

BALANCING ACTS – keeping children safe in congregations
Reverend Debra W. Haffner

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FOREWARD

Among the most difficult decisions congregational leaders face are those dealing with ethics and safety, including the decision to allow and welcome (or not), someone with a history of sexual offenses/abuse into a congregation. The few calls that have come to my office on this subject are the result of a crisis – the congregation finds itself faced with making this decision and is ill-prepared to do so. The experience of these congregations and the complexity of the issues involved led me to invite experienced sexologist, the Rev. Debra W. Haffner, Director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing and an ordained Unitarian Universalist Minister, to develop this resource. I am grateful to Rev. Haffner for her ministry with us. I trust you will find this a valuable resource for your congregation's work and ministry.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people and congregations participated in the research and development of this manual. I interviewed a dozen ministers and congregational leaders who have faced this difficult issue in their congregations. Because many asked for our conversations to remain confidential, I included no names here but I am grateful for their honest sharing. I also benefited from the wisdom of several colleagues during informal consultations at conferences I attended throughout the year I worked on this manual.

With the support of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we convened a task force to review an early draft of this manual. Task force representatives included the Rev. Patricia Tummino, the Rev. Dr. William Stayton, Dr. Steve Brown, Dr. Steve Thomas, and Joan Tabachnik. We were joined by the Reverends David Hubner and Pat Hoertdoerfer from the Unitarian Universalist Association for a day of spirited discussion and debate. This manual is better because of their contributions, insights, and expertise.

I am grateful for the support of the Reverend Tracy Robinson-Harris and Claudia Hull from the UUA for their support and commitment to this project, as well as their encouragement and astute comments.

This has been one of the most difficult assignments I have faced. It surely may raise some controversy. I hope it will help as you work to balance the needs for justice, compassion, accountability and safety.

Reverend Debra W. Haffner

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

- A person who is a known sex offender is invited by one of the lay leaders of the congregation to join the faith community.
- During a pastoral care session, a man reveals to the minister that he feels like he is “on fire around children.”
- A twelve-year-old (who attends religious education) from the congregation is babysitting for a four-year-old boy, who later that evening, tells his parents that the babysitter asked him to touch his penis.
- A person who used to be a member of the congregation writes the minister (who has never met him) to say that he is about to be released from jail for a sex offense and wants to return to the congregation.
- A convicted sex offender decides that the restricted access agreement he has been asked to sign is too restrictive at one congregation and begins to attend another one in the area.
- A newly settled minister of one month discovers that a person in the community was arrested for child molestation over fifteen years ago; when the previous minister departed, he never told anyone.
- A long standing member of the congregation is charged with uploading child pornography on an Internet bulletin board.

All of these situations involving sex offenses - - and undoubtedly others -- have happened at Unitarian Universalist congregations. In each case, the minister, the board of trustees, and key lay leaders didn't know what to do. One minister reports that “this was the most difficult decision I have faced in fifteen years in ministry.” These situations can exacerbate people's most painful personal histories, and congregations often experience divisive conflicts over how to handle such situations.

This manual is designed to help. It offers information and procedural suggestions for leaders faced with the difficult task of helping the congregation decide if and how to include a sexual offender in their religious community. The facts and circumstances of the particular situation you are dealing with are of critical importance as you seek to make the best decisions for all involved.

Child sexual abuse is a devastating social and public health problem. It is also a crime. Half a million children are thought to be sexually abused each year.ⁱ These children are violated in the most soul scarring ways, and in the majority of cases, by people they know and trust. The results are often pernicious and life long. Many survivors of child sexual abuse experience depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress syndrome, reduced sexual desire, and problems with intimate relationships in adulthood.ⁱⁱ

[NOTE TO SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:

By reading this report or your congregation deciding to include people with a history of sexual offense, you may experience increased feelings of physical, emotional or spiritual pain. The work described in this manual must be done in conjunction with efforts to address the experience and needs of survivors and victims as well. Go to <http://www.uua.org/cde/ethics> for more information including the report “*Restorative Justice for All*” (<http://www.uua.org/cde/csm/index.html>)

There have always been people who are sexually attracted to children in congregations. In every congregation, there are abusers, victims, survivors, and bystanders of childhood sexual abuse. The recent crisis in the U.S. Catholic Church dramatically illustrated that people we love and admire may turn out to be sex offenders, causing irreparable damage to people’s lives. Unitarian Universalists are not immune. We also know that most sexual abuse occurs among family members, and we may not be aware of the abuse that is currently occurring in families that are in our congregations. Many of our children and youth who have participated in the Our Whole Lives program are speaking up as a result of receiving education about child sexual abuse.

As a result of a 1996 federal law, every state now has a notification law for sex offenders who have served prison time and are now back in the community. The federal law required states to pass laws mandating that convicted sex offenders register with the local law enforcement agency after release and that states make these registries available to the general public. Over time, each state and the District of Columbia have adopted statutes modeled after the federal legislation, referred to as Megan's Law. This law is in memory of Megan Kanka, a seven-year-old girl, raped and murdered by a neighbor who, unknown to her family, was a convicted sex offender.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2000, the Supreme Court found the laws constitutional. These registries include people who have committed a wide range of offenses, from child molestation to rape to exhibitionism and voyeurism to 19-year-olds who had sexual intercourse with their 15-year-old boyfriend or girlfriend and were reported by irate parents. It is estimated that as many as half a million people may be listed on these registries; the State of California alone has more than 75,000 people listed.¹

Despite these shockingly high numbers of registered sex offenders, it is still true that the vast majority (88%) of sex offenses are not reported.^{iv} The large majority of people who commit sex offenses do not serve time in prison or receive mandated treatment. The fact is that even with registries, there is no way we can know for sure who may abuse children.

¹ To find out how to obtain the local registry, contact the local police department or sheriff's office. The KlaasKids Foundation (link to www.klaaskids.org) has an updated list of state laws based on Megan's Law – click on the button for “legislation” to be directed to your state's law and registry.

Yet, we have a responsibility and a commitment to keep our children and youth safe from the person sexually attracted to children and/or youth whether or not they have a history of molesting children/youth. There are policies and practices that we can implement in our congregations to assure that the possibility of sexual abuse is greatly reduced. These policies can also address the safety of vulnerable adults, especially those who may face developmental delays.

This manual is grounded in our Unitarian Universalist principles and practices. We believe in the dignity and worth of every person – EVERY person includes the person who has abused children, no matter how morally repugnant that person's past behavior has been. We believe in justice, equity, and compassion in human relations - qualities that we must bring to thinking about this difficult issue. We affirm the use of the democratic process in our congregations, and must honor that in the hard work we do together in community. We are challenged to confront the powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love and called to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science. The report entitled "Restorative Justice for All" stated it this way, "We place a high value on creating a culture of sanctuary within our congregations. Anyone should be able to enter our houses of worship without fear of being exploited in any way."^v

The preamble from the safety policies of one Unitarian Universalist congregation expresses this commitment in these words:

"Our commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, to the inherent dignity and worth of every person and to justice and compassion, compel us to create a safe environment that protects children and youth from harm and promotes their spiritual growth.

We believe our church must respond to this challenge, because it is a special place that highly values the ideals of community and the search for truth. It is a place that encourages personal growth, allows for personal truths, and supports individuals and families in their efforts to build better lives and a better society. As a caring, intergenerational community we can respond to those in need in broader, more flexible ways than many other institutions.

We accept the responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about sexual misconduct, abuse, molestation, harassment and exploitation. We pledge to do our best to protect and support those who come either at risk or in crisis. We as a congregation pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner which conveys mutual respect and consideration."

This manual is based on three tenets that indeed present a balancing act, as faith communities develop policies:

- 1) We have a responsibility to assure that children and youth will be safe in our congregations from sexual abuse, sexual assault and harassment *even* or perhaps *especially* when we do not know if there is an offender in our

congregation. Indeed, we have a responsibility to see that our congregations are sexually healthy congregations and free of sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation for all of our members – children, youth and adults – as well as visitor and staff.

- 2) We are called to treat every person with worth and dignity, and to offer a congregational home to all who are seeking one like ours, while honoring that in the case of an individual with a history of sex offenses, there must be limitations to congregational involvement. That commitment means that only in rare cases will a person be denied access to ministry and fellowship. In the words of one congregation's policy, we must provide "compassion, support, affirmation, and protection against further harm."^{vi}
- 3) We have a responsibility to educate ourselves about child sexual abuse and healthy childhood sexuality, to be well informed about sexual offenses and offenders and to develop processes that will help us make good decisions about the actions that we are called to take. We must be willing to listen, to use a democratic process, and to be humble about our own certitudes in creating these policies.

This manual is first about primary prevention. We hope that by raising the issues around sexual abuse and sex offenders, congregations can institute policies before there is a crisis. Some UU congregations may want to think "these issues don't affect us. After all, no one in our congregation would do these types of terrible things." Unfortunately, even the "nicest people" may do these types of things. One estimate is that between 7 and 10% of the population may have a sexual inclination towards arousal by children. Many of these people will never act on their feelings, and some will. With the increased use of sex offender registries, we will often know (or can find out) when a convicted sex offender enters our community.

If the congregation does not address these issues before they occur, there is likely to be a sense of panic and crisis when a sex offender starts attending activities at the congregation, if someone in the congregation is accused of abuse, or when the minister, Religious Educator, or a member finds out that a congregant has a history of abusing children or youth. If you are in the midst of one of these situations and do not have policies in place, you may want to first go to, DURING A CRISIS.

