

Managing Risk in Our Congregations: Keeping Children and Youth Safe

~May 19, 2007

~UU Church of Amherst

AGENDA

1. Chalice lighting
2. Background, philosophy and benefits of safety/risk management policies
3. Introductions
4. Definition of abuse and profiles of abusers

~Steps to developing a risk management policy~

5. 1st steps
6. Screening procedures
7. Supervision guidelines
 - RE classes & activities
 - Transportation and field trips
 - Overnights
 - “Principles of Supervision” [video](#)
 - [Small group activity I](#)
8. Other policies and risk factors
 - Lock-down & evacuations
 - First aid and universal precautions
 - Buildings and grounds safety (Church Mutual [video](#))
9. Creating/adapting forms
10. Set up structure for making & receiving allegations
11. Set up structure for regular evaluation
12. Providing education at all levels

break

lunch

~Implementation~

13. Responding to allegations
14. Effecting change in congregations
15. An implementation strategy
16. [Video](#) (opt.)
17. [Small group activity II](#)

~Resources~

18. Summary of resources
19. Sharing of stories and experiences
20. Conclusions & evaluations

Ideally Safety Policies Should Include:

1. Statement of philosophy
2. Definition of abuse, harassment, interpersonal violence
3. Screening procedures for hiring staff and recruiting volunteers
4. Supervisory guidelines for on-site programs, lock-ins, and field trips or other off-site transportation.
5. Procedures for responding to allegations
6. Procedures for lock-downs, evacuations, First Aid and Universal Precautions (handling of bodily fluids)
7. Standards and plans for training workers, and education for all congregants
8. Standardized forms
 - Applications for workers with children and youth
 - Waivers for reference checks (releasing those providing references from liability, etc., and waiving the right to inspect information provided)
 - Permission for background checks
 - Codes of Ethics
 - Abuse reporting forms
 - Accident reporting forms
 - Limited Access Agreement templates
 - Parental permission slips/medical release forms
9. A structure for regular review and evaluation of the policy

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Two-adult rule, preferably not a couple
2. Adult to child ration - generally 1:7, with minimum of two
3. 6-months in congregation policy
4. Windows in doors, or doors open
5. Bathroom policies (buddy system for children, younger ones accompanied by at least one adult)
6. Arrival/dismissal policies (e.g. keep lists of who may pick up children 5th grade and under, post family photos of nursery children)

Policies for Transportation

1. Parental permission/medical release forms required (separate from the district's con forms). Drivers carry one copy, extra copy to be kept on file with the DRE or at the church.
2. Drivers at least 25 years old.
3. Youth/adult ratio in cars: 2 adults per car when possible, otherwise one adult per car, but two to be with the group on arrival at the destination.
4. Seat belts required
5. Valid driver's license, registration and proof of insurance coverage checked
Copies kept on file. Note special licenses necessary for over 15 person van.
6. Congregational liability insurance for transportation.
7. When possible, at least one cell phone per car.

Policies for Overnights

1. Permission slips/medical releases required
2. Minimum two adults, 7:1 ratio
3. Two adults awake throughout the night
4. One chaperone of each gender if mixed group.
5. No leaving the building without the group, unless with permission (if appropriate, keys of youth who drove themselves may be collected)
6. No sexualized behavior, shared bedding, etc. (this should also be specified in a Code of Ethics). No exclusive behavior.
7. Single sex sleeping rooms available.
 - Not necessarily policy, but recommend discussing/agreeing upon rules for showing movies (esp. R-rated) and for use of video games and other exclusive technology. Also recommend keeping parents informed of the group's planned activities and sleeping arrangements.

Summary of steps to take if an allegation is made

1. Be prepared in advance
2. Take all allegations seriously. Don't form your own conclusions.
3. Support the victim and family. Meet with the child's parents, and with the child if parents approve.
4. Collect all relevant information quickly, and document the allegation.
5. Fulfill state reporting requirements. Notify Social Services and/or the police. If unsure whether or not police should be called in, check with Social Services.
6. Notify the congregation's insurance agent and its attorney
7. With permission of police or Social Services, inform the alleged perpetrator, and place appropriate restrictions on him/her. Do NOT conduct your own investigation.
8. Provide support for the accused.
9. Keep all documents confidential
10. When appropriate, communicate with congregation members under "qualified privilege"
11. Have a media plan

Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team

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.
- g. Receive allegations of possible abuse, and develop a process for expeditious handling of such allegations.

