

## **Northeast Iowa Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

### **Position Statements and Policies on Behavior**

We the members of the Northeast Iowa Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (NEIUUF) believe that the well-being and strength of our Fellowship depends on a sense of mutual care and concern for each other, qualities which can only exist in an atmosphere of trust, respect and cooperation.

We expect ourselves, and each other to exhibit behaviors that enhance the dignity and inherent worth of all participants: expressing sincere appreciation; speaking thoughtfully with courage and compassion; being creative in problem solving; maintaining a sense of humor; actively listening and clarifying what we hear; letting others have their say; respecting boundaries that may differ from our own; respecting confidentiality; refraining from harmful gossip about others; and speaking honestly.

While we are a recognized liberal body, welcoming diversity of opinion and belief, our openness may not be used to harbor or countenance those who would do harm, or cause intentional mental or physical pain to our congregants. As responsible members of this community, we all have an obligation to bring to light concerns which threaten the health of our fellowship.

In addition, we recognize that religious communities, which should be sanctuaries in every sense of the word, can be particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the welcoming spirit, the ever-present need for volunteers, and the high level of trust and respect rightfully accorded those volunteers, especially in programs for children and youth. We seek to preserve that spirit of welcome, respect and trust in balance with our concern for safety, applying the test of "reasonable precaution" to any policies or guidelines we adopt. We further acknowledge that institutions operating in the best possible manner with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free setting.

**Our statements and policies regarding behavior address the following related concerns:**

- A. Reporting Inappropriate Behavior – Affirming that we expect everyone to treat each other with compassion and respect**
- B. Safe Children – Describing goals to assure our youth are safe**
- C. Sexual or Physical Abuse Allegations – Confirming that any inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated**
- D. Convicted Sex Offenders – Describing how we provide a safe fellowship environment while welcoming – with limits – a person previously convicted of sex offenses.**

#### **A. Reporting and Resolution of Alleged Inappropriate Behavior**

When a person believes that they have been the victim of inappropriate behavior, and that incident was such that the person felt too uncomfortable to discuss the issue directly with the other party, the following procedures will be used in an attempt to ensure that a fair and just resolution can be found:

1. Concerns must be documented and submitted to the NEIUUF Board of Trustees, in order for Board members to deal with specific allegations and facts. This documentation must include signed, written statements and descriptions of the alleged misbehavior from those bringing complaints.

2. After concluding that information presented is indeed a concern, two Board members will be designated to meet with the person(s) addressed in the complaint.
3. At the meeting, the accused person will be asked to submit a written statement recounting their best recollections of the event(s) in question.
4. After reviewing written and verbal testimony from both of the parties the Board will decide whether additional information is necessary (ex: witness statements) and make such requests as needed, before final deliberations on the matter.
5. If the Board decides that it is able to conclude its consideration of the complaint and issue an official statement, it may choose to ask the parties to reconcile without Board action, or the Board may choose to direct either, or both of the parties to consider the inappropriateness of the offending behaviors, and refrain from their practice in the future.
6. If another incident occurs, both parties will be asked to meet with the entire Board and explain their behavior. The Board will then meet in closed session to decide what action will be taken
7. If the Board determines that an additional offense has occurred Board action may include expulsion from the Fellowship, or a warning that expulsion will follow any future misconduct.
8. In all cases, and using their own best judgment, alleged victims are also entitled to report alleged misconduct to appropriate civil authorities.

## **B. Safe Children Policy**

(Note: Licensed child care providers are required by law to report any suspicions/evidence of a child having been mistreated.)

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 against children, or children against children. In light of this situation, and in order to add a layer of monitoring and reporting to this policy the NEIUUF requires that any staff member, volunteer, or congregational member who witnesses inappropriate, or unsafe behavior involving children must immediately report the incident to a member of the NEIUUF Board of Trustees.

### **Meetings and activities involving children**

1. While it is preferred that at least 2 adults/providers are present in activities involving children, we recognize that this not often not feasible. This preference will not interfere with program opportunities/activities. The following is listed as a general expectation for the maximum number of children/youth supervised by each adult or helper
  - a. For ages up to middle school, the general expectation is no more than 8 children per adult or helper
  - b. For middle school and high school aged children, the general expectation is no more than 10 children per adult.

### **C. Sexual Harassment Policy Statement**

NEIUUF members, guests, employees, visitors and volunteers have the right to pursue their activities free from all forms of discrimination and conduct or contact which could be deemed of a sexual nature, harassing, coercive, or disruptive. NEIUUF therefore, will NOT tolerate any form of sexual harassment or misconduct by any of its members, employees, agents, representatives, volunteers, guests or visitors.

NEIUUF is committed to dealing expeditiously, openly, fairly, and compassionately with allegations of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. This policy outlines the procedures recognized and utilized by NEIUUF in connection with the reporting, investigation, and resolution of claims involving alleged sexual harassment or misconduct.

