

Safe Steps

Abuse Prevention Policy for the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph

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Statement of Philosophy and Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment

We, the members of the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph, confirm that our congregational community is dedicated to providing a safe environment for adults and Young People as we promote spiritual growth. We will not tolerate any forms of abuse, harassment or neglect committed by anyone in the congregation, including employees, members, friends or volunteers.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are dedicated to uphold:

- the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and*
- justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.*

We accept the “Duty of Care” that these commitments require of us:

- generally in society, and*
- particularly to our congregation’s members, friends, and guests.*

We accept active responsibility for:

- the prevention of violence and abuse within our congregation*
- protecting our staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations, and*
- healing where such violence or abuse has occurred, thereby restoring community.*

We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner that conveys mutual respect and consideration. We affirm our commitment to maintain a safe environment free of discrimination and harassment based on colour, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, ability, gender or sexual orientation, including establishing policies and taking actions to increase the safety of our congregation. We also affirm our responsibility to take steps when we observe behaviour that is contrary to the principles and policies of the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph Safe Steps Policy.

Note: This Safe Steps Policy was updated in late 2019 by The Director of Lifelong Learning, Melissa Horvath-Lucid and 2019 board members, Nancy Schmidt, Naomi Matsui, Martha Savage, Forrest Smith. The original policy was developed in 2009 by UCG Board of Directors committee that included Melina Bondy, Rebekah Jamieson, Julie Elliottson, Lorna Wyllsun, Steve and Maria Chovaz, Helen Prinold, Janet Colley, Harold Chapman and Dee Yates. We are grateful for those Unitarians from across North America who provided us with resources and templates, including the Canadian Unitarian Council, Unitarian Universalist Association and several Ontario congregations – most particularly Waterloo and Hamilton (via June Gilbertson who remains with us in spirit). Thank you all for your support.

Revisions to the Policy will be considered during an annual policy review and renewal, to be signed-off as complete by the Board of Directors. Please forward your suggestions for revisions to both the Board President and Director of Lifelong Learning (and any congregation members you feel may be interested).

Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms (in *italics*) are defined:

Duty of Care is a legal and moral obligation requiring that an individual or organization adhere to a standard of reasonable care while performing any acts that could potentially cause harm to others.

Toddler means anyone who is younger than 4 years old.

Child means anyone who is 4-12 years old.

Youth means anyone who is 13-18 years old. There is an overlap where Youth Programming includes Adults who are 16, 17 and 18 years old in Youth Programs.

Young People is a plural form used in this document as a general term that includes the definitions of toddler, child and youth.

Vulnerable Adult is anyone 16 years or older who carries a heightened risk of abuse or harm due to mental or physical disabilities, social isolation, etc.

Adult means anyone who is age 16 or older.

Staff includes any individual hired by the congregation as part of its operations and ministry and to whom regular remuneration is provided for services rendered.

Volunteer includes any individual who provides service(s) to the congregation (on a regular or occasional basis) but is not a staff member. This can include (but is not limited to) teachers, drivers and lay visitors. Typically, a volunteer does not receive payment for services.

Physical Abuse is violent non-accidental contact that may result in injury. This includes but is not limited to striking, biting or shaking.

Sexual Abuse is sexual involvement or sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than an adult, or with an adult who is non-consensual. This includes all acts that are considered criminal by Provincial and Federal Law. Sexual abuse of children includes offences such as sexual interference, sexual exploitation, and the possession of child pornography.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of crushing a person's spirit and attacking his/her self-worth through rejections, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Young Person Neglect is the failure by a caregiver to provide for a toddler's, child's or youth's emotional needs (for example, love and attention), physical needs (for example, food,

clothing, shelter and health care), and failing to offer supervision when it is within their responsibility to do so.

Harassment is any conduct or communication that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

Inappropriate Touching includes any touching that is unwanted and/or creates an intimidating, hostile, embarrassing or offensive environment.

Improper Discipline is any discipline that violates our first principle of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Corporal punishment is always a form of improper discipline, and is strictly prohibited.

