



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

COMPETENCIES FOR MINISTRY TO/WITH YOUTH

Developed by the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries and Congregational Life Staff

(2017)





Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Competencies for Ministry to/with Youth	
(1) Able to form healthy relationships and share leadership with youth	Page 4
(2) Able to create a safe(r) youth program	Page 5
(3) Able to provide appropriate pastoral care and interventions	Page 6
(4) Able to create an inclusive youth ministry	Page 7
(5) Able to bring thoughtful, skilled communication to planning, leading, and facilitating in a youth ministry context	Page 8
(6) Understands and is able to use major models and contents of youth programming	Page 9
(7) Develops in self-knowledge and presence	Page 10
(8) Able to function on a team	Page 11



Introduction

Vital youth ministry and resilient Unitarian Universalist youth begin with healthy, spiritually mature adults. Companionship on their spiritual journey is an important ministry, one that adults might not know what they're getting into when they sign up. Adults aged 25 and older who are part of their congregation's ministry to and with youth may be youth advisors, religious education teachers, youth program coordinators, Our Whole Lives teachers, Coming of Age mentors, Bridging mentors, conference sponsors, service trip leaders or committee or ministry team members. Congregational leaders have a responsibility to ensure those working with youth are competent companions for youth.

These eight competencies were co-created by UUA Congregational Life Staff and the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries and are seen as vital areas of development for adults working with youth.

We see three levels of use for this tool:

- UUA staff can use this tool to support religious professionals in building a breadth and depth of competence for healthy, safe congregational youth ministry.
- Religious professionals can use this tool as a guideline for healthy best practices in hiring volunteers and staff and evaluating existing teams. We know religious professionals aspire to hire the best volunteers and staff to work with youth, and this tool can help religious professionals hire and mentor the right adults.
- Adults who work with youth can use this optional tool to self-assess the ways they compliment one another as part of a team and their areas for growth. Evaluation matrices are available as a companion to these competencies for you and your supervisor to assess your areas of strength and improvement.

There is no requirement that these tools are used for any congregation's youth ministry. However, it provides common language with which to describe resources available in the area of youth ministry.

There are three categories for each competency: entry level (critical for an adults in youth ministry to have on day one), basic (the foundation of a healthy youth ministry) and advanced (appropriate for long term volunteers, paid staff, and other highly committed adults).

None of us ever really "finish" any of these competencies. Youth ministry encompasses so much and we are continually developing resources for vital youth ministry. Youth ministry is relational, there is always more self-reflection and deepening we can do as our own lives unfold and we change and grow. So take a look at these competencies to see where you're at, and where you can go!



Competencies for Ministry to/with Youth

(1) Able to form healthy relationships and share leadership with youth

Entry Level: Understands that mutually respectful youth/adult partnerships in shared leadership is a goal

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain appropriate, authentic, friendly, covenantal and mutually respectful relationships with youth • Be present and participate as a role model • Share leadership and be in relationship with youth who are at different maturity levels <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The adult holds responsibility for accountability that precludes a mutual friendship, or being “just one of the group” • Power dynamics: power with/within, and power over • The spectrum of shared youth-adult leadership • Adults’ responsibility to make space for and invite youth leadership • What is “acceptable failure” – when to step in and when to let youth learn by their own experience 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate liability concepts in ways that give youth understanding in shaping rules and policy • Be a youth advocate outside the youth group with other adults in the faith community • Foster youth leadership and mentor youth leaders • Understand and articulate that ministry with youth is a covenantal practice in which youth are safe, recognized, and affirmed as full and vital participants in the life of our shared Unitarian Universalist faith community. • Support youth growing into resilient young adults • Promote involvement of youth, individually and collectively, in all aspects of congregational life



(2) Able to create a safe(r) youth program

Entry Level: Knows key relationship guidelines, institutional liability concerns, and local safe congregation policies, and the reasons these are in place

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create rules and covenants with youth where youth are responsible for co-creating, following and lifting up the rules and covenant for others • Articulate and follow local safe congregations policies <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for key relationship guidelines, safe congregation policies, and rules related to liability concerns • Role as a Mandated Reporter under state and local law • How to maintain healthy online communication with youth using current technology including email and social media 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create policies that balance youth, parent, and congregational perspectives with liability concerns • Create safety for youth in intergenerational settings <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to create sexually healthy communities



(3) Able to provide appropriate pastoral care and interventions

Entry Level: Understands confidentiality, when to expand it to include additional help and how to communicate with religious educator, minister or supervisor

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately share concerns about youth with the youth ministry team including religious educator and minister • Include youth in caring for faith community members • Know when to seek personal pastoral care • Inform youth of the limits of confidentiality such as in a covenant <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of active listening • Confidentiality, and when and how to expand confidentiality to include additional help 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist the ministry team in the ongoing development of a team-based network for referrals and make referrals as appropriate to one’s role • Implement team-based support • Operate using knowledge gained through training in youth pastoral care, and the basics of chaplaincy • Ability to support youth in crisis • Knowledge of and ability to support youth with: self-harm, suicidal ideation, disclosure of abuse, and other adolescent crisis • Ability mediate conflict



