

**ELIOT UNITARIAN CHAPEL  
SAFE CONGREGATION POLICY  
2019-20 (reviewed & updated August 2019)**

**Preamble:** Eliot Unitarian Chapel has a made a commitment that members, friends and visitors of Eliot Chapel feel welcomed, safe, respected and cared for. It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership positions or formally signed members, but all community participants, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of everyone in the congregation.

**The purpose of this policy is the following:**

- To promote safety in all areas of congregational life (physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual), especially pertaining to the safety of children, youth, and adult volunteers & staff (workers) working with children and youth.
- To provide training and guidelines for handling unsafe situations, safety concerns, and reported & alleged abuse.
- To reduce the possibility of sexual misconduct or child sexual abuse.
- To provide safeguards in case of false accusations of sexual abuse made against Chapel volunteers and/or paid staff.
- To proactively establish a plan for addressing these issues of safety
- To declare our congregation's ongoing commitment to the safety and well-being of everyone in the chapel community and ensuring, to the best of our ability, that our congregation is free of sexual abuse, harassment, and misconduct. (**Source:** Religious Institute: Sexually Safer Best Practices #18-Ongoing Commitment)

**1. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH**

a. Those who provide direct care or supervision for children or youth at Eliot ("workers"), including staff, ministers, and volunteers, must meet the following criteria:

**"Worker"** is defined as anyone, volunteer or staff, serving as a teacher, advisor, childcare attendant, chaperone, or supervisor of children and youth during Eliot Chapel sponsored activities and events who has supervisory or oversight responsibilities.

- i. Those working with children and youth in junior high school (7<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and younger should be at least 18 years of age. Workers below the age of 18 must be approved by the Director of Religious Education ("DRE").
- ii. Those working with high school groups (usually 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) should be at least 25 years of age. Workers below the age of 25 must be approved by the DRE.
- iii. All workers must consent to such reference and/or background checks as Eliot, in its sole discretion, deems necessary. The DRE and minister

will be responsible for determining disqualification based on background or reference checks. This information will be kept confidential.  
iv. All workers must be trained as prescribed by the DRE.

b. For other programs that involve children and youth, such as Room at the Inn, the program coordinator will serve in the role described for the DRE in this policy in all respects to ensure that this policy is upheld.

## **2. SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND POLICIES**

a. All workers are subject to the supervision and evaluation of the DRE.  
b. All workers are required to comply with the following policies to ensure a safe and secure environment for children and youth while participating in Eliot activities:

i. Each group should have at least two workers present at all times with at least one worker being an adult (18+). For infants and toddlers, the desirable ratio is one worker for every three children. The DRE shall determine the appropriate level of supervision for each group and activity and may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis.

-“**Adult**” - an individual who has reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

ii. Visibility and access into classrooms and other spaces used for education and programming with children & youth must be maintained at all times.

iii. The DRE OR ADRE, OR their designee, shall circulate in the RE classroom area and monitor classroom activities randomly during regular Religious Education classes.

iv. No private off-site meetings with children and youth are allowed, other than with a parent or guardian present, or without prior approval and notification from both parent/guardian and DRE.

- If an offsite meeting is to occur (with parent/guardian approval and notification), it should occur in a public location, such as a restaurant or coffee shop.

v. All outings and events, onsite or offsite, which are organized by Eliot staff or volunteers, must be pre-approved by the DRE or their designee. Participating children and youth must have formal permission from a parent or guardian.

### **In the event that Eliot organizes travel arrangements for an approved outing:**

vi. All drivers shall be a minimum age of 25. Drivers must submit proof of a current & valid driver’s license and submit to a Driver Background Check through the State of Missouri before being assigned chapel driving responsibilities.

vii. Drivers should have two or more children or youth in the car when transporting children and youth to and from activities. The only exception

is when the driver is transporting a child or youth with prior parent approval and notification of the DRE.

**Disciplinary Matters:**

viii. If disciplinary issues arise, there must be two adults present during all disciplinary meetings between the worker and the child or youth involved. The parents or guardians shall be informed of any such meeting and its contents as soon as possible.

ix. Corporal punishment or abusive language is prohibited. This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.

x. Behavior must both *be* and *appear to be* above reproach.