This manual provides background information on child sexual abuse, sexual abuse prevention, pedophiles, and others who abuse children. There are three important considerations to keep in mind while reading this manual to help bring perspective to commonly held beliefs about child sexual abuse:

- 1) Many people believe that the greatest threats to children or vulnerable adults are known sex offenders or strangers. **Research indicates that in the vast majority of cases of child sexual abuse, the abuser is an adult that the child knows and trusts.** They are parents, step parents, grandparents, other relatives, babysitters,

teachers, coaches, and yes, clergy and Religious Educators. More than eight in ten sexual abusers are never reported. “So the police and the courts can’t tell you about these sex abusers because they don’t know who the abusers are.”^{vii} **No policy dealing with a convicted sex offender will assure that all children, youth and vulnerable adults in your congregation are safe.** Each of our faith communities must have a commitment to implementing policies that help us do everything we can to assure that our congregations are safe places for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults. In addition, we must be committed to providing compassionate support to those who struggle with a personal history of child sexual abuse or face this problem today in their own families.

- 2) **Many people believe that all sex offenders will re-offend regardless of treatment or other factors that suggest otherwise.** Sex offenders can resume healthy lives in the community, including not committing other offenses, if they have completed treatment and if they have a commitment to never abusing another child. In a comprehensive review of more than 61 studies, all treated sex offenders had a re-offense rate for another sexual crime of less than 13%.^{viii}
- 3) Many people believe that sexual abuse happens to other people. **A significant minority of adults have survived histories of child sexual abuse.** And, child sexual abuse occurs in all types of families, without regard to religion, ethnicity, or economic status.

“We fall into a trap when we demonize offenders as another class of humanity and think all we have to do is figure out who they are for members of our congregations to be safe. Violence committed by strangers is not the greatest source of sexual abuse. We’re wrong...if we believe that protecting ourselves against sexual predators is most importantly a matter of tightening the sex offender registry, educating children on ‘Stranger Danger’, and knowing when a convicted pedophile moves into the neighborhood. Law enforcement officials and doctors tell us that these efforts fail to address one group that, statistically, poses the greatest threat to children: male relatives and trusted family or community friends.”¹

There are a minimum number of policies that every congregation should consider in order to keep children and youth safe and to build the foundation for dealing with a convicted sex offender.

Here’s a quick self assessment check list for your congregation.

- a. Institute a Safe Congregations Committee or a Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team with primary responsibilities for these issues. Provide them with support to maintain their knowledge and skill strengths. Have opportunities for them to regularly inform the congregation of their role.

- b. Create and implement a written policy on safe congregations. Share it with the congregation. Train appropriate staff and leaders in its application. Review and update it as needed
- c. Make sure the Minister, the Religious Educator, and the Board Chair know the state laws for reporting concerns about child abuse. Implement annual training for all volunteers in the Religious Education Program on how to recognize possible signs of abuse and sexual abuse, and subsequent actions to take.
- d. Teach Our Whole Lives (OWL) Program including the sessions on sexual abuse at each of its grade levels as a routine part of religious education for all ages
- e. Adopt and use a screening form for all employees, regardless of position, and all volunteers who work with children and youth. The form should ask directly about histories of sexual offenses.
- f. Create and use a Code of Ethics for persons working with children and youth. Review it with each such individual each year. Have them sign the Code annually and keep a signed copy on file. The Code of Ethics developed by the UUA for this purpose is found on page xxxx in your appendix.
- g. Create a template for a limited access agreement or develop a check list for convicted or accused sex offenders.
- h. Make education about child sexual abuse prevention a routine part of the religious education program. Offer such education at least twice during elementary school and once during middle school and high school.
- i. Offer annual adult education programs on sexual abuse prevention for parents and families as well as one for religious education teachers.
- j. Develop and implement a policy that requires two adults be present in each class or program for children and youth as well as in cars transporting young people to activities.
- k. Create and distribute a referral list of community organizations and therapists who specialize in sex abuse prevention and treatment in cases where such referrals are necessary and appropriate.
- l. Offer support groups and/or counseling for those who have survived child sexual abuse.

The following section offers information and guidance to assist congregations in implementing the recommendations in the above check list.

CONGREGATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Congregations need to consider three major components to assure that theirs is a safe space for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. They are:

*Policies and procedures developed and implemented for keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe from sexual abuse.

*Policies and procedures developed and implemented for educating adults, youth, and children in the congregation about child sexual abuse and prevention.

*Policies and procedures developed and implemented for responding to a person who has been convicted or accused of sexual offenses against children, youth or adults.

These components will vary by congregation. The size of the congregation, the physical layout of the congregation, the personal histories of the minister and the congregants, and other factors will influence development and implementation. If such policies and procedures are not now in place begin the process of addressing these issues. Adapt or modify these suggestions to meet the specific needs of your communities. Guidelines and forms are templates for discussion and deliberation. There is no “one size fits all approach” to these complex issues. Each congregation will decide what is right and fitting for you. Further this is a process - it may take a year or two to put all of these recommendations into place. The following recommendations are offered as starting points, as procedures to consider. They are based on best practices of existing congregational policies, expert advice and consultation.

A congregation may have a Task Force on the Sexually Healthy Congregation which will provide recommendations to the Board of Trustees and the Ministers on all areas of sexuality: worship, pastoral care, lifespan education, welcoming and affirming congregations, social action, and safe policies.² Other congregations that view these areas of sexuality as distinct and separate may choose instead to have a “Safe Congregations Committee” that has the responsibility for developing safety policies and procedures without the broader responsibilities of the Task Force mentioned above. In other cases, a new committee may be formed to deal with child sexual abuse prevention and safety.

However named, the committee will meet to review this manual and its suggested policies. Committee members will review the background information on child sexual abuse prevention and sex offenders and seek assistance from local community resources, the UUA District Office serving that congregation and/or from the UUA’s Congregational Services staff as needed.

² For more information on creating sexually healthy congregations, see D.W. Haffner, “A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Congregations, CT: Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, 2003.

The committee will recommend to the Board of Trustees adapting, amending, or adopting policies for screening of all employees and volunteers who come into contact with children and youth and a draft of a Limited Access Agreement or check list.

The committee, with the advice and consent of the Board of Trustees, will name a Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team (or other name deemed appropriate) generally made up of the minister, the Religious Educator, and three members of the congregation, preferably with experience in sexual abuse issues. Gender balance will be given consideration in appointments. Some congregations have developed a panel of six to eight members of the congregation who can be called upon as needed to form a response team. Although some congregations form such a response team only after there has been an allegation, this is unlikely to provide the wisdom and continuity that is required.

The Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response team will generally have the following responsibilities:

- a. Know about community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors.
- b. Know about state laws regarding reporting.
- c. Be a resource for people to share their concerns.
- d. Evaluate applications for religious education teachers and youth group leaders that are flagged by the religious professionals in the congregation as needing more information or follow up. Facilitate annual training for religious education staff and volunteers on issues, policies, and procedures relevant to sexual/physical abuse.
- e. Work with the Religious Education committee to assure that the sex abuse education sections of the Our Whole Lives curricula are offered at each age level.
- f. Meet with sex offenders to develop a Limited Access Agreement for participation in church activities.
- h. Receive allegations of possible abuse, and develop a process for expeditious handling of such allegations.

This committee will offer a report at each annual meeting of the congregation. Policies will appear at least annually in the congregation newsletter, will be used as appropriate in training/orientation for leaders and teachers, and be included in new member packets.

DURING A CRISIS

If you have turned directly to this section, it may be because you are facing a crisis situation in your congregation. It may be that a person who has served time for a sex offense against children has come to the minister and said they want to become part of the congregation. Or maybe a member of the staff has scanned the sex offender registry and noticed that the name of a member of the congregation is on it. Perhaps it is that a long standing member of the congregation who is a teacher has been accused by a student of sexual misconduct. Or maybe you've just heard that a twelve-year-old in the congregation was found fondling a three year old while he is babysitting.

Almost uniformly, congregations that have dealt with sex offenders during the past few years report that there has been some degree of panic among members when the facts become known. In some cases, congregations have become badly divided over the issue of whether a sex offender should be allowed to attend worship services at all. In some cases, the minister has refused to allow the person to participate. In many cases; those most alarmed about the possibility of a pedophile attending worship are themselves survivors of childhood sexual abuse or assault. This past history continues to affect people in their adult lives, and this kind of situation can evoke past trauma and an unwillingness to address even the possibility of attendance.

- **DO NOT PANIC.** There is no question that this will be a difficult issue for the minister, the Religious Educator, the Board and the members of the congregation who become involved. This issue is likely to take months if not years to address. Anxiety may be high among many in the congregation. Staff and leaders are challenged to be less anxious.
- **ASK FOR HELP.** Contact the District Staff who serve your congregation. Contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA. They can direct you to resources and provide guidance and support.
- **KNOW THAT THIS IS LIKELY TO BE A DIFFICULT AND DIVISIVE ISSUE.** Some parents of children may threaten to resign if the offender is allowed to attend worship at all. Some people who were themselves sexually abused as children may be especially affected as old hurts are reopened. Provide opportunities for all sides to be heard. Recognize that reasonable people may disagree. Allow time for and facilitate the opportunity for people to share their feelings **BEFORE** you move to policies and guidelines.
- **SEEK OUTSIDE EXPERTISE.** While it is necessary for the facts and circumstances of the situation to be known and understood by congregational leaders, and they should do their best to determine these, it is also unrealistic to expect that the members of a church board of trustees will have the requisite skills to evaluate an individual situation or assess safety issues in a particular context. It is reasonable for the members of the leaders of the congregation who are dealing with the decision including the minister, to meet with the (alleged) abuser (and

parents if that person is a minor), ask for written permission to contact their therapist, and parole officer, or in the case of someone who has completed mandated treatment, to ask the person to meet with a trained therapist (who is a member of ATSA) for an evaluation of their risk potential.