**Topics for annual training
on sexual abuse prevention and reporting requirements**

1. Definition of child abuse
2. Sexual and physical abuse symptoms
3. Basics of child sexual development and expected behaviors by age
4. What constitutes inappropriate touch and behaviors
5. Congregation's safety policies and ethics policy
6. Rationale behind screening procedures
7. Reporting procedures for observed or suspected child abuse and child sexual abuse
8. Review of the congregation's Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth

Safe Congregation Resources

1. The main UUA website for safety information, with links to numerous resources, may be found at <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ethicscongregational/index.shtml>
2. Information specifically relating to responsible staffing and screening guidelines may be found at <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/responsiblestaffing/index.shtml>
3. *Balancing Acts – Keeping Children Safe in Congregations* by Deborah Haffner
 - written document available online at <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/balancingacts/index.shtml>
 - register for and take the new, free online interactive curriculum at <http://courses.neari.com>
4. *The Safe Congregation Handbook: Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in Our Faith Communities* by Patricia Hoertdoerfer and Frederick Muir.
5. A resource for free forms, booklets, DVDs, etc. is Church Mutual, which is the company that insures most UU churches. Their website is www.churchmutual.com Go to Safety Resources.
6. A great resource for advocacy, to “sell” the concept of a safety policy when a congregation is deciding whether or not it needs one, is www.reducingtherisk.com. The district library has the books and DVDs that are featured on this site.
7. Link to the Ohio-Meadville District's "Child and Youth Protection Policy" from <http://www.ohiomeadville.org/geninfo/policy.html>
8. Three congregations who have posted policies online:
 - From the UU Society of Schenectady, NY:
<http://fussonline.org/Trustees/FUSS%20Safe%20Congregations%20Policy%20REV%205%202007.pdf>
 - From the Northshore UU Church (suburban Chicago) go to www.nsuc.org and go to Education and then Safety Policy.
 - From Live Oak UU Church (Austin, TX) go to <http://www.liveoakuu.org/abusepolicy.pdf>
9. The UUA’s own policy, “Responsible Staffing”, may be viewed at: http://archive.uua.org/programs/ministry/staffing_guides.html
This site provides questions to use when checking references, recommends the following companies for use in **national background checks**, and provides much more useful info.
 - Oxford Document Management Company, Inc.
655 West Highway 10
Anoka, MN 55303-1623
(800) 801-9114
<http://uua.oxforddoc.com>

Note: The UUA has contracted with this agency to conduct background checks at a reduced cost.

 - Church Mutual Insurance Company’s Screen Now program, with services provided by ChoicePoint
3000 Schuster Lane
P.O. Box 357
Merrill, Wisconsin 54452
(800) 554-2642
www.churchmutual.com

10. For criminal **background checks in the state of New York**, contact:
New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services
Sex Offender Registry
4 Tower Place
Albany, New York 12203
Phone Numbers:
Main Phone number, non-search, Monday - Friday 8:00a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
518-457-3167
For database searches available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
800-262-3257
email: infodcjs@dcjs.state.ny.us
Website: <http://www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us/nsor/index.htm>
11. To report an incident of abuse: the National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-Child or <http://childhelpusa.org>) provides state-by-state information on how to report abuse in each community.

