

Behavior Covenant for Adults Working with Children and Youth

We at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville recognize the importance of creating communities where everyone, especially our children and youth, are safe.

We recognize that intentional spiritual communities depend on a high level of trust; we welcome newcomers and rely heavily on volunteers who serve our congregation through Religious Education programming. Volunteers who work with children and youth have an especially critical and privileged role that carries a great deal of power and influence. Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship can develop between a young person and an adult. Such relationships can be not only healthy, but transformative for both.

- Any relationship developed between an adult and a young person that extends to activities outside of church sponsored programs or events must have the full knowledge and consent of the parent(s).
- It is in the best interest of both the adult and the youth that the Minister and/or Director of Religious Education also are aware of the outside relationship/activities.

Adults working with children and youth at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville are in a position of stewardship, and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individual participants and other volunteers in the Lifespan Religious Education community.

- 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, well-being, or self-esteem.
- RE volunteers should NEVER engage in sexual behaviors of any kind with a child or youth. Such behavior includes not only explicit sexual behavior or touching, but also sexually provocative language or conversations. Physical expressions of affection, such as hugs, are best initiated by the young person, and kept from being prolonged by the adult.
- We believe that when activity or event leaders engage in behaviors associated with exclusive relationships while they are acting in an official church capacity it sets a poor example and is detrimental to community, and we expect our volunteers to refrain from public displays of affection or acting on personal relationships, and to behave in a friendly and professional manner with other adults at all times while they are on duty.

Confidentiality: Adults who work with children and youth under the aegis of the congregation are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the church and district as well, and need to be aware of rules governing both personal and corporate liability. Usually, information shared privately with a volunteer serving as a mentor or chaplain should be held in confidence; however, there are times when a volunteer must disclose what a child or youth has said.

The exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are:

- If a child or youth is being physically abused or neglected, or subjected to circumstances that could result in physical or mental harm.
- If a child or youth is threatening to hurt him or herself.
- If a child or youth is threatening to harm others.

In most states, certain professionals are bound by mandatory reporting laws. If such a disclosure is made, the non-professional volunteer should encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other trusted adult. Then the volunteer should inform professional staff about the situation, so that an appropriate course of action can be determined.

Disclaimer: Our faith calls us to create safe environments that lend themselves to justice and peace in human interactions, but we realize also that institutions operating according to best practices and with all due concern for the welfare of children and youth still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free environment.

In accordance with this behavioral covenant,

I, (print name) _____, have read and understand the expectations outlined in the behavioral covenant, and agree to abide by it at all times when working with children and youth at (name of church).

Signed _____

Date _____