- **BE SURE PASTORAL CARE IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE WHOSE ISSUES MAY BE EXACERBATED.** It can't be said enough: some people who are survivors of sexual abuse or assault may need special attention at this time.
- **REMEMBER THAT IF THE ACCUSED PERSON IS PART OF THE COMMUNITY THEY ALSO DESERVE SUPPORT.** There is likely to be a feeling of revulsion or antipathy towards the person, and the immediate response may be to want to isolate that person completely. According to the UU Church of Yarmouth, "it remains the mission of this church to recognize and support the integrity and inherent worth and dignity of that person even though we do not condone inappropriate behaviors, and to treat him or her with compassion." It is also important to reach out to that person's life partner and/or children.
- **EDUCATE, EDUCATE, EDUCATE.** If the whole community knows about this situation, it may make sense to call for a community meeting. An education session with outside experts on child sexual abuse and sex offender treatment can be very helpful. In some cases, it may be helpful to ask the offender to tell their story to the Board of Trustees or at a community meeting. Keep the community as a whole informed as the leadership of the congregation works to develop or implement policies.
- **SEEK LEGAL COUNSEL.** Local and state laws may impact your course of action and decisions that you will need to make. Find out about the legal limits, liabilities and requirements.
- **ALLOW ENOUGH TIME.** The process for developing an informed, just response to this situation will likely be time consuming, messy, emotional, and not satisfying to all parties concerned. Recognizing that this will take time, may not be perfect, and is always difficult will help the healing process.

KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAFE

Although the primary purpose of this manual is to help congregations deal with a known sex offender, that alone does not keep children safe. It is often the case that **the sex offender that is known and who has been through treatment is not the person who is most likely to sexually abuse children in your congregation.** It is the person that we don't know, but who has children's trust, that can pose the greatest threat.

In defining our responsibility to the children and youth we serve, the 1995 UUA Congregational Handbook said: *“Adults working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that can carry a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, child care worker, teacher, choir director, minister, or in any other role, adults have a special opportunity to interact with young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to young people and adults...while it is important that adults be capable of meaningful friendships with the young people with whom they work, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and young adults and refrain from using young people to fulfill their own needs. Young people are in a vulnerable position when dealing with adults and may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior by adults....adult religious leaders need to be people who...have a social network outside of their religious education responsibility in which to meet their own needs for friendship, affirmation and self esteem, are willing and able to seek assistance from colleagues and religious professionals when they become aware of a situation that requires expert help or intervention.”*

Creating Safe Congregations: Toward an Ethic of Right Relations Workbook is the primary resource for this issue.

Taking into account the facts and circumstances of each situation, there are basic questions that can guide congregational policy development and implementation

- 1) What will your policy be regarding involvement of a person who has been convicted of an act of sexual misconduct in religious education for children and youth, children's worship, events for children, or youth group activities?
- 2) What process will you follow if it is disclosed that sexual abuse of a child has possibly occurred by either a staff member of the church or a volunteer at the church working with children? By whom and how shall such allegations be reported to the police and Child Protective Services, as required by state law?
- 3) What will your policies be regarding adult supervision? How will you implement a policy requiring a minimum of two adults present at all times in each classroom, at youth group meetings, and other events involving children and youth in the church? How will you assure that this policy works and works well for you? Consider having the Religious Educator and/or chair or member(s) of the RE committee circulate among classrooms on Sunday mornings, partially to assure

that this policy is in effect. What will you do when a teacher or leader calls to say they will not be able to be present as planned? What process will you use so that the other teacher or leader can recruit an appropriate adult to stay in the room during the class? Will you determine that classes will generally not take place with only one adult present?

- 4) How will you screen prospective employees and potential volunteers? Develop and use a Screening Form that includes the necessary information for a background or other appropriate record check to be performed. This should be done for all persons who will be working with children and youth – both those seeking employment and for volunteers. (Your local police department can provide you with information for your state on how to conduct a background check.) A sample screening form is found in the appendix.

Every employee and every volunteer who comes in contact with children and youth needs to receive a copy of the safe congregation policy, ethics policy, and sexual harassment policy. Review those policies with every individual who will be teaching. The UUA recommends doing background checks on all employees and volunteers who will be working with children and youth. It is essential that this be done if items are checked on the screening form that raises the possibility of past abusive histories.

The use of a Screening Form in and of itself may well deter a pedophile from further attempts to volunteer or work at the congregation. Most pedophiles will look for places with easy access to children; this type of screening form indicates that your congregation is not such a place.

- 5) Every employee and every volunteer who works with children and youth will annually review and sign the AGREEMENT TO TEACH FORM and the congregation's Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth. One such policy is included in the Forms and Samples section of this manual
- 6) What policies will you develop and implement for persons new to the congregation who wish to be involved in ministries with children and/or youth? All persons volunteering to work with children and youth will have been associated with the congregation for a minimum of one year. Exceptions may be made only by the Religious Educator in consultation with the minister upon recommendation of a minister or Religious Educator at another congregation where the volunteer has provided such services.
- 7) What plans for regular training of adults working with children and youth will you develop and implement? At a minimum, every person, whether employee or volunteer, who works or comes in contact with children and youth, will attend an annual training on child sexual abuse prevention and reporting requirements. This training will include:

- Definition of child abuse
 - Sexual and physical abuse symptoms
 - Basics of child sexual development and expected behaviors by age
 - What constitutes inappropriate touch and behaviors
 - Congregation's safe policies and ethics policy
 - Rationale behind screening procedures
 - Reporting procedures for observed or suspect child abuse and child sexual abuse
 - Review of the congregation's Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth
- 8) What policies will you develop and implement regarding the screening and training of preteens and teenagers who work with children in Religious Education programs and/or provide child care for congregation events? Ideally, all of our child care providers would have Red Cross or similar babysitting training. Like with adults, teens and preteens should only provide child care in pairs or even larger groups. Information about sexual abuse should be part of their annual training, including the damage that inappropriate sexual touching does to a child and the consequences for the child care provider who engages in inappropriate touching of a child. Teen and preteen potential child care providers need to know that if they feel tempted to touch a child sexually, they must tell a grown up who can help them. Attention to this in the pre-service training may help screen out young people who might sexually act out or propel them to get help.
- 1) Relationships between adult advisors and teens should also be discussed in youth advisor trainings. Relationships of advisor/advisee and mentor/mentee are important to the faith development of youth. However, friendships between advisers and youth should be discouraged. An unhealthy relationship initiated by a sex offender may masquerade as a mentor or friend relationship. The Pacific Southwest District Child and Youth Protection Requirements, state that "if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of district-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 district-sponsored events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents. Furthermore, you shall let an appropriate member of the district know what you are doing...Notify the youth's minister, or religious education leader, or society president. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the district and the parents informed of your actions."^{ix} Such a policy could be adapted to apply to events or activities outside of the congregation as well.

EDUCATING CHILDREN FOR PREVENTION

A high quality sexuality education program, such as Our Whole Lives (OWL), <http://www.uua.org/owl/>, is one of the best methods for sexual abuse prevention. Children who learn that their bodies are good, that their sexuality is a gift, how to make good decisions, and the language to communicate accurately and effectively about sexuality are also being prepared to respond appropriately when faced with abusive behaviors, to assert their right to control their own bodies, and to tell an adult if such behaviors occur. For more information about the Our Whole Lives curricula, see www.uua.org/

Even if OWL is not offered, it is imperative that all children and youth develop the skills to recognize when an adult is acting in an appropriate manner towards them as well as a sense of what to do if an adult tries to engage them in inappropriate behavior. Children must know the names of the parts of their body, and they must trust that adults will believe them if they “tell on” an adult. The Our Whole Lives curricula have sessions on sexual abuse at each of its levels. Regardless of whether the religious education program includes OWL at all levels, it is good practice to offer a sexual abuse prevention lesson as a part of the congregation’s religious education program, once during early elementary school (k – 2), once during later elementary school (3-5), once during middle school, and again during high school.

A child who understands that their body belongs to them and that no one else should touch any part of it without their consent and permission is less likely to be vulnerable to an adult. Every child, from the age of three onward, can learn “No, Go, Tell” – say no to the abuse, leave the situation immediately or as soon as possible, and tell a parent or care giver if someone tries to hurt them or asks them to keep a secret about touching.

Age appropriate messages for a pre-schooler include:

- Your body belongs to you.
- Other children’s bodies belong to them. You should not touch another child’s body in any way without their permission.
- Tell your parent if any other person makes you feel bad or funny or does something that makes you think, “uh-oh.
- You can tell someone, even a grown up and even a relative, not to touch your body if you don’t want to be touched.
- If someone touches you and tells you to keep it a secret, tell a parent or other grownup anyway.

Age appropriate messages for an early elementary school-age child include:

- No adult should touch a child’s genitals except at a doctor’s office.
- Sexual abuse occurs when an older, stronger, or more powerful person looks at or touches a child’s genitals for no legitimate reason.

