

**Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**Adult, Child and Youth Protection Policies**  
**Focus: Sexual, Physical, and Emotional Abuse**

**BACKGROUND**

**Church Covenant with one another**

Unitarian Universalists choose to covenant with one another. Our covenant is not a creed or doctrine. It does not dictate correct or specific belief or dogma. It does describe our relationships with one another. It is a voluntary and unconditional agreement to act in ways that express the values of our Unitarian Universalist principles.

We, the members of Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, believe that our commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, spiritual growth, and the use of a democratic process within our congregation compels us to create and maintain a safe environment that protects children and adults from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

**Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, our District, and UUA**

We recognize that religious communities, which should be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all the members, are particularly vulnerable to incidents of sexual, physical, emotional, or verbal abuse or misconduct. Generally churches promote a high level of trust, a welcoming spirit, and a strong reliance on and need for volunteers, especially in child and youth programs. We realize that entities operating in the best possible manner with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free setting, and thus we need to adopt policies of “reasonable precaution” regarding the issue of abuse.

The Unitarian Universalist Association and the Southwest District have policies set up that are intended to prevent sexual, physical, and emotional abuse in their communities and at church sponsored events.

**United States Society**

We live in a society where sexual abuse is common. It is estimated that 27% of adult women and 16% of adult men experience childhood sexual victimization. When talking to the people in our own congregation we have found many people who have experienced some form of sexual abuse.

**Lawsuits and Liability**

A lawsuit brought against the church could compromise programming, staffing, and our future plans. Losing a lawsuit would put the church in jeopardy of losing our building, along with any other valuable assets. A key determining factor in losing a lawsuit is negligence. This policy is a first line of defense against legal action. Insurance is a secondary line of defense.

## ***Policy Scope***

Abuse of any kind, whether it be between adults and youth, between adults and adults, or between youth and youth, is not tolerated within our church community. This policy focuses specifically on sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of children/youth.

### ***Section I. The Policy***

In creating and adopting this policy, the members and friends of Live Oak UU Church accept our responsibility to define abuse, educate our congregation about it, and implement policies and procedures that will create a climate of safety, love, and awareness.

#### **A. Defining Abuse of Children and Youth**

- ❖ Abuse can be mental, emotional, physical or sexual. People may be guilty of abuse if they personally inflict the abuse, or if they cause or permit a child to be in a situation that results in the abuse.
- ❖ A mental or emotional injury is one that "results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development or psychological functioning."
- ❖ A physical injury is one that results in substantial harm (or the genuine threat of substantial harm) to the child.
- ❖ Sexual abuse is any sexual conduct that is harmful to a child's mental, emotional or physical welfare.

#### **B. Education**

The successful implementation of this policy requires that we educate our congregation about what constitutes sexual abuse, situations at church that could put people at risk, and the rules and procedures that we have adopted together. As we educate people, we need to make sure that we do so in a way that emphasizes love, awareness and action. It is important that we avoid creating an environment of fear or suspicion.

**For members of the congregation, the Safe Congregation Committee will:**

- ❖ Create, keep up to date, and make available a Live Oak UU Safety Handbook that provides education for age 4 – adult, including information about child sexual abuse prevention, an explanation of inappropriate behavior, unsafe situations to avoid, and what reporting is required if abuse occurs.
- ❖ Make available the current Child and Youth Protection Policy for the church library
- ❖ Obtain and make available the Texas statutes addressing child abuse and mandatory reporting of child abuse
- ❖ Provide information to the Nominating Committee about the criteria for appointing members to the Safe Congregation Committee
- ❖ Provide a representative of the Safe Congregation Committee to the LOUU new member orientations to present an overview of these policies

- ❖ Provide an overview of this policy to be included in the new member packet, which will include the policy scope and section I

**For our Children and Youth, the RE Committee will provide:**

- ❖ Age appropriate classes on development and sexuality to be taught on a regular basis using the UUA curriculum "Our Whole Lives".
- ❖ Sunday School class time to go over the Live Oak UU Safety Handbook information.

