

Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Board Policy
Participation of Registered Sex Offenders at TUUC
May 2012

Introduction

In Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation (TUUC), as with every congregation, there are likely to be abusers, victims, survivors and bystanders of childhood and adult sexual abuse. Registered Sex Offenders (SO) are present throughout our Pierce County communities. It is natural that some of these individuals will present to TUUC for the purpose of participating in TUUC activities. Offering a spiritual home for a sex offender while honoring the needs of all congregants, including those who may have been affected by sexual assault or abuse provides an opportunity for TUUC to live its mission to “Welcome all with love and compassion,” and “Live and promote Unitarian Universalist principles.” This Board Policy defines general parameters for involvement of a SO at TUUC while promoting safety and justice for all members and friends. It will include a template Limited Access Agreement between the SO and the Board of TUUC and guidelines for determining specific parameters for their participation.

Purpose

While TUUC has a detailed Child and Youth Protection Policy, the primary purpose of this Sex Offender Participation policy is to create clear boundaries that protect TUUC members and friends and their children with respect to sexual misconduct. Guidelines are established that prohibit the kind of unsupervised activities between the SO and TUUC members and friends that could possibly lead to or be perceived as opportunity for illegal and dangerous contacts. The second purpose of this policy is to address the support needs of survivors and others affected by sexual assault and abuse, and mitigate the concerns that some members and friends may have knowing that a SO is present in the community. The third purpose of this policy is to develop strict boundaries that will allow a SO to participate appropriately in activities of personal and spiritual growth at TUUC.

Sex Offender Review Team

A team of five will be formed, comprised of the Minister, the Religious Education Director, two members of the congregation with relevant expertise--preferably one from the pastoral care team--and one board member. The Sex Offender Review Team (SORT) has the following responsibilities:

- a. Know about community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors.
- b. All team members should read the UUA’s resources on this subject. Currently Reverend Debra W. Haffner’s *BALANCING ACTS: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations* is recommended for all review team members.
- c. Know state laws and ethical guidelines regarding reporting.

- d. Monitor and update TUUC's sex offender policy.
- e. Be a resource for members and friends to share their concerns.
- f. Ensure that the SO and TUUC community have access to resources to promote healing and recovery.
- g. Meet with the sex offender to develop a Limited Access Agreement (LAA).
- h. Meet regularly with SO to ensure LAA is working and that he/she is fully cooperative with all requirements of parole and probation, sex offender registration laws, and court orders.
- i. Depending on the age of the SO and level of offense, determine whether participation must include an understanding that their identity and the nature of their crime will be made known to the whole congregation.
- j. If the identity is not public information or known to the whole congregation, notify appropriate sextons and Safety Committee members as appropriate.
- k. Coordinate with the pastoral care team and Adult Religious Education to create a support ministry as needed for the SO and congregants with concerns around sexual assault.
- l. Coordinate with RE and OWL teams to ensure abuse prevention education is ongoing.
- m. Identify appropriate TUUC members to join the SORT as needed for chaperoning and monitoring of activities.
- n. Annually scan the list of Registered Sex Offenders through the Pierce County Sherriff's office website for names of individuals who may not have come forward to the congregation.

Policy General Parameters

1. Any SO must present himself or herself openly to the Minister of the congregation before being allowed to attend any TUUC activities. If a SO learns of this policy after some time has elapsed, he or she must inform the minister immediately.
2. Any SO entering agreement with TUUC must take full responsibility for his/her behaviors, and be in full compliance with requirements of parole and probation, sex offender registration laws, and court orders.
3. If the abused individual is an adult member, friend or attendee at TUUC, his/her alleged or convicted offender shall be barred from church property and all TUUC events and activities unless both the abused individual and the Minister or his/her designee agree to an exception.
4. If the abused individual is under 18 years of age and attends TUUC activities or events his/her alleged or convicted offender will be barred from church property and all TUUC events and activities unless an exception is agreed to by the Review Team and there is no objection to the exception from the child/ youth or his/her parent or guardian.
5. In the case of an allegation of sexual abuse, the Review Team will meet with the alleged offender. If the alleged victim is available and willing, the Review Team will talk with her/him (and/or parent/guardian). The Review Team will also review any accessible public records regarding the alleged crime. The Review Team will then determine a course of action, which in most cases will include

creation of a Letter of Agreement. (Guidance is provided in the document *Balancing Acts* from the Unitarian Universalist Association for Letter of Agreement template).