- A person who is sexually abusing a child may tell the child to keep the behavior secret.
- Tell a parent right away if unwanted or uncomfortable touching occurs.
- Most adults would never abuse children.
- Both boys and girls can be sexually abused.³

³ These are adapted from the SIECUS Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education and my book for parents, *From Diapers To Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children*, Second Edition, NY: Newmarket Press, 2004.

EDUCATING ADULTS IN THE CONGREGATION

There are a number of ways that everyone in the community can become involved in sexual abuse prevention. This can include educating people about the prevalence of child sexual abuse, programs for parents on educating their children about healthy sexuality including sexual abuse prevention, and making sure that staff, lay leaders, and volunteers know how to handle a suspected case of child abuse or child sexual abuse. The congregation's policies on these issues should be included in new member packets and reviewed periodically with the congregation.

Primary prevention is key. Possibilities include:

- Sermon on child sexual abuse
- Order of service insert on policy
- Healing service for survivors
- Minister's letter to members
- Newsletter articles
- Adult RE class
- Our Whole Lives
- Open Congregation Meeting
- Annual training for RE Teachers, Board of Trustees, and staff
- Special speakers
- Relationships with local organizations and experts to consult with should the need arise

Programs for parents on talking with their children about sexuality, including how to keep their children safe from abuse, can be offered by the congregation, and are especially important if they are not offered elsewhere in the general community. Parents need support in providing their children with healthy messages about sexuality that are age appropriate. They also need to be able to recognize the signs of possible child sexual abuse. Parents need to know that (1) while sex play between children of similar ages is often healthy curiosity, sex play between children more than three years apart in age is most often problematic, (2) it is expected for children to play doctor or "you show me yours, I'll show you mine", but that any type of penetration, whether with fingers, objects, or penises, is not typical but a sign to be concerned, and (3) it is important to screen childcare workers and babysitters for histories of sex offenses and to ask that day care and nursery school caregivers, coaches, scout leaders, after school workers, etc. be screened by the sponsoring agency.

Possible Signs of Childhood Sexual Abuse

(Adapted from Debra W. Haffner, *From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children*, Newmarket Press, 2004, used with permission.)

- A child with an unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- A child who compulsively masturbates in public, after being told repeatedly that this is private behavior
- A child who tries to get other children or adults to touch his or her genitals
- A child who is more interested in sex play than playing with friends, going to school or other activities
- A child who manually stimulates or has oral or genital contact with pets
- A child who repeatedly draws pictures with the genitals as a primary focus
- A child who engages in sex play with a child more than 3 years apart in age
- A child who engages in penetrative behaviors during sex play

All of these behaviors could also arise from other causes. If you see these behaviors, stay calm but do make an appointment as soon as possible with your child's pediatrician or a mental health professional that specializes in child sexual abuse and assessment.

WHEN ABUSE IS SUSPECTED

It is important for adults in the community to know what to do in cases where they suspect abuse. According to Stop It Now!, “We adults have to learn to see when people are acting strange around our kids. And we have to learn what to do when we think a person is harming a child in a sexual way. It’s a lot like what you do when you see someone who is drinking and planning to drive: you try to get them help so they don’t hurt someone. There are warning signs that can help us figure out whether someone we know might be interested in children...the most important piece of information we can use to protect our kids is knowing who to call for advice, for help, or to report a case of abuse.”^x

STOP IT NOW! has a confidential toll free hotline for assistance on what to do if you are concerned about potential abuse but are unsure how to proceed: 1-888-PREVENT. Stop It Now! hotline staff will walk you through the options that are available and what might be done to get help for everyone involved.

Possible Signs of an Adult Being an Abuser

Do you know an adult or older child who:

- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits?
- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection?
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen (e.g., talks repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating)?
- Manages to get time alone or insists on time alone with a child with no interruptions?
- Spends most of his/her spare time with children and has little interest in spending time with someone their own age?
- Regularly offers to baby-sit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone?
- Buys children expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

If you answered "yes" to some of these questions, talk to that person. If you are uncomfortable, but don't see these signs, be sure to trust your instincts and ask questions. For information and advice on how to talk to someone, please call the Stop It Now! Toll-Free Helpline at 1-888-PREVENT. Reprinted with permission.

Laws in each state vary on reporting suspected child sexual abuse. The Minister, the Religious Educator, and the President of the Board need to thoroughly understand the laws on reporting. But it is also important that every person who works with or comes in

contact with children in the congregation knows what is required of them if they suspect abuse. Updated legislation should be circulated widely throughout the congregation, and at least annually, there should be information in the congregation newsletter about what a congregant should do if they suspect abuse.

The National Child Abuse Hotline (by telephone at 1-800-4-A-Child or their web site <http://childhelpusa.org>) provides state-by-state information on how to report abuse in each community. In every state, doctors, nurses, dentists, mental health professionals, social workers, teachers, day care workers, and law enforcement personnel are required to report suspected abuse. In some states, clergy are mandated reporters. In about 20 states, any person who suspects abuse, regardless of their professional background, is required to report it.^{xi} The law generally requires that adults report any suspicions of abuse or neglect.

Regardless of who is specified by the law to be a mandated reporter, any teacher or youth group leader who suspects abuse should contact both the Religious Educator and the minister with their concern immediately, so that required actions will be implemented. If a teacher or youth group leader has reason to suspect that a child would be endangered by returning home, and they cannot reach the Minister or the Religious Educator, the adult should contact the police or Child Protective Services immediately, and then leave an emergency message for the minister.

It is not the function of the congregation -- neither the minister, the religious educator, the chair of the board or any member -- to conduct a formal investigation into a case of alleged abuse. If a child tells you a story, listen carefully and affirm their courage for telling you. Do not ask investigative questions, which can hurt prosecution at a later time. Tell the child that you will contact the minister and that you will help them get help. It will be necessary and important for the appropriate congregational leaders to gather enough information about the facts and circumstances of the situation to make their best decisions about what actions need to be taken.

If alleged or suspected abuse occurs within the congregation or at a congregation-sponsored event, it should be reported as required and the facts and circumstances determined so that the appropriate leader can take necessary actions. When abuse is alleged or suspected involving someone who is part of the congregation -- but not occurring at a congregational event -- reporting requirements must be met but further investigation is not up to congregational leaders. In both situations, staff and leaders should attend to pastoral care needs and be prepared to make referrals as necessary.

In general, when suspected abuse is reported to Child Protective Services, the person reporting will be asked the child's name, date of birth, parent's name, details of the suspected abuse, the name and residence of the offender and their relationship to the child, and if possible, the address where the abuse occurred.

SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

There are likely to be people in the congregation who themselves were abused sexually as children. According to national statistics, as many as one quarter of adult women and one in seven adult men experienced at least one incident of inappropriate sexual touching as a child. And for a significant minority this has had lifelong ramifications. As Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer, Director for Children, Family and Intergenerational Programs for the UUA, has written, “I remind myself and our colleagues often that in every congregation there are people of all ages who have experienced the pain of abuse, people who have caused others the pain of abuse, and others who remain silent and are complicit in the harm of abuse. We need to find the courage to call ourselves and one another to justice as we heal ourselves, our congregants, and our Association.”

Congregations can offer support groups for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. There can be healing services for survivors. Religious professionals and other pastoral care providers can obtain special training in providing counseling to people who have been abused. It is important to have referrals for people who need more intense therapy around past sexual abuse issues. The list of RESOURCES starts on Page 47. A referral agreement/relationship with the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in the area is also critical.

For more information, go to www.uua.org/cde/ethics or contact the District Staff serving your congregation or the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA.

GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING SEX OFFENDERS

INTRODUCTION

The third key component of a commitment to keep children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe in our congregations is developing policies and procedures to use when a person who is a known pedophile or a sex offender wants to be part of the congregation or an existing member is accused of a sexual offense. It is best to think through these policies and procedures in advance of facing a crisis. Just because this situation has not come to your congregation's attention yet, does not mean that you shouldn't be thinking about it. Given the prevalence of child sexual abuse, it is especially important to try to be prepared in advance.

According to the federal Center for Sex Offender Management, "the criminal justice system manages most convicted sex offenders with some combination of incarceration, community supervision, and specialized treatment...the majority are released at some point on probation or parole (either following sentencing or after a period of incarceration in prison or jail.) About 60% of offenders managed by the U.S. correctional system are under some form of conditional supervision in the community."^{xii} And many of them want to attend worship and participate in the life of a faith community. In fact, attendance and membership in a local congregation may be encouraged by their treatment provider and parole supervisor, often to cut down on their social isolation.

There are those who believe that a convicted sex offender never belongs in one of our communities. In fact, one of the ministers I interviewed for this manual was quite clear about this: "I told the Board that they could have the minister or the pedophile. Not both." A former Director of Ministry for the UUA, took this position in a 1991 article, "my own bias is this, based on what I know now – that an identified pedophile should not be part of congregational life. They must cease any physical presence."^{xiii}

This manual offers information and guidance for congregations wishing to consider including a person with a history (or an accusation) of sexual abuse. This manual also offers resources for inclusion such as a sample Limited Access Agreement. A review of the literature on sex offenders, interviews with congregations that have successfully integrated a convicted sex offender into adult worship and education, and a theological commitment to the dignity and worth of all people, even those that have committed morally repugnant acts, suggest that inclusion is possible. And each congregation faced with this situation will make its own decision about what is right given the particular facts and circumstances.

