

Children and Youth Religious Education Volunteer Information

The following information is a synthesis of what was presented in the CYRE volunteer training and also includes the Code of Conduct that volunteers sign at the end of the training. This is helpful to review to understand the situations that may occur in your volunteer experience that may raise a concern or is an incident that you feel should be reported. The CYRE staff person you are with should be consulted related to what you have observed (unless the concern or incident involves the staff person). One of you will complete a form to report the incident or concern if applicable.

In completing the form, you will be asked several questions about the concern or incident.

Wildflower's Safe Congregations Committee and the CYRE staff (if applicable based on your answer to a previous question) will help discern what calls for mandatory reporting & what does not.

We offer abbreviated descriptions here to help you identify the way we are categorizing various situations:

-Potential Concern: There's something I'd like to talk through with a member of the Child & Youth Religious Education Team or the Interim Safe Congregations Committee.

-Incident Report: I need to report something that happened during CYRE that should be documented but does not require mandatory reporting to the state. Examples include: accidental injury, mental health concerns, behavior that parents should be notified about, etc.

-Mandatory Reporting: I need to report an incident that occurred during CYRE that I believe may fall under the requirements of Mandatory Reporting (harm to self or others). Examples include: suicidal ideation, child abuse, sexual abuse, plans to commit violence, etc.

To report a concern or incident to the Interim Safe Congregation Committee, click [here](#).

More detailed descriptions are in the materials below.

As a reminder, this is the Code of Conduct that you signed at the end of the Volunteer Training:

Code of Conduct for Working with Children and Youth

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. Adult volunteers have a 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 Wildflower 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, respect, and fun. Our charge to children and youth 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 Wildflower 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 any 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 parties. 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 abide by the “Rule of 3” (any communication with youth must also include another, unrelated adult) and be with the knowledge and consent of the parents. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. If you have any concerns regarding what might be appropriate or inappropriate behavior in these situations, please contact the CYRE team and the Safe Congregation Committee.
- **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 affection 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 Wildflower 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** report this to a member of the Interim Safe Congregation Committee or the CYRE team about an appropriate course of action.

This is how confidentiality is explained to youth:

We honor confidentiality for what you say at church EXCEPT if we learn:

- you're being hurt by someone
- you're hurting yourself
- you're hurting others

This is how the UUA defines harm to self or others:

1. Harm to self or others may include, but is not limited to: suicidal ideation; cutting; burning or shocking oneself; physical or verbal aggression towards self or others; violent intimate relationship; bullying or threatening to harm another; potentially dangerous relationship (e.g. much older adult); addiction to dangerous substances; Internet grooming; symptoms of eating disorders, such as food refusal or frequent vomiting; and/or any suspicious or concerning participant behavior.
2. Any suspicion of child abuse including on site non-consensual peer sexual contact and sexual contact between peers with an age gap beyond what is legally allowed.

These are the crucial rules for events that include children & youth:

The “Big 9”

1. No violence, weapons or dangerous items – This includes physical violence, verbal threats or harassment, or possession of weapons or explosives such as fireworks.
2. Respect property/No vandalism – respect local facilities and the community’s possessions, and no theft.

3. No drugs, alcohol, or illegal substances
4. No smoking, vaping, or use of tobacco products.
5. No harassment on the basis of sex, race, national origin, religion, disability or any other protected status.

6. 6. No sexualized conduct or sexual activity, including kissing. In general, includes any touch meant to arouse, sharing sexually explicit material such as videos, apps or games.

7. 7. No unwanted, uninvited touch – only a clearly expressed “yes” means yes – e.g. ask before hugging.

8. 8. No leaving the event location without proper permission from the adult responsible for supervising the youth.

9. 9. Rule of Three - All excursions **off-site** must include a minimum of three, multigenerational participants. No youth or adults are to ever be alone in a closed space with another youth participant.

Digital/Online Safety

All of the Big 9 apply to social media/digital spaces:

- No violence including violent/bullying language, threats, displaying a weapon or violent images.
- No sexualized conduct or behavior on or off line including sexual advances, jokes, explicit or offensive pictures, requests for sexual favors, sexting, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- No use of drugs, alcohol, cannabis, or illegal substances—before or during the event so no one is under the influence during the event.
- No harassment on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, race, national origin, religion, disability or any other protected status. Such harassment includes unsolicited remarks, gestures, display or circulation of written materials or derogatory images directed at any of these categories.
- Online rule of three—no adult one-on-one messaging/interaction with a youth.

Adults will seek parent/guardian permission before communicating with youth and include an opportunity for the parent/guardian to limit interaction.

When communicating electronically with youth, adults must include a second adult on the message or communication.

Adult volunteers and staff are expected to stay in “adult role” on any social media platform in which their posts are visible to youth.

Harassment

Conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment based upon race, color, religion, national origin, sex, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or any other protected status is considered harassment

This conduct includes unwelcome communications such as jokes, unsolicited comments, written or online materials, pictures, physical contact

Sexual Harassment

Sexual advances, jokes, explicit or offensive pictures, videos or other online content, requests for sexual favors, sexting, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment.

What one person may consider acceptable conduct may reasonably be viewed as harassment by another. So youth and adults are expected to consider how their words and actions might reasonably be viewed by others.

Bullying

We are committed to an environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying so that we can promote learning and prevent and eliminate all behavior that can get in the way of developing your faith and learning together.

We recognize that certain youth may be more vulnerable to bullying and/or harassment because of various factors, including:

- *Race*
- *Religion*
- *Sex*
- *Gender identity or expression*
- *Homelessness*
- *Physical appearance*
- *Perceived to have one or more of these characteristics*
- *Color*
- *National origin*
- *Sexual orientation*
- *Socioeconomic status*
- *Academic status*
- *Disability*

Retaliation

Retaliation is any action that would discourage someone from coming forward to make or support a claim of harassment, bullying or discrimination.

It can include :

- comments
- excluding or avoiding someone

-getting in the way of someone participating in a program or activity

-any other behavior meant to show displeasure or annoyance because of the youth or individual