**For our RE Teachers and other Volunteers working with children and youth, the Safe Congregation Committee and the RE Committee will provide:**

- ❖ Copies of the current Child and Youth Protection Policies, and the Texas statutes addressing child abuse and mandatory reporting of child abuse.
- ❖ Copies of the Code of Conduct for Adults and Youth

### **C. Selection and Screening of Staff & Volunteers**

Religious Education (RE) teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth:

- Will be at least 25 years of age to work with high school youth.
- Will be at least 21 years of age to teach other RE classes (an 18-20 year old may teach as the second adult with someone who is 21 or older).
- Will be at least 18 years of age to provide childcare.
- Will have been an active participant in Live Oak UU for at least six months or have childcare references from the public or private sector.
- Will have completed a screening form (see appendix).
- Will have been interviewed by the sponsoring committee.
- Will have had two references checked
- Will have passed a criminal background check.
- Will have attended at least one training session on child abuse put on by the RE committee and/or the Safe Congregation Committee.
- Will have received and understood a job description.
- Will have read, understood and signed the *Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth* or the *Code of Ethics for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children*. (See pages 15-17 of this document.)
- Will have valid driver's licenses, liability insurance, and current state safety inspection stickers on their vehicles if they are to transport children/youth to church-sponsored activities.

Paid staff members who work with children will also meet the above criteria.

### **D. Supervision**

#### **Events where the church provides programs for children and youth and assumes responsibility for children and youth:**

The **Two Adult Rule** will be used and is defined as requiring that at least two adults shall be present during any church activity where the church is taking responsibility for the care of

children/youth, including but not exclusive to Sunday morning RE classes and nursery care, and childcare for Steering Committee, Live Oak Business meetings, youth lock-ins, and the Canvass Dinner.

The minimum age of the adults is to be consistent with the RE Teacher guidelines above. Youth under the age of 18 may work as helpers with younger children, though they cannot be used to satisfy the two adult rule.

Adults and youth working in church provided programs for children and youth must meet or exceed the criteria listed above in section C. Adults who accompany youth from other UU churches to attend district youth activities held at Live Oak will be screened by their home churches according to their own policies.

Programs that involve children and youth shall always include adequate supervisory personnel or they will be cancelled/postponed. Supervision shall be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians. A program with only one child or youth present, without the specific approval of the parent or legal guardian, will be canceled or postponed.

Procedures shall be implemented for the church nursery that clearly identify the child and the child's parent or guardian. Children shall only be released to a properly identified and preauthorized adult.

**Events where the parents provide programs or activities for their own children and youth:**

The two adult rule defined above does not apply to church events where the parents have responsibility for their own children and youth. This could include outings, campouts, community outreach events arranged by the church, or childcare *arranged and funded independently by parents* for small group meetings.

**Before and after church programs where parents assume responsibility for their children and youth:**

The two adult rule does not apply to situations where the parents have responsibility for their own children and youth. However, the children, youth, and adults are expected to remain in the open public areas designated by the Campus Use Committee. Anyone found hanging out in other areas will be expected to return to the public areas.

With written parental consent, one adult driver, meeting the criteria above in section C, may transport two or more children or youth to and from a church-sponsored event. The two adult rule still applies during the destination activity.

**E. Reporting**

Situations of suspected child abuse are seldom simple and straightforward. Religious leaders and congregational members should be guided by a commitment to the overriding priority of protecting the children. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations.

**State Law**

If a Live Oak member or friend of the congregation has a suspicion that a child has been abused, either while involved in church programs, events and activities, or at other times, that person

must report the incident to state authorities, defined in Texas as the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS) or law enforcement.

In Texas, "a person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person shall immediately make a report..." As such, *all persons* are termed "mandatory reporters" by law and reports may be made anonymously to the state. The Texas abuse/neglect hotline number is (800) 252-5400. The church is under the local law enforcement jurisdiction of the Williamson County Sheriff's Department at 943-1300.

### **Reporting Within the Church**

In addition, if the person with the concern believes the abuse occurred during a church program, event or activity, the individual should report his or her concerns to the minister, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) or a member of the Safe Congregation Committee.

Any person who has concerns about *inappropriate behavior* by teachers, child care workers, or other adults or older youth in our church community should report their concerns immediately to the minister, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) or a member of the Safe Congregation Committee. Inappropriate behavior may include such things as failure to follow the 2 adult rule or physical / verbal interaction with a child that could be construed as sexual in nature (e.g. an adult resting his/her hand on a child's thigh). Such behavior, which is not in itself abuse, is not in the best interest of our children and needs to be addressed and monitored in order to protect both the child and adult involved.

### **False Accusations**

The protection from false or mistaken allegations of adults who teach in the RE program or otherwise interact with children at Live Oak is also an important goal of this policy. A key way to prevent false or mistaken allegations is to abide by the prevention guidelines outlined in these policies, as well as the *Code of Conduct for Adults Working With Children and Youth* and the *Code of Ethics for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children*. We should be sensitive to the disruption and damage a false accusation may cause to both the adults and the children involved. This is true even when the accusation is one due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what seems a child's straightforward report of an event.

## ***Section II. Organizational Structure***

### **Safe Congregation Committee**

The Nominating Committee, in consultation with the minister and DRE, will appoint a Safe Congregation Committee of 4-6 responsible and knowledgeable people who will be responsible for the implementation of this policy. There will be no term limits on this committee, but the members must be submitted by the Nominating Committee every two years.

These persons will be selected by qualification and willingness to serve. Qualifications include:

1. Professional or volunteer experience in working with children and/or child abuse issues or through special training in said areas;
2. Understanding of these policies, UUA "Safe Congregation" material, or *Church Law & Tax Report* risk reduction materials; and/or

3. Knowledge about available resources and reporting procedures for children, inclusive of applicable Texas State laws.

These members must meet the same screening requirements as all other child/youth volunteers.

### **Response Team**

In response to a specific situation a Response Team will be formed consisting of the DRE, the minister, and three individuals from the Safe Congregation Committee. If the incident or allegations involve any of these individuals or their family members, that person will be removed from the Response Team.

The Response Team does not have the legal authority, expertise or training to determine guilt or innocence. Its overall purpose is to protect members of the church community, and to ensure that the victim and the accused are treated with dignity and respect.

## ***Section III. Implementation of Policy***

### **A. Education**

#### ***Documentation***

The Safe Congregation committee must ensure that supporting documentation exists to record the occurrence of educational activities on a yearly basis. The documentation must be kept indefinitely. The documents can be computer generated or scanned and saved on computer media. Historical files are to be kept in the church file room.

### **B. Selection and Screening of Staff and Volunteers**

#### ***Documentation***

The Safe Congregation committee, along with the DRE, must ensure supporting documentation exists demonstrating thorough screening of staff and volunteers who will work with children or youth, including: verification of minimum age, time active at Live Oak or work references check, training session attended, job description delivered, signed Code of Conduct, screening form, interview notes, personal references checked, and criminal background check completed.

#### ***Reference Checks***

All personal and organizational references provided by the applicant will be contacted and interviewed by a member of the Safe Congregation Committee or the sponsoring committee for the applicant. A written record of each contact will be made which will include the following: the date and method of contact, the person making the contact, and a summary of the reference's remarks. These records will be kept with the original application. The primary question to be explored is whether in the opinion of the reference, the applicant is suitable for working with youth and children.

#### ***Criminal Background Check***

Confidential criminal background checks will be conducted in accordance with Texas state laws.

If possible, a third party will be utilized to screen these background check reports. This party will be given comprehensive and concise criteria on which to base a pass / non-pass status for each applicant, which will be provided to the Safe Congregation Committee.