### 3. MAINTAINING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

a. **Mentoring:** Mentoring relationships between children or youth and adults are actively encouraged, subject to the following guidelines:

- A mentor, by definition, is a trusted counselor or guide. In the relationship between an adult and a child or youth, differences in age and maturity automatically bring differences in power and responsibility. Mentoring is not the same thing as peer-to-peer friendships which are grounded in equality of status.
- Regardless of the age of the child or youth, it is the responsibility of the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries at all times AND to be conscious of how their behavior is welcoming or exclusive to children and youth, in order to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust. (**Source:** UUA Youth Inclusion & Safety Guidelines)
- Anyone who becomes aware of, or observes, any boundary violations in relationships between minors and adults, must immediately discuss the situation with the minister or DRE.

b. **Physical Affection.** Limited physical expressions of affection such as hugs are acceptable, but the adult should allow the child or youth to initiate the contact. Any form of touch or physical expression shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid adult staff.

c. **Sexualized Behavior.** Adults who work with children and youth are in positions of power and play a key role in the spiritual and identity development of younger members of the community. It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but to sexually provocative, seductive, romantic, or

erotic behavior or language as well. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, connotations, or “double entendres”. Sexualized content on social media or any other virtual or electronic outlets is prohibited.

**d. Harassment.** Adults shall not sexually harass or engage in any other behavior with children or youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse or harassment. Any harassment regarding race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or disability will not be tolerated. Such harassment may include unsolicited remarks, gestures or physical contact, or displaying or circulating written material or derogatory pictures directed at any of these categories. In addition, sexual advances, jokes, explicit or offensive pictures, requests for sexual favors, sexting, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment and will not be tolerated.

In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

**(Source:** UUA Participation Covenant for Youth Events)

i. In the event a child or youth initiates inappropriate touching or any other form of sexualized behavior or harassment, the volunteer or paid staff member must immediately inform the child or youth that such touching is inappropriate. The adult must notify the DRE or, in their absence, the minister or administrator, of the incident within 24 hours.

**e. Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol.** Children and youth are prohibited from using tobacco (INCLUDING vaping, vape devices, and/or electronic cigarettes), drugs, or alcohol, and must not be allowed to engage in illegal behavior while participating in church-sanctioned activities. Volunteers and staff should, at all times, be aware that their own behavior is a powerful statement to children and youth. Adults, while actively supervising children and youth at a church-sponsored event or gathering, must not consume alcohol, use illegal drugs, or use tobacco products (INCLUDING vaping, vape devices, and electronic cigarettes) for the duration of the event or the tenure of their responsibility, both to maintain their ability to act responsibly in the event of an emergency AND to avoid the distance between youth and adults created by alcohol or tobacco consumption (**SOURCE:** UUA Youth Safety & Inclusion Guidelines)

i. Whenever alcohol is present at an Eliot Chapel event, adults of legal drinking age (21 and older) who are consuming alcohol are expected to do so in a responsible manner which does not endanger themselves or others. Left over alcohol should be removed or disposed of appropriately after the event.

**f. Communication.** All communication, regardless of the method, between adults to children and youth ***must be AND appear to be*** above reproach. All communication between adults and children or youth should be thought of as though it were occurring in-person, regardless of whether it is occurring face-to-face, over the phone, or electronically. The vast number of communication possibilities, and the quickness with which new applications and devices are created, requires that adults working with children and youth be cognizant of the need to maintain appropriate relational boundaries at all times, no matter the means of communication.

**Guidelines for Electronic Communication:** We encourage the use of electronic communication between volunteer teachers, youth advisors, Eliot staff, and Eliot families (including children and youth), subject to the following guidelines:

- i. Volunteer teachers, advisors, and staff may communicate with the parents/guardians of children and youth enrolled in the Religious Education program by using email, texting, and other forms of electronic communication.
- ii. Electronic communication between volunteer teachers, youth advisors, staff and Religious Education families, children and youth should be used to communicate facts and information relevant to the Religious Education program, or other Eliot Unitarian Chapel or Unitarian Universalist programming and business only.
- iii. When adult teachers, advisors, staff, and mentors communicate with youth through email, Facebook, or any other electronic forms of communication, the appropriate Eliot Chapel staff and/or youth's parents or guardians should be copied (CC'd) or included whenever possible, or notified of the communication ASAP.
- iv. If a youth should contact a mentor, advisor or church staff member privately through electronic communications, the recipient may send a reply with a CC (copy) to either to the youth's parent/guardian or the appropriate church staff member.
- v. Social Network communication between adult leaders and high school youth related to Eliot Chapel activities, youth programming, regional & national UU youth events, and other chapel business is permissible with advance parent/guardian notification/approval. Any such communication should, whenever possible, occur in a public space and must BE and APPEAR TO BE above reproach.

vi. Group communication through email, Facebook, group texting, etc. is appropriate. Any such communication should occur, whenever possible, in a public space, such as the “Facebook wall”. Whenever possible, parents/guardians and/or the appropriate church staff member should be copied or included.

vii. The use of text messaging with high school youth (grades 9-12) as a means of communicating about Religious Education & youth group programming is permitted with advance parent/guardian approval.

viii. If an adult is in doubt about the appropriateness of any ongoing or emerging forms for communication, they must consult with their supervisor on the church staff (usually the DRE) as soon as possible.

**g. Confidentiality vs. Secrets.** If a child or youth discloses incidents of abuse or neglect, or is exhibiting self-destructive tendencies, the worker must report it immediately to the minister or DRE. Adults should never give children or youth the impression that they will keep secrets for them, or promise to keep such information confidential.

i. If workers hear or encounter sensitive personal information from a child or youth which, in their judgment, necessitates notifying other church personnel for support or guidance, they should inform their supervisor on the church staff (usually the DRE or ADRE) as soon as possible.

#### **4. REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

a. If an individual has a safety concern regarding children, youth, or an Eliot adult worker (volunteer or staff), the matter must be brought to the direct attention of the DRE, minister, or administrator, who will then assess the situation and make an initial assessment of credibility. The matter should not be shared with other members of the Chapel community or a third party, as doing so may interfere with the successful investigation of the concern or cause unwarranted harm to the reputation of individual(s) in question. Concerns will be taken seriously and given prompt attention.

b. If a worker, volunteer or staff, has reason to believe that abuse has occurred during an Eliot Chapel program or event, has reasonable cause to suspect the child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, OR observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, the worker must immediately notify the lead minister, administrator, and/or DRE of their concern. The individual worker (volunteer or staff), along with the DRE, lead minister, administrator, OR a designated agent of the chapel, shall then become responsible for immediately making a report to the

Missouri Department of Social Services-Children's Division Hotline (either electronically OR by phone, pending the circumstances) as required by Missouri law. Nothing in this section, however, is meant to preclude any person from reporting abuse, neglect, or any suspicions thereof, and no person making a report (staff or volunteer) shall be subject to any sanction or adverse action from their employer or supervisor. The term "abuse" is not limited to that abuse inflicted by an individual responsible for the child's care, but also includes abuse inflicted by any other individual. **(Source: Missouri Revised Statutes (MRS) 210.115, Sections 1, 2, & 3, CURRENT as of August 2019).**

**Source:** [https://dss.mo.gov/cd/pdf/guidelines\\_can\\_reports.pdf](https://dss.mo.gov/cd/pdf/guidelines_can_reports.pdf)

i. **Missouri Children's Division Hotline: 1-800-392-3738** (current as of August 2019)

- **NEW:** The Missouri Department of Social Services-Children's Division now allows mandated reporters to file reports of NON-EMERGENCY abuse or neglect online. Information can be found at the link below for this procedure.
  - <https://apps.dss.mo.gov/OnlineCanReporting/default.aspx>

ii. If an individual required to report suspected instances of abuse or neglect pursuant to this section **has reason to believe that the victim of such abuse or neglect is a resident of another state or was injured as a result of an act which occurred in another state**, the person required to report such abuse or neglect may, in lieu of reporting to the Missouri children's division, make such a report to the child protection agency of the other state with the authority to receive such reports pursuant to the laws of such other state. If such agency accepts the report, no report is required to be made, but may be made, to the children's division **(Source: Missouri Revised Statute 210.115-Section 8, Current as of August 2019).**

iii. If the worker (staff or volunteer) ascertains that the child or youth is in a situation of imminent risk, they (or another responsible person) should immediately remove the abusive adult or vulnerable child from the situation and take steps necessary to protect the child or youth. The worker will cooperate with any subsequent investigation.