MANDATED REPORTING LAWS

Mandated reporters of child or elder abuse or neglect in all 50 states and District of Columbia are medical personnel, school personnel, daycare providers, social service personnel, mental health care personnel and law enforcement personnel. The extent of the knowledge that triggers the legal duty to report is “a reasonable cause to suspect” abuse or neglect. The report must be made to a child protection agency or a law enforcement agency. Reporting only to a parent or relative will **not** satisfy the reporter’s legally-mandated duty to report. Every state and the District of Columbia has a law that absolutely protects any reporter of abuse or neglect from civil and criminal liability as long as the report was made in “good faith”. The following are laws specific to the states of New York and Pennsylvania:

New York:

Who Must Report

- Physicians; registered physician assistants; medical examiners; coroners; dentists and dental hygienists, optometrists; chiropractors; registered nurses; hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care or treatment of persons; or a Christian Science practitioner;
- School officials; social service workers; day-care center workers; providers of family or group family day-care; employees or volunteers in a residential care facility; or any other child care or foster care worker;
- Psychologists; mental health professionals; substance abuse counselors; or alcoholism counselors;
- Peace officers; police officers; district attorneys or assistant district attorneys; or other law enforcement officials.

Circumstances

- When they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child coming before them in their professional or official capacity is an abused or maltreated child: or
- When they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is an abused or maltreated child where the parent, guardian, custodian or other person legally responsible for such child comes before them in their professional or official capacity and states from personal knowledge facts, conditions or circumstances which, if correct would render the child an abused or maltreated child.

Privileged Communication

- None

Pennsylvania

Who Must Report

- Licensed physicians, medical examiners, coroners, funeral directors, dentists, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, registered and licensed practical nurses, hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care or treatment of persons, Christian Science practitioners;
- Members of the clergy, school administrators, schoolteachers, school nurses, social services workers, day-care center workers or any other child-care or foster-care workers, mental health professionals, peace officers or law enforcement officials.

Circumstances

- When, in the course of their employment, occupation or practice of their profession, they come into contact with children who they have reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of their medical, professional or other training and experience, that a child coming before them in their professional or official capacity is an abused child.

Privileged Communications

- Except with respect to confidential communications made to an ordained member of the clergy which are protected under law relating to confidential communications to clergymen, the privileges communication between any professional person required to report and the patient or client of that person shall not apply to situations involving child abuse and shall not constitute grounds for failure to report as required by this chapter.

**Reports of abuse should be made to your local Children’s Protective Services Agency or you may use these toll-free numbers:

New York 1-800-324-3720

Pennsylvania 1-800-932-0313

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1-800-422-4453 or <http://childhelpusa.org>) provides state-by-state information on how to report abuse in each community.

Guidelines for Involving Sex Offenders -Limited Access Agreements (see more details in *Balancing Acts*, from which this is adapted)

Steps to Take:

1. Minister should meet with the person as soon as possible, and check the Sex Offender Registry in advance.
2. Assuming a cause for concern, the minister should ask the individual to meet with the hopefully pre-existing Abuse Response Team – or if no pre-existing committee, the minister should convene at least 3 members of the congregation with professional expertise in this area.
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. The therapist, and parole officer if applicable, should be asked about the likelihood of re-offense and the adequacy of a limited access agreement. The Abuse Response Team must be able to feel confident that the person will obey a Limited Access Agreement.
4. If an assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the team may choose to develop a Limited Access Agreement.
5. The Response team should meet at least quarterly with the individual to review the arrangement and address any concerns. If the minister, DRE or Board president changes, new people should be made aware of the situation, in order to provide for pastoral care for the individual as well as continued awareness of the situation. Copies of the agreement and other confidential information should be kept locked.
6. Decide who needs to know. At a minimum, key people such as the minister, DRE need to know about the agreement, and the fact that the person must never be alone with or have contact with children or youth.

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

Safety Checks at Your Worship Center from Church Mutual's DVD/brochure

Major risks are from fires, slips & falls, theft, and vehicle mishaps

Outside your facility, regularly check the safety and maintenance of your:

- Parking lot
- Grounds
- Doors locked
- Sidewalks, steps and handrails
- Handicap access
- Roof, eaves, vents, downspouts
- Lightning protection
- Church vehicles, if any
- Separate shed for paints, lawnmower, etc.
- Playground equipment
- Trees (not about to fall, drop branches, etc.)
- Ice/snow regularly cleared from the parking lot and all entrances and walks. Check for ice build-up or ice dams.
- Burglar protection: adequate night-time lighting, no low bushes for hiding, blinds over windows to prevent burglars from looking in. Request regular police drive-by if appropriate.

