

Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Children & Youth Safety Policy

We the members of the Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation (TUUC) recognize the importance of Children and Youth Religious Exploration, and the importance of feeling secure in one's spiritual home, no matter their age.

1. Therefore as a community, we commit to the following guidelines for children and youth programming.

- a. We commit to reviewing and publishing an updated Children & Youth Safety Policy every other year by January 31st.
- b. There will be at least two unrelated adults supervising/leading each activity or class. Exceptions can be made in consultation with the Director of Children's Religious Exploration (DRE) and/or the minister.
- c. Volunteer teachers, facilitators, and advisors working with children and youth programming will be active participants at TUUC for at least six months before volunteering. Volunteers supervising children ages 0-14 must be 21 years or older; volunteers supervising youth ages 14-18 must be 25 years or older.
- d. TUUC understands that guardians of children (parents/grandparents/legal guardians/"grown ups") are a child's primary religious educator, so they are **welcome to attend class at any time.**
 - i. The exception to this rule applies to Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality Education classes for 4th-6th, 7th-9th, or 10th-12th graders, which at an organizational level are meant to be confidential to protect the privacy of the young people in class. Guardians are welcome to attend OWL classes for Kindergarten-1st graders.

- e. All volunteers in children and youth programming are required to submit a national background check through TUUC's online system and sign TUUC's Code of Ethics before becoming involved in classes.
- f. Volunteers will also be required to attend teacher training within 6 months of getting involved with the program to continue volunteering.
 - i. Training will include education on warning signs of abuse and instructed on the proper steps to take if abuse is suspected.

2. General Supervision for Volunteers with Religious Exploration

- a. During Sunday school sessions, at least two unrelated adults are to be present at all times.
- b. It is expected that at the end of the service, guardians will come to the classroom and check out with the RE Volunteer, letting them know face-to-face that they are taking their children with them.
 - i. Guardians MUST be 18+, unless prior arrangements are made with the minister and/or DRE.
 - ii. **Only adults who have been designated in the RE registration to pick up their child will be allowed to do so.** If an adult tries to pick up a child without being on the approved list stated on the child's RE registration, an approved guardian will be called to pick up the child instead.
- c. If guardians have not picked up their children 10 minutes after the service has ended, volunteers will bring the child to Social Hour to find their guardian. The volunteers/minister/DRE must stay with the child until they are released to their guardian. Under no circumstances will children be left alone without two background-checked unrelated volunteers or staff members with them.
- d. Children ages 11 years or older (Youth) are able to leave when class is over and will be directed to find their guardian without volunteers present. Youth must check out with their volunteers before leaving, letting the volunteers know where they are going. Youth are not permitted to leave class to go anywhere other than to their guardian. Youth are permitted to leave class early to

find their guardian only with the consent of the volunteers present, or as decided by the minister/DRE.

- e. Once children are either released to their guardians, or youth are dismissed to find their guardians, they are no longer being supervised by RE volunteers, the minister, or the DRE. Guardians are responsible for their children and youth outside the classroom.
- f. Toileting
 - i. If a child requests the help of an adult in the restroom, the door will be kept cracked with the adult facing away from the child and standing outside the door. The guardian of a child older than nursery age needing help toileting will inform the DRE on their registration. If there is no prior arrangement for a RE volunteer or DRE to assist a child, the guardian will be called to come help their child.
 - ii. Guardians of nursery age children (0-4) will be required to consent to toileting with a written form in their registration. Volunteers or the DRE will assist children only when necessary.
- g. Conduct for Volunteers and Staff Working with Children & Youth
 - i. Adult/Minor friendships and mentorships
 - 1. Genuine mentor relationships between adults and children/youth can be healthy and transformative for both.
 - 2. The adults in the relationship assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating a healthy, trusting atmosphere.
 - 3. In all child/youth and adult interactions via relationships formed at TUUC, the guardian of the minor will be fully aware, present for interactions, and consent to the interactions.
 - 4. In the case that a child/youth's guardian cannot be present, the adult may only interact with the minor in the presence of another unrelated adult. Two unrelated adults must be

present in any interactions with children and youth, no exceptions.

5. These rules are not only for the protection of the minor, but also to protect the adult from misconduct accusations and misunderstanding.

3. Supervision Expectations for Guardians:

- a. Children under 14 in attendance of a TUUC RE program are required to have at least one designated guardian at the church at all times.
- b. Youth ages 14-18 in attendance of a TUUC RE program are required to have at least one designated guardian within 10 miles of TUUC at all times.
- c. If an informal guardian, such as another child's parent, a visiting grandparent, a nanny, or another person who is not on the child's registration, is picking a child up from a TUUC event, this arrangement will need to be made prior to the child leaving with the informal guardian, and told to the DRE or minister via email or verbally.
- d. It is expected that at the end of the Sunday service, guardians will come to the classroom and check out with the RE Volunteer, letting them know face-to-face that they are taking their children with them.
 - i. Guardians MUST be 18+ (no siblings under 18), unless prior arrangements are made with the minister and/or DRE.
- e. Once children are either released to their guardians, or youth are dismissed to find their guardians, they are no longer being supervised by RE volunteers, the minister, or the DRE. Guardians are responsible for their children and youth outside the classroom.
- f. Guardians will provide transportation to and from TUUC events.
- g. Guardians are required to complete a children & youth registration after 3 visits to the congregation, so the DRE, minister, and volunteer are aware of how to get in contact with the guardian. This registration will also be a chance to let the DRE know about any allergies, dietary restrictions,

individualized behavioral plans, diagnoses, family dynamics, and anything else we can do to help make this a place for a child to thrive.

- h. Guardians with children wishing to participate in RE programming that are not registered, such as guests or first-time attendees, are required to leave their name and phone number in the sign in binder in the foyer of the church building.