Young People's Program Areas include the rooms, halls, stairway, washrooms and vicinity of Young People's program activities at the times of those activities supervised by program leaders or parents.

Young People's Program Periods are the times of planned activities only for Young People under the supervision of program leaders. This does not include events that are planned for Young People and adults together.

Abbreviations

RE – Religious Exploration

DLL—Director of Lifelong Learning

Preventing Abuse, Harassment and Neglect

Education, careful hiring and volunteer recruitment procedures, monitoring and supervision and clear policies regarding the circumstances of Young People's interactions with adults are concrete steps toward creating a safe environment for all concerned. The policies and procedures of the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph (UCG) for promoting the safety of our Young People are described in the following pages. The consequences of non-compliance with the Safe Steps Policy will be at the discretion of the Board of Directors and will comply with the laws regarding reposting responsibilities.

Education and Training

It is the intention of our RE and Lifelong Learning programs to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our Young People and our adult membership. To accept the responsibility delegated by parents for Young People in and during supervised Young People's Program Activities in Young People's Program Areas, the following will be provided:

1. Information for all members and friends of the congregation regarding resources within the community that address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse including a copy of

the UCG Safe Steps Policy, posted on our website and on our resource board at the congregational building.

2. Everyone working with Young People, including all RE teachers and youth leaders, will receive training that includes the Safe Steps Policy and ways to create safe spaces for both Young People and Youth & Adult Leaders. Any questions or concerns shall be directed to the Director of Lifelong Learning. If there is a conflict of interest, the President of the Board shall be approached. For a sample training session, see page 19.

3. Information about Ontario law that requires any adult with a suspicion that a Young Person under the age of 16 may have been abused to report the suspicion to the local Children's Aid Society or to the police.

Procedures for Recruiting Volunteers

Religious communities are particularly at risk for sexual misconduct because they make significant efforts to welcome everyone and automatically assume a level of trust. Since incidents of sexual abuse often take place in the context of an ongoing relationship, it is essential that recruitment and hiring procedures be established to promote the safety of Young People and adults in our programs. In addition, procedures should guard staff and volunteers from false accusations and shield the UCG from liability.

Committees and individuals responsible for recruiting volunteers will use the following procedures, which will include appropriate screening:

1. Any adults volunteering with Young People or vulnerable adults in our congregation on an on-going basis or more than 1 time, must have regularly attended the UCG, or been involved in a recognized Unitarian Community, for a minimum of six months. This will be at the discretion of the DLL/or the President of the Board. Adults facilitating a one-off workshop with our programs, who are not directly supervising our youth and who facilitate with two of our staff members present, are not required to present a police check or attend our Safe Steps Policy training. Examples include: Indigenous Elder, a yoga teacher providing a yoga class, a parent providing a workshop on water security etc.
2. Individuals interested in on-going volunteer roles related to vulnerable People will fill out the form "RE Volunteer Application" and will provide a clear Police Records Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector upon request. Recruitment and volunteer placement will take place at the discretion of the DLL or designate.
3. Adults identified in the "Screening Levels" matrix (see Appendix 1) must complete the appropriate applications and sign the appropriate documents (see Appendix 2).
4. Adults identified in the "Screening Levels" matrix (see Appendix 1) must be interviewed by the appropriate congregational representative(s) (for example, DLL, member of the Board, Committee Chairs, etc.). Volunteers and staff without a clear police check will be unable to work within the programming aspect of congregational life.

5. The DLL shall keep all application forms for volunteers working with Young People, evidence of the completion of clear Police Records Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector, and other relevant documents in a secure online location.

