First Unitarian Society Faith Formation Safety Policy & Code of Ethics

At First Unitarian Society, we are committed to creating a Faith Formation program where every child, youth, volunteer, staff member, and family is welcomed, valued, and treated with dignity. Grounded in Unitarian Universalist values of compassion, respect, inclusion, and justice, we strive to cultivate a community where all people can learn, grow, and belong. These safety policies are designed to support the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of everyone participating in our programs. By working together with mutual respect, clear expectations, and shared responsibility, we help create a nurturing environment in which children and youth can thrive.

1. Parent/Guardian Agreements

- Check-in and Pick-up: Parents or guardians of children in elementary school and younger are expected to pick up their children promptly at the conclusion of Faith Formation classes at 10:15 a.m. Youth ages 12 and older may leave independently unless other arrangements have been made with staff.
- Child Supervision: For the safety of all children, parents and guardians remain responsible for supervising their children whenever they are not actively checked into a Faith Formation program. Because our church is located in an urban setting, children should not be left to wander the building or surrounding area without adult supervision.
- Hold Harmless Agreement on registration form: I, the undersigned parent or legal guardian, give permission for my child to participate in Faith Formation programs and related activities at First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I agree to release, indemnify, and hold harmless First Unitarian Society, its ministers, officers, employees, and volunteers from any claims, liabilities, or damages arising from participation in these activities, except in cases of intentional misconduct. In the event of a medical emergency, I authorize the church to obtain necessary medical care for my child.

2. Health Expectations for Parents/Guardian, Children, Staff and Volunteers

- Sick Policy: To help maintain a healthy environment for everyone, children and volunteers who are ill should remain at home. They may return once they have been free of fever and vomiting for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Allergies: Parents and guardians are asked to disclose any allergies during registration. Allergy information may be noted on a child's nametag, and staff and volunteers will make reasonable efforts to check for allergies before serving food or snacks. Parents/Guardians are responsible for bringing and maintaining possession of any necessary emergency medications, such as EpiPens, for their child.
- Medications: Staff and volunteers do not administer medications to children. An exception may be made during youth overnight events, where the Minister of Faith Formation may assist with medication management when written parental/guardian permission has been provided.
- Emergencies & Liability: In life-threatening emergencies, staff and volunteers will contact 911 and then notify parents or guardians as soon as possible.

3. Reporting Concerns, Incidents, and Child Safety

- Reporting Chain: Any concern regarding child safety, abuse, neglect, misconduct, or inappropriate behavior should be reported immediately to the Minister of Faith Formation or the Faith Formation

Coordinator. If neither is available, the concern should be reported to a designated staff member, acting minister, or Children's Faith Formation Team member.

- Self-Harm, Harm to Others, and Suspected Abuse: If a child or youth discloses self-harm, intentions to harm others, possible abuse, or any situation that raises safety concerns, volunteers must notify a minister as soon as possible. Clergy serve as mandatory reporters in certain situations and will work with the family, the Senior Minister, and appropriate authorities to determine next steps consistent with legal and ethical obligations. If you are unable to reach them, please call the church's main phone number (414-273-5257) and press 5 for the emergency pastoral care line.
- Reporting to Child Protective Services: Anyone who believes a child may be experiencing abuse or neglect may make a report directly to Child Protective Services. Information about Wisconsin reporting procedures can be found through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/misconduct/reporting.htm
- Incident Documentation: Significant injuries, safety concerns, and serious behavioral incidents will be documented using a standardized incident report form.

4. Volunteer Screening, Expectations, and Supervision

- Background Checks & Code of Ethics: All volunteers and staff must sign a Code of Ethics and undergo a criminal background check which will be renewed every three years.
- Volunteer Introduction Period: During their first 30 days, new volunteers will work alongside staff and experienced volunteers, allowing time for mentorship, observation, and mutual learning before serving independently.
- Parent/Guardian Volunteer Participation: Parents/Guardians who wish to volunteer in Faith Formation classrooms must complete the required background check and Code of Ethics agreement. Parents who choose not to complete these requirements are welcome to attend with their own child but may not serve in a volunteer supervisory role.
- Two Adult Guideline: We prioritize having a minimum of two adults in every classroom who are unrelated to each other (i.e., not a married couple).
- Open Door Practice: If an adult must temporarily leave the room (leaving only one adult present), the classroom door must remain open.
- Staff and Parent/Guardian Exception: In limited circumstances, vetted staff members or parents/guardians may be alone with a child when necessary. Whenever possible, interactions should remain visible to others and occur in open, observable settings. Any extended one-on-one interaction should occur with parental/guardian knowledge and approval unless doing so would create an immediate safety concern.
- Alcohol and Substance Use: To help maintain a safe and supportive environment, people participating are asked not to consume alcohol or use any substance that may impair their judgment, awareness, or ability to fulfill their responsibilities before or during program activities.
- Supported Volunteers and Supervision: We value volunteers with a wide range of abilities and experiences. Volunteer responsibilities will be assigned in ways that support both volunteer success

and child safety. Volunteers who are not able to independently supervise children should serve alongside another approved adult at all times.