If utilization of a third party is not a workable option, a member of the Safe Congregation Committee who has received training recommended by the Texas DPS will conduct the criminal background checks. All relevant laws pertaining to confidentiality and destruction of documents will be strictly followed.

### ***Disqualifying offenses***

Any applicant who has ever been convicted of any disqualifying offense, been on probation or received deferred adjudication for any disqualifying offense, or has presently pending any criminal charges of any disqualifying offense before a determination of guilt is made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication, will automatically be given a "no-pass" status by the Safe Congregation Committee.

### ***Guidelines for Determining Disqualification***

- The following offenses are grounds for disqualification:
  - ❖ Homicide
  - ❖ Assault
  - ❖ Kidnapping
  - ❖ Sexual assault
  - ❖ Other sex offenses involving children
    - Fondling
    - Indecency
    - Indecent exposure
    - Pornography
  - ❖ Family offenses
    - Child neglect, cruelty, abandonment, or endangerment
    - Contributing to the delinquency of a minor
  - ❖ Weapons offenses
  - ❖ Drug offenses
    - Selling or distributing illegal drugs to minors
    - Selling, distributing, manufacturing, or smuggling illegal hallucinogens, opiates, narcotics, cocaine, amphetamines, or barbiturates
  - ❖ Traffic Offenses (only if applicant will be transporting minors on behalf of the church)
    - Driving while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs
    - Reckless driving
    - Hit and run

- Other offenses may be added to the screening criteria, and thus result in disqualification, at the discretion of the Safe Congregation Committee if they feel that an offense not listed above could compromise the safety of children or youth.
- If a disqualifying offense is revealed in an applicant's background check, the applicant may appeal the "no pass" result to the Safe Congregation Committee. Factors considered by the Safe Congregation Committee to determine disqualification include the nature and severity of the criminal conduct, the length of time since the offense occurred, the likelihood of rehabilitation (must be evidenced by community standing, employment and references) and other factors that the Safe Congregation Committee may deem appropriate under the circumstances. If the "no pass" result is due to false information or mistaken identity, the applicant will be directed to the Department Of Public Safety to have the error corrected. Unless the "no pass" status is overturned by the Safe Congregation Committee, the applicant will not be eligible to serve with children or youth.

### **C. Supervision**

#### ***Documentation***

The Safe Congregation committee and DRE must ensure documentation that demonstrates compliance with these policies. The documentation must be kept indefinitely. The documents can be computer generated or scanned and saved on computer media. Historical files are to be kept in the church file room.

### **D. Reporting**

#### ***Response to suspicious behavior***

Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult staff member or volunteer worker and a child/youth shall be confronted immediately and investigated. Any such situations shall be reported to the minister, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) or any member of the Safe Congregation Committee. Prompt warnings shall be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored closely. The adult worker's services shall be terminated immediately for continued violation of such warnings, or for a single violation of sufficient gravity.

#### ***Response to an allegation of abuse***

When an allegation of child abuse occurring during a LOUU program, event or activity is reported, the responsible person receiving the allegation must take the following steps:

- ❖ Take immediate action to ensure the protection of the child/children
- ❖ Report the incident to the appropriate state authorities in accordance with Texas law. See "Reporting" on page 4.
- ❖ Convene a meeting of the Safe Congregation Committee to form a Response Team specific to the incident
- ❖ Document the allegation in writing using a Safe Congregation Incident Form (see appendix) and submit this to the chair of the Safe Congregation Committee.

#### ***Response Team***

The team responding to the allegation should keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. **Safety of the Children** – The safety of the children in the church program should be of primary importance. Reasonable and timely actions should be taken to ensure their safety

based upon the credibility and severity of the allegation and other pertinent factors. All allegations will be taken seriously.