Policies Regarding the Hiring of UCG Staff and general conduct of all staff

Committees and individuals responsible for hiring staff will use the following procedures, which will include appropriate screening:

1. Every person seeking a permanent or contract staff position at the UCG will complete the employment application form in Appendix 2 and will receive a copy of the Safe Steps Policy. The appropriate hiring committee will screen those candidates selected for interviews, and will contact references and record the contact. Depending on the risk assessment and the position being held, additional information/training may be required.
2. UCG staff will be required to provide a Police Records Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector which will be updated every 3 years for the duration of the tenure of the person or earlier at the discretion of the Board. The record will be kept in a secure, confidential file online, along with any references that have been requested. As our building is used broadly, it is not reasonable to keep private files onsite, unless they are in a locked cabinet, in a locked room.
3. All staff members and contractors working on behalf of UCG on more than a one-off basis, will receive a training session regarding the Safe Steps Policy.
4. All staff working directly with children/youth will obtain First Aid certification.
5. Staff must be 14 years of age or older.
6. Staff may have their cell phones with them, during facilitation time. All staff agree not to use their device for personal reasons and to use their phones in case of emergency or if they require assistance from the DLL. All staff will be given the DLL's direct line, to call when required, and the DLL will move through the programming spaces, unless they are directly facilitating a service or program.

Policies for Classroom Teachers, Assistants and Nursery Staff

Classroom teachers will establish a classroom covenant and expectations for each class and will consistently enforce these guidelines. If a child/youth continually struggles with behavioural challenges in the classroom, the teachers and assistants will follow the Guidelines for Teachers on page 12.

1. Any form of corporal punishment is strictly prohibited, as is any action that violates our first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of all people.
2. Children 5 years old and younger will be signed in and out of Young People's Program Periods.

3. Teachers shall ensure that all appropriate lights are turned on before Young People's Program Periods begin including stairwells and washrooms.
4. Rooms and closets not in use during Young People's Program Periods will be locked.
5. There must be a minimum of two staff members working downstairs. The doors separating rooms will have glass in them, if working in two separate groups. The DLL will check in periodically during RE time, unless they are directly facilitating RE programming or a Sunday Service.
6. All RE participants 5 years of age or younger, must be signed in and out of the programming time, using the clip board and form provided. Children can only be signed in and out by the same person, or another person who is listed as having permission to sign out the child.
7. All staff facilitating nursery, RE and youth are asked to ensure that children do not engage in rowdy or overly active behaviour that could result in physical injury.
8. The DLL (or designate) will regularly monitor the childcare room and classroom activities on Sunday mornings. At no time, are children/youth left unattended. If you require assistance, please contact the DLL (or designate) directly or ask for help from the other RE facilitator.

Additional Policies and Procedures for the Childcare Room and Caring for Infants and Toddlers

1. If there are ever more than four children signed in when only one childcare worker is on duty, that childcare worker will ask a parent to stay and assist.
2. The upper door to the nursery is to remain open. The DLL moves through programming spaces and will check in to support the nursery team and assist as required.
3. Childcare workers are expected to be in the childcare room 15 minutes prior to services or congregational functions, unless otherwise specified, and to remain until all children have been picked up or the DLL has found an appropriate replacement.
4. Parents/guardians are to bring infants/toddlers to the childcare room and sign them in with the childcare worker(s). At pick-up time, children must be signed out by the person who signed them in, or by another person who is listed as having permission to sign out the child.
5. When visitors are signing in infants/toddlers to the childcare room, parents/guardians will indicate on the sign in form
6. Toys are to be picked up and put away neatly. Toys are to be washed regularly. Any broken toys must be given to the DLL for removal or repair.

6. When visitors are signing in infants/toddlers to the childcare room, parents/guardians will indicate on the sign in form if they give permission for childcare workers to provide toileting assistance. Diaper changes will be done by the parent/guardian only. The Nursery staff will notify either the DLL or the parent directly if this is required.