Peer reviewed literature suggests that, depending on the nature of the offense and assuming successful completion of treatment, most treated sex offenders do not recidivate. As religious communities, we can provide compassion, support, and reconciliation to those who truly have indicated that they have changed and have taken responsibility for their actions. We believe in the healing power of involvement in a

spiritual home, and in the words of one affirmation heard in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, “to seek the truth in love and help one another.” Sex offenders who have completed prison sentences and mandated treatment as well as registered with the state have according to the court system complied with their punishments. As faith-based communities, we can provide support and compassion with awareness and vigilance so that all are safe as those who have sexually offended return to or join our church community. **A Case Study: A Sex Offender in Church** discusses how one congregation has faced these issues and is follows the list of Resources at the end of this document.

In many ways, the person with a history of sex offenses has the same needs for a faith community as the rest of us. But the sex offender needs more to assure that his involvement doesn’t pose risks to the congregation and that standards are in place for protection against false allegations and suspicions. “Such involvement needs to include helping him manage his behavior and not get into situations which in the past led to offences...an offender who truly wishes to participate in the life of the church, who realizes the extent of his crime and the difficulty his presence may cause to survivors, and who is truly committed to a new life will understand and accept the need for the imposition of restrictions...”^{xiv}

But in order to do so safely, we must assure that the convicted sex offender does not have the opportunity in our congregations to re-offend again. This includes avoiding situations where they can be accused falsely. The fact is that a person with a history of sex offense against children should never be allowed to be with children, work with children and youth, or socialize with children at the congregation. **No person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of, any sexual misconduct can be permitted to be involved in any religious education or youth group activities.**

The core response of the congregation to a convicted or accused sex offender is a LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT. This agreement invites the person with a history of sex offenses to participate in certain aspects of congregational life, setting clear boundaries including what the individual will not do. Typically a Limited Access Agreement will specify participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all-adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events as acceptable. It asks the person to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes not talking with children, volunteering or chaperoning children’s events, including children’s religious education classes, talks with children during worship, and children’s activities during intergenerational events. It generally requires the person to remain in the presence of an adult who knows their situation at all times when children are present, including in some cases, asking the person to suggest a group of people to act as companions at church events where children may be present. It denies the person access to keys to the building and asks them to avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group. The sample Limited Access Agreement that can be modified based on the feedback of the committee and the individual circumstances of the offender, can be found in the APPENDIX of this document. It includes two introductory paragraphs: one for a person who has been

accused of a sexual offense, the other for someone who has been convicted. It's available in check list format as well. **The message to the sex offender should be that they are both welcome to participate in adult worship, adult social, and adult educational activities and that they must covenant with the congregation to avoid all contact with children.**

Many congregations already have policies on how to deal with disruptive behaviors including

- perceived threats to the safety of other members
- disruption of church activities
- diminishing appeal of the church to its current and potential members

In general, these policies first ask the minister to meet with the offending individual to address the concern. If the behavior continues, the offending individual may be asked to leave the congregation for a period of time, with reasons for suspension and conditions of return made clear. Individuals are generally not excluded from the congregation completely except by agreement of the Board of Trustees and the Minister, who will communicate the decision.

In the words of one policy, we strive “to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruption compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as a people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.”

If your congregation already has a policy for dealing with disruptive behavior it can be amended to include a section addressing the inclusion of sex offenders as many of the same conditions apply. It is good practice for a congregation to develop a draft of a Limited Access Agreement or check list that can be a template when a situation arises.

There are generally a few ways that the presence of a convicted sex offender becomes known in a congregation. In an ideal world, a person with this background would come to the minister before they started coming to the congregation to discuss limits on their participation. Sex offender treatment specialists often encourage their clients to do just that. One community facing this issue wrote, “The Board’s response to this situation would have been made easier if, before becoming so deeply involved in church activities, the individual had approached our church, explained his situation, asked whether there was some arrangement under which he could participate, and then awaited our response.”

This is probably not often the case. In some cases, people reveal their backgrounds to the ministers. In other circumstances, another congregant may discover a congregant’s history of sexual offenses. Congregants should know that in these cases they should make their concern known to the minister. In other cases, someone may see

a familiar name on the sex offender registry. Or, perhaps it becomes known that a long standing member of the congregation has been accused of a sexual offense.

STEPS TO TAKE

- 1) No matter how the situation is revealed, the minister as quickly as possible should meet privately with the individual to discuss the concerns that have been raised. The minister may want to check the local sex offender registry before meeting with the person. (If the minister is the one being accused, this manual and these steps do not apply. Instead, the President of the Board should be contacted immediately and the president should contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA and/or the District Executive serving the congregation.) If the person is a member of the congregation and has a partner who also attends the church, then the minister should reach out to the partner as well.
- 2) If the minister determines that there is genuine cause for the concern, the person should then be asked to meet with the hopefully pre-existing Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team (hereinto referred to as the Response Team). If such a team does not exist, the Minister in consultation with the President of the Board of Trustees, should convene such a group, consisting of the minister, the Religious Educator, and if possible at least three members of the congregation who have professional expertise with this issue.
- 3) The individual should be asked to sign a release form so that the minister can contact his/her sex offender treatment provider and/or current therapist. Ask if those people are members of ATSA, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. The therapist and, if applicable, the parole officer should be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will re-offend and whether additional restrictions beyond the standard Limited Access Agreement ought to be placed on the person's participation. It will be helpful to know the number, timing and nature of offenses. Such information allows consideration of different situations. For example, an 18 year old male who had sex with his 16 year old girlfriend and against whom her parents pressed charges or the person who has served time in jail for sex offenses against neighborhood children. In the second scenario, if the person has been in the community for some time and has previously completed mandated treatment, the committee would be wise to ask the person to go for a professional assessment with a therapist who specializes in working with sex offenders. The congregation may choose to provide the funding for this assessment. If the offender refuses permission to contact the therapist or refuses to go for an assessment, the congregation would be right to refuse participation in any congregation activity. For more information on this issue, go to REASONS FOR EXCLUDING A PERSON FROM ALL CONGREGATION ACTIVITIES.

It is beyond the scope and experience of congregations to assess the risk or probability that a sex offender will re-offend. According to the Center for Sex Offender Management, even therapists with special training in treating sex offenders can be wrong. They write, “There are no absolutes or magic bullets in identifying these risk factors. Rather, this process is an exercise in isolating factors that are associated with specific behaviors. While this association reflects likelihood, it does not say that all individuals who possess certain characteristics will behave in a certain manner. Some offenders will inevitably commit subsequent sex offenses...likewise not all sex offenders who have re-offense characteristics will recidivate.”^{xv}

The question the Response Team (or other responsible entity in the congregation) must be able to answer is this: given what professionals have advised you, will this person sign and obey a Limited Access Agreement that they can maintain with the leadership in order to assure the safety of children and youth?

- 4) If the assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the Response Team may choose to develop a Limited Access Agreement. If the professional assessment indicates that the person is at high risk for re-offending, it is appropriate to deny that person involvement in the faith community until treatment is successful at reducing the risk. One denomination that has developed a resource for assisting congregations in making these decisions recommends that “a small group should be set up, consisting of approximately five persons, including the minister, persons who have agreed to offer pastoral support for the offender, and accompany them in worship and other church activities, someone with expertise or experience in this field, and someone to represent the wider church community. The group should acquaint itself with any therapeutic program the offender has undergone or will continue to be part of. The group should meet the offender, their probation officer, and other appropriate people so that clear boundaries can be established for the protection of children and youth and to reduce the likelihood of false allegations or suspicions. This group will, at best, operate alongside other agencies in a multi-agency approach to the offender’s rehabilitation.”^{xvi} Meeting with the other support people in the offender’s life – their family, therapist, probation officer – can powerfully demonstrate the faith community’s desire to support the person and hold them accountable. If the person has a partner in the community, that person should be involved in developing the Limited Access Agreement as well.

It is important to point out that a person with a commitment to avoiding future abuses will welcome the opportunity for controls on their behaviors. Stop It Now! writes, “You can show your support of the abuser’s willingness to live a different life that keeps children safe. Your support and watchfulness can help in his or her recovery. It is also a chance to let the abuser know that you are aware of the past and are watching his or her actions today.”^{xvii}

All persons with past histories of sexual offenses should be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement or Check List. Upon entry into the congregation and depending on the circumstances, the person may be asked to sign one annually. If the offender refuses to do so, it is then appropriate to deny the person access to congregation functions and church property. An offender who refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement should know that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked to leave by a member of the Response Team or the Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.

- 5) The Response Team should meet at least quarterly with any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangement and address any concerns. If the minister or the Religious Educator changes, as well as the chair of the Board of Trustees, it is important that the departing person inform the new person of this situation to ensure provision of pastoral support for the offender as well as continuity of awareness of the situation. In sharing information appropriately it is also important to remain aware of confidentiality and privacy for all involved. Copies of files including Limited Access Agreement information should be treated with care, and kept in a secure file drawer.

If and when legal questions arise, the minister and/or Board President should contact a lawyer who can provide information and advice informed by local and state statutes that apply.

- 6) Decide who needs to know. One of the very important and difficult questions is who needs to know that a congregant has a history of sex offense. Clearly, key people, including the Minister, the Religious Educator, the Chair of the Board and the Response Team need to know that the person is attending church, that he or she has agreed not to have contact with children, has signed a Limited Access Agreement or check list, and that he or she should never be alone with children and adolescents.

