

# Safe Congregation Policies and Procedures

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford

## For all Emergencies (crime, fire, or ambulance) – 911

Lafayette County Sheriff's Department	662-234-6421
Federal Bureau of Investigation	601-948-5000
Lafayette County Fire Department	662-234-8789
Mississippi Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Animal Control (this is handled by the Sheriff's Department in the county)	662-234-6421

*(These policies and procedures have been adapted from similar policies at the West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Cleveland, Ohio; the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington, NY; and the Unitarian Universalist Association's Creating Safe Congregations)*

As with anywhere in life, potential threats to physical and/or psychological well-being exist in the operations of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford. The safety of our members, guests, and friends is paramount. This document details policies and procedures aimed to ensure we are equipped to handle a variety of potential threats and accidents.

Our first principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Part of realizing this principle is creating a safe and nurturing environment. The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford is committed to creating and maintaining an atmosphere free from discrimination and harassment.

### **First Aid and Physical Injuries**

First Aid kits are located in the coffee room, kitchen, and RE room. If an injury is deemed severe and beyond the skills of those present, call 911.

### **Fire Response**

Fire extinguishers are located in the coffee room and kitchen.

All board members, leaders, staff, and any others using the building for non-UUCO functions (piano lessons, yoga classes, etc...) need to know the location of fire extinguishers and all exits to the building.

## **Response to Tornado Warning**

In the event of a tornado warning, all present should move in an orderly fashion into the hallway between the sanctuary and RE rooms. While no place is truly safe in the event of a tornado strike, the hallway the closest to a center point in the building and has the fewest windows. Everyone should remain in this space until the tornado warning is lifted by the National Weather Service.

## **Maintaining the Physical Premises**

The Building Mayor maintains a checklist of periodic maintenance activities and inspections. Ones relating to safety include routine inspection and maintenance of the fire alarms to ensure they work and that batteries have sufficient power and routine inspection of the fire extinguishers to make sure they are not expired.

If anyone notices something in the building or on the grounds that might be a potential health hazard, it should be reported to the building mayor. If she/he is not present, report this information to one of the board members.

## **Disruptive Behavior Policy/Procedures**

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the major values held by our congregation and expressed in our purposes and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

The possibility exists for the disruptive behavior of an individual within our congregation's building to lead to:

1. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
2. The disruption of UUCO activities;
3. Diminishment of the appeal of the congregation to its potential and existing membership.

The following shall be the policy of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford in dealing with these issues:

- A. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the President of the Board, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved or another Board member. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required the Lafayette County Sheriff's Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without any board members being present, the Board must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Board to the offending party or parties.
- B. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the Board of Trustees. The Board will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

- a. The Board will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
- c. The Board will collect all necessary information.
- d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
  - i. DANGEROUSNESS: Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
  - ii. DISRUPTIVENESS: How much interference with UUCO functions is going on?
  - iii. OFFENSIVENESS: How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
  - i. CAUSES: Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the congregation? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
  - ii. HISTORY: What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
  - iii. PROBABILITY OF CHANGE: How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- f. The Board will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
  - i. LEVEL ONE: The Board or a member of the representative of the Board shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.
  - ii. LEVEL TWO: The offending individual is excluded from the congregation and/or specific UUCO activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear.
- g. Any action taken under item f. (above) may be appealed to the Board.
  - i. LEVEL THREE: The offending individual is permanently excluded from UUCO premises and all congregation activities.

UUCO strives 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 disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.

### **Active Shooter/Attacker Procedures**

While UUCO hopes we are never involved in an active shooter or violent attacker situation, we must all be aware of the actions that need to be taken in a potentially life-threatening incident and want to provide the resources necessary to keep people informed and safe.

In order to make sure you're prepared, always remember to avoid, deny, defend, and report.

Here are some tips to keep in mind in the event of an active shooter:

## **AVOID**

- Leave an active shooter/attacker scene immediately, if you can.
- Avoid areas of danger.
- If you cannot evacuate, wait for police assistance.
- Remain calm.
- Follow police commands.
- Know where the building exits are located.

## **DENY**

- Deny the shooter/attacker access to your area.
- Shelter in place by locking yourself in a secure area if possible. [There are not many secure areas in the UUCO building, but locking outside doors to prevent an intruder entry can slow his/her progress.]
- Try to find a place to hide that's out of sight, and remain quiet.

## **DEFEND**

- If the shooter/attacker reaches you, defend yourself.
- Use any available item as a weapon.

## **REPORT**

- Call 911 when you can and offer any specific information available.
- Remain alert and if you see any suspicious persons or activity, contact authorities immediately.

## **Policy for Protection of Minors**

1. Staff and Volunteers should be known to UUCO for at least 6 months before working with minors during Religious Education (RE), Spirit Play, or other activities, or should undergo an interview process through which at least three references will be checked.
2. Two-deep adult leadership is expected at all times for RE/Spirit Play. One middle school or high school-aged assistant approved by the RE Trustee may serve as one of these leaders.
3. Prior to working with minors, Staff and Volunteers, including teen assistants, should have training, organized by the RE Trustee and approved by the UUCO Board, on what steps to take if they suspect child abuse or child sexual abuse.

*(Policy for Protection of Minors approved by the Congregational Board  
of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford  
on May 15, 2013)*

## **Transportation to and from UUCO Sanctioned Events**

It is the responsibility of the UUCO Youth Group leader(s) and/or the parents to provide safe transportation to and from UUCO sanctioned events. UUCO requires the following:

- When traveling to and from outings, conferences, meetings and other UUCO activities, a parent/guardian signed permission slip is required for each child/youth participating or being driven to an off-site activity. (see appendix A)
- Drivers must be at least 25 years old.
- Every person in the vehicle will have a seat belt and age appropriate seating arranged in reference to airbag safety rules.

## Appendix A: Youth Group Travel and Off-Site Event Form

Youth's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Youth's Cell Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Youth's Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Emergency Information:**

Parent/Guardian Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Email Address(es): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Home Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Cell Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative Emergency Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative Emergency Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Physician: \_\_\_\_\_

Health Insurance Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies or Dietary Restrictions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medications: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Other needs/information: \_\_\_\_\_

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This youth has my permission for the following (check all that apply):

Spend the night with the youth group

Ride in a vehicle to and from the event

Parent/Guardian signature: \_\_\_\_\_