Administrative Policies to be upheld by the DLL

1. All Young People regularly attending RE programs will have registration forms completed by their parent/guardian indicating the primary caregiver's name, address, telephone number, emergency contact number and any special considerations, on a yearly basis. Forms are to be reviewed/updated by the parent/guardian, no less than once per congregational year.
2. Parents/guardians will complete permission forms for their child/youth who is participating in a field trip and or special programs outside of Sunday morning times when parents/guardians are not on the premises.
3. Employees and volunteers will sign a declaration indicating a valid driver's license and automobile insurance (minimum amount \$1,000,000) if they are to be transporting Young People. If driving children and youth on behalf of UCG, the driver assumes liability for any accidents/unintended harm while the passenger is in their care.
4. An annual review of the Safe Steps policy will be carried out, and any necessary changes implemented for all RE and youth programming.
5. The intake paperwork for staff and volunteers working in the Programming aspect of congregational life includes: Program forms, resumes, Clear police checks, Program proposals, and all other associated paperwork. The Board President will check in with the DLL monthly, to ensure that all paperwork is in order.

Policies Regarding the Interaction of Adults with Young People

The following guiding principles are intended to provide a general overview of how interactions should occur between adults and Young People. It is recognized that unforeseen circumstances can and will occur. The most important safeguard is *full disclosure*. If this policy, particularly numbers 4-7 below, cannot be enacted, every effort should be made to find a second adult or at least inform the child's parent or guardian as quickly as possible under the circumstances.

1. Parents of Young People enrolled in UCG RE programs are encouraged to ask questions and stay informed of the nature of their children's interactions with adults. Parents/guardians with concerns are encouraged to talk with their youth/children/toddlers about the programs,

volunteers and staff they encounter. Parents/guardians with concerns about specific staff or volunteers are encouraged to talk to the DLL, or to the Board President for concerns regarding the DLL.

2. Adults working with toddlers, children or youth on an ongoing basis shall attend an orientation on our Safe Steps policies and procedures. Included in the training will be a discussion of standards for appropriate behaviour.

3. Field trips, overnight programs and programs outside of regularly scheduled Young People's Program Periods should have a minimum of two screened adult leaders present. For sleepovers, separate gender changing areas and sleeping areas should be made available. For youth 14 and older, mixed gender areas for sleeping may be made available in addition to separate sleeping areas. Adults should change and sleep separately from children and youth unless in family groupings.

4. Adults who form a relationship with youth/children through our faith community's activities should not seek out other opportunities to spend with them off-site. If planned off-site interactions occur, the parent/guardian must be informed.

5. Adults should not help youth/children/toddlers with toileting, unless they cannot manage alone and the parent/guardian has given permission.

6. Young People should not travel in an adult's vehicle without the permission of their parent/guardian and the knowledge of the leaders.

7. Any physical contact between adults and Young People should occur in public and be sanctioned by the parent/guardian or the program supervisor (for example, hugs and kisses for younger children or physical games with older children). Informed consent is vital.

8. Any form of corporal punishment is strictly prohibited, as is any action that violates our first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

Policies Regarding Adults Convicted of Charges Related to the Sexual Abuse of Young People

1. Any individual who attends the congregation known to have been convicted of charges related to sexual abuse of Young People or who has outstanding charges related to sexual abuse of Young People will be required to meet with the DLL and the Board President or Board Designate, to review the Safe Steps policy and to create a plan to ensure the safety of all. It is the responsibility of sex offenders to disclose this information and to take the necessary steps and precautions to avoid contact with minors. We, as a congregation, actively support this initiative.

2. Any individual charged with offences related to sexual abuse of Young People or convicted of charges related to sexual abuse of Young People will not be allowed to enter the Young People's Program Areas and will refrain from all interaction with children and youth at the congregation before, during and after program times. They are to be accompanied at all times by a mutually agreed upon person.

Appendix 1: Additional Information

Screening Levels

<p>Low Risk</p>	<p>Communication Coordinator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Employment Application including references • Complete interview • Sign contract of employment • Read <i>Safe Steps Policy</i> and sign “Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment” <p>Special one-time guest or facilitator for the RE Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to be in attendance when a special one-time guest or facilitator is present in our RE program <p>Board Members who are not working directly with children, youth or vulnerable adults on behalf of the congregation or board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Safe steps Policy and sign “Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment.” • Clear Police check is recommended by the insurance company and not required.
<p>Medium Risk</p>	<p>Board Members who are working directly with children, youth or vulnerable adults on behalf of the congregation or board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete “UCG Volunteer Application” including references • Read <i>Safe Steps Policy</i> and sign “Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment” • Obtain a “Police Record Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector” (updated every 5 years) • Participate in Safe Steps Orientation Training <p>Volunteer Classroom Teachers and Assistants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete “Children’s RE Volunteer Application” including references • Read <i>Safe Steps Policy</i> and sign “Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment” • Obtain a “Clear Police Record Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector” (updated every 5 years) • Participate in Safe Steps Orientation Training

