

Resources for Parents

Unitarian Universalist children around the country are suffering from bullying and shaming by their fundamental religious peers for their (or their parents') UU beliefs. Our children are told that they are "going to hell," and that they are "nothing," because of prejudices passed on by the parents and churches of their schoolmates.

Children are bullied when they are repeatedly exposed to negative words or actions by others that damage their self-esteem, their place amongst their peers, or their physical bodies. This includes being told that they are going to hell if they don't accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It includes being excluded from group activities on the playground, or after school, such as not being invited to birthday parties.

Bullies have a sense of superiority or entitlement and create an imbalance of power between themselves and their victims.

Support Your Children

Parents are the most significant support for children in this situation. Listen to your children. Believe them. Take it seriously.

Children who are being bullied need support & protection from adults.

Encourage children who are being bullied to:

- Always talk to a responsible adult.
- Try not to get caught alone by bullies, stick with others who support you.
- Try to get involved in activities with other kids.
- Walk away if you can.
- Don't try to argue or reason with a bully. They do not want a discussion.
- Don't try to debate religion with bullies.
- Talk to other supportive adults, such as your minister, Director of Religious Education, or a mental health professional.

Bullied children need help and support. DO NOT tell them to:

- Handle it yourself; you can work it out.
- Try to ignore them.
- You need to stand up for yourself.
- Just treat it like a joke.
- Don't be a tattler.
- What are you doing to make this happen?

Promote Pride in Unitarian Universalism

As Unitarian Universalists, help your children to understand and appreciate their unique theology -- not to argue religion with their bullies, but for their own spiritual support system.

Some History

Unitarians began as Bible-based Christians who could not find the trinity in the Bible. They believed in the unity (oneness) of God. God is God. Jesus is his son. The Holy Spirit is God working through us, on earth, (our "helping hands.") Jesus was a good and holy person, with many good teachings and examples to follow.

Universalists believed in a good God, who does not condemn people to hell. Essentially, Universalists, and now Unitarian Universalists, don't believe in hell.

Over time, because Unitarianism was a creedless faith (there were no words that we had to swear to believe), we were open to more than just Christianity. Unitarians and Universalists learned to find wisdom in all of the world's religions. There are still UU Christians. There are also UU Jews and UU Buddhists and UU atheists and UU Muslims and UU Hindus and UU humanists and UU pagans and UU mystics and more.

Sometimes it is hard to be a UU, because no one will tell us what to believe. We have to figure it out for ourselves. We have the seven Principles, which our churches covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person (*respect all people*)
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations (*offer fair and kind treatment to all*)
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations (*yearn to learn throughout life*)
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning (*grow by exploring ideas and values*)
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large (*believe in your ideas and act on them*)
The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all (*insist on a fair and peaceful world*)
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part (*value our connection with all life and nature*)

And many of our churches have a covenant, a promise to be together in loving relationship. It is up to us to figure out what this means in terms of how we behave. Parents, talk to your children about what it means to you. You are their best example. This is *not* so that they can debate religion with their friends, but so they know they have a real and valuable faith.

Universalist and Unitarian beliefs have sustained and nourished people since the very beginning of Christianity, almost two thousand years ago. Use the following list, and other resources available online at UUA.org, to find people that your child can be proud of, and make sure they know that UU's are not "nothing."

