
Purpose

To build and maintain a safe and caring culture at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton

Definitions

Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, mental, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours, including words, that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, injure, or wound someone. Abuse is never acceptable.

Bullying or Harassment is when abuse continues over time; especially when the offender has been told to stop (though this is not required to constitute bullying or harassment). This is an intentional campaign to hurt, demean, or disempower another person.

Conflict is present when people are unable to “agree to disagree.” When people are in tension over personality differences, a decision or direction, or a matter of opinion, they might be in conflict. Conflict is normal and healthy when addressed with maturity. We value a diversity of views and perspectives and affirm that “we do not need to think alike to love alike.”

Destructive behaviours are actions and words which cause harm to the church, as well as to people, by causing others to question being involved with the church or to leave. Bullying or harassment is destructive behaviour, but so are actions that attack leaders, violate our values, or present the church in ways that are counter to our mission and/or diminish the appeal of the congregation to its potential or existing membership. Generally, but not always, destructive behaviours are actions that continue after a request to stop, amend, or alter the actions.

Destructive behaviour is different from *disruptive* behaviour. Destructive behaviour creates concern for the physical or emotional safety of children or adults, staff, members, or even visitors. A baby crying in worship does not threaten the physical or emotional safety of the congregation. It may be distracting or disruptive, but it is not destructive. However, someone standing and yelling racial epithets during the service does indeed threaten the physical or emotional safety of those in attendance. Destructive behaviour disturbs activities or weakens the congregation’s ability to serve current and future members and friends. Incidents of destructive behaviour can occur on UCE’s property, during an off-site congregational event, or via email and social media.

Restorative principles stem from restorative justice practice which is an approach rooted in human dignity, healing, and interconnectedness. It seeks to repair harm by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm to communicate about and address their needs in the aftermath of destructive behaviour. The principles support the beliefs that:

- those who have caused harm have a responsibility to repair that harm

- those who have been harmed are central in deciding what is needed to repair it
- communities have a role to play in supporting victims and offenders, and addressing the root causes of the behaviour.

The restorative principles are:

Reparation: Focus on acknowledging and repairing the physical, emotional, and financial harm caused by the destructive behaviour and meeting the needs of those affected.

Respect: Treat all participants with dignity, compassion, and equal consideration.

Voluntariness: Ensure the participation of victims, offenders, and community members is voluntary, and based on free, informed, and ongoing consent.

Inclusion: Foster and support the meaningful participation of those affected, including victims, offenders, their friends, their families, and their communities.

Empowerment: Enable participants to communicate openly and honestly and to have an active role in determining how to address their needs, as they see them.

Safety: Attend to the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual safety and well-being of all participants.

Accountability: Assist those who have caused harm to acknowledge and take responsibility for harm and reparation.

Transformation: Provide opportunities for understanding, healing, and change, and contribute to the restoration and reintegration of victims and offenders.

Right Relations Team is made up of at least three members who have knowledge and skills in areas such as justice-making, restorative practices, mental health, or similar fields. In addition to being responsive to concerns, the Right Relations Team is charged with reminding and encouraging the congregation to keep the covenant, engage conflict in healthy ways, and practice restorative and healing justice in the church and in the world. Growing the congregation's capacity to handle both conflict and harm with spiritual maturity and healing skills is part of their charge.

Guiding Principles

At the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, we are committed to providing an environment in which everyone, including staff, is treated with respect and dignity and which is free from harassment and violence. We recognize the importance of creating a safe environment to allow for the exploration of ideas, use of gifts and talents, and the creation of a diverse community of life-long learners.

We begin with a belief of good intent, and we offer support for individuals to continually learn and grow.

Acts of harassment or violence against or by any person will not be condoned or tolerated.

It is the collective responsibility of all those involved with UCE to uphold this policy and to work together to prevent harassment and violence, with the UCE Covenant of Right Relations as a foundation.

Policy

1. If you witness or experience abuse, bullying, harassment or other destructive behaviour, and feel you can do so, speak directly to the person behaving destructively and ask them to immediately stop. If you do not feel you can speak directly to the person, or if their behaviour persists after you have spoken with them, report it to the minister, board president or a member of the Right Relations Team.
2. All reports will be taken seriously. If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the minister or their delegate will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.
3. The identity of the reporter and the alleged individual will be kept confidential unless pastoral support, safety and/or healing require disclosure or if the actions are required to be reported to an outside authority.
4. Responses to the destructive behaviour may occur in steps and can vary according to the seriousness of the behaviour. The steps may include:
 - a. **In situations where an immediate response is called for**, the minister and/or the leader of the group involved will immediately respond to destructive behaviour. This may include suspending a meeting or activity until it can safely be resumed and/or asking the destructive person(s) to leave.