High Risk	<p>Director of Lifelong Learning, Nursery Childcare Workers, Youth advisors, RE teachers, Minister</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Employment Application, including references • Complete interview • Sign contract of employment • Read <i>Safe Steps Policy</i> and sign “Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment” • Obtain a “Clear Police Record Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector” (updated every 5 years) • Participate in Safe Steps Orientation Training • Participate in ongoing performance evaluations by the Board President and/or DLL if applicable.
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Guidelines

The spiritual development of our Young People is a collaborative venture amongst them, their parents and teachers. The following guidelines were developed to clarify the role of each in creating a supportive learning environment.

Guidelines for Parents

Parents are the primary spiritual educators of their children and youth. They also have an important role to play in Religious Exploration at our Congregation.

1. Parents are encouraged to support the participation of their children/youth through awareness of classroom activities, and regular attendance.
2. Assist your child/youth to understand that, while parents are attending the adult service, the teacher is responsible for them and it is important they follow the rules of the classroom. Please review the Guidelines for Children/Youth (below) with them.
3. Please communicate to the Director of Lifelong learning any special needs that your child/youth may have. If there are behavioural challenges, let us know their nature and what strategies may be most effective for the teacher. If there are any special circumstances that may temporarily affect behaviour (such as a new sibling or divorce), it is helpful for us to be informed.
4. If you have any questions, concerns, and suggestions, or would like to help in some way, please talk to the teacher or the DLL. Parents are welcome to attend RE programming and are asked to support the RE facilitators only and to not directly supervise the children, without first going through the volunteer RE training process.
5. You must bring your child/ren to the service and pick up your child/ren after the class. If you are unable to bring and pick up your child/ren, you must let the DLL and teacher know what alternate arrangements have been made before your child arrives on Sunday morning.

Guidelines for Children/Youth

We are glad to have you participate in the class and want you to enjoy your time here.

1. Please follow the classroom guidelines and respect the class covenant. This makes the class a better place to be for everyone.
2. Treat your classmates and teacher with respect and listen carefully when others are speaking.
3. Give your best effort when participating in class activities.
4. Violent behaviour is not permitted. It is up to the classroom teacher to determine acceptable behaviour. We want everyone to feel safe and comfortable.
5. After class, please help tidy up.
6. If you are not happy with someone or something in your class, please talk to your parent, teacher or the DLL, so that we can do something to improve things. We want you to enjoy your time with us.

Guidelines for Teachers

Teachers are essential to the RE program. They give of their time and talent to nurture children and youth on their spiritual journey. They will do their best to maintain a positive learning environment and to value the uniqueness of each person.

The DLL will support teachers working with our children and youth. Teachers are encouraged to ask the DLL for assistance and advice. There are windows in all of our classrooms, and the DLL will periodically look in on classes on Sunday mornings to determine if any help or additional resources are needed.

Teachers and young people will establish together guidelines for having a safe and meaningful time together, known as a covenant. They will work together to consistently honour the covenant. If a child/youth is having difficulty following the rules, the teacher will employ strategies to engage co-operation such as calling their name, reminding the child/youth of appropriate behaviours, moving to be near the child/youth or moving the child/youth to a different seat. Any form of corporal punishment is strictly prohibited.

If a child/youth continually struggles with behavioural challenges in the classroom, the teacher and/or the DLL will discuss the concerns with the parent(s) and work together to find satisfactory solutions. If the behaviour of the child/youth is significantly disrupting the class on a particular day, and other methods have failed, the DLL may be asked to assist in the classroom or temporarily withdraw the child/youth from class to discuss the concerns with them. Alternatively, the parent may be asked to leave the service upstairs and assist with their child/youth in the classroom or withdraw them from the class for that day.