6. Any SO who wishes to attend will have an individualized plan based on the Template Limited Access Agreement included here. An individualized plan shall be consistent with any terms or conditions of parole that the SO is subject to and the SO shall keep the Review Team promptly informed of any changes in such terms and conditions.
7. The Limited Access Agreement will be developed by the SO Review Team based on the specific offenses of the person, as available in the public record. This may also include conversation between a team member and the probation officer or Sex Offender detective familiar with the details and process of rehabilitation. The SO would sign Release of Information forms as necessary for this communication to occur.
8. The boundaries created by the Letter of Agreement are absolute. Any variance from these boundaries will end all opportunities for the SO to participate in TUUC activities.
9. The Sex Offender Review team will consider the nature and extent of the specific crimes as detailed in the public record, and may use this information as cause to reject a Sex Offender's request to participate at TUUC.
10. Staff of TUUC will be fully informed of the SO's name and status and will watch for signs of non-compliance with the Letter of Agreement.
11. Depending on the level of offense and terms of rehabilitation, the SO's identity may need to be released to the whole community in a respectful manner.
12. In the case of past sex offenses against children, parents of young children at TUUC will be informed of the Sex Offenders' name and status.
13. Any activity that could be construed as "grooming" behavior (where a relationship is built up, especially with children and youth, that might be the prelude to illegal sexual contact) is not allowed.
14. The SO will be accompanied (directly present in person) at all times by another adult member of TUUC approved by the SORT who knows of the person's Registered Sex Offender status, in all activities in which he or she participates at TUUC.
15. In the initial covenant, the SO will only be permitted to attend Sunday services. Activities may be expanded as progress is determined by the SORT.
16. If an individual was in treatment in the past and has been in the community for several years but is no longer in treatment program, the individual and the Response Team will come up with evidence of completion or other assurance of safety.
17. Individuals who enter into covenant with the congregation may have partners or family members who also wish to attend. TUUC will also consider and respect the needs and privacy of these individuals as well when creating agreements.
18. Individuals who have refused legally recommended treatment for a sex offense would be barred from any activities with TUUC.

Youth Who May be Abusers

When a child or teenager has sexually touched another child in our congregation it could be normal sexual exploration and/or boundary issues and impulsive behavior that needs to be addressed with the child by his/her parents and possibly the minister and/or the RE Director.

In addition to legally mandated referrals (if any), a referral needs to be made as soon as possible to the TUUC Sex Offender Review Team if a child/youth is observed or reported to have engaged in sex play with a much younger child or coerces or forces someone to engage in sexual activity. In this situation the minister may need to encourage the parents of the child who was touched to seek an appropriate evaluation and counseling. The Sex Offender Review Team should require that in order to continue participating in TUUC activities the offending child receive an extensive assessment by an appropriate professional who is experienced in evaluating children with sexual behaviors. The Sex Offender Review Team has a range of options including, but not limited to, simply talking with the offending child and his/her parents; increased supervision; creating a modified Limited Access Agreement signed by the child and his/her parents; and prohibition from attending TUUC activities until successful treatment has occurred.

Understanding and Values

Sex Offenders who come forward and are in covenant with Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation may present significantly less risk than an individual in our midst who, unknown to us, is a SO. For this reason we adhere strictly to the Child and Youth Safety Policy.

Involvement in a faith community may decrease the chance that a person will commit another sex offense, and that is strengthened through community vigilance to compliance with rehabilitation agreements. Entering into such an agreement is only possible if TUUC members and friends promote emotional and physical safety through our Covenant of Right Relations, involvement in spiritual development activities, and adhering to our Safe Congregation Policy.

This policy and ministry is grounded in our Unitarian Universalist principles. We believe in the dignity and worth of every person: victim, survivor, abuser and bystander. As Rev. Haffner says in *Balancing Acts*, p. 5, “We believe in justice, equity and compassion in human relations—qualities that we must bring to thinking about this difficult issue. We affirm the use of the democratic process in our congregation, and must honor that in the hard work we do together in community.”

Template Limited Access Agreement

The following comprises a Letter of Limited Access Agreement between Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation and _____.
(Name of Registered Sex Offender)

In accordance with the above Policy on Registered Sex Offenders of Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation (TUUC) and under the oversight of the Sex Offender Review Team, I agree to the following restrictions on my activity at TUUC.

I understand that I will not be allowed to participate in TUUC activities if I do not adhere to these behavioral expectations strictly or comply with the TUUC Board Policy for Registered Sex Offenders.

I understand that the Board of Trustees of TUUC has the right to deny me further access to congregational activities at any time.

Specifically,

1. I agree to be accompanied on TUUC property at all times by another adult who is an active member of TUUC and is not my partner, and who knows about my sex offender status.
2. I agree to have my status as registered sex offender known to the following members of the TUUC Community: (delineated as appropriate to age of offender and level of offense)
3. I will not teach or volunteer in the children and youth religious education program nor involve myself in intergenerational activities that involve children or youth.
4. In our current facility, I will not go downstairs for any reason.
5. I will not spend informal time with children or youth in conversation before or after Sunday services.
6. I will only attend Sunday services, no other TUUC functions, until a review by the Review Team.
7. I will not contact TUUC children or youth outside of TUUC.
8. I will not participate in TUUC activities until this agreement has been signed by all parties below and approved by the Board of Trustees.

Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation is committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of personal troubles. Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation welcomes you with this Limited Access Agreement.

Signed:

_____ (Registered Sex Offender) _____ (date)
_____ (Minister) _____ (date)