Advances in Youth Safety:

Policies, Procedures, and Covenant

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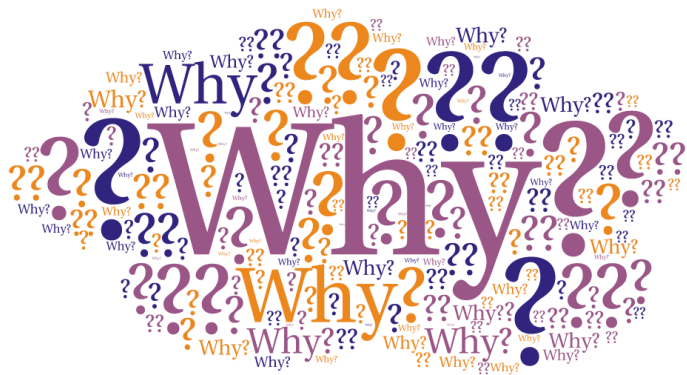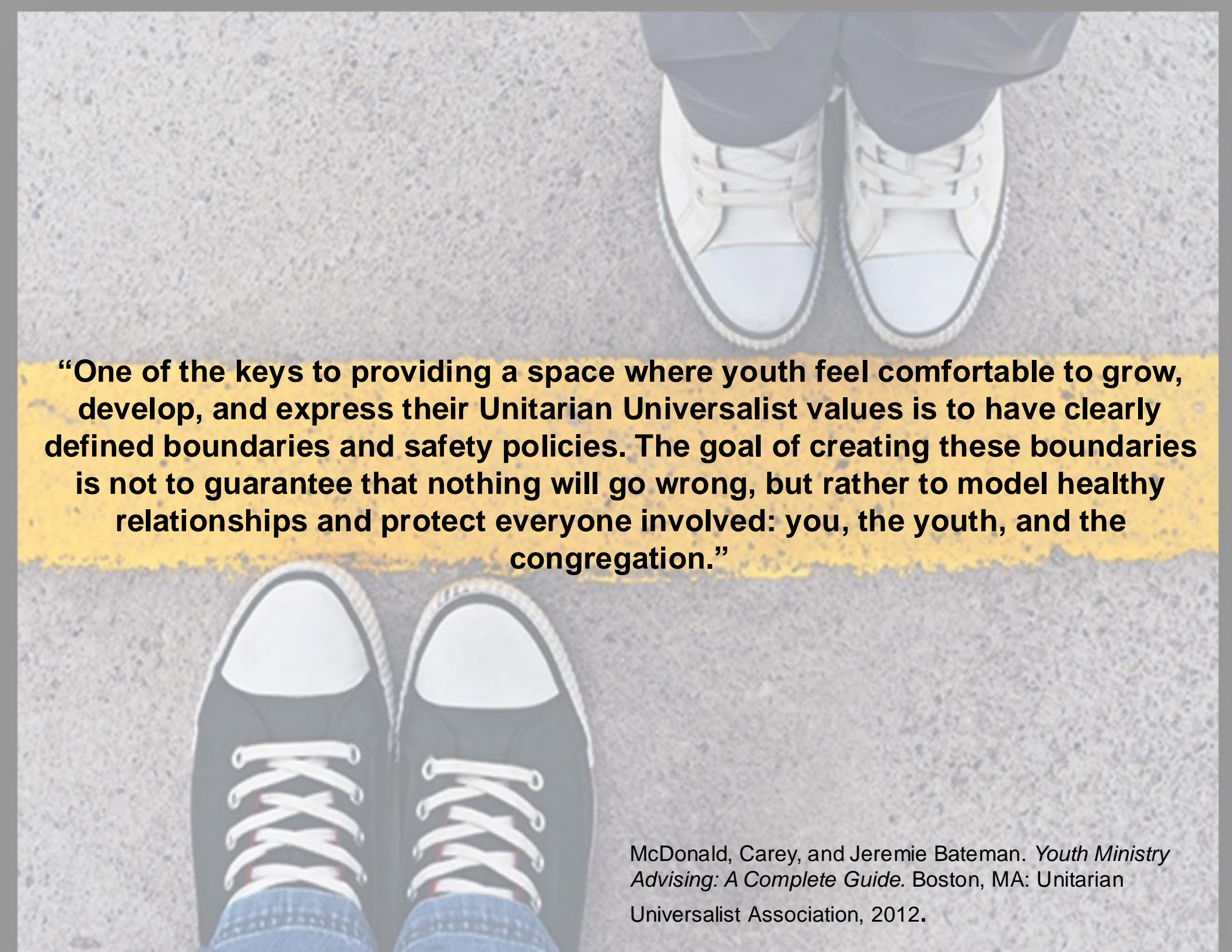**uua.org**

Advances in Youth Safety: Policies, Procedures, and Covenant

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"One of the keys to providing a space where youth feel comfortable to grow, develop, and express their Unitarian Universalist values is to have clearly defined boundaries and safety policies. The goal of creating these boundaries is not to guarantee that nothing will go wrong, but rather to model healthy relationships and protect everyone involved: you, the youth, and the congregation."