If You Suspect Abuse...

It is now Ontario Law that each person is to report any suspected child abuse (including toddlers or youth) to their local Family and Children's Services agency. For our congregation, this would be:

Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County
55 Delhi Street, Box 1088 Guelph, ON, N1H 6N3
519-824-2410 or 1-800-265-8300
www.fcsgw.org OR info@fcsgw.org

If a Young Person personally reports abuse to you at any point:

- Let them speak about what is happening to him or her: do not ask leading questions. Just listen.
- Affirm to them how difficult it must be to be in that situation.
- Do not attempt to further interview them; leave that to professionals who have been specially trained to deal with this sensitive issue.
- Do not frighten the child further by talking about reporting the abuse. In many cases, their abusers have told children who are being abused that very bad things will happen if they tell anyone.

If you are unsure if the situation constitutes abuse or necessitates reporting, you are able to contact F&CS to pose a hypothetical question and confirm whether reporting is necessary.

Immediately report the alleged abuse to the Director of Lifelong Learning and to Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County (informing the DLL when you have done so). Maintain communication with the DLL about follow-up.

Without admitting legal liability or making public statements prior to obtaining legal council, we will assure a compassionate response to the alleged victim and their family, maintaining confidentiality for the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.

Signs of Abuse – from Family and Children's Services Guelph

The first step in helping an abused or neglected child is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring, but a closer look at the situation may be warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination. Children exhibit signs of abuse and neglect in many different ways. Often, they show a number of behavioural and physical indicators.

The Child may:

- Show sudden changes in behaviour or performance
- Have not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parent/caregiver's attention

- Show learning problems, or a difficulty concentrating that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes
- Appear always to be watchful, as though waiting for something bad to happen
- Be overly compliant, passive or withdrawn or exhibit excessive aggression and attention seeking behaviour
- Comes to social or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Have frequent psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, nausea and abdominal pains

Signs of **physical** abuse in children may appear in the following ways:

- A presence of various injuries over a period of time
- Facial injuries in infants and preschool children
- Injuries inconsistent with the child's age
- Presence of several injuries that are in various states of healing
- An inability to recall how injuries occurred, or a hesitant or inconsistent explanation of the origin of injuries
- A generalized wariness of adults
- Demonstrated fright of the parents, or protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Flinching if touched unexpectedly
- Extreme aggressiveness
- Extreme withdrawal
- The indiscriminate seeking of affection

Signs of **sexual** abuse in children may appear in the following ways

- Age-inappropriate play with toys, self or others
- Unusual or excessive itching in the genital or anal area
- Shows difficulty walking or sitting
- A sudden refusal to participate in physical activities
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Displaying explicit sexual acts
- Age-inappropriate sexually explicit drawings or descriptions
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- Seductive behaviour

Signs of **emotional** abuse or **neglect** of children may appear in the following ways:

- Severe depression
- Extreme aggressiveness
- Extreme withdrawal
- Extreme attention seeking
- Acting inappropriately adult (parenting of other children)
- Acting inappropriately infantile (frequent rocking or thumb sucking)
- Delayed in physical or emotional development
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent

- Stealing of food or money
- Consistently poor personal hygiene
- Lack of sufficient clothing for the weather

If a child tells you about abuse that she or he is experiencing, be attentive to the child's behaviour. Remember that a child disclosing abuse may be very cautious and may use childish language or terms unfamiliar to you. A child may expect you to be aware of the abuse, feeling he/she has been marked in some way that should be obvious to adults. For this reason, it is important to be aware of the physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse and neglect.