(4) Able to create an inclusive youth ministry

Entry Level: Recognize the importance of creating inclusive youth space that affirms all identities of all members

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage group dynamics in healthy and inclusive ways • With youth leaders, shift in-group behavior to inclusive behavior • Use covenanting to support youth in creating a healthy and inclusive community where youth are able to call each other back into covenant. <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural Competency basics • Basics of including youth of color, youth with different gender/sexualities identities, and youth with different development • That racial and social justice is part of a holistic and inclusive youth ministry • Adolescent Development • Multiple learning styles • Five Steps of Community Building • The importance of restorative rather than punitive approaches to covenant breaches 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create anti-oppressive and inclusive policies that balance youth, parent, and congregational perspectives with liability concerns • Create safety for youth in intergenerational settings • Help youth understand and include other youth who have disabilities and mental health needs • Help youth, parents, and community manage conflict; create and hold space for difficult conversations. • Implement racial and social justice programming and reflection with diverse groups of youth • Able to use restorative practices to restore community and heal covenant breaches. <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural Competency (more in-depth) and Intercultural Development Continuum • The intersections among identity, privilege, and oppression; group power dynamics • The process and stages of identity development for youth with regard to their race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc. • Experiential education, in and outside a structured curriculum



(5) Able to bring thoughtful, skilled communication to planning, leading, and facilitating in a youth ministry context

Entry Level: Knows how to communicate in a direct and accountable manner with youth, parents, and congregational leaders.

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use covenanting: Create a covenant, help youth live into or uphold a covenant; help youth understand the “why” of covenant agreements in terms of behavior’s effect on community • Use congregational communication systems • Communicate with parents • Use non-violent/compassionate communication tools • <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different learning styles and different communication styles • Appropriate and ethical ways to communicate with youth online, including email and social media • The importance of using restorative practices and natural consequences for breaks in covenant or rules 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help youth, parents, and community manage conflict; create and hold space for conversations that may be difficult for a group • Participate in relationship-building among parents, congregational leaders, and youth • Manage triangulated relationships with parents and congregational leaders • Create communication systems that connect youth, parents, and congregational leaders with appropriate use of technology • Facilitate restorative justice practices for breaks in covenant or rules <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theological underpinnings of Unitarian Universalist Youth Ministry • Adaptive leadership • Change theory • Systems theory



(6) Understands and is able to use major models and contents of youth programming

Entry Level: Understands UU Principles and Sources and creates opportunities for community building

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and lead games • Introduce and lead youth worship • Apply models/modes of integrated youth ministry beyond youth group and overnights, including multigenerational programming • Introduce/lead UU religious education curricula including Tapestry of Faith • Assess current programming through the lens of the Six Pillars and Web of Youth Ministry <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical current models of youth ministry programs • Models of youth ministry that work in one’s own size congregation • Understands the need for a balance between multigenerational and congregational involvement and developmentally focused opportunities 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to program growth or shrinkage by implementing variations suitable for new program size • Able to lead Bridging and Coming of Age programs • Coordinate/supervise social action and service trips • Network or collaborate with congregations with similar or target youth programs • Balance building authentic relationships among youth and between youth and adults with content and curriculum <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogies used in UU curricula • Experiential education theory • Building intergenerational congregations • Support for family ministry • History of UU youth ministry and evolution of philosophies and models



(7) Develops in self-knowledge and presence

Entry Level: Has knowledge about Unitarian Universalist theology and is aware of one's need for spiritual development

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Unitarian Universalist principles are practiced and understood with and by youth • Develop capacity to be present to self and others • Recognize when one is in need of social/spiritual support and identify and utilize such support • Develop or affirm a spiritual practice <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That youth ministry must be rooted in Unitarian Universalist theology • One's own anxieties, and the impact of these anxieties on one's youth ministry • One's own needs for social/spiritual support • One's own social history with adolescence 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate one's own theology • Develop theological grounding for why one chooses to do ministry • Deal with discouragement <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One's own social/cultural location and identity and how that affects one's ministry • Self-differentiation – understands that creating appropriate distance between oneself and the youth does not require alienating the youth



(8) Able to function on a team

Entry Level: Understands one's responsibility as a member of a team

Basic (In addition to Entry Level)	Advanced (In addition to Entry Level and Basic)
<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor others and be mentored by others • Form a collaborative relationship with religious professionals, parents, and elected congregational leaders <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lines of accountability and supervision 	<p>Able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do evaluation of self, program, and team • Skillfully manage change and conflict • Be a non-anxious presence in the congregation • Share resources or learnings with similar or aspirational congregations <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family systems theory • How anxiety affects a system • How to recognize and identify sources of anxiety that are affecting a youth program, for example, youth anxieties, adults' anxieties about youth, system anxiety about youth group