2. **State Law** – Copies of the applicable Texas state laws will be kept in the *Child and Youth Protection Policies* book and shall be referenced when an incident is reported. Appropriate and timely reporting will be made to the appropriate local or state law enforcement agency or the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. (Phone numbers are listed previously in this section.)
3. **Professional Resources** – The Response Team should call upon or make referrals to whatever professional resources they deem appropriate, both within and outside the church. The church insurance company and attorney should be notified immediately.
4. **Who to Inform** – Decisions about who to inform about the incident and the information to be provided should be made in a careful, but timely manner by the Response Team. The decision should be made based upon the individual situation, inclusive of the severity of the allegation, credibility of the allegation, and any existing threat to the safety of the children.
5. **Notification of Executive Committee and District** – The Response Team will notify the LOUU President and the Southwest District Executive:
  - ❖ That a Response Team has been convened
  - ❖ About the nature of the issue
  - ❖ That a report has been or will be made to PRS or law enforcement agencies.
 The LOUU President will report to the LOUU Executive Committee in a closed meeting at the earliest appropriate time.
6. **Spokesperson** – The Response Team will designate one individual to act as a spokesperson for the church. That will be the only person authorized to speak for the church regarding the situation.
7. **Confidentiality** – In order to ensure that the safety of our children and youth is our highest priority, we must encourage the responsible reporting of all concerns or suspicions of child abuse. To this end, all reports to the Safe Congregation Committee will be considered confidential.

In this context, “confidential” means that the identity of the child victim and/or reporting person, the details of the allegation or concern, and any other identifying information, will be kept among the members of the Response Team and the accused. This information will not be disseminated to the congregation.

8. **Restrictions with Children** – In order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk and to protect the accused from further suspicion, decisions about removing the alleged perpetrator from interacting with children in the RE program, or other church events and activities will be made by the Response Team. A decision should be made and action taken in a timely manner based on the possible threat to the children, the credibility and seriousness of the allegation, and other related factors.

- ❖ If a report is made to PRS or law enforcement, a leave of absence will be mandatory for the alleged perpetrator.
  - ❖ The Response Team may determine, even without an accusation of abuse being made, that they have reason(s) for concern that an individual's contact with children or youth in our congregation potentially places both the adult and the children at risk of incident or accusation. For this reason, the Response Team is authorized to restrict an individual from teaching in the RE program or otherwise volunteering at or chaperoning children's events.
  - ❖ If disputes arise out of the actions taken by the Response Team, Safe Congregation Committee, or DRE, the matter may be taken to the church leadership. However, the DRE and the Safe Congregation Committee retain the right and responsibility to screen and authorize volunteers for teaching in the RE program, and the Response Team and the Safe Congregation Committee will make final decisions about removing a teacher or otherwise restricting an individual's contact with children and youth on church property or at church-sponsored events.
9. **Other Inappropriate Behaviors** - Some incidents or allegations in the RE or other child or youth programs may involve behaviors that are not clearly child abuse, but may be in other ways deemed inappropriate by a parent, the DRE, or the Safe Congregation Committee. This shall include the possession of weapons or impairing of judgment or ability through the consumption of alcohol and/or any other substance, legal or illegal. In such cases, a Response Team may be called together to review the situation and decide what action to take.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Live Oak screening form
2. Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Youth and Children
3. Code of Ethics for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children
4. "Possible Indicators of Child Abuse" handout – to be used in teacher education
5. Internal reporting form

## LIVE OAK UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH SCREENING FORM FOR CHILDREN OR YOUTH WORKERS

*THE INFORMATION OBTAINED IN THIS FORM WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL*

This screening form is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. This is not an employment application form. Persons seeking a position in the church as a paid employee will be required to complete an employment application in addition to this screening form. This form is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs.

*\*\*If you need more space for any of your responses, please use additional sheets of paper\*\**

### **PERSONAL**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(First)

(Middle)

(Last)

Identity must be confirmed with a state driver's license or other government-issued ID.

Do you have a current driver's license? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, DL# \_\_\_\_\_ Issuing State \_\_\_\_\_

**Present Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip Code** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_

Previous addresses for the last 10 years \_\_\_\_\_

In what area of youth/child work are you interested? \_\_\_\_\_

What date would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain fully

Have you ever committed, or has any civil action ever been filed against you for reasons related to, sexual misconduct or child abuse? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

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Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that might call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children and youth? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

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***CHURCH HISTORY AND PRIOR YOUTH WORK (Please list organizations' names, addresses, type of work performed and dates)***

Please list any churches that you have attended regularly during the past 5 years \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe any church volunteer work over the past 5 years \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe any youth work (at churches or other organizations) over the past 5 years

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In what ways have you participated in Live Oak over the past 6 months? \_\_\_\_\_

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Please list any training or education in youth-related work \_\_\_\_\_

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**PERSONAL REFERENCES** (not former employers or relatives)

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

### Applicant's Statement

The information contained in this screening form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this form to give Live Oak UU any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this screening form by Live Oak UU, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization, excepting only the communication of knowingly false information.

I (check one):

waive

do not waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct and policies of Live Oak UU in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I understand that *Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church* will obtain information relating to my criminal history record. The criminal history record, as received from the reporting agencies, may include arrest and conviction data as well as plea bargains and deferred adjudication. I understand that this information will be used, in part, to determine my eligibility for an employment/volunteer position with this organization. I also understand that as long as I remain an employee or volunteer here, the criminal history records check may be repeated at any time. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review that criminal history and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received.

I, the undersigned, do, for myself, my heirs, executors and administrators, hereby remise, release and forever discharge and agree to indemnify Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, and each of their officers, directors, employees, and agents harmless from and against any and all causes of actions, suits, liabilities, costs, debts and sums of money, claims and demands whatsoever, and any and all related attorneys' fees, court costs, and other expenses resulting from the investigation of my background in connection with my application to become a volunteer/staff member.

I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. This is a legally binding agreement, which I have read and understand.

Applicant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Children and Youth*

### ***Live Oak Position Statement***

Adults working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith, have a crucial and privileged role. To help our children grow up to be caring and responsible adults can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person. It is important to recognize that this role carries with it both power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, child-care worker, teacher, minister, mentor, or any other role, the adult has special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to the young people and to the adult. Adults who work with children and youth at Live Oak events are expected to always have the best interests of children and youth at heart.

### **Expectations**

Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. Our charge to children and youth workers is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness.

We intend to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and communities. We expect that one person's enjoyment will not be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church has of adults working with children and youth. They are as follows:

- ***“Friendship” with Youth*** – Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for “friendship” is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. A “friendship” is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. It is expected that relationships that an adult has with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitative.
- ***Unofficial Contact With Youth*** – Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These can be not only healthy, but also transformative for both. However, it is our concern that a “predator,” who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart, will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of church-sponsored events, it is imperative that your behavior both *be and appear to be* above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a youth outside of church-sponsored events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents. Furthermore, you should let an appropriate member of the Safe Congregation Committee know what you are doing. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the Safe Congregation Committee and the parents informed of your actions.

- ***Sexualized behavior*** – Adults play an important part in helping our youth develop healthy identities as sexual beings. Children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care. It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for example, or to make “double entendres.” Physical expressions of affections such as hugs have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.
- ***Confidentiality*** – Adults who work with children and youth under the aegis of the church are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the church as well. **Remember: you are acting both ethically and legally as an agent of Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church.** Sometimes you will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. *YOU MUST NOT KEEP SUCH INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.* For this reason, please try never to give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. *CONFIDENTIALITY IS NOT SECRET KEEPING.* For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when the information is of a major crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. In addition, you yourself *MUST* consult with a person of greater authority in the church, which in this situation means a member of the Safe Congregation Committee, the DRE, or the minister, about an appropriate course of action.

### Accordance with This Code of Conduct

Any Live Oak Unitarian Universalist staff or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the Safe Congregation Committee. However, until such a time as the church chooses to alter any portion of its provisions, the worker must abide by the code as written.

