

Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church

Safe Congregation Policies for Children and Youth

Introductory Statement

The congregation of the Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church (“the Church”) states in its covenant that “we share in a loving ministry each for the other; and thereby provide for our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.” We strive to achieve a consistent safe environment for all children and youth through preventive measures, as well as educational strategies.

Program Administration Policy

The Director of Religious Education (DRE) and Lifetime Religious Education (LRE) Teams are responsible for the implementation of the Safe Congregation Policies.

The Board of Trustees approves the policies of the program.

Important documents identified by the DRE and LRE Team Leads shall be maintained in a secure and confidential manner.

Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Training Policy

The following shall apply to all staff and volunteers who will work with our children and youth:

1. Each individual shall have been actively associated with the Church ideally for a minimum of six months before they may begin work. If a person has been active with the Church for less than six months but has been actively involved at another church, or teaching youth, then after a background check and a check on his/her references, he/she may teach. Other opportunities may be available for those with less time at the Church.
2. Each individual shall complete an application providing details for background checks, sign a release for background checks, and sign a covenant stating that they understood and will comply with the policies.
3. A background check shall be performed on each individual to the extent determined by the DRE.
4. The DRE shall assess each individual to determine how s/he may best work with children and youth.
5. A copy of Safe Congregations Policies & Procedures for Children & Youth shall be made available to each family, along with staff and volunteers, for self-study.
6. A copy of the Safe Congregations Policies and Procedures shall be maintained in the Church office and at the Church web site for reference by all interested persons.
7. The DRE shall provide program training to staff and volunteers once a year and, as needed, based on their specific areas of responsibility.
8. Visitors wishing to observe Church sessions or events will also be exempted from these requirements provided they are accompanied by an approved staff member or volunteer.

Safety & Health of Children and Youth Policy

1. All children and youth must have a registration form filled out for them every year by their parents/guardians that lists any special needs/allergies/medicine/etc. Each classroom shall have a record of this available to all volunteers in the room. The DRE will ensure that this information is available in each session space.
2. No LRE/CYRE class/session or event may be held with only two staff members or volunteers who are in a relationship or members of the same household.
3. No LRE/CYRE class/session may be held with only one adult and one child, regardless of the age of the youth. If this situation arises:
 - LRE classes can be combined, or
 - The LRE/CYRE class/session must be cancelled and the child is immediately escorted back to his/her parent/guardian.
4. Ages six through high school sessions which have one adult and only two children/youth can be held, but the session door or accordion wall must remain open and a nearby session must also be in attendance with its door open. There shall never be less than two adults in any class age five and below.
5. All children and youth up to age 17 who are not with their parent/guardian must always be under supervision of an adult with a background check during Church service hours or if in a room that can be closed with a door.
6. CYRE leads should ask the supervising adult of visiting children whether the child(ren) have any special needs or allergies. The visiting child(ren) must be signed into the session with the supervising adult's contact information and the child(ren)'s medical needs noted. The DRE will ensure that a sign-up sheet is available in each room. Children who continue to attend but have not filled out a registration form should do so by their fourth visit.
7. First Aid kits shall be available to staff/volunteers.
8. An Incident Report form will be filled out by the person most directly connected to an incident when there is an injury to a child or adult (e.g., falls, bites, other injuries). Incident Forms are available in the classrooms and from the DRE.
9. Guidelines for teachers will be established for the handling of a disruptive child.
10. An inspection of Church grounds and buildings shall take place at least annually to assure that the physical surroundings are safe.
11. For any overnight Church/LRE sponsored event, two adult chaperones who are not in a relationship or from the same household must be present.
12. Any alcohol at Church events will be served by bartenders. Any alcohol before or after events will be in a locked cabinet or removed from Church premises. In addition - see the Church Policy on Serving Alcoholic Beverages.

Child Abuse and Neglect Policy

In North Carolina, General Statute 7B-301 mandates that anyone who suspects that a child has been abused or neglected must report to the local department of social services. It is NOT the role of the reporter to prove if abuse or neglect has in fact occurred. The key word is “suspect.” If someone suspects, he or she must report. The DRE should be immediately notified of the concern (unless the DRE is a part of the reported concern). If this is not possible, the Lead Minister should be notified.

Where to Report

1. If an incident of possible abuse or neglect occurs to a child, and a church member or volunteer in the Church CYRE Program is the alleged perpetrator, the report will be made to the Department of Social Services in Mecklenburg County.
2. If an incident of possible abuse or neglect has occurred to a child in a setting other than the church by a family member or caregiver, the report will be made to the Department of Social Services in the county where the child resides.

