

## **All Souls Religious Education Program Safety Policy**

Updated August 2023

All Souls Church (ASC) and its congregants want all people at the church to be safe. In order to provide a supportive space for all to grow in spirit, develop in community, and act as justice-seeking Unitarian Universalists, we need to have clearly defined limits on unhealthy behaviors, especially in regards to our most vulnerable populations. Therefore, the Religious Education (RE) Program Safety Policy (Safety Policy) is focused on the reasonable boundaries, behaviors, and rules ASC and its congregants should follow and respect to keep our children and youth safe. We ask that all RE volunteers, guests, and staff follow these rules with all children and youth in the church during church-related activities.

### ***Definitions***

- Child: an individual from birth through a 5th grade RE class.
- Youth: an individual enrolled in a 6th grade RE class through high school graduation
- RE Staff: Paid RE staff including the Director of Religious Education (DRE), the Youth Ministry Coordinator, the RE Assistant, and childcare providers. RE staff have annual background checks.
- RE Volunteer: Anyone who regularly volunteers in the RE program with children or youth in any capacity, and thus has a background check, including as a teacher, RE Committee member, facilitator, chaperone, advisor, and mentor.
- RE Guest: Anyone who only occasionally volunteers in the RE program with children or youth (and thus may not have a recent background check on file).

### ***Implementation***

The DRE or designee supervises RE volunteers and guests, and the DRE is responsible for implementation of this policy. Any violations of this Safety Policy should be reported to the DRE. Non-compliance with the RE Safety Policy may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including temporary or permanent suspension of a volunteer or the termination of a staff member's employment.

### ***Reporting Abuse***

1. No minister, DRE, RE volunteer, child caregiver, or other person working under the auspices of All Souls Church shall engage in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with young people under the age of 18 years; or sexually harass or engage in behavior with young people that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.
2. Any RE volunteer or RE staff member who suspects child abuse, including cases of child-on-child abuse, shall report their suspicions to a minister or the DRE. The DRE or

minister will make appropriate reports to the appropriate police department and/or child and family services agency. If the action involves a volunteer or guest in the RE program, the volunteer will be suspended until the matter is resolved. In the event cause is not found to exist, reinstatement of the volunteer will be considered.

3. All staff and volunteers must promptly notify a minister or DRE of any suspected volunteer misconduct. The DRE shall inform a minister immediately to determine appropriate action.
4. Children and youth will be encouraged to report any concerns to RE staff or ministers.

### ***RE Volunteers***

1. **Application + covenant:** Prospective RE volunteers complete a written volunteer application and sign a covenant, including that they understand and will follow this Safety Policy.
2. **Minimum age:** RE volunteers must be at least 16 years old to work with children, 21 years old to work with middle school youth, and 25 years old to work with high school youth. Middle school and high school youth under 16 are welcome to volunteer but must first complete an age-appropriate volunteer training and cannot count as a trained, background-checked volunteer for supervision purposes.
3. **Experience:** Prospective RE volunteers should participate in the life of the ASC community for 6 months prior to volunteering in the program. The DRE may make an exception after contacting references at another UU community.
4. **Background checks:** ASC will obtain a criminal background check and a national sex registry search for all RE volunteers and staff (or reference check for youth volunteers) before they start volunteering and at least every 3 years. ASC will retain the results and keep them confidential. The DRE and Senior Minister will bar from volunteering any individual whom they believe may not be safe around children and youth based on their history.
5. **Training:** All RE volunteers should attend an RE training annually. If unable to attend training, the volunteer should contact the DRE to determine how to complete the training requirement. Training includes safety policy and procedures, standard practices related to volunteer roles, child development information, and classroom management techniques.

### ***Supervision***

1. **Two Person Rule.** Subject to the limited exceptions addressed below, no RE Staff or RE Volunteer should ever be alone with one child/youth unless that child/youth is their own child/youth or legal ward. Any ASC program or event

must have at least two unrelated/non-partnered RE Volunteers or RE Staff present at all times.