Any time such an immediate response is made, the minister and a member of the Right Relations Team must be notified. They, in turn, will then consult with the whole Right Relations Team to determine what steps must be taken before the offending person(s) may be allowed to return to the activities involved. The Right Relations Team will send a letter detailing these steps to the offending person(s).

- b. **In situations where an immediate response is not possible**, someone will refer the matter to the Right Relations Team. This may be the group leader involved in an initial incident, the person harmed, the person engaging in destructive behaviour, or any third party having knowledge of the incident.

The Right Relations Team will respond, observing the following:

- There will be no attempt to define “acceptable” behaviour in advance.
- Persons identified as destructive will be dealt with as individuals; the Right Relations Team will be expected to be attentive to the way that culture of origin, generation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, and other factors shape behaviour and conflict.

5. To determine the necessary response, the Right Relations Team will consider the following points:
 - *Causes*—why is the behaviour occurring?
 - *History*—what has been the frequency and degree of destructive behaviour in the past? Has the individual been asked to stop, and failed to do so?

- *Commitment to repair*—has the person engaging in destructive behaviour sought restoration and healing of the relationship? Are they eager to be back in covenant?
6. The Right Relations Team will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes, the Team will conclude that it is conflict, and not a matter of destructive behaviour, and invite the parties into mediation and healing. When the Team determines that destructive behaviour is happening, however, they will be guided by the following levels of response:

Level One—The Right Relations Team will meet with the person alleged to have behaved destructively and the affected parties. The goal is to set appropriate boundaries, make amends, create healing and safety, and build community. Whenever possible, restorative principles will be used at this level. If the behaviour cannot be resolved at this level, the Team will proceed to Level Two and the full Board will intervene. Additionally, the Right Relations Team will refer the matter directly to the Board if the individual has been in significant resolution attempts before, in which case the Team will infer that repeated meetings have not worked.

Level Two —If resolution cannot be found at Level One, or if the individual has been in significant resolution attempts before, the Right Relations Team will refer the matter to the Board. The Team will provide a written report outlining the destructive behaviour, the person(s) harmed, and the follow up. The report will also include recommended action(s), which the Board may accept or amend. The Board may determine that the person who behaved destructively needs to be excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time. The action, the reasons for the action and the conditions of return will be made clear in a written notification from the Board to the person behaving destructively and the person(s) harmed.

Level Three —The Board of Trustees, after careful consideration, may determine that the person who behaved destructively needs to be excluded from some or all church activities, the church premises or membership. The Board will provide written notification of such a decision, along with an explanation of the individual's possible recourse, to both the individual who behaved destructively and to the person(s) harmed.

Any action of the Board taken under Level Three may be appealed, in writing, to the Board of Trustees within 30 days of the date on the letter of notification.

- An ad hoc appeal committee will be formed by the Board of Trustees in the event that the action taken under Level Three is appealed.
 - The appeal committee will be composed of two members of the Board of Trustees, two members selected by the Right Relations Team who are not members of the Right Relations Team nor members of the Board of Trustees, and a fifth active church member, chosen by the person slated for exclusion. If the individual does not have a member to propose, the fifth member will be selected by the other four members of this appeal committee. The majority decision of the appeal committee will be final and

not subject to further appeal. The board will inform the individual of their decision, along with any terms of involvement with UCE, in writing.

7. Any request for reinstatement must be made in writing by the individual who was removed from membership. The request must contain:
 - a. a statement of understanding of the reason(s) for which they were removed from membership, and
 - b. a detailed explanation of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that reinstatement would be justified. This should include a plan for repairing the relationships with those harmed.

The request will go to the board. The board will review the request and respond with their decision to the requester in writing within 60 days. The decision of the Board will be final and not subject to further appeal.

A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the removal. In the event that a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent reinstatement requests may be made no sooner than one year following the individual being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

8. Any time that the church may have legal exposure, the Right Relations Team must inform the Board.

Effective Date: (Board of Trustees approval date)

Last reviewed:

See also:

- Conflict Resolution Policy
- Safe and Caring Conditions Policy
- UCE Covenant of Right Relations