What to Report

The social worker or police intake worker will ask a number of questions designed to provide the basic information they will need to begin an investigation:

- Name, date of birth and address for the child
- Any additional information that may be helpful in making contact with the child
- Parent’s/guardian’s name and contact information
- The child’s condition, including nature and extent of the injury
- Any additional information about the home, such as substance abuse, history of violence, etc. that may be important

The completed Incident Report can be a basis of the information for making the report.

If the child’s parent/guardian is the alleged perpetrator, the parent/guardian should NOT be informed that a report to social services has been made.

Departments of Social Services are required BY LAW to protect the confidentiality of anyone making a report of possible child abuse or neglect.

Travel Safety Policy

1. Any Church LRE sponsored trips that transport children or youth from the Church property require written permission from parents/guardians. Copies of the forms must be provided to the DRE to be filed.
2. Drivers must provide a current driver's license, and demonstrate active automobile liability insurance, to the DRE.
3. Driver must have possessed license for more than two years.
4. Safety precautions and behavior guidelines shall be reviewed with the minors before the trip and as needed thereafter.
5. Each individual in the automobile/van must use a working seatbelt. This may include use of a car or booster seat as required by law.
6. While on the road with engine on, driver must be handsfree with mobile devices or GPS systems.
7. Medical and insurance information must be on-hand by the supervising adult(s) at all times.

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Safe Congregation Procedures for Children and Youth

Volunteer Application Procedure

Purpose: This procedure outlines the steps to be taken to submit application for employment or to serve as a volunteer in the Church Children and Youth Religious Education (CYRE) program.

1. Each individual shall submit an application to the DRE, beginning in the spring before the fall start-up of the CYRE program, or as appropriate throughout the year.
2. The individual may choose to provide supplemental information along with the application to further explain any details related to his/her experience with child and youth protection or with respect to any related incidents that may have occurred in the past.
3. Applications will be reviewed by the DRE and then will be in a secure location only accessible to the DRE, Minister(s), and Congregational Administrator.

Screening and Evaluation Procedure

Purpose: This procedure outlines the steps to be taken to screen and evaluate staff and volunteer applicants associated with the Church CYRE program.

1. The DRE will review each application and determine if adequate information is provided to perform an evaluation.
2. The DRE may choose to contact references provided by the applicant to obtain their perspective on the applicant's relationship with children and youth. References will be requested only for staff positions.
3. The DRE will perform a background check on applicants as appropriate for the type of involvement with the CYRE program. A copy of the results will be attached to the application.
4. If the DRE determines that limitations need to be implemented on the applicant with respect to his/her relationship with children and youth, the DRE will advise the applicant. Together, they will finalize the limitations to best suit the needs of the LRE program and to best protect the applicant.

Travel Safety Procedure

Purpose: This procedure outlines the steps to be taken to plan and manage CYRE church-sponsored events for children and youth that require travel away from the church facilities.

1. The DRE will advise parents/guardians of the destination, purpose, duration, potential hazards, and special rules associated with any child or youth travel. If parents/guardian have concerns about the trip, they should contact the DRE and address them as soon as possible to allow the DRE time to advise other parents/guardians of any changes.
2. Parents/guardians must sign permission slips in order for their child or youth to travel.
3. The DRE will find volunteers to accompany the children and youth during travel and ensure that they meet all driver requirements (e.g., valid driver's license, active auto insurance, etc.)
4. The DRE will assign children and youth to specific drivers to ensure proper behavior and to take limitations, such as permission to ride with a driver under the age of 21, into consideration.
5. The DRE will provide information for each adult who is responsible for specific children and youth. This information will include the permission form along with emergency information and special child or youth needs for all children and youth participating in the trip.
6. The DRE will ensure that volunteers, as well as the children and youth, understand all of the rules associated with the travel before they depart.
7. Following the trip, the DRE will solicit feedback from teachers/advisors, children/youth and parents/guardians for consideration when planning future trips.

Travel Management Procedure

Purpose: This procedure outlines the steps to be taken to manage groups of children or youth when they travel away from church facilities.

1. If any volunteer becomes unable to lead their assigned children or youth, they will find someone else to assume their responsibility before they relinquish it.
2. Each volunteer will ensure that all of his/her assigned children or youth are accounted for at each stop along the way, as well as at designated times while at the destination.
3. If a child or youth is not present at these times, then the volunteer will request that a second volunteer care for their designated children or youth while the first volunteer goes to find the child or youth.
4. If any child or youth refuses to follow the rules or the instructions by his/her designated volunteer, then a conference will be held between the child or youth, his/her designated volunteer, and at least two other volunteers to determine an appropriate response to the situation.
5. If the volunteers participating in the conference determine that the child or youth is a potential danger to him/herself or to others, then the designated volunteer will contact the child or youth's parents/ guardians and DRE.
6. The parents/guardians will then discuss the issues with their child or youth over the phone in order to resolve the situation.
7. If this is not effective, then the parents/guardians will be requested to pick up their child or youth and take them home.