

## Unitarian Universalists of New Braunfels Religious Education Safety Policy and Procedures

### **General Purpose Statement**

The Unitarian Universalists of New Braunfels seek to provide a safe and secure environment for our children and youth participating in Religious Education programs and family events and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of UUNB from safety accidents and incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

The policies and procedures apply to any person who provides care to children for any activity held under the auspices of UUNB, including but not limited to Religious Education teachers, childcare attendants, or persons who care for children during a UUNB program or event.

### **Definitions:**

For the purposes of this document

- The terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years
- UUNB means Unitarian Universalists of New Braunfels
- Minister means UUNB’s minister.
- DRE means UUNB Director of Religious Education
- RE means Religious Education
- REC means Religious Education Committee
- Parents refer to any parents and/or guardian responsible for the child

### **Selection of Workers:**

Employees and volunteers working with children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

### **Volunteers**

#### **a. Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be allowed to work with children until s/he has been a member or regular attendee of UUNB for a minimum of 6 months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the volunteer allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant working with children. This rule may be waived at the discretion of the DRE and REC.

#### **b. Agree to Code of Ethics/Statement of Clear History Form**

All volunteers will agree to and sign a code of ethics for their time with all children during RE classes, activities and events, which includes a statement of clear background and history relating to any behavior or criminal record that would compromise their ability to ethically, legally, and responsibly volunteer with the children at UUNB.

## **Employees**

### **a. Written Application**

All persons seeking employment or paid compensation with children at UUNB must complete and sign a written application. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire about previous experience with children, involvement at other UU congregations, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file.

### **b. Personal Interview**

A face to face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

### **c. Reference Checks**

At least two references will be checked for each employee. These references must not be personal or family references, and are preferably from organizations or employers where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file.

### **d. Criminal Background check**

A criminal background check is required for all employees and paid childcare attendants in the RE Program. Before a background check is run, prospective employees sign an authorization form allowing UUNB to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

Disqualifying offenses that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the DRE, REC and if necessary, Board of Trustees or minister on a case-by-case basis. Generally, convictions of an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The criminal background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file.

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two vetted and approved adults will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. In the event this is not possible due to last minute cancellations or illness, there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher, and every effort will be made to enlist volunteers to fill in.

## **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

*Anyone currently accused of any crimes against minors or morally suspicious activities will be disallowed from volunteering or working in RE until they are cleared of charges or until the UUNB BoT, MInister, RE & Safety Committees and DRE deem the situation acceptable and participation in RE is allowable. See below for more detail.*

To define it, “child abuse” is any action or lack of action, which endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical abuse-- any injury to a child, which is not accidental, including but not limited to beating, shaking, burning, and biting.
- Emotional abuse-- emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling or persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse-- any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest and pornography.
- Neglect-- depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

RE Program employees and volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at UUNB becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to Child Protective Services, the DRE and the Board of Trustees for further action, including reporting to New Braunfels PD or FBI as mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at UUNB or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified, unless they are the alleged abuser.
2. The worker/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.
3. Our insurance company will be notified and we will complete and Incident report.
4. We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
5. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children.
7. The Minister will be our spokesperson to the media concerning Incidents of abuse or neglect, unless s/he is alleged to be involved. All other workers/volunteers should refrain from speaking to the media.
8. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.

### **Restrooms/Diaper Changes**

Due to the proximity of the bathrooms to the childcare and RE rooms, children going to the bathroom will simply require to be observed to enter the bathroom unless further assistance is needed.

If further assistance is needed, or if diapers need to be changed, parents will be retrieved to help. UUNB employees and volunteers will not change diapers or assist children going to the restroom. If a child requests an employee or volunteer to escort them, the adult must not go further than the door of the outer restroom, remain visible, and keep the door open. Anything more requires the parent or guardian help their child.

### **Sick Children**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all the children at UUNB. A common sense approach is requested. We suggest children with the following symptoms should not participate in RE:

- Fever, diarrhea, vomiting within the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Communicable eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Antibacterial wipes are available and children are allowed to leave for the restroom to wash hands at any time to reduce germ sharing.

### **Medications**

UUNB will not administer any prescription or non-prescription medications to the children in our care. Medications should be administered by parents or guardians at home. Exceptions may be granted for children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address this directly with the DRE to develop a plan of action for potential situations.

### **Discipline**

UUNB will not administer corporal punishment under any circumstances, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There will be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children.

In addition, no employee or volunteer may use any of the following methods of discipline while acting as a childcare provider or teacher at UUNB:

- No child shall be subject to physical punishment, corporal punishment, verbal abuse or threats
- No child or group of children shall be allowed to discipline another child
- Unsupervised isolation is never allowed.
- Food, water, nap, rest, or bathroom trips may not be withheld as punishment.
- No child shall be physically restricted in any way, unless his or her actions could bring harm to others.
- An adult shall never address a child with intimidation or ridicule.

Should disciplinary issues arise that are not manageable through talk and cooperation, parents will be retrieved or the child will be brought to parents. Following any major discipline incident, the DRE and parents will communicate to determine whether a “behavioral covenant” would be beneficial or needs to be established.

### **Accidental Injuries to Children**

Employees/volunteers shall report any injury of a child, no matter how minor it may seem, to the parents and DRE. **Any major injury should be reported to the parent immediately.**

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, these steps should be followed:

1. Minor injuries, scrapes and bruises should be given first aid (antiseptic and bandages, etc.) as appropriate and parents or guardians will be notified when the child is picked up.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment, parents will be summoned immediately. If necessary, an ambulance will be called.
3. Any major injury requires an incident report.

### **General Safety RE Rules:**

Employees and volunteers should keep these basic safety rules in mind at all times:

- Never leave a child alone on the playground or any room for any reason. Text the DRE or another adult for assistance if necessary.
- If a spill occurs, clean it up to avoid children or members slipping.
- Keep the courtyard gate closed and latched when children are outside during RE attendance (10:30-11:40am).
- All RE and child care areas should be continually monitored for potentially hazardous items and substances.
- Treat children with respect. Use kind and caring language, as well as voice control.
- Remember that children may have unseen disabilities and/or limitations that require different accommodations and expectations. Because of confidentiality, this information cannot be shared by the RE department. Employees, volunteers, parents and other members must assume the best about every child and their behavior.

### **Child Delivery to Parents at End of Session**

At the end of each session, employees and volunteers must directly deliver children to parents, observe children being picked up by parents, or check with parents about the “change of hands” from RE time to parent responsibility.

Employees and volunteers are responsible for confirming this with parents, but parents should assume that once their child is at the end of their RE session, at 11:40am, the shift in responsibility moves to the parents. **Children will not be monitored by RE employees or volunteers on the playground, outdoor campus, or inside the UUNB building and are the parents’ responsibility. Even if children remain in the RE and childcare rooms, RE employees and volunteers are no longer responsible for children.**

### **Confidentiality**

All employees, committee members or volunteers subject to privileged medical or personal information about children and families involved in RE agree to keep this information to themselves, including but not limited to information about diagnoses, prescriptions, family history, behavior challenges, allergies, food sensitivities and private information that might be sensitive in nature. Sharing such information inappropriately could result in disciplinary action of an employee or conflict mediation for a volunteer.

### **Training**

UUNB will provide child protection procedures to all RE employees and will strive to provide additional opportunities or events annually. Volunteers are encouraged to attend training events as well.