

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD**  
**SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY:**

**Purpose of This Policy:**

The Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield (UUSGS) strives to welcome all those who use our spaces and programs to invest in the free and unrestricted development of the human spirit for the good of all and see UUSGS as one instrument of its realization. We recognize that in this mission our institution - and especially our children and youth - are vulnerable to individuals whose purpose or behaviors may run counter to our congregation's core principles. We therefore recognize the importance of creating reasonable policies and protocols that will serve our needs to protect the personal safety of our children and maintain coherence with our values and mission as a congregation.

**Ownership:**

Because the ownership of the safety of our congregation needs to be held by a representative body, not just one individual, a Safe Congregation Council (SCC) will be established and assembled by the Director of Family Ministry (DFM). The council will review any questionable background checks, create access and support plans for adults or children who require additional supervision, and provide counsel on other Safe Congregation Policy matters that require privacy and confidentiality. The DFM is charged with assembling this council to include at minimum: the DFM, the Minister(s), a member of the Family Ministry/Religious Education committee, and a member of the congregation at large, preferably a person serving on the Healthy Congregations Team. In the event that a person serving on this council is closely connected to an individual(s) or incident that is before the council, they must recuse themselves until the process of review and recommended action is complete. A substitute may be recruited to temporarily serve in their stead.

The DFM is charged with presenting and reviewing the Safe Congregational Policy regularly, and coordinating implementation with all staff and volunteers of the Family Ministry/Religious Education program. In addition, the policy and the resulting protocols and expectations set in place by the DFM are to be distributed every Fall to all parents and/or guardians with children in the program (for compliance), as well the congregation and general public (for communication).

**Background Check and Sexual Offender Policy:**

Any adult wishing to work or volunteer in any capacity within the Family Ministry/Religious Education program must have been involved with UUSGS for at least 6 months, submit 2 references from organizations or institutions where they have worked or volunteered with children, and agree to - and provide personal information for - a state and national background check. Background checks must be redone every 3 years. In addition, volunteers must read, sign, and agree to abide by a Code of Ethics for Working with Children.

The DFM is charged with reviewing all background checks of RE applicants and volunteers and bringing to the attention of the SCC any checks that reveal a questionable history.

Bi-annually, the DFM will review the membership and guests roster and compare it against registered sex offender lists in the surrounding areas (Agawam, Chicopee, East Longmeadow, Enfield, Hampden, Holyoke, Longmeadow, Monson, Springfield, West Springfield, Westfield, Wilbraham) and bring to the attention of the SCC any matching individuals.

Any congregant with knowledge of offenders present is encouraged and expected to privately bring the matter to the attention of the DFM and/or a member of the SCC. Once the matter is turned over to the SCC, the SCC will decide how best to proceed.

The Safe Congregation Council is charged with reviewing all access for any individuals with questionable background checks, and any members with sexual offender convictions. They will gather the necessary information to identify the assessed level of risk and, if appropriate, the circumstances of offense. Level 2 and Level 3 offenders will not be allowed any involvement in the Family Ministry/Religious Education Program. Access to Level 1 offenders will be determined on a case by case basis, depending on the circumstances of the offense. All materials collected containing individuals' personal information, and personal information discussed or shared, will be kept private and access will be restricted to the DFM and the SCC.

The Safe Congregation Council may request that any offenders, youth or adult - whether those of legal conviction or those who have illustrated egregious, violent, or risky behaviors while at UUSGS - to agree to comply with an access contract. The contract may include but is not limited to: restricted access to building spaces and events, prior notification of attendance, attending events with fewer or zero children present, and/or attending with a chaperone. In the case that this becomes necessary for a youth/minor, this restricted access will be framed as an IFFP (Independent Faith Formation Plan) so as to explicitly serve the spiritual growth and development of the child while still maintaining the safety of the RE learning environment and community. While pertinent information in an access contract or IFFP may be shared on a need-to-know basis with staff or classroom volunteers, the offense and personal information obtained about the individual will remain restricted to the SCC.

### **Incident Reporting Policy**

Any incidence of violence, bullying, mistreatment and/or concerns about the safety of any child at UUSGS should be addressed directly to the DFM. (This includes if a complaint originates with the minister, another member of the SCC, or a Trustee.)

Any volunteer or classroom staff person, having reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering or has suffered from violence, abuse and/or neglect at or outside of UUSGS, must orally report their suspicions to the DFM and submit a written report within 48 hours. The DFM, acting as a mandatory reporter, must report any reasonable suspicions to Child Protective Services, as mandated by state law.

If an accusation or report of inappropriate conduct is made against any volunteer, staff member, or congregant currently working with children, all contact with children at UUSGS will be suspended until the incident and course of action can be decided on by the DFM, with the advisement of the Safe Congregation Council, and if applicable, reported to the Police and Child Protective Services, as required by state law.

### **Child Supervision Policy**

UUSGS will provide adequate supervision for all church-sponsored children's classes and events at which childcare is expressly provided.

All requests to serve as an RE volunteer require approval and will be reviewed by the DFM.

All Society-sponsored events and classes for children 0 - 11 years of age will have at least two unrelated adults scheduled to be present. If circumstances interfere with scheduled teachers to provide coverage, the DFM shall find adequate coverage. Such coverage can include: a regular program substitute, two childcare-certified youth (over 12 years of age) working with a CORI-checked adult, a combination of classes and teachers, and/or explicit permission from the parents for one provider to provide coverage in an "open door" setting with another adult in the close vicinity.

At no time will the proportion of children to adults exceed:

- 6 children to 1 care provider, for ages under 5 years of age
- 10 children to 1 care provider, for ages 5 of age and up.

During Society events and programming in which groups of children are using multiple spaces in the building, the building will be monitored to keep children safe and limit access by unauthorized adults from those spaces in use, including halls and bathrooms. A "hall monitor" may be employed, as needed.

Youth activities at the Society or trips sponsored by the Society for children 12 years old and up will have at least one supervising adult (18 years or older) and should at no time have less than 3 people present (i.e., no one-on-one with adults OR other youth) in a "closed door" setting.

In cases of emergency, priority will be given to having multiple adults present before having only CORI-checked individuals present. At no time will children be supervised by a non-CORI-checked adult(s) only.

When childcare is not provided and classes are not in session, but a child or children are in the building, then their parent(s) or a parentally designated adult will be responsible for “eyes on” supervision of said children. Children will not be allowed unattended access to any classroom or other building spaces. At all times, parents or their designee, should remain on the premises while their child is in programming, childcare, or in the building in any capacity unless specific written permission or privileges are granted by the DFM.

A list of certified child care providers (youth and adults) shall be kept by the DFM for use by parents and event coordinators. Groups or individuals wishing to provide childcare for their children, or for the children of attendees, should make every attempt to use individuals from the list of certified childcare providers. In this case, arrangements can be made directly with the providers as private contractors.