- Adult Presence Required: Youth volunteers cannot be placed in charge of a classroom in lieu of an adult. An adult must always be present in the room.
- Youth Approval Process: Youth (ages 12 and older) who are interested in assisting with younger children must receive approval from the Minister of Faith Formation and the appropriate classroom leader before serving as volunteers.
- Positive Guidance and Discipline: First Unitarian Society is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and nurturing environment for every child. Physical discipline of any kind, including spanking, hitting, grabbing, or other uses of physical force, is not permitted. In addition, children will not be isolated or placed in "timeout rooms" as a behavior management strategy. We encourage age-appropriate, compassionate, and relationship-based approaches to guidance and redirection.
- Support for Successful Participation: We are committed to helping every child have a positive and meaningful experience in Faith Formation. If a child experiences ongoing challenges with behavior, the Minister of Faith Formation will partner with parents, the Senior Minister, and the Children's Faith Formation team to better understand the child's needs and explore supportive strategies together. In rare cases, if those efforts are not successful, alternative participation options may be considered.
- Restrooms & Bathroom Assistance: No adult should be alone with a child behind a closed restroom door. Assistance with toileting, diapering, or potty training will be provided only by designated staff members or pre-approved volunteers following established procedures.

5. Digital Safety and Communication

- No 1:1 Digital Contact: Adult volunteers may not initiate private electronic communication, including texting, direct messaging, or social media messaging, with youth participants.
- Social Media: Adult volunteers should not friend-request or connect with youth on social media platforms.
- Group Communication: Communication related to church activities should occur through transparent group communications whenever possible.
- Staff Exception: Staff members may communicate directly with youth, provided parental consent is given on the youth group registration form.

6. Transportation and Off-Site Travel

- Driver Vetting: Any volunteer transporting youth for an official church activity must provide a valid driver's license, proof of insurance, a satisfactory driving record review, and any required liability documentation.
- Vehicle Safety & Behavior: All occupants must wear seatbelts per state law. The church's behavioral covenant applies fully while in transit.
- Vehicle Transportation: An adult may not be alone in a vehicle with a youth participant unless prior permission has been provided by the youth's parent or guardian, and the adult is an approved staff member or volunteer.

- Permission Forms: Written permission slips containing emergency contact information are required for all travel.
- Parent-Arranged Transportation: Informal carpooling arranged privately by parents outside of official Faith Formation programming is not under the church's liability.

7. Congregational Safety and Limited Access Agreements.

- Volunteer Prohibition: Any individual with a sexual offense conviction is strictly prohibited from volunteering with children or youth.
- Limited Access Agreements (LAA): Individuals with a history of sexual offenses who wish to participate in congregational life may be required to enter into a Limited Access Agreement developed in partnership with church leadership. Such agreements help support congregational safety while outlining appropriate participation boundaries.

The Minister of Faith Formation may exercise reasonable discretion when responding to situations not specifically covered by the policy.

Code of Ethics for Faith Formation Staff and Volunteers of Children and Youth

Adults and older youth in Faith Formation leadership roles are in a position of stewardship in fostering spiritual development. It is especially important that those in leadership positions provide appropriate nurture, care, and support. Spiritual growth in human beings includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and sexual identities. Please be mindful that all communication has the potential to carry harmful messages. Communication includes body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, as well as choice of words in written and verbal expression.

Children, youth and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders engage in physical, emotional, verbal, or intellectual abuse of any kind. In addition, behavior that is seductive, erotic or contains sexual innuendo can be especially damaging. As a leader and role model in the Faith Formation program at First Unitarian Society, you are asked to enter a covenant to follow these guidelines:

As I engage in the shared ministry of Faith Formation, I covenant to be mindful of the spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of my role and to:

- Be mindful that spiritual growth, both my own and that of others, encompasses all aspects of relationships.
- Be consciously gentle and non-threatening in all physical contact and proximity with children and youth and adults.
- Communicate in a manner that is positive and affirming, as feelings and ideas are shared most honestly in a safe environment.
- Refrain from all behaviors, verbal and physical, that are in any way erotic, seductive or sexual in nature; including sexual innuendo.

I understand that in case of violation, appropriate action will be taken. As an adult volunteer, leader, or childcare provider working in a paid or volunteer capacity for the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, I hereby agree to abide by this Code of Ethics.

This Policy was adopted in August 2026.