McDonald, Carey, and Jeremie Bateman. *Youth Ministry Advising: A Complete Guide*. Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2012.

Assumptions…

- We are talking about ministry to and with high school aged youth or the home schooling equivalent, generally ages 14-18.

- The adults working with our youth are ages 25 or older.

- We are talking about congregationally based youth ministry and events.

- We have a shared commitment to maintaining safety for our congregations, youth, and adults who work with them.

Training

Social Media and Communication

Sleeping Arrangements

Sex, Minors, and the Law

Structures and Training to Encourage Youth to Report

Training

- All staff and if applicable, all volunteers who work with youth receive training on signs of sex abuse, sex abuse prevention, and reporting procedures.

- Education on abuse prevention awareness in context of positive sexuality education for children, youth, and parents/guardians at least every other year, including such topics as safer internet use, bystander and anti-bullying education, harm to self or others, and consent.

- Education about mandated reporting requirements, state specific laws around minors and sexuality and specific implications for youth after they turn 18.

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Training tips for all including youth

- Train your youth!
- Clear description of definite "harm to self and others"
- Clear guidance on the grey areas
- Process to "expand confidentiality"
- Clear training on affirmative consent
- Why to report "weird" or "uncomfortable" things
- Case studies are awesome for youth and adults

Social Media and Communication

- Written policy on use of church computers/other technology and social media for clergy, staff, volunteers, etc.

- Policy should address such issues as staff and volunteer interaction with minors; tagging, posting, and friending policies; statement that the use of technology in faith-based organization should be public, observable, and monitored by church staff.

Sleeping Arrangements:
large or multicongregation

- single gender room options

- multigender room option for trans inclusion

- after programming youth must either in sleeping rooms or single lit awake supervised space

- no shared bedding and visible floor space between youth

- a pair of youth and a pair of adults sweep the building alternating so one pair remains in the awake room

Guiding Principle: witnesses present for any touch

Sleeping Arrangements:
small events, single congregation, leaders

- two adults sleep in each room of youth

- youth agree to sleep

- two adults awake as long as youth are awake

- no shared bedding and visible floor space between youth

Requirements:

Covenant with youth and adults

Trust in your youth

Trust in your adults

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Don't hold an overnight event without trust
…with parents
...with youth
...with adults
...with congregational leaders
...with you

Sex, Minors, and the Law

"While sexuality is a healthy and important part of young people's lives, there are times and places where sexual behavior is inappropriate...Exclusive relationships distract from the community."

- Participants must respect each other's physical boundaries.

- Participants shall refrain from sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior while at the event.

- Sexual behavior between participants at the event and sexual harassment are not permitted and will not be tolerated.

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Research project for you!

- Age of consent? For sexual contact? Conduct?
- Which violations count as child abuse?
- Sharing substances with minors?
- Sexting—creation and possession of child porn?

Structures to Encourage Youth to Report

- Create your structure knowing that most issues don't start out as obviously in need of reporting

- Be clear who is responsible

- Do not give the responsibility to those already overloaded running events

- Have more than one person responsible. Have some youth included.

- Have a clear process including interviews that include compassion and hearing the root causes.

- Emphasize safety, inclusion, restoring relationship, and restoring trust

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Training to Encourage Youth to Report

- Clearly communicate your structure and process to youth *and* parents
- Show youth how they are in covenant with parents, the congregation, you, the insurance company…
- Help them understand youth events only can happen when there is trust.
- We know things happen. We need to trust the youth will help all of us respond appropriately when they do.
- Help youth understand why to seek assistance with things that are "weird" or "uncomfortable"
- Emphasize to youth that the process is about **facilitating covenant** which includes keeping each other safe.
- Use a case study with youth!

Panel Presentation

Case Studies

- What's the "big deal"?

- What are the root causes that helped allow this to happen?

- What information did the youth need? The adults need?

- What can be done to prevent similar situations?

Q & A