Inside your facility

- Post exit route maps throughout
- Poison control phone number posted beside all phones
- Have working, wall-mounted fire extinguishers and smoke alarms, provide training on use of extinguishers, and hold fire drills
- No torn carpet (to prevent tripping)
- No cords across walking areas
- Wall-mounted fire extinguishers always within 75 feet
- All windows locked
- Electric outlets covered, especially in the nursery
- Audio-visual equipment on carts and strapped down
- Surge protectors and suppressors in place
- Video document sanctuary and rest of facility in order to document valuables for insurance purposes

~ In the kitchen

- Clean, easy exits, including one opening directly outdoors
- Circuits not overloaded, appliance cords safe
- Fire extinguisher functional and near an exit
- Heat and smoke detectors functional
- 1st Aid kit

~In the basement

- Nothing stacked against the furnace
- Check circuit breakers

~Stairs

- Well-lit
- Hand-rails
- No obstructions

Systems

- Have adequate alarm systems
- Know who has access to the building (e.g. contact people for rental groups, sign in and out of the building, etc.)
- Screen employees and volunteers, check references
- Check motor vehicles of those driving for church
- Systems for handling cash (two people to handle money, all cash either immediately deposited or locked in the church, annual audits).
- Establish an evacuation procedure for emergencies
- One individual designated as point person in emergencies, to talk with police, media

Keys to Implementing a Risk Management Program

1. Become informed, and be able to clearly communicate the importance of developing and implementing a program.
2. Convene a task force of people who are passionate about the subject, and choose a leader.
3. Enlist the support of key leaders in the congregation – show the “Reducing the Risk” video or Church Mutual video as a tool.
4. Raise congregational awareness throughout the process, through a sermon, newsletter articles, a workshop, posters, a pastoral letter, bulletin inserts, etc.
5. Draft a plan, including procedures for:
 - Screening employees and volunteers
 - Supervision of program and activities
 - Responding to allegationsHave the plan reviewed by the congregation’s attorney, and reviewed and approved by leaders and Board. Create an Abuse Response Team to handle allegations.
6. Build consensus, and revise the policy per input from congregational leaders IF appropriate.
7. Screen all employees and volunteers working with children or youth. Form a team to conduct screening and reference checks, and make sure all in the congregation understand what you’re doing and why.
8. Provide a multi-faceted training program
 - Full group training before start-up of major programs (as part of teacher orientation sessions prior to fall and spring religious education classes, as part of mentor training prior to a Coming of Age program, etc.)
 - Provide online training (using the UUA’s *Balancing Acts* and/or reducingtherisk.com) for those who need training mid-stream
 - Create a brochure outlining the main points of the program and distribute to all employees and volunteers as appropriate. Keep copies available in the nursery for nursery care-givers who work only occasionally.
 - Include an overview of the policy as part of new member orientations.
9. Monitor the program, and solicit feedback.
10. Review and evaluate the program annually. Review state reporting laws and requirements regularly. Integrate the program into the culture of your congregational life.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Infection Control Procedures and Universal Precautions

First aid kits, containing among other things latex disposable gloves and plastic bags for their disposal, will be maintained in the DRE's office and in the kitchen. Also included in the first aid kits will be the following instructions for infection control, as well as a notebook or forms for accident reporting:

1. Anyone responding to a first aid situation will first put on a pair of latex disposable gloves.
2. After completing assistance and removing of gloves, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. '
3. If there is a spillage of blood, or any blood-contaminated body fluid, the person cleaning the area must follow these steps:
 - a. Wear disposable gloves.
 - b. Spread paper toweling over the spill and allow it to soak up the fluid.
 - c. Wipe up the area and dispose of the material in a plastic bag.
 - d. Clean the area with soap and water.
 - e. Spray a hospital grade disinfectant or use a 10% bleach solution to disinfect the area.
 - f. Remove disposable gloves and dispose in plastic bag and seal.
 - g. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Management of Exposure to Significant Risk Body Fluids

1. Immediately after the exposure incident, wash the exposed area thoroughly with soap and water. If blood is splashed in eyes, nose or mouth, flush them with clean water.
2. Report the incident to the DRE or office manager, and assist in documentation of the exposure incident.
3. Document the exposure incident as soon as possible and notify parents or significant others.

