

Safety Policy for Children & Youth

Westside Unitarian Universalist is committed to providing a safe environment for children and youth. Westside shall establish practices and procedures that protect these people from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and exploitation. As a spiritual community we take seriously our responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all who participate.

Adults working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that may carry with it a great deal of power and influence. Whether in the role of youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, mentor, choir member, or any other capacity, the adult has a special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to the young people and the adult.

It is important that adults maintain meaningful relationships with the young people they work with, In this context, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom and have awareness of their influence with children and youth. Every child and youth must experience physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual safety while participating in Westside activities. In addition, any child disclosing abuse will be met with support and appropriate advocacy.

PREVENTION

To provide a safe and nurturing environment we shall:

- The responsible adult communicates directly with the student (when age appropriate), reminding them that the behavior is inappropriate and informs the other team teachers. The DRE, with the support of the committee and the minister, as needed, can help teachers clarify the issues.
- If the situation persists, the teacher and/or DRE will communicate with the child/youth and parent/guardian about the issue/s of concern. The DRE, parents and teachers will create an intervention plan that addresses the behaviors of concern. It is expected that communication will continue until the issue is deemed to be resolved.
- If the behavior continues, the DRE, in consultation with the minister will determine whether the behavior is so disruptive to the class or poses an unacceptable risk to the student or other members of the community that a child may be withdrawn/excluded from class until such time the DRE determines it is appropriate for the child or youth to reengage in the program. If a child or youth is excluded from their class, alternative means for the child youth to be successfully involved in the RE program or church community will be considered.

The RE Council also recognizes that for effective implementation of behavior policies:

- Promote self-esteem throughout our curriculum and interactions.

- Offer Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality program which includes sessions on sexual abuse prevention as well as assertiveness, non-violent communication and resources for children and youth.
- Provide training for RE teachers, OWL leaders, youth advisors and mentors in the area of abuse prevention and intervention.
- Plan for two unrelated adults to be present in all situations.
- Participate in background screening for all volunteers and staff working with children and youth.
- Ensure that the Director/Associate Director of Religious Exploration and the minister will be trained in appropriate responses to disclosure of abuse by any individual within the church community.
- Encourage parents to speak with their children about family safety rules.
- Plan programs so that a single child is not alone with a single adult without DRE and parental permission.
- Educate the congregational community that when children and youth are present at events, the sponsoring individual or committee is responsible for assuring that children and youth do not have access to alcoholic beverages. Care should be taken to assure there are other beverages available.
- When possible, rooms and buildings not being used and monitored for the event should be locked, if not able to be locked, should be clearly off limits.

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS

Adults and older youth wishing to volunteer with children will complete the following steps:

- Complete the Employee and Volunteer Safety Screening (WSP form)
- Complete the WSUU Code of Conduct for Religious Exploration
- Read the Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation Safety Policy (latest version)
- Meet with the Associate/Director of Religious Exploration

SUPERVISION

Sunday mornings the RE teachers and staff are responsible for the children and youth from the time they leave the sanctuary until they are reunited with parents. Before and after that time the parent/guardian is responsible for the safety of their children.

Children not participating in RE activities must be supervised by their parent/guardian at all times.

Children are not permitted to roam unsupervised in the buildings or on church property. Parents/guardians are responsible for their child's safety except during RE classtime, or other designated classes or events.

Rules of conduct for youth overnights and off premise events will be developed and reviewed by the A/DRE, Youth Advisors and RE Council.

TRANSPORTATION

Adults driving Westside children and youth will complete a Driver Agreement which includes the following guidelines:

- Proof of Liability Insurance showing that they carry at least the minimum amount of liability insurance required by the State of Washington on the vehicle they will be driving.
- Confirm that they are at least 25 years old.
- Verification that their personal driving record reflects no citations other than minor violations, as defined by the State of Washington, and that their license has not been revoked or suspended in the past 5 years.
- Promise to abide by all posted speed limits while transporting Westside children and youth.
- Abstinence from use of tobacco, alcohol, and other non-prescription drugs while on any trip. This includes the 12 hours preceding the trip in the case of alcohol and prescription and non-prescription drugs, that may impair judgment while driving.
- Driver will take medical and travel release forms and contact information with them on the trip.
- Driver will travel with a First Aid kit.
- Parents/guardians will verify, via email or phone, that their child is permitted on each specific trip away from 7141 California Ave SW

Special Considerations:

REPORTING AND RESPONSE SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT RESPONSE TEAM

The Director of Religious Exploration, Associate Director of Religious Exploration and the Minister, are mandated to report any information they have about the abuse of a child. This report goes to Children's Protective Services (CPS).