By signing below, I indicate that I have read this Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it. Further, I agree to refrain from any conduct that may constitute verbal, emotional or physical abuse. If I violate any of these provisions, the church leadership will take appropriate action, and I may become ineligible to work with children or youth at Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

## Code of Ethics for Older Youth Working with Younger Youth and Children

Older youth who are in leadership roles need to be aware of the underlying purpose that we have in our gatherings at church and the special responsibilities that come with your new role in the classroom.

**Underlying Purpose:** When ever we gather together at church, we are each involved with our own spiritual journeys as we strive to develop a healthy sense of self-worth, identity, and mutual respect.

### **Responsibilities:**

#### **1. Respect.**

The children and youth in our care are still forming who they are and what they believe. As you enter into relationship with the children in your care, ensure that you bring respect of those around you and that you expect others to respect you, so that everyone's positive potential can be realized.

When we are not respectful, we can end up being abusive. A person may be guilty of abuse if they personally inflict the abuse, or if they cause or permit a child to be in a situation that results in the abuse. Abuse can be mental, emotional, physical or sexual.

- ❖ A mental or emotional injury is one that "results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development or psychological functioning."
- ❖ A physical injury is one that results in substantial harm (or the genuine threat of substantial harm) to the child.
- ❖ Sexual abuse is any sexual conduct that is harmful

#### **2. Development**

Your actions and conversations have a direct impact on how others feel about themselves, how they feel about being at church, what they value, and what they believe. Two key areas of personal growth are a) self-worth and b) a healthy identity as a sexual being. Research shows that children and youth suffer damaging effects when leaders or mentors become abusive or sexually involved with young persons in their care.

#### **3. Agreement:**

Therefore, I will not harass or engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Furthermore, I agree that I will not engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.

I agree to be respectful of those around me, to expect others to be respectful of me, and to use my skills to be kind, truthful, respectful, and nurturing.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

Children do not always tell someone they are being abused. They may have been threatened into silence or be too embarrassed or horrified to talk about what is happening. They may exhibit extreme behaviors such as abusing animals, other children, or their dolls, or they may completely withdraw from family and friends. There are both physical signs and behavioral clues that may indicate child abuse or neglect. These indicators are warning signs to look further, ask questions, or seek assistance from a professional.

### Physical Abuse

- Unexplained fractures, burns, bruises, cuts, welts, or bite marks.
- Explanation for an injury that is inconsistent with the injury.
- Self-destructive and destructive behavior.
- Extreme behavior: fear, aggressiveness, withdrawal, or regression.

### Sexual Abuse

- Sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge relative to the child's age.
- Pain or itching, bleeding, or bruises in or around the genitals.
- Self-destructive and destructive behavior, such as alcohol or drug use, running away, or promiscuous behavior.
- Extreme behavior: withdrawal into fantasy play and away from peer relationships, depression, or passivity.

### Emotional Abuse

- Impaired sense of self-worth.
- Delayed physical, emotional, or intellectual development or failure to thrive.
- Self-destructive and destructive behavior, such as alcohol and drug abuse.
- Extreme behavior: unusual aggression or passivity, hyperactivity.

### Neglect

- Constant hunger or fatigue, inappropriate dress, or poor hygiene.
- Lack of supervision over long periods of time.
- Unattended physical or dental problems.
- Self-destructive and destructive behavior, such as alcohol or drug use.

(Taken from the UUA brochure *Honoring the Children - What We Can Do to Prevent Child Abuse* by Patricia Hoertdoerfer and Jade Angelica)

## SAFE CONGREGATION INCIDENT REPORT FORM

TODAY'S DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE AND TIME OF INCIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF PERSON WHO INITIATED REPORT \_\_\_\_\_

NAMES OF CHILD(REN) AND ADULT(S) INVOLVED IN INCIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

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WHERE DID THE INCIDENT OCCUR? (BE SPECIFIC) \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED \_\_\_\_\_

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HAS THE SAFETY OF THE CHILD(REN) BEEN ASSURED?

WHO HAS BEEN NOTIFIED ABOUT THIS INCIDENT? (LIST NAMES AND DATES/TIMES)