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### Purpose

To provide safe, caring conditions for everyone at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton (UCE)

### 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.

**Employee** is a person assigned to a paid position with the Unitarian Church of Edmonton.

**Member** is a person aged 16 or over who has applied for membership and been accepted as a member of UCE.

**Visitor** is a person attending a UCE-hosted event but who is not a member.

**Volunteer** is any person who donates their time and services to the Unitarian Church of Edmonton without directly or indirectly receiving any remuneration.

**Vulnerable persons**, for the purpose of this policy, are people who, because of age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, are in a position of dependence on others or are otherwise at a greater risk than the general public of being harmed by a person in a position of authority or trust relative to them.

**Vulnerable sector check** is a check of local police records conducted by Edmonton Police Service or the RCMP, depending on an individual's place of residence, to determine the existence of a pattern of behaviour that may result in harm to vulnerable persons.

### Guiding Principles

A safe, caring environment is foundational for everyone to feel welcome at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton. UCE also has a moral, legal, ethical and spiritual duty of care to its members, employees, volunteers and visitors. Each member, employee, volunteer and visitor has the right to visit and work in an environment that promotes equality of opportunity, dignity, respect and recognition of diversity and is free from abuse. Such an environment creates conditions where all can thrive.

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

It is the collective responsibility of all those involved with UCE to create and maintain a safe, caring culture within all UCE settings, with the UCE Covenant of Right Relations as a foundation.

### Policy

1. The board will implement internal protocols and policies to ensure that:

- a. a vulnerable sector check is completed for all employees, and for all individuals who will be volunteering alone with any activities where participants are exclusively minors and/or vulnerable persons.
    - i. The vulnerable sector check results are confidential. Documentation is kept on file indefinitely for all employees and applicable volunteers.
    - ii. The cost of the checks will be paid for by the Unitarian Church of Edmonton.
    - iii. If the check does uncover something, the minister or their designated staff member will discuss the findings with the volunteer. The volunteer is not automatically disqualified from participating.
    - iv. A new vulnerable sector check is required every five years for individuals described in 1a.
  - b. internal controls are in place that reduce the risk as low as reasonably practical in relation to allowing any vulnerable population to be in the sole presence of a volunteer or employee (e.g., two volunteers/staff should be present when working with vulnerable people).
2. All volunteers who will be working alone with exclusively minors/vulnerable persons require a signed reference from the minister or other designated staff member. This reference is only to be made following an interview with the minister or designated staff member and after the volunteer has attended UCE for a minimum of six months. (This six-month wait can be waived if the individual joins UCE from another UU congregation and is referred by the DRE, minister or their designated staff at the initial congregation).
    - a. The ministerial/delegate reference and any accompanying reference letters, along with the vulnerable sector check, and date(s) of risk mitigation training as outlined in Item 3 are kept securely on file in the church administrator's office for no less than 35 years.
  3. To provide a safe environment for vulnerable persons at UCE, volunteers are taught by the minister, director of religious exploration, or their delegate to:
    - a. reduce risk factors;
    - b. recognize and avoid physical situations that are unsafe or uncertain;
    - c. recognize signs of abuse; and
    - d. promptly report any disclosed, witnessed, alleged or suspected case of neglect or abuse to the minister, their designated staff person or the board president.
      - i. Under the [Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act](#), anyone who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe a child is being sexually, physically, emotionally abused or neglected has a legal obligation to file a report with police.
  4. When notified of an allegation or complaint of abuse, the minister or the board president will appoint the Right Relations Team to investigate. The Right Relations Team will:
    - a. Meet with and discuss the incident with the person alleged to have been abused and with the alleged abuser.
    - b. Express UCE's concern to the complainant and assure them of their commitment in assisting the investigation
    - c. Determine whether there is a statutory obligation to report the alleged incident to police authorities or child protective agencies, and if so, support the complainant or witness in reporting the incident.

- d. Maintain confidentiality regarding both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator, unless pastoral support, safety and/or healing require disclosure or if the actions are required to be reported to an outside authority.
  - e. Suspend the alleged perpetrator from all duties related to the situation being investigated pending the outcome of the investigation if the alleged perpetrator is an employee or volunteer.
  - f. Refrain from admitting liability or from making public statements (e.g., to the media or from the pulpit) without obtaining formal legal counsel.
  - g. Contact UCE's insurance agent or broker to report the incident.
  - h. Recommend to the board appropriate action(s). Examples of recommended actions for the board could include:
    - a restriction or ban on communication between the parties involved
    - removal from the staff or volunteer position
    - counseling as required
    - withdrawal of membership for the accused
    - dismissal of the complaint
    - other actions as appropriate
5. The board will provide written notification of their decision to both the complainant and to the individual(s) investigated.
  6. Investigations will be completed in as timely a manner as possible, taking into consideration the circumstances and complexity of the complaint, external factors (e.g., leaves of absence, natural breaks such as holidays) and the need to balance thoroughness and fairness in the process.
  7. Documentation regarding the alleged incident will be kept confidential and will be kept on file in a secure location.
  8. Any person affected by the abuse incident investigation process has the right to appeal to the board. The board will convene within thirty days to consider the appeal. The decision of the board is final upon a majority vote at a legally constituted meeting.

Effective date: (Board of Trustees approval date)

Last reviewed:

See also:

- Conflict Resolution Policy
- Destructive Behaviour Policy
- UCE Covenant of Right Relations