- o At least one of the two RE Volunteers or RE Staff must be an adult (18 or over, or in the case of those working with middle-school or high-school age groups, 21 or over and 25 or over, respectively).
- o Should related or partnered workers want to work together, a third volunteer must be present.
- o Visibility and access into classrooms and other spaces used for RE programming must be maintained at all times.
- o The DRE and/or their designee shall circulate throughout the RE classroom area and monitor classroom activities during Sunday RE classes.
- o In the event of insufficient staffing, the DRE may elect to merge classes or modify an activity. If, despite best efforts, accommodations cannot be made the DRE will cancel an RE program or activity.
- o **Limited Exceptions to Two Person Rule.**
  - If two unrelated/non-partnered RE Volunteers or RE Staff are not available despite best efforts, one adult RE Volunteer or RE Staff (of the age required depending on the age of the group) may be in the same room with multiple children/youth, but this may occur only with the express approval of the DRE and parental notification.
  - For very brief periods, such as when one RE Volunteer or RE Staff needs to accompany a child to the restroom, as discussed further below, or in an emergency situation, one adult RE Volunteer or RE Staff may be in the same room with multiple children and/or youth.
- o **Limited Exception for Youth Pastoral Care.** Pastoral care conversations between adults and youth require a supportive, appropriately confidential, and safe space for youth. To facilitate such face-to-face conversations, RE Volunteers and RE Staff must choose a space for pastoral care and conversation that is easily observable by others while allowing for some privacy; for example, a corner of Pierce Hall, a corner of the lobby, or a room with the door open and with someone else working nearby. With the permission of a youth's parent or legal guardian, a pastoral care conversation may also take place at a coffee shop, mall, or similar public location where the participants are visible to others and the noise provides privacy.
- o **Coming of Age Mentoring.** A parent or guardian of a youth engaging in Coming of Age will provide specific permission for one-on-one meetings between their child and their child's Coming of Age mentor. Such meetings are subject to the same requirements for youth pastoral care addressed above.
- o **Drop-Off.** If only one RE Volunteer or RE Staff is in the room at drop-off, the parent/guardian must stay until a second RE Volunteer or RE Staff arrives.
- o **During Service.** During service, children/youth must either be in class or in the service.

- **Pick-Up.** Parents/guardians must pick up children in 5th grade and younger promptly after class. Teachers may not dismiss a child in 5th grade or younger on their own unless the parent/guardian has expressly permitted this in writing. Please be mindful of this when socializing after the service.
- **Parent/guardian on-site.** Children and middle school youth must have a parent or guardian on-site while participating in RE activities or childcare except in cases where the DRE has been notified of and approves of the absence of a parent or guardian. Youth (grades 9-12) may attend RE events and classes unaccompanied with their parent/guardian's knowledge and permission.
- **Outside of Service.** In times outside of service and RE classes and activities, children and youth may move through the church with age-appropriate independence. However, children and youth are expected only to enter spaces meant for people to occupy, e.g., they cannot climb into closets, hide backstage, or go by themselves into the bell tower. Consider both the physical safety of the space and the likelihood that a child or youth could get hurt out of view by objects or people. Parents/guardians are responsible for supervising children/youth.
- **Diapering, Bathroom Use, and Toileting.** The "two person" rule applies when diapering children and during bathroom trips.
  - The nursery sign-in sheet will include a place for parents/legal guardians to indicate whether they want an RE Volunteer or RE Staff to change their child's diaper or if they would prefer to be contacted so they can change the diaper themselves. Unless a parent or legal guardian has indicated that they do not want an RE Volunteer or RE Staff to change their child's diaper, diapers should be changed in the nursery, where two unrelated/non-partnered RE Volunteers or RE Staff are present. Under no circumstances should one RE Volunteer or RE Staff take a child into a bathroom or other separate room for a diaper change.
  - Parents/guardians should make every effort to take potty-trained children to the bathroom before service.
  - If a preschool aged child (or a child in the nursery who is not in diapers) needs to use the restroom, one RE Volunteer or RE Staff should accompany the child to the door of the bathroom located in the preschool room and wait by the opened door until the child is finished. If a child needs help wiping or pulling up their pants or has an accident and needs to be cleaned up, the child's parent or guardian must be contacted. If a child needs assistance with zippers or buttons, the RE Volunteer or RE Staff may assist them at the door with another volunteer present.
  - If a child in the 5th grade or below (other than preschool age children, who are addressed above) needs to use the bathroom, one teacher should notify the DRE or their designee who is monitoring the area (or another RE staff or RE volunteer) and both

should accompany the child to the restroom and wait outside the restroom door. An RE Volunteer or RE Staff should ensure that no adult is in the restroom when the child goes in.