Self-assessment Checklist for Congregations

From *Balancing Acts* by Debra Haffner

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 the appendix of *Balancing Acts*.
- 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.

■ HOLYOKE, Mass. –

It was a moment of shock for members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Manchester, N.H.: one of their congregants was accused of sexually abusing an underage relative.

Rather than panic at the prospect of having a child molester in their midst or spend months wondering whether they should fit him in or kick him out, church leaders gave the man one chance to remain: He had to sign an agreement to stay away from any church setting where there were children, limiting himself to events like adult education classes and one-on-one meetings with the pastor.

He refused, and decided to leave. But the ultimatum let the church stick to its mission of trying to minister to all while keeping its children safe.

"We had a policy in place," said Sandra Greenfield, who was the church's director of education at the time and now holds a similar job at the South Church in Portsmouth, N.H. "There was no confusion about how we were going to handle the situation."

Eight years after that incident, Greenfield and other Unitarian Universalists have created an online course with the Holyoke-based New England Adolescent Research Institute to help churches set guidelines for dealing with a member accused of a sex crime or a convicted sex offender who wants to join their congregation.

"This should be a piece of every congregation's overall policy, and we're nowhere near that," said Rev. Debra Haffner, director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing. "The majority of congregations in the United States do not have any plans in place to deal with this issue."

Haffner, a Unitarian Universalist minister in Westport, Conn., who helped design the course called "Balancing Acts," said she works with at least two congregations of varying denominations a month grappling with whether to accept a sex offender.

One of the most heavily publicized situations she dealt with was in Carlsbad, Calif., where members of the Pilgrim United Church of Christ voted in May to set guidelines for dealing with registered sex offenders after a convicted child molester wanted to join the congregation.

Pilgrim's pastor, Rev. Madison Shockley, declined to discuss the policy or say whether the man is attending services.

Balancing Acts, named for the harmony churches must find between protecting their congregants and ministering to all, is designed specifically for Unitarian Universalists. But its ideas can easily conform to other denominations, and its creators are hoping preachers from all faiths find some use in it.

And for those who might feel uneasy asking for help about such a sensitive topic, the free course's online availability might provide a sense of anonymity that could encourage people to use the resource.

"Not everyone is likely to pick up the phone and ask someone about how to deal with these issues," said Joan Tabachnick, director of educational initiatives at the New England Adolescent Research Institute and a national consultant on sexual abuse issues. "The key was to create something that was available and accessible to everyone." The course suggests following some guidelines that have long been in place at the Manchester Unitarian Universalist church. If a convicted or accused offender wants to take part in religious activities, the church should determine how much of a risk he may be to children.

From there, church leaders can create a list of restrictions, called a "limited access agreement." Such arrangements might range from making sure an offender is escorted at all times while in a church to allowing him to only attend adult worship services or confine him to one-on-one meetings with a minister where no children are around.

Balancing Acts also encourages congregations to adopt rules such as making sure that at least two adults are always with a child and trying to keep children in wide open spaces as much as possible.

"Every place of worship needs a safe-congregation policy," Haffner said. "If not, you have an offender who shows up, the congregation is alarmed and nobody knows what to do. Then there's a split in the congregation where you have people saying 'Jesus called us to welcome everyone,' and others saying 'if a pedophile comes in, I'm quitting.'" Some signs of a congregational split have surfaced at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Reno, Nev., where a convicted sex offender wanted to worship in December.

The church had no policy for dealing with the situation, and the congregation has since been debating how to fit the man into their community -- if at all.

"I wouldn't be surprised if some people leave if we do decide to include him," Senior Pastor Carl Wilfrid said. "But others have said they'd leave if we don't include him. There have been people terribly afraid for their children, and I don't fault them at all for that. But I also recognize the struggle to serve this man."

It's a struggle that's so far taken seven months, and Wilfrid says his congregation has grown spiritually from the experience.

He isn't sure that having a policy before the sex offender showed up to pray would have made things easier, "but it's certainly a good idea for congregations to start thinking and talking about these issues," he said.