**If an abuse situation is reported:**

c. If an abuse situation is reported, the minister, or in their absence the DRE or administrator, shall ensure that the situation is reported as required by law and notify the church's insurer as the matter requires. Eliot staff members may consult with Unitarian Universalist denominational personnel in regards to the situation, and may inform the president of the Chapel's board if, in the minister or

staff member's opinion, this is warranted. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution of the offender, result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.

i. If the reported abuse involves an **Eliot adult volunteer (18+)**, the DRE or minister shall immediately relieve that person of further duties involving the supervision, care or teaching of children and youth until the matter is resolved.

ii. If the reported abuse involves an Eliot Chapel **staff member**, the matter will be addressed according to the terms and conditions in the Personnel Manual.

iii. If the reported abuse involves a **minister**, the matter should be brought to the attention of the President of the Chapel Board immediately. In addition to discussing the matter with the minister and discreetly removing him or her from direct contact with children, the President should contact the Director of Ministries and Faith Development at the Unitarian Universalist Association immediately for advice on how to proceed.

iv. If the reported abuse or allegation involves **a child or youth in the congregation** being accused of inappropriate touching (or some other form of abuse or conduct) towards another child or youth in the congregation, the minister should initiate contact individually with the parents/guardians of each child/youth to discuss the allegation and next steps. Depending upon the allegation and the nature of the incident, it may be necessary to report the incident to the Missouri Children's Division Hotline. Regardless of whether the allegation is founded, the child or teen who initiated the reported abuse or other inappropriate behaviors should not be allowed to participate in activities with the same child or youth until a safety plan can be developed, or the matter is otherwise resolved. It may, depending on the circumstances, make sense to remove the child or teen from religious education programming during this time (**SOURCE:** Religious Institute-Sexually Safer Practices, Item #17-Adolescent & Child Offenders).

d. Should the media contact Eliot about an alleged incident of abuse, the minister shall represent the Chapel to the public. While no identifying information should ever be disclosed, the minister may disclose steps taken to prevent such incidents, investigate this incident, and to guard against abusive situations in the future.



## Restricted & Limited Access

e. If it is determined that any person should have restricted or limited access to children and youth, or the Eliot community as a whole, the individual shall be required to sign a **Limited Access Agreement**, and shall not be allowed to have access to children and youth except as consistent with that agreement. The Lead Minister, DRE, Administrator, and Board President shall determine if such an agreement is necessary, and the application of that agreement.

i. Restrictions & limitations may be placed on an individual's participation in chapel activities if any of the following circumstances become known to the Lead Minister, DRE, and/or Board President.

1. It becomes known that an individual is facing allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct.

2. It becomes known that an individual has engaged in sexual abuse or misconduct, or has a prior conviction for such actions.

3. If it's determined, even without a formal accusation of abuse or misconduct, that an individual's contact with children or youth potentially places the individual and/or the children & youth at risk of harm or accusation.

ii. A draft of the Limited Access Agreement can be found in Section 6 of this policy.

### Sources:

- Unitarian Universalist Association: Balancing Acts: Limited Access Agreements
  - <http://www.uua.org/safe/children>
- First UU Society-Burlington, VT: Safe Congregation Policies
- Unitarian Universalist Society of Iowa City: Policy & Procedure Manual
- UUA Participation Covenant for Youth Events
  - [http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/participant\\_covenant.pdf](http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/participant_covenant.pdf)
- Religious Institute: Safer Congregations
  - <http://religiousinstitute.org/safer-congregations/>
- UUA Youth Safety & Inclusion Guidelines (updated 2015)
  - [http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/youth\\_inclusion\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/youth_inclusion_guidelines.pdf)

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION, Education, and Enforcement

a. The most current version of this policy will be distributed widely, including as follows:

i. The policy will be posted on the Chapel website.

ii. The policy will be included in information provided to new members.

iii. The policy will be given to all Religious Education teachers and youth leaders at the beginning of each program year, and to new teachers and leaders as they assume duties during the year.