If a child tells you she or he is being abused: Believe in the child. Abuse victims often believe they are, in some way, responsible for the abuse they receive and may be hesitant to discuss the abuse. Your acceptance of what the child says is very important. Recognize that it may be difficult for you to accept the identity of the abuser or that the abuse occurred. Victims of sexual abuse may feel they are breaking a "trust" or "telling a secret," or they may have been threatened with harm to themselves or others if they tell. Remember that your relationship has allowed the child to open up to you.

Listen openly and calmly. You may feel angry, frustrated or it may be painful for you to hear a child disclosing abuse. It is very important that you put these feelings aside and give the child your full attention. You can demonstrate your attentiveness with signs such as nodding understandingly. Allow the child to tell what happened in his/her words. Do not "interview" the child or press the child for details. Where possible take the child aside to a safe, quiet place.

Reassure the child. It is important that you tell the child you will do something to help. Reassure the child that what has happened is not his/her fault, and that he/she is doing the correct thing by telling you. Do not promise the child things you are unable to provide, such as that the abuser will go to jail or that the child will have a new home. Do tell the child you will do your best to help him/her.

Write down the facts. A written record of what the child has told you is important in the investigation process. If you cannot record the conversation at the time of disclosure, do so as soon as possible and use the child's own words avoiding interpreting what was said. Even if you feel a comment or fact is insignificant record it anyway, don't leave anything out. Report the disclosure by calling F&CS right away. **All individuals have a duty to report child abuse. As soon as possible after a disclosure, please call Family and Children Services: 519-824-2410, 800-265-8300**

Avoiding Allegations of Abuse

- Adhere to policies and guidelines as outlined in the Safe Steps Policy. Review policy regularly and discuss any potential concerns as soon as they arise. Document any and all concerns.
- Be aware of situations in which actions can be misconstrued or manipulated by others, such as being alone with the last Young Person to leave UCG after an activity. It generally does not make sense to spend excessive amounts of time alone with Young People away from others. Avoid spending excessive time alone with any one Young Person, whether at UCG or in other locations.

- Be aware of the physical surroundings. Be sure to be visible to others as much as possible (such as being in a room with windows, or in the presence of another adult when interacting with youth or children).
- Be vigilant of how actions and words can be misinterpreted. It is important to set clear personal boundaries with all Young People and revisit those on occasion, speaking clearly and unambiguously as required.
- Avoid teasing, horseplay, wrestling, and suggestive language. Children, parents and uniformed observers may get a different message than you intend during these actions.
- If any Young Person makes inappropriate comments or communicates an interest in having an inappropriate relationship, clearly inform the Young Person that such a relationship is inappropriate and why. Document the incident in writing and debrief with an appropriate administrator or board member. Work together to determine next steps, including parental involvement or limiting interaction with the individual Youth if behaviour continues.
- Be aware of the content of films shown to Young People. Films containing inappropriate sexual or violent content could be seen as developing a precedent for your alleged inappropriate behaviour.
- Refrain from any form of corporal punishment or any action that violates our first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of all people.
- Challenge Young People displaying inappropriate language or behaviours, and document the use of such language if it becomes continuous. Note that any change in language or behaviour of a Youth to use specifically explicit words can be a sign of sexual abuse.
- Avoid comments about a Young Person's appearance that may be misconstrued or considered offensive by the Young Person.
- Seek outside resources and assistance at any time if an issue arises that causes discomfort or questioning regarding the safety of yourself or a Young Person.

Abuse Incident Response Committee

The Abuse Incident Response Committee is responsible for responding to any allegations of harassment, abuse, or conduct inconsistent with the rules and guidelines set out in the Safe Steps policy.

The Committee will consist of the President of the Board of Directors, the Director of Lifelong Learning, and an additional designate. Other members may be appointed at the Committee's discretion. If the complaint involves any member of the Abuse Incident Response Committee, that individual will step down from the committee while the incident is investigated. The Committee may appoint another member as it sees fit.