2. **Off-Site Activities.** All off-site activities in which children/youth may participate without their parent or legal guardian must be pre-approved by the DRE or their designee. No child/youth may participate in such an event without their parent or legal guardian unless ASC has a signed permission form from the child/youth's parent or legal guardian.
  - o No one under the age of 25 may be an adult leader responsible for children or youth on ASC-sponsored field trips or overnights.
  - o The ratio of adult RE Volunteers or RE Staff to youth for offsite activities will be at least 1:5.
  - o **Transportation.** In the event that ASC organizes travel arrangements for an approved outing:
    - Drivers must be at least 25 years old, must submit proof of a valid driver's license, vehicle registration, and insurance coverage before being assigned ASC driving responsibilities.
    - Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times. The number of passengers must not exceed the number of working seatbelts in the vehicle. Drivers must follow locality regulations about front seat passengers.
    - Drivers should have two or more children or youth in the vehicle at all times. An adult should never be alone in a vehicle with a child or youth who is not their child or legal ward unless the parent or legal guardian of the child or youth has given permission and the DRE has been notified and has provided authorization.
    - When transporting youth via public transportation, youth must travel as a group with at least two adult RE Volunteers or RE Staff. Every person in the group should know the route and the final destination in case the group gets separated. One adult should lead and one should follow to prevent youth from being separated from the group. The ratio of adults to youth should be the same as for the event.
  - o **Overnight Activities.**
    - There must be a minimum of three adult RE Volunteers or RE Staff present for overnights.
    - No fewer than two unrelated/non-partnered adults must be present and awake at all times that any number of children or youth are awake.
    - Expectations for specific overnight events will be detailed in the event permission form and will comply with UUA best practice recommendations.

## **Electronic Communications Policy**

*Note: While there is an expectation of confidentiality in some situations, such as certain OWL programs, Coming of Age classes and mentoring sessions, there are limitations on the adult's ability to maintain confidentiality. Nothing in these guidelines is intended to promise confidentiality or privacy for any communication or disclosure that a youth might make when seeking support and guidance from a RE staff member or volunteer. Ideally, youth should be made aware of the confidentiality rules at the beginning of the church year so that they know we as a community expect RE staff and RE volunteers to share information with parents in the event of potential harm.*

### **1. General**

- All communication with young people enrolled in All Souls' Religious Education program, regardless of the medium or platform, should be appropriate to the situation and above reproach at all times, and should not include content that is illegal, obscene, sexually explicit, discriminatory, harassing, abusive, shaming, demeaning, bullying or otherwise contrary to UU values. Communications should reflect an appropriate awareness of the inherent power differential between adults and minors and should not exploit or blur the line between friendship and mentoring.
- All communications should come from All Souls staff email addresses or group communication apps moderated by All Souls RE staff. In the unusual case where a private personal device and email account is used to contact a youth, staff and volunteers should copy the DRE or minister on the email message.

### **2. Electronic Communication**

- Email and text communication should only be used with middle school and high school youth (grades 6-12) and only as a means of communicating basic facts about RE group programming, such as the time of an event, agenda for a class or meeting, text of a document, etc.
- Communication should not take place between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.
- Staff and volunteers should use group texts and emails rather than one-on-one communications and should copy the DRE or another volunteer on the communications.
- One-on-one communications should be avoided, except in parent-approved mentoring situations where a parent or guardian has provided written consent for such communications or is copied on the communications. If a youth initiates one-on-one communication, the staff member or volunteer is responsible for ensuring that another adult (RE staff, volunteer, or parent) is included in the response.
- Staff members and adult volunteers must report conversations that include indications of any of the following:
  - self-harm or planned harm and/or violence toward others
  - suspected sexual abuse of a minor
  - disclosure of risky or dangerous behavior including, but not limited to, self-harm or harm to others, suicidal thoughts and intent, child abuse, drug or alcohol abuse, promiscuity, and bullying

Staff members and adult volunteers are required to notify the DRE or a minister immediately of any child/youth safety concerns. The DRE will notify parents and/or authorities as appropriate. While the All Souls staff and volunteers are not considered “mandated reporters” and not subject to the more stringent penalties required under DC law, failure to report sexual abuse, sex trafficking, or a sexual performance that uses minors could result in civil fines or imprisonment.

3. **Social Media**

- Staff and volunteers should not friend, follow or be followed by children or youth on their personal social media accounts.
- Staff and volunteers should not connect with young people on Tik Tok, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and other social media apps and platforms that allow for disappearing messages.
- Volunteers should not take, post, or share photos, videos and audio recordings of children and youth on online websites, communications, social media platforms, or other forms of publication, including church newsletters, webpages, and All Souls Facebook pages. Staff may share photographs and or video in church newsletters, webpages, and All Souls Facebook pages with written parent/guardian permission.

### ***Evacuation and Emergency Procedures***

All Souls Religious Education follows the All Souls Church Emergency Procedures. Specific training on RE Volunteer responsibilities will be shared during volunteer training sessions.

- ASC will perform evacuation drills so that children and volunteers are familiar with routes. Parents/guardians will meet youth outside if evacuation is required.
- First Aid: ASC provides limited first aid kits in every classroom. More comprehensive kits can be found at the front desk and in the RE office.

### ***Policy Updates/Reviews***

The RE Safety Policy will be reviewed annually or more often if appropriate. All RE volunteers and staff will be promptly notified of any changes made to policy.