Any volunteer who suspects that a child is being abused, physically, emotionally, verbally or sexually, shall report such suspicions to the DRE or minister. We are all responsible for the safety of our children.

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 children. They should also be sensitive to the harm that can be done by false or mistaken accusations. Any person who has concerns about inappropriate behavior by teachers, childcare workers, or other adults or older youth in our church community should report their concerns immediately to the minister or Director of Religious Exploration.

A Response Team will be formed in the case of an incident of abuse of a child. It will consist of the DRE, minister, a board member and Westside's member who is coordinating insurance. Its purpose will be to protect members of the church community, and ensure that the victim and the accused are treated with dignity and respect.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information about families will be kept confidential except in cases that require mandatory reporting. If in doubt, talk to the DRE or minister.

MEDIA/TECHNOLOGY/PRIVACY RELEASES

The registration form will have a place for parents to give permission for their child to be photographed or videotaped in scheduled Westside activities. Such photos may be used by Westside for community building, publicity or educational purposes. Adults will not contact children and youth via any communication means without permission from the DRE, Youth Coordinator and parent. Group emails that include the DRE or parents are permissible.

DOCUMENTS

The following documents and forms will be utilized and updated as needed.

Related Documents:

- Bathroom Policies, in Safety manual and posted in age appropriate bathrooms
- RE General Policies and Procedures (in development)
- Youth Group policies and Procedures (in development)
- Overnight Rules (in development)
- RE Registration
- Medical and Travel Release
- Youth Group Agreement (Parent/Guardian/Youth) (in development)
- Specific Event travel permission/Field Trip form
- Incident Report (in development)
- Child Sexual or Physical Abuse Report (in development)
- Driver Agreement
- Employee and Volunteer Safety Screening (WSP form)
- Code of Conduct
- Sunday morning attendance master lists for use in case of fire

Bathroom Guidelines for Helping Young Children

Encourage parents to take their child to the bathroom prior to leaving the child in the classroom. Take children to the bathroom one at a time.

Tell co-teacher when you are leaving the classroom with a child/ren to use the bathroom. Adult should ask if any other children need to use the bathroom at that time. Respect the child's independence and needs.

Ask child if they need help and help as needed with clothing. Take your lead from the child; observe his or her behavior particularly for the little ones with fewer verbal skills. Children who are using the potty should be independent enough to take care of their own wiping needs.

Give the child enough privacy but maintain supervision. Never close the door when you are in the bathroom with a child.

Younger (2-3 yr.old) - Stay in bathroom with door propped open using a doorstop. Help with hand washing and clothing if needed.

Older (3-5 yr.old) - Stay outside the bathroom with the door closed. Monitor child by listening. Knock or briefly open the door to check on the child if needed. Remind/reinforce hand washing before child leaves the bathroom.

Kindergarten and First Grade – Maintain visual contact as child enters and leaves the bathroom to be certain they get there and back to the classroom. Reinforce hand washing when they return.

Always wash own hands before returning to or upon entering the classroom.

CODE OF CONDUCT

For adults and older youth in leadership roles with children and youth
Adults and older youth working with children in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that may carry with it a great deal of power and influence. This role can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person.

Adults and older youth leaders play a key role in fostering the spiritual and character development of individuals. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurturing, care and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationship is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being.

Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Therefore, those who lead children and youth will:

- provide nurturing care and support to all children and youth. work to help children develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence.
- respect the selfhood of each child or youth, including the absolute right to privacy of their own minds and body
- not engage in any behavior with children or youth which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.
- not engage in behavior or language which is personally threatening or demeaning.
- not engage in any sexually harassing behavior, nor any other sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children or youth.

- not encourage or condone any sort of illegal or unethical activity on the part of children or youth.
- sign the following forms: Application to Volunteer, Employee and Volunteer Safety Screening, Code of Ethics