In addition to the procedures outlined in this policy, it is imperative that any individuals who have been subjected to sexual harassment or misconduct and/or anyone with knowledge of sexual harassment or misconduct, especially involving minors (children under age 17) or those who lack the mental capacity immediately notify the appropriate civil authorities of such conduct. NEIUUF will cooperate fully with any investigation by civil authorities relating to any alleged claim or sexual harassment or misconduct.

NEIUUF is committed to maintaining an environment free of any form of sexual harassment and/or sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct and harassment are both inappropriate and immoral. It is also illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. NEIUUF prohibits any of its members, officers, employees, guests, visitors, volunteers, agents and representatives from engaging in sexual harassment and/or sexual misconduct of any form. Furthermore, NEIUUF forbids retaliation, reprisal or adverse treatment of any kind against anyone complaining of or reporting allegations of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct.

### **Sexual Abuse Allegation Policy and Actions**

The following outlines required procedures if a sexual abuse allegation has been made.

#### **Procedure**

Whenever there is an allegation of sexual abuse is brought to the Board, the Board will designate specific individuals (referenced below as "Designates") assigned to coordinate these policies.

The Designates should meet privately with the accused individual as quickly as possible. And will develop a Limited Access Agreement with the individual accused on inappropriate behavior (referenced below as "Individual."

If the Individual refuses to do so, it is then appropriate to deny the Individual access to congregation functions and church property until the allegation process has been completed. An Individual 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. If the Individual further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.

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, a Designate member or the Board President should contact a lawyer who can provide information and advice regarding local and state statutes that apply. The Designate member or Board president will seek the lawyer's advice about contacting the police, and will do so if so advised.

A Designate member or board chair will advise the Religious Education leaders that the Individual 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.

### **Standard Limited Access Agreement for Individuals Accused of Sexual Abuse**

*The Limited Access Agreement presented here is to be modified based on the individual circumstances of the accusation, including changing the limited access restrictions. This sample is based on behaviors related to children.*

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Board. 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 Board chair and the Religious Education Committee chair.

### **Agreement:**

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. However, 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 until all concerns are resolved.

Signature:

Date:

Witness (Designate member):

Date:

Board Chair:

Date:

#### **D. Convicted Sex Offender Policy**

*Adapted from the Unitarian Universalist Association's online resource "Keeping Children Safe".*

##### **INTRODUCTION**

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.

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/her involvement doesn't pose risks to the congregation and that standards are in place for protection against false allegations and suspicions. 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. 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.

## **PROCEDURE**

- (1) When it is revealed that a convicted sex offender is seeking involvement in the congregation, the Board should meet privately with the offender as quickly as possible.
- (2) The offender should be asked to sign a release form so that the Board can contact his/her sex offender treatment provider and/or parole officer.

The Board should ask if treatment providers are members of ATSA, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. The treatment provider and/or 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. The Board may decide to ask the offender to go for a professional assessment with a therapist who specializes in working with sex offenders. The Board may choose to provide the funding for this assessment. If the offender refuses permission

to contact the treatment provider and/or parole officer or refuses to go for an assessment, the Board would be right to refuse participation in any congregation activity.

- (3) If the professional assessment indicates that the offender has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the Board may choose to develop a Limited Access Agreement (the standard Agreement may be used as is or adapted). If the offender has a partner in the community, that person should be involved in developing the Limited Access Agreement as well.

If the offender refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement, it is then appropriate to deny the offender 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. If the offender further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.

- (4) If the professional assessment indicates that the offender is at high risk for re-offending, it is appropriate to deny the offender access to congregation functions and church property until treatment is successful at reducing the risk.
- (5) The Board should meet every 6 months with any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangement and address any concerns.
- (6) The Fellowship Coordinator, Board members, child care providers, and anyone involved in Religious Education or other youth programming need to be aware of all Limited Access Agreements. Beyond that, the Board should decide who in the congregation needs to be aware of a Limited Access Agreement. The congregation should be aware of the policies

that have been developed to keep children safe. The Board will share the name of any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement with any parent who requests it in a private meeting.

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.

- (7) If and when legal questions arise, the Board should contact a lawyer who can provide information and advice informed by local and state statutes that apply.

### **Reasons for Excluding an Offender from All Congregation Activities**

- Refusal for the Board to contact the treatment provider and/or parole officer.
- Refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.
- Report by a treatment provider and/or parole officer that the offender 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 offender 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.

### **Standard Limited Access Agreement for Convicted Sex Offenders**

*This standard agreement can be modified based on the individual circumstances of the offender.*

The Northeast Iowa Unitarian Universalist Fellowship 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.

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: the Fellowship Coordinator, Board members, child care providers, and anyone involved in Religious Education or other youth programming.

I have reviewed this Limited Access Agreement and the Convicted Sex Offender Policy and agree to abide by these 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 agreement will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Date:

NEIUUF Board Chair:

Date: