures are created, maintained and revised by the applicable subcommittees, regarding:
 - Safe practices for working with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the congregation
 - Practices that ensure that the building is a safe space for all congregants.
- Ensuring that training related to the implementation of these practices for RRUUC staff and volunteers is conducted as needed
- Receiving reports from the Senior Minister that describe incidents and their resolution. Names and other identifying details may be omitted from these reports. The SCBC shall forward such reports to the Board.

All members of the SCBC will sign confidentiality agreements with respect to any concerns or incidents that are brought to the Committee for consideration.

III. Responsibilities of the Building Safety Implementation Group

Health and safety as it relates to the physical environment

- A.** Fire safety best practices (life safety compliance)
- B.** Accessibility provisions (ADA) that allow for inclusion
- C.** Hostile intruders and other security issues
- D.** Disasters
- E.** Weather-related issues
- F.** First aid.

IV. Responsibilities of the Religious Education Safety Implementation Group

- A.** Establishing and implementing individual and group best practices when working with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- B.** Assessing adults working with children, youth or vulnerable adults, including as appropriate background checks
- C.** Responding when a person is charged with a crime involving youth, children or vulnerable adults

All policies and practices developed and maintained by both Implementation Groups will apply to vulnerable adults and language to that effect included where applicable. Additionally, all guidelines/practices/procedures apply to all congregational activities.

V. Reporting of Abuse of a Child or Vulnerable Adult

Any person witnessing or having reasonable suspicion of injury, exploitation, objectionable conduct toward, physical or sexual abuse of any child or youth or other person at RRUUC shall report the information immediately to the Senior Minister; or in their absence, to the Lifespan Religious Educator or the Religious Educator for Youth. The Chair of the Board of Trustees also shall be notified. The Board shall be informed of the fact of the incident if it (1) poses a significant risk to RRUUC; (2) poses a significant risk of liability for the congregation or its trustees; (3) is reported to the authorities; or (4) may put any individual at risk, or at the discretion of the Senior Minister, or in their absence, the Lifespan Religious Educator. Any details will be provided to the Board at the Senior Minister's discretion.

The report should be put in writing by the person observing signs of suspected abuse. The report must include all events witnessed and information received, stating the date, time, and location of such events or the receipt of information, and identifying any other witnesses. The person making the report must be told if the authorities will be informed.

If the report involves an RRUUC teacher, the Senior Minister and the RE staff will determine whether the person should continue teaching. In the case of a report to the authorities, there will be no internal investigation or questioning, with the exception of the Senior Minister, who will separately attend to pastoral care needs.

After a report to authorities, the Senior Minister will report to the Board Chair and arrange for pastoral care of those involved with colleagues from other institutions. Whether or not an incident is reported to authorities, the Senior Minister shall also notify the SCBC of the incident and how it

was handled. Names and other identifying information may be omitted from such a report, at the Minister's discretion.

RRUUC will cooperate fully with appropriate law enforcement and social services agencies and personnel as required by law. Maryland Code procedures for the reporting of child abuse can be found at <http://dhr.maryland.gov/child-protective-services/>. Telephone numbers for 24-hour reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect: Montgomery County Child Protective Services, 240-777-4417 (for children and youth) and Montgomery Adult Protective Services, 240-777-3000 (for reporting any issues for vulnerable adults).

Neither the RRUUC staff, nor members of the Safe Congregation Board Committee, nor members of the Board of Trustees will take any retaliatory action against any person making such a report. Every reasonable effort to protect the privacy and rights of all persons involved will be made by RRUUC staff, SCBC and members of the Board of Trustees.

If the Senior Minister chooses not to report a reportable incident under law, they are required to report it immediately to a Good Officer provided by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and check in with that Good Officer again in six months. A Good Officer is a designated member of the UU Ministers Association trained to support ministerial colleagues with professional problems and concerns.

VI. Inclusion of Charged or Convicted Sex Offenders in the Congregation

Any congregant who is known to have a criminal charge pending against him/her or has pleaded guilty to or been convicted of the sexual or physical abuse of a child, and/or is required to register as a sex offender, will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

If it becomes known that a person meeting this description is participating in any of the congregation's activities:

- The Senior Minister will check the local sex offender registry and meet with the individual to discuss the issue of his/her inclusion on the sex registry. Based on this meeting the Senior Minister may choose to pursue additional steps toward inclusion.
- The individual will be asked to sign a release form to allow the Senior Minister to contact his/her offender treatment provider, current or former therapist, and/or his/her parole officer. If the individual refuses to sign the release, the Senior Minister may bar participation in all congregational activities.
- If the assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and/or is not at risk for recidivism, the Senior Minister will complete a Limited

Access Agreement (see definition, Page 2) with the individual. If children and youth are involved in any of the activities noted in said agreement, the individual must agree to attend only when a Congregational Companion is available.

- RRUUC reserves the right to require the individual to sign a Limited Access Agreement annually.

The Senior Minister shall inform the Board Chair of any Limited Access Agreements.

VII. Communication of this Policy and Required Procedures

This policy will be posted on the RRUUC website and distributed to all adults involved in care and teaching of children and youth. The Implementation Groups are strongly encouraged to post their best practices and procedures. These practices and procedures may be summarized at their discretion.

RRUUC staff involved in implementing the practices and procedures shall develop written manuals and training programs for other RRUUC staff, child care workers (both employees and volunteers), religious education teachers, youth mentors, members of the Welcome Team, and others as needed. They shall provide these materials to the SCBC for its review.