- Should Eliot host an event which is open to children or youth from another congregation (such as a Youth Conference (CON)), adult leaders from the participating congregations will be provided with a copy of this policy in advance of the event.

iv. The policy will be provided to all Board members, ministers, and staff members annually, who are expected to familiarize themselves with the contents of this policy as part of their commitment to promoting safety in all aspects of congregational life (**SOURCE:** Religious Institute Best Practices: #1-Board & Clergy Commitment).

v. Hard copies of this policy will be available outside the Religious Education Office and in Guest Center.

vi. The congregation will be kept informed of this policy through periodic publicity via the newsletter, website, weekly email notifications, etc.

b. Discussion and review of this policy will be part of any Religious Education volunteer orientation sessions or leadership team meetings which are held.

c. This policy will be reviewed annually by the DRE, along with other church staff members and/or lay leaders as deemed necessary, for any necessary revisions and updates. The congregation will be notified of any changes or updates as they occur (through the communication noted in section a, part vi).

d. The DRE is responsible for ensuring that this policy is upheld during Religious Education program events and activities. The DRE may seek the help and support of other church staff members and lay leaders as needed to ensure that these policies are upheld.

i. Section 1, Part B outlines implementation for other church events (such as Room at the Inn).

ii. When Eliot Unitarian Chapel children, youth, and adult chaperons attend events at other congregations or locales, policies relevant to Eliot Unitarian Chapel prevail over less stringent policies specific to the event/conference/locale. (**Source**-First UU Church-Rochester, MN)

## 6. Forms

### Eliot Unitarian Chapel Limited Access Agreement DRAFT

**\*Note:** This is a sample form subject to modification by the Lead Minister, DRE, Administrator, & Board Chair as deemed appropriate to the circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

#### **Introductory paragraph in cases of allegation or concern:**

A serious complaint/allegation/concern, now under review, has been brought to the attention of the Eliot Unitarian Chapel Lead Minister/DRE/Board Chair. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion or allegation, we expect you to abide by this interim agreement. **Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt.** This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Minister, DRE, Administrator, Board Chair, and others specifically mentioned in Terms & Acceptance, and will be kept in a locked file in the office.

#### **Introductory paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:**

Eliot Unitarian Chapel affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. Your participation is limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth, and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

#### **Agreement:**

You are to avoid all contact with children and youth on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- Refrain from talking with children/youth.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone, or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving, or otherwise transporting children and/or youth to church sponsored events.
- Remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children/youth are present (\*support person).
- If a child/youth in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as religious education activities or youth group events.

The following activities which are checked "Yes" are activities that we feel are appropriate for your participation.

- Worship services  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
- Coffee Hour  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
- Adult meetings with children in building  
No ( ) Yes ( )
- Adult meetings without children in building  
No ( ) Yes ( )
- Have a key to the building OR an access code  
No ( ) Yes ( )

- Intergenerational church activities which occur on church property  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
  
- Intergenerational group outings which occur offsite, such as ice skating, baseball games, etc.  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
  
- Alone in church building with minister or other staff  
No ( ) Yes ( )
  
- Social activities in other member's homes (such as Covenant Groups)  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
  
- Participating in Bergfried activities  
No ( ) Yes ( ) With support person\* No ( ) Yes ( )
  
- Other:
  - Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
No ( ) Yes ( )
  
  - Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
No ( ) Yes ( )
  
  - Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
No ( ) Yes ( )

\*A **support person** is a person who knows about your history/situation and has been designated by you with our approval to accompany you to activities where children and youth may be present.

## Terms & Acceptance

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/youth for whom they care: **INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITION IN CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP.**

I have reviewed this agreement and agree to abide by its provisions. I agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property.

I understand that this agreement will be reviewed every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Minister: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

D.R.E.: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Board Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_