According to the Methodist Church of the United Kingdom, “there is much to be said for explaining the circumstances to the whole congregation, to promote understanding and support for the individual but also to ensure that church members do not unwittingly allow children contact with the individual concerned. However, this needs to be weighed against any need for confidentiality or pastoral sensitivity...the need to know must be balanced with the danger that the offender may be hounded out of the community (to his detriment and to the greater danger of the other children if he decides to maintain a low profile next time around.)^{xviii} One congregation has devised a policy in between: the congregation knows the policies that have been developed to keep children safe. The name of a particular person with a history of sexual offending is known to the minister and the Religious Educator. The minister will share that name with any parent who requests it in a private meeting. The Board of Trustees in grappling with the issue of sex offenders in the congregation will want to make the decision about how confidentiality will be handled, and it is that decision that should be communicated to the entire congregation.

REASONS FOR EXCLUDING A PERSON FROM ALL CONGREGATION ACTIVITIES

- Refusal for the minister to contact the treatment provider and parole officer.
- Refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.
- Report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high risk for recidivism.
- Refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement.
- Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement.

Once an individual decides that they can comply with these conditions, the process would begin again to reassess the individual and see if they could be welcomed into the life of the congregation anew.

Introductory Paragraph in cases of allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. 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, we ask 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, the Religious Educator and the members of the Response Team (or other appropriate congregational entity.). It will be kept in a locked file in the office

Introductory Paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:

The NAME OF CONGREGATION 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. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all adult social events, and well supervised intergenerational events. You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

Please do not talk with children.

Please 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.

Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present.

If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.

Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

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

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

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Minister

Date

Director/Minister of Religious Education

Date

Board Chair

Date

CHECK LIST FORMAT

Introductory Paragraph in cases of allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. 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, we ask 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, the Religious Educator and the members of the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. It will be kept in a locked file in the office

Introductory Paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:

The NAME OF CONGREGATION affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who choose to worship 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. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited in ways to ensure the safety of our children and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

You understand that you will not be allowed to volunteer or chaperone events for children and adolescents, including children's religious education classes, talks with children/adolescents during worship, youth group, children's and adolescents' activities during intergenerational events, and driving children and young people.

The following activities 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, such as choir: No () Yes ()

Adult meetings without children in building: No () Yes ()

Have a key to the building: No () Yes ()

Intergenerational church activities No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

YOUTH WHO MAY BE ABUSERS

One of the most difficult possible situations is when a teenager or child in the congregation has been accused of inappropriately sexually touching a child in the congregation. The difficulty is that in some cases these children may simply be acting on their sexual feelings impulsively, not quite understanding the importance of boundaries, whereas in other cases, youth and children who engage in sexual activity with younger children may become future adult offenders. If an older child forces sex on a younger child or exposes his or her genitals to a younger child, both of these children will need professional help. If an older child demonstrates inappropriate sexual interest in younger children that doesn't extend to these behaviors, there may or may not be cause for congregational involvement. However, "any child who engages in sex play with a much younger child, or children who coerce or force someone to engage in sex, is beyond normal sexual exploration. If a child is being used in any way to meet the sexual needs of another, then it is sexual abuse."^{xix} And some children who behave this way are acting out their own history of sexual abuse.

After such an incident comes to the attention of the minister or other staff member, the minister should initiate contact individually with the parents of both children to discuss the allegation and next steps. In both of the congregations that I spoke to where this had happened, the ministers reported that the parents had simply stopped coming to the congregation rather than seeking help for their children and support from the faith community during what is surely a difficult time.

The minister should encourage the parents of the child who was touched to seek an evaluation for this child. Some children may seem unchanged by the incident. However, a child who has been sexually abused, according to Stop It Now!, "needs specialized help and attention to heal from this abuse" through treatment with a specialist, "otherwise he or she might be at risk for further abuse or for showing abusing behaviors." However, with treatment and support, the risk of either further abuse or for abusing is dramatically decreased. Contact the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) or the Safer Society Foundation for referrals if you don't have a local list of therapists with expertise in this area.^{xx}

The parents of the child who initiated the sexual contact need to be engaged more thoroughly in discussions about next steps. Depending on the state law and the nature of the incident, it may be necessary to call Child Protective Services. Regardless, before the initiator is allowed to continue to attend religious education, this child should receive an extensive assessment by a child psychologist or psychiatrist with experience with children with sexual behavior problems. It is NOT the responsibility of the minister or the response team to decide if abuse has occurred, but rather to assure that such assessment does take place.

While this review is occurring, it is important that the child's religious education teacher be informed of the allegation and for the parents to agree to closely monitor their child before and after the religious education program. It may make sense to remove the

child from religious education during this time. It would certainly be prudent for the child not to be allowed unsupervised time with other children until the assessment is complete.

The minister will need to decide if the situation warrants the involvement of the entire Response Team and at what point. If the evaluation finds that this was simply a case of inappropriate boundaries or impulsive behavior, and with the recommendation of the therapist that the child can safely attend church functions with other children, the minister and the parents can meet with the child to discuss the importance of never repeating the behavior, the harm it can do to other children, and the consequences should such a situation occur again.

On the other hand, if the treatment provider reports that the child has a sexual behavior problem that is likely to be repetitive, the minister, the Religious Educator, the response team, and the parents need to meet to decide how and if the child can safely be involved with the Religious Education or Youth Group program. A modified Limited Access Agreement should be developed and signed by both the child and the parents. In some cases, it may be necessary to deny the young person continued involvement with other children until treatment is completed and to consider alternative ways to provide religious education, such as through individual sessions with a Religious Educator or home schooling.

In some situations, a family will want to bring a child who has been treated for sexual offenses back into the congregation after treatment is completed. In such cases, the steps for involving an adult offender can be followed, including a Limited Access Agreement signed by both the youth and their parents.

In any of these cases, pastoral care and support for the families involved is crucial. This will be very difficult for the parents involved, and they will need the support of their church community, especially the minister and the Religious Educator. Helping them to feel welcome and supported is essential, as is the ongoing offer of ministry.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, PEDOPHILIA AND SEX OFFENDERS

Childhood sexual abuse is a pervasive and devastating social problem. It is important as we consider these issues that we learn the facts about child sexual abuse, pedophilia, and sex offenders, and that we separate them from the myths that are held in the culture. The information in this section will provide the reader with a rudimentary understanding; readers are encouraged to contact the organizations listed in the Resources (internal link to RESOURCES) section of this document for more information, as well as reading the cited resources.

DEFINITION

One sex offender treatment specialist defined child sexual abuse as “a sexual act imposed upon a child who lacks emotional, maturational, and cognitive development. Authority and power enable the perpetrator, implicitly or directly, to coerce the child into sexual compliance. The ability to lure a child into a sexual relationship is based upon the all-powerful and dominant position of the adult or older adolescent perpetrator, which is in sharp contrast to the child’s age, dependency, and subordinate position.”^{xxi} The abuse can be intrafamilial - between a child and a family member or person in the role of a family member - or extrafamilial - between a child and someone outside the family. Incest is a specific term for sexual contacts between persons who are prohibited to marry by virtue of their familial relationship.

Sexual abusive behaviors range from nudity, disrobing, exhibitionism, to oral, anal, or vaginal sex. Child sexual abuse can include:

- Touching a child’s breasts, genitals, and anus.
- Having any type of intercourse with a child.
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear adult sexual acts.
- Using an object, instrument, or body part to penetrate a child’s genitals or anus
- Having a child touch another’s genitals.
- Using a child in erotica.
- Showing erotic or pornographic materials to a child.
- Photographing a child in sexual poses.

PREVALENCE

Sexual abuse of children is very common. According to a number of studies, between 17 and 25 percent of women report that they were sexually abused before the age of 18, and 10 and 15 percent of men were sexually abused before the age of 18. In a national study of adults aged 18 to 59, about 12 percent of the men and about 17% of the women reported that they had been sexually touched as children.^{xxiii}

Who is abused:

The prevalence of childhood sexual abuse is remarkably high, and the facts often run counter to the assumptions that many people have. Both boys and girls are sexually abused, but abuses against girls predominate. Experience with childhood sexual abuse does not vary by ethnicity, race, social status, or education background of the parents.
xxiii

- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn age 16.^{xxiv}
- Children under the age of 12 account for half of the juvenile victims of forced sexual offenses.^{xxv}
- Young people under age 18 make up over two thirds of all sex crime victims.
- Girls predominate as victims of sex offenses.^{xxvi} 82% of all juvenile sex crime victims under the age of 18 are female.^{xxvii}
- One of every seven victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies were under the age of six.^{xxviii}
- Nearly five out of every six sexual assaults of juveniles occurred in someone's home, not a public place.^{xxix}
- Most children do not tell anyone the abuse has taken place. In a study of adults who remembered being touched sexually as a child, only one quarter of the women and one in six of the men remembered that they had told someone about this sexual contact with an older person.^{xxx}

Relationship of the offender to the victim

Many people believe that children are sexually abused by strangers or known sex offenders. The reality is that strangers account for a small proportion of the abuse.

- Children know their abusers well in 90% of the cases – they are parents, family members, neighbors, clergy, coaches, and teachers.^{xxxi}
- Family friends and relatives are the primary offenders; family friends are more likely to offend with boys and relatives to offend with girls. One in seven girls is abused by a father, step father, or mother's boyfriend, although only 3% of boys are abused by people in these categories.^{xxxii}
- One quarter of offenders of victims, ages 12 through 17 are family members.^{xxxiii}
- Only 7% of offenders of juveniles are strangers to their victims.^{xxxiv}

Profile of the offender

The public image of the sex offender is a strange middle-aged man lurking at a playground eyeing potential victims. The actual profile of the offender is someone well known to the child, someone who may be a teenager, and for boys, more likely to be female than another male. The percentage of adolescents that inappropriately touch children is rarely addressed in congregational policies or screening.

