

Code of Conduct for Adults and Youth in Leadership Positions Who Work with Children and Youth

Adults and youth in leadership positions who work, either in a paid or volunteer capacity, with children and youth at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron (UUCA) events are expected to always have the best interests of children and youth at heart. Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. No one's enjoyment should ever be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. Our charge to children and youth workers is to encourage kindness and genuineness among the children and youth, and to discourage unkindness and falseness. In this manner, we intend to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and communities. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that the UUCA has of adults and youth in leadership positions who work with children and youth. They are as follows:

- Sleep-workers and youth chaperones at UUCA events are expected to get enough sleep so that they will be alert and able to maintain good judgment and clear thinking. We expect each worker to take individual responsibility for getting 'enough' or 'a reasonable amount' of sleep each night, so that they may perform their expected duties in a competent and professional manner.
- Workers will refrain from being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug which would impair their judgment or ability to function effectively in a leadership role with children or youth.
- "Friendship" with Youth—Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for "friendship" is not sufficiently mature to be in a supervisory position. A "friendship" is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivation an atmosphere of health and trust. It is expected that relationships that an adult has with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitative.
- Unofficial Contact with Youth—Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These can be not only healthy, but also transformative for both. However, it is our concern that a "predator," who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of UUCA-sponsored events, it is imperative that your behavior both be and appear to be above reproach. Any relationship you develop with a youth outside of UUCA-sponsored events must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents or guardians. Furthermore, you should let an appropriate member of the UUCA know what you are doing (such as UUCA staff, a member of YAC (Youth/Adult Committee) or a member of the UUCA RE Committee) and notify the youth's minister, or religious education leader, or congregational president. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, but also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the UUCA and the parents and guardians aware of your actions.
- Sexualized Behavior—it is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for example, or to make "double entendres." Physical expressions of affections such a hugs have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged.

- Confidentiality—Effective relationships between youth and the adults who work with youth and youth who work with youth in leadership positions are established through trust, understanding, patience and the emotional bonds that develop. Confidentiality is an important component of this process, but there are limits to confidentiality and circumstances under which the confidential relationship must be broken. Sometimes you will learn that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. **FOR THE SAFETY OF BOTH THE YOUTH AND YOURSELF, YOU MUST NOT KEEP SUCH INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.** For this reason, never give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. For the most part, a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when information is of a major crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. In addition, you yourself **MUST** consult with a person of greater authority in the UUCA about an appropriate course of action. If in doubt, it is best to initiate this conversation. Adults and youth in leadership positions who work with children and youth under the aegis of the UUCA are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the UUCA as well. Remember: you are acting both ethically and legally as an agent of the UUCA.

Accordance with This Code of Conduct

Any UUCA worker with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of the UUCA. However, until such time as the UUCA chooses to alter any portion of its provisions, the worker must abide by the code as written.

I hereby affirm that I have never been convicted of child abuse or neglect nor had such convictions expunged. I understand that any such conviction, expunged conviction or my failure to affirm this statement precludes my ability to work with children and youth in UUCA programs.

I understand that any information provided is subject to verification by the UUCA.

By signing below, I affirm that I have read this Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it. If I violate any of its provisions, I may be removed as a worker at UUCA events.

Signature of Worker with Children and Youth

Date

Print Name

_____ name of worker

Note: this Code of Conduct of the UUCA has been adapted from the Ohio-Meadville District Child and Youth Protection Procedures adopted by the OMD Board, May 2004.