- King John Sigismund, a Unitarian King of Transylvania, was the first European monarch to declare religious freedom for his people. (1568) In all other European countries, the subjects had to be the same religion as the ruler.
- Sir Isaac Newton, who discovered gravity, was unitarian in his beliefs. (1643-1727)
- Joseph Priestly, the scientist who discovered oxygen in its gaseous state (1774), was a Unitarian with universalist beliefs.
- Paul Revere, a hero of the American Revolution (1776), was a Unitarian.
- Four U.S. Presidents have been Unitarians: John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Millard Fillmore, and William Howard Taft. President Thomas Jefferson held unitarian beliefs.
- Maria Mitchell was the first woman astronomer to discover a comet, which was named after her. (1818-1889). She was a Unitarian and became the first professor of astronomy at Vassar College.
- Dorothea Dix, who lobbied for humane treatment of the mentally ill (beginning in 1841,) was a Unitarian.
- Florence Nightingale, the 'lady with the lamp' during the Crimean War (1853-1856), was a Unitarian. She founded the first professional nursing school in Britain. (1860)
- Charles Darwin, who introduced the scientific theory of evolution to the world in 1859, was raised Unitarian until his mother's death. (1809-1882)
- Julia Ward Howe, a Unitarian, wrote the lyrics to *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* during the Civil War. (1861)
- Clara Barton, a Universalist, was called "the angel of the battlefield," when she began her work nursing wounded Civil War soldiers in 1862. In 1881 she founded the American Red Cross.
- The Universalists were the first denomination in the United States to ordain a woman to ministry, Olympia Brown. (1863) Today, more than half of UU ministers are women.
- Unitarian Henry Bergh was the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ASPCA. (1866) Later he helped to start the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
- Susan B. Anthony, who led the fight for the right for women to vote, became a Unitarian. (1820-1906)
- Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, was a Unitarian. (1832-1888)
- During the Civil Rights Movement, hundreds of UU ministers responded to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's call to come march with him in Selma. (1965) Two of the people killed while supporting the civil rights marches were Unitarian Universalists: the Rev. James Reeb and lay person Viola Liuzzo.
- Unitarian Universalists were the first denomination to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people within their congregations, ministry, and in the world. (1970)
- The Unitarian Universalist Association published the OWL programs (Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education) for ages Kindergarten through adult, because they believe that our bodies are part of our whole spiritual beings. (1999)
- Writer Kurt Vonnegut, science-fiction writer and author of the anti-war novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, was a UU. (1922-2007)
- Movie stars Paul Newman (1925-2008) and Christopher Reeve (1952-2004) were UU.
- Folk singer Pete Seeger (1919-2014), a civil-rights activist, was a UU.

Live your UU values at home. You might practice “Roses and Thorns” at dinner time, when everyone says one thing that was good about their day, and one thing that was bad. Say grace or give thanks for the food on your table and the people who worked to bring it to you. Take walks in nature during which you admire the good around you, and do your part to make the world a better place by picking up trash as you go. Talk about how these are UU values.

Use other UU resources to support and sustain your family's faith at home...

Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting, by Michelle Richards.
How to Bury a Goldfish: And Other Ceremonies and Celebrations for Everyday Life, by Louise B. Nayer

Ask your Director of Religious Education/Exploration or Director of Faith Formation to offer UU parenting classes to help you live your UU faith at home.

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There are three ways of supporting someone who is being bullied. The most important is individual support, then enlisting the silent majority of people who are not being bullied, and finally, changing policies that allow bullying to take place on the school grounds or elsewhere. Ask your child if they want this kind of help at school.

Mobilize Support

- When bullying occurs at school, see if it's possible to organize students. Perhaps a religious minorities club, or a Religious Understanding and Tolerance Day?
- Encourage UU students and other religious minorities to share their stories. Older youth may have already survived religious bullying, which seems to be more prevalent for UU's in elementary and middle school. They can tell their stories and assure children that this won't last forever.
- Help educate school faculty and administration about the issues faced by non-Christian students, including Muslims, Hindus, UU's, and other religious minorities.
- Seek the involvement of interfaith clergy and community leaders.
- Create coalitions by reaching out to youth agencies, human rights organizations, churches, synagogues and mosques, parents groups, and local organizations.

Work with Policy Makers and Advocate for Safer Schools for Everyone

- Find out at what level decisions are made in your school district (school board, superintendent, principal, counselors, teachers), and make them allies.
- Lobby for a zero-tolerance anti-bullying policy that includes race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender expression/identity, and ability/disability.

It's Not Easy Being UU: Let's Get Real About Religious Bullying

- Advocate for training to enable school staff to identify and address religious bullying and harassment.
- Promote use of an age-appropriate, inclusive curricula to help students understand and respect religious differences.
- Do not try to engage in religious debate with school personnel.

**Some of the bullying resources were adapted from the following UUA resource on bullying:
"Countering Religious Bullying & Spiritual Violence Aimed at LGBT Youth"
http://www.uua.org/documents/interweave/1106_counter_bullying.pdf*