- Girls are primarily touched by men, while the boys are touched more often by women but also by men. The risk to girls is greatest from adult men (63%),

- followed by adolescent males (28%). The risk to boys is greatest from adolescent women (45%), followed by adolescent men (25%) and then older men (38%).^{xxxv}
- Ninety-six percent of all offenders in sexual assaults of all ages reported to law enforcement agencies were male.^{xxxvi}
 - Adults were the offenders in 60% of the sexual assaults of victims under the age of 12.^{xxxvii}
 - Forty percent of the offenders of children under the age of six were other juveniles under the age of 18.^{xxxviii} Sixteen percent of juvenile offenders were under the age of twelve.^{xxxix}
 - Six percent of the offenders who sexually assaulted juveniles under the age of 18 were female, with 12% of the offenders with victims under six were female.^{xl}

PEDOPHILIA

Pedophilia and pedophiles are terms that are often used incorrectly to describe someone who has had sexual contact with children. This information is presented to increase knowledge of pedophilia and clarify the use of terminology.

Clinical pedophilia is not the same as child sexual abuse or offending; a person can be diagnosed as having clinical pedophilia without committing criminal sexual acts with children. Many pedophiles may not be child sex offenders (they are attracted to children but do not act on those feelings), and many people who sexually molest children are not pedophiles. In other words, they are people who are primarily sexually attracted to adults, but in a specific situation, may molest a child.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Sexual Disorders, or DSM IV-TR, defines a person with pedophilia as a person who:

- a. Over a period of at least 6 months, has recurrent, intense sexual arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally 13 years or younger).
- b. The person has acted on these urges, or the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty
- c. The person is at least age 16 years and at least 5 years older than the child or children in Criterion a.

The DSM IV-TR notes that this definition does not include an individual in late adolescence involved in an ongoing sexual relationship with a 13-year-old. It also asks clinicians to differentiate based on the sex of the preferred child, whether the behavior is limited to incest (a family member), and whether the attraction is exclusive (attracted only to children) or non-exclusive.^{xli}

Ephebophilia is a preferential sexual attraction to adolescents. It is not considered pedophilia, and given the proliferation of images of sexualized adolescents in the media, it is fairly common. Ephebophilia's legality is determined by state sexual consent laws;

in other words, once a young person reaches the state's legal age of consent, it is not a crime to have sex with them. Nepiophilia is a sexual attraction to infants.

Pedophilic behavior usually begins during adolescence or early adulthood. Pedophiles are said to “groom children.” It is rare for their contact to be forced upon a child. Rather, “they may begin with flattery and gifts or take the child on “dates” (outings), while proceeding from intimate conversation to sexual talk and sexual touch, gradually getting the child accustomed to each new step.” Children who are lonely, depressed, or angry with their parents are most vulnerable to these special attentions.^{xlii}

Treatment and Recidivism

As noted above, most sex crimes against children are never reported, and most sex offenders do not come to the attention of law authorities. Eighty-four percent of sexual abusers are never reported, and the National Crime Victimization Survey found that two thirds of sexual assaults against persons 12 and older are not reported to law enforcement.^{xliii}

Nevertheless, since congregations need to know how to respond to people who have been convicted of sex offenses, this information is offered to clarify many of the myths around treatment and recidivism.

Although state laws and practices vary, in many states convicted sex offenders who are serving time in prisons are not granted parole until they have successfully completed a sex offender treatment program. And once granted parole, states generally require the person as a condition of their parole to participate for a length of time in a treatment program for sex offenders. State laws do vary, and congregations will want to find out what treatment is available in their county jails and state prisons as well as parole requirements for treatment.

Treatment for sex offenders typically includes “A cognitive behavioral approach, which emphasizes changing patterns of thinking related to sexual offending and changing deviant patterns of arousal; ...a psycho-educational approach, which stresses increasing the offenders concept of the victim and recognition of responsibility for their offense; and the pharmacological approach, which is based upon the use of medication to reduce arousal.”^{xliv} According to the Harvard Mental Health letter, anti-androgen medications are “the only reliable way, proven in controlled studies, to suppress pedophilic urges.”^{xlv}

There is a generally held perception that sex offenders are untreatable. Indeed, when I conducted interviews with congregations about their experience with this issue, I heard repeatedly that the majority of sex offenders will re-offend. And in several cases, congregations voted to completely exclude the offender from the faith community based on this incorrect assumption. One church that dealt with these issues, wrote to their membership, “the social worker explained that while studies in the literature vary substantially on the issue of recidivism rates, she was inclined to accept that repeat offenses were rather likely.”

The problem is that it isn't true. The review of the literature for this monograph actually shows that **with treatment, the majority of sex offenders will not recommit a sexual offense.**⁴ Even with the offenders who are pedophiles, treatment can help change behavior even if it does not change sexual attraction patterns. In a 1998 evaluation of 61 research studies on sexual offender recidivism (known as a meta-analysis), sexual offense recidivism was very low (13.4% of more than 23,000 offenders). The sexual offense recidivism of child molesters was slightly lower - - 12.7% for 9,603 abusers.^{xlvi} In another study, one in five of the extrafamilial child molesters recidivated.^{xlvii} The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice reports that 5.3% of sex offenders were rearrested for a sexual crime within three years of release.^{xlviii} Another study found that child molesters with female victims had a 10 to 29% recidivism rate while child molesters with male victims ranged between 13 and 40%, but this study included non-sexual offenses in its data.^{xliv} Other criminals had higher rates of recidivism – for example, 38% of those convicted of a violent crime had another offense, as did one third of those with a property offense. In other words, in each of these studies, the majority of child molesters are *never* reconvicted for a sexual offense. It is also important to note that many of these studies include all sex offenders, not just child molesters or pedophiles, and that they are based on reported cases. According to the Harvard Mental Health Letter, “arrests and confessions don't necessarily indicate the true numbers of repeat offenders.”¹

Treatment makes a difference. According to Stop It Now!, “there is a credible body of evidence that suggests that with specialized treatment, some sex offenders can take responsibility for their own behaviors, learn how to identify and control their triggers, and go on to lead healthy, safe, abuse-free lives.”^{li} In a 2000 study in Kentucky, fewer than one in five (17.6%) of treated non-family offenders committed another sexual offense. But, untreated offenders commit more than twice as many sexual offenses as those who have had treatment.^{lii} According to the above referenced meta-analysis of 61 studies, offenders who fail to complete treatment are at higher risk for re-offending than those who complete treatment.^{liii} In one study of child molesters in treatment, 18% of those receiving cognitive behavioral treatment recidivated compared to 43% who did not participate in a program.^{liv}

There are also other factors besides completing treatment that are believed to reduce the risk of re-offending. These include “realizing the enormity of what they have done, admitting their responsibility and the harm their sexual violence has caused; support from family and friends on release; establishment of a social network; avoidance

⁴ It is important in reviewing research on sex offender recidivism to separate child molesters from other sex offenders such as rapists and exhibitionists, as well as subsequent sexual offenses from all possible criminal offenses committed. Note in some studies sexual and nonsexual re-offenses are grouped together, leading to much higher re-offense rates. For this paper, only sexual re-offenses are considered. It is also important to recognize that studies are limited because they are only based on reported offenses, not those that might go unreported.

of situations involving contact with children; and participation in ongoing treatment and agreement to monitoring.”^{lv}

There are people with a history of sex offense(s) who have demonstrated that they are able to control their impulses, avoid triggers, and thus eliminate any subsequent sexual behavior with children.

Further, involvement **with a faith community may actually lessen the chance that a person will commit another sex offense.** To quote the Methodist Church of the United Kingdom, “for many sex offenders, social isolation and a failure to integrate into an adult community contribute to an emotional lovelessness and poor self esteem that serve to increase the risk of re-offending.”^{lvi} To offer them appropriate support and involvement in a congregation reduces isolation and increases accountability.

An excellent review article, that is accessible to non-professionals, is “Recidivism of Sex Offenders” by the federal Center for Sex Offender Management. It can be read at www.csom.org/pubs/recidsexof.html

CONCLUSION

The issues addressed in this manual are complex and difficult. But if we are to honor our commitments to providing a safe place for all to worship, learn, and socialize, these issues must be addressed seriously and with integrity. We can keep our children, youth and vulnerable adults safe from sexual abuse *and* we can offer ministry and a congregational home to people who have been treated successfully for sexual offenses. We can honor our most basic principle that every person has inherent dignity and worth, and balance justice, compassion, accountability and safety. We are called to do no less.

Number of years at current employment_____

May we call your current employer for a character reference? ____ yes ____ no

If not, please tell us why.

A. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense? If yes, please explain.

B. Have you ever been accused of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

If yes, please provide details:

C. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by any employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

If yes, please provide details:

D. Have you ever been convicted of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

If yes, please provide details:

E. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children and youth?

If yes, please provide details.

Congregation History and Prior Work with Children and Youth

List congregations you have attended during the past five years.