Upon receiving a complaint, the Committee will take the following steps:

1. Complete Incident Report Form. A sample is contained in Appendix 2.
2. Ensure all statutory reporting obligations to police authorities or child protective agencies have been satisfied.
3. In cases that may involve criminal actions and legal liability:

- a. Do not admit liability or make any public statements (to the media or from the pulpit) without obtaining formal legal council.
 - b. Contact our insurance agent (Robertson Hall Insurance, London, Ontario) to report the incident.
4. On behalf of the Congregation, express concern to the complainant and assure them of our commitment to assisting the investigation.
 5. Ensure the confidentiality of all individuals involved with the complaint.
 6. Suspend the alleged perpetrator from any involvement with children or youth programs in the congregation (as per *Policies Regarding Adults Convicted of Charges related to the Sexual Abuse of Young People*), pending outcome of investigation.

Safe Steps Orientation Training Program

(open to all members and friends of the UCG Community)

An orientation and training session will be scheduled for all regular RE staff and volunteers. The DLL will organize training sessions and tailor their contents to the responsibilities of the particular individuals in attendance. All volunteers will receive an initial training/orientation and an annual refresher. The sessions will generally involve the following items:

1. Review UCG's Philosophy Statement and Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment in the Safe Steps Policy.
2. Review Definitions in Safe Steps Policy.
3. Review Education and Training and Procedures for Recruiting Volunteers and Hiring Staff in Safe Steps Policy.
4. Provide a general overview of Safe Steps Policy.
5. Review of roles, responsibilities, forms, guidelines, reporting.
6. Case studies.
7. Each training program attendee will sign a copy of Philosophy Statement and Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment

Sample Training Workshop - 1.5 hours

Goals:

1. To ensure volunteers' awareness of policies regarding misconduct and/or screening.
2. To help volunteers develop sensitivity regarding the need to screen and deal with misconduct.
3. To help volunteers understand their responsibility to ensure a safe environment.

Agenda

Review policy and definitions (30 minutes) Case studies, small group discussion, large group debriefing (30 minutes) Discuss ways to create and maintain safe environments, sign forms (30 minutes)

Sample case studies:

Case Study 1: You are an adult leader of a youth group. The program has ended and everyone has gone home except for you and one young person. She/he calls home and is told to get a ride from someone at the program because there has been a little crisis with her sister. As she/he is speaking on the phone, you recall that you and the other leaders have noticed that this young person flirts with the adult leaders. You realize you are alone with this young person and may be breaking the screening policy. You also know you need to make sure this young person gets home safely. What do you do?

Case Study 2: You are a new Spiritual Development coordinator and want to implement the screening policy. You have 10 teachers; one of them has been volunteering in this ministry for over 6 years and is a very good friend of ministry leader's family. The teacher's children are extremely unruly in the other classes and, when he/she disciplines them, excessive physical force is used. When you do a random spot check, you hear yelling from his/her classroom. What do you do?

Case Study 3: You have a senior attending the same Adult SD class as you do. As you get to know this senior, she gradually tells you that the person who comes to help with the cleaning is not very nice to her. At one class, you notice large bruises on her arms. What do you do?

Statement of Philosophy and Affirmation of Responsibility and Commitment

We, the members of the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph, confirm that our congregational community is dedicated to providing a safe environment for adults and Young People as we promote spiritual growth. We will not tolerate any forms of abuse, harassment or neglect committed by anyone in the congregation, including employees, members, friends or volunteers.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are dedicated to uphold:

- the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and*
- justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.*

We accept the “Duty of Care” that these commitments require of us:

- generally in society, and*
- particularly to our congregation’s members, friends, and guests.*

We accept active responsibility for:

- the prevention of violence and abuse within our congregation*
- protecting our staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations, and*
- healing where such violence or abuse has occurred, thereby restoring community.*

We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner that conveys mutual respect and consideration. We affirm our commitment to maintain a safe environment free of discrimination and harassment based on colour, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, ability, gender or sexual orientation, including establishing policies and taking actions to increase the safety of our congregation. We also affirm our responsibility to take steps when we observe behaviour that is contrary to the principles and policies of the Unitarian Congregation of Guelph Safe Steps Policy.

Name of Staff or Volunteer

Signature of Staff or Volunteer

Date