Name of congregation: _____

City State

When did attend _____

List all previous work involving children and youth (list name, type of work performed, person you were responsible to)

Please list two references who are not relatives who have known you for at least three years and who are familiar with your character as it pertain to your experience with children or youth:

1) Name_____	Phone_____
Address_____	Relationship to you:_____
2) Name_____	Phone_____
Address_____	Relationship to you: _____

I authorize the congregation to contact references and other congregations to obtain information about my background regarding my character and fitness for work with children and youth. I authorize references to provide such information about me. I hereby release and hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to hold harmless this congregation, its trustees, employees and volunteers.

Further, I understand that a member of the staff may check the sex offender registry and/or contact the local police for more information about my background.

This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff or volunteers or participating in a response team, or as required by law.

I attest that the above information is true and correct.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX (continued)

AGREEMENT TO TEACH FORM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS AND YOUTH GROUP LEADERS

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

CELL PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

I have read and understand our congregation's policies on keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe. These include: [put in by name]

I agree to uphold these principles in my work with _____ [name of congregation] children, youth, adults, and families.

I have signed the Code of Ethics statement.

I affirm that I have never been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty to any sexual crime. I also have not pled guilty to a lesser charge after having been charged with a sexual crime. I have never engaged in any form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. I have never been determined to have engaged in any sexual offenses in any civil, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum or other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, I have met to review this information confidentially with the Minister and the Religious Educator.

Further, I agree to notify the Minister and the Religious Educator immediately should I be accused of sexual abuse, sexual offenses, sexual harassment, or other sexual improprieties in the time that I am working with children and youth in this congregation.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX (continued)

Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, 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 youth and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if positive potential 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. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

Leaders shall be informed of the code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I have read and understand the above statements of position, expectations, and actions.

Date

Name Printed

Name Signed

RESOURCES

For a more comprehensive list of organizations that deal with sexual abuse, go to Stop It Now!, www.stopitnow.org

General Information about Child Sexual Abuse

Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence
936 No. 34th Street
Suite 200
Seattle, WA 98103
206-634-1903
www.cpsdv.org

ChildHelp USA – National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A Child
Hotline is staffed 24 hours, 7 days a week.
National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
PO Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013
800-fy1-3366
www.calib.com/nccanch

Prevent Child Abuse America
Formerly National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse
332 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604
800-CHILDREN
www.childabuse.org

STOP IT NOW!!
PO Box 495
Haydenville, MA 01039
1-888-Prevent
www.stopitnow.org

(Their comprehensive resource guide includes a more extensive list of resources than are presented here.)

Information about Sex Offenders

Center for Sex Offender Management
8403 Colesville Road
Suite 720
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-589-9393
www.csom.org

National Adolescent Perpetration Network
Kempe Children's Center
1825 Marion Street
Denver, CO 80218
303-864-5192
www.kempecenter.org/about.htm

Safer Society Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 340
Brandon, VT 05773
802-247-3132
www.saferociety.org
(also treatment referrals)

For Referral to a Treatment Provider for an Assessment

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)
4900 S.W. Griffith Drive, Suite 274
Beaverton, OR 97005
503-643-1023
www.atsa.com

National Council on Sexuality Addiction and Compulsivity
PO Box 725544
Atlanta, GA 31139
770-541-9912
www.ncsac.org

See also the Safer Society Foundation and the National Adolescent Perpetrators Network as well.

Support for Congregants

Parents Anonymous
675 W. Foothill Blvd.
Suite 220
Claremont, CA 91711
1-800-339-6993

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network
800-656-HOPE
www.rainn.org

Sexual Assault Recovery Anonymous
PO Box 16
Surrey, BC, V35 424 Canada
410-584-2626

Survivors of Incest Anonymous
PO Box 190
Benson, MD 21018-9998
410-893-3322
www.siawso.org

Voices in Action
PO Box 13
Newtownsville, OH 45158
1-800-7-Voice-8
www.voices-action.org
(support for victims of incest and child sexual abuse)

FOR INSURANCE ISSUES

Church Mutual Insurance Company
3000 Schuster Lane
PO Box 357
Merrill, WI 54452
800-554-2642
www.churchmutual.com

A CASE STUDY: A SEX OFFENDER IN CHURCH

Reverend Patricia Timmino

In 1996 a parishioner invited a known sex offender to First Unitarian Universalist Society because he felt the man (let's call him Dan) was trying hard to make a fresh start and could use the support of a church family. The minister was informed and met with Dan and welcomed him. Dan agreed to have a 'buddy,' who could be with him while he was in church. The purpose of the 'buddy' was both to assure the safety of parishioners and to protect Dan against accusations as well.

A few months later, news of Dan's background leaked out. Many people were angry. Some parents with young children were particularly angry because they had unknowingly invited this man into their home. The minister supported Dan's right to be in church.

For his part, Dan didn't hide his past. Most people were genuinely moved by how hard he was working to heal himself through therapy and twelve-step programs. Some kept their children away from him as a precaution, but challenges over his right to attend church subsided over time.

Eventually, Dan entered into a loving relationship with a woman and left First UU to attend church some 15 miles away. First UU had changed ministers by this time. The new minister knew Dan and would sometimes bump into him in the supermarket. Dan credited his ability to have this relationship directly to growth that had occurred as a result of being accepted by people at the church.

The new minister invited Dan to do a "Moment of Fellowship" at the church. It was a proud day for both Dan and the church when he returned, stepped into the pulpit and thanked the congregation for accepting him, helping him to grow and make a new life possible. He received a warm ovation.

Two years later, a church member came to the minister having heard that a newcomer was a convicted sex offender. The minister made an appointment with the man. From the outset, Ron felt very different from Dan. The minister regretted that no policy had been developed first time around. Ron agreed to have a 'buddy,' and to allow the minister to inform the leadership, including the RE Director, of his presence. He also agreed to the minister's exploratory request to inform the congregation in due time, once an appropriate, and low-key way to do it could be devised.

The minister then asked the Parish Committee to develop a means for the church to come up with a policy regarding the participation of sex offenders in church life.

Shortly thereafter, Ron disappeared from church. It turned out that Ron had been arrested and charged (and would subsequently be convicted) with a new sex-related offense. The first offense had been with a woman, this was with a young man.

Emotions flew when the congregation learned that another sex offender had been among them. The minister immediately invited everyone with a strong view onto a Safety Committee to develop a policy. Seventeen people in a church of 110 agreed to serve. Some, mostly parents, argued that because our children assume that any adult they see at church is safe, there should be zero tolerance of sex offenders. Social justice advocates argued that UU's should minister to this population because no one else will; if they've served their time, we should not continue to punish through ostracism.

The committee educated themselves, listened to experts, and argued to the point of exhaustion. They produced an interim policy which was accepted by the congregation at annual meeting. This policy was crude, contained harsh language and yet represented the best work the committee was capable of at that time. It put something in place while the committee continued its work.

Experience had taught that every situation would be unique, so the committee sought to create a policy that could deal with offenders as different as Dan and Ron. The final guidelines called for a trained standing Safety Committee to make decisions on a case-by-case basis. It offered a process for reporting concerns and a flexible check list that could allow anything from total access to very limited participation.

The church is now considerably more sophisticated about safety and sexual ethics because they have struggled with it so openly. In the end, the value of the Safety Policy will not be nearly as great as the educational process to which the committee and church has become dedicated. We now accept that no church can ever be a totally safe place because it is part of society at large. Our true measure of safety stems, not from a policy, but from our level of education on the issue and our continued willingness to talk openly.

With this in mind, we teach our children two safety classes a year and offer one to adults, and the existence of the Safety Policy is published for all to see. The process is ongoing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- ⁱ Stop It Now!, Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Abuse and Those Who Might Commit It. MA: Stop It Now! 1998.
- ⁱⁱ Laumann, Edward, ET. al., The Social Organization of Sexuality, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 346.
- ⁱⁱⁱ www.epic.org/privacy/meganslaw
- ^{iv} Joan Tabachnik, personal communication.
- ^v Restorative Justice for All, www.uua.org/
- ^{vi} "We believe in a safe church for all of us", Brochure by The Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist, no date.
- ^{vii} Stop It Now!, Child Sexual Abuse: Facts, op. cit., inside cover.
- ^{viii} CSOM Recidivism of Sex Offenders, CSOM Documents, May 2001, <http://www.csom.org/pubs/recidsexof.html>
- ^{ix} Pacific Southwest District. Child and Youth Protection Requirements. http://www.uua.org/library/pswd_protection.html
- ^x Stop It Now!, Child Sexual Abuse: Facts", 2.
- ^{xi} "Protecting Our Children From Abuse and Neglect", <http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/abuse.html>
- ^{xii} CSOM op. cit.
- ^{xiii} Diane Miller, No Tougher Issue, http://uua.org/re/reach/fall01/leadership/no_tougher_issue.html
- ^{xiv} Methodist Church UK, op. cit.
- ^{xv} CSOM. Op. cit.
- ^{xvi} Methodist Church Reports, op. cit.
- ^{xvii} Stop It Now!, Child Sexual Abuse: Facts, 10)
- ^{xviii} Methodist Church UK., op. cit.
- ^{xix} Stop It Now!, "Do Children Sexually Abuse Other Children", MA: Stop It Now!, 1999, 4.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} Claudia Crawford "Child Sexual Abuse Evaluation, Treatment, and Legal Issues", Handouts prepared for workshop for American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, September 2003.
- ^{xxii} Laumann, et. al. op. cit., 340
- ^{xxiii} Ibid.
- ^{xxiv} Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, fact sheet, www.cpsdv.org/Child-Abuse/index.htm
- ^{xxv} Ibid.
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