4. Building Safety & Emergency Protocol

- a. Matches will be kept out of reach of children. Children will be allowed under direct supervision only to light candles with safety lighters.
- b. Outlet plugs will be maintained in all unused electrical outlets in the Nursery
- c. Smoke detectors will be tested monthly, and batteries will be replaced twice yearly.
- d. Fire drills will be conducted once a year for the entire congregation.
- e. The designated meeting place for parents and children will be the fenced tree in the parking lot on the north side of the building. RE volunteers will escort the children to and from the designated meeting place, with the binder containing who is in attendance if it is safe to do so. Guardians should evacuate the building immediately in case of emergency and meet their children at the designated meeting place.
- f. Lockdown protocol for classrooms will be dispersed between the minister, DRE, and RE volunteers. It is available upon request by guardians with children enrolled in the TUUC RE program.

5. Health

- a. Hand washing will be done before and after all diapering, food handling, and applying first aid.
- b. First aid kits will be kept stocked in classrooms and in the coat closet at the top of the stairs. All volunteers will be oriented to their locations.
- c. If a child is injured, proper first aid will be applied and the parent will be notified. In case of serious injury, volunteers and/or staff will call 911 for emergency assistance.

- d. In the case of an accident requiring more than a band aid, volunteers or staff should fill out an incident report as soon as the child is safe. Incident reports will be available in the classroom binders and with the DRE. Incident reports shall be returned to the DRE or minister the day the incident happens.
- e. Religious Exploration registrations will include questions regarding general allergies and food allergies. Copies of pertinent forms will be available in attendance binders in classrooms during TUUC events and programming, and kept locked in the DRE's office the rest of the time.
- f. Children will be reminded to walk when inside the building.
- g. Children's names and photos will not be used in promotional materials without written consent of the parent or guardian.
- h. Any photos posted on the TUUC website or Facebook page will not have any individual children's or youth's names associated with them.

6. Training and Education of Church Members and Volunteers

- a. Once approved, this policy will be available to all members and friends of TUUC. Notification will be made in the church newsletter and church electronic announcements when changes are made and ratified.
- b. The policy will be reviewed briefly during new member orientation. A copy of the full policy will be included in the new member packet.
- c. Parents new to TUUC that have marked they'd like to receive RE news will receive a copy of the policy by email, or as a paper copy if they prefer.
- d. All volunteers who work with children will get a copy of the policy.
- e. Copies will be maintained in the DRE's office files.

7. Technology

- a. When adults are communicating with anyone under 18 via email, phone call, texting, or through any messaging apps, the rule of having two unrelated adults applies as it does with in-person communication. The adult communicating with the minor will include the DRE and/or minister, as well as the minor's guardian on all online communication.

- b. Adults will keep phone contact with youth to a minimum and call for only schedule or program related topics.
- c. In spaces of youth-only communication in person or online, covenant will apply, and therefore in situations of harm, repair must be done with the students, DRE, minister, guardians of the students, and youth advisors as necessary.
- d. Photos of minors will not be posted on any TUUC websites, blogs, promotional materials or TUUC social networking platforms. Recorded TUUC services are accessible to congregants through Zoom.
- e. Children and youth involved in church activities will have only necessary and minimal information kept about them, and only with the knowledge of a guardian, such as incident reports, RE registrations, and email lists. This applies to physical information and digital information. This information will only be shown to the DRE and minister, as well as background-checked volunteers if appropriate. TUUC will protect submitted family information unless a valid judicial warrant is provided to specifically gather that information, or with the consent of the guardian.

8. Safe Congregations

- a. RE Volunteers and staff will be trained yearly, and training will include:
 - i. Information on appropriate boundaries between children, youth, and volunteers,
 - ii. Warning signs to look for that may indicate abuse,
 - iii. Church wide policy for mandatory reporting in Washington state,
 - iv. Warning signs to look for that may indicate grooming behaviors,
 - v. TUUC's Board Policy for participation of Registered Sex Offenders (available on the TUUC website: <https://www.tahomauu.com/about-us/our-bylaws/>)
 - vi. Guidelines for behavior that will protect children, youth, and adults from abuse or accusations of abuse.

9. Mandatory Reporting Procedures

- a. If an adult suspects abuse of a minor, the adult must immediately report it to the DRE or minister. Washington state law states that any person in the role of professional educator, who has reason to suspect that a minor has been abused or neglected, must make a report. This applies to any RE volunteer, the DRE, and the minister.
 - i. State agencies have determined the person who experienced the suspicion of abuse first-hand is most encouraged to call the ChildHelp National Abuse Hotline at 800-422-4453.
- b. Any report of abuse or neglect must be disclosed to the DRE and/or minister.
- c. If it is determined that a minor is in a situation of risk, at a TUUC event or programming, the alleged adult or child will be removed from the situation, and take the other necessary steps to protect the at-risk party.
- d. The minister and/or DRE will be notified and report this reported abuse situation to the board of trustees. Otherwise, this matter is to remain confidential to prevent release of information that may endanger a child further, interfere with successful prosecution, or damage the reputation of the alleged abuser without due process.
- e. If reported abuse involves a worker or volunteers at TUUC, they will be immediately released of their duties of interacting with children and youth until the matter is resolved. The supervisor of this person will keep a written record of who reported the suspected abuse and any related circumstances.

10. Responding to Media

- a. If anyone, including the media, contact TUUC about an alleged abusive situation, only the president of the Board of Trustees or a designee will speak for TUUC. In general, the following guidelines apply for these situations.
- b. Because of confidentiality issues, no one affiliated with TUUC can discuss specific cases in a public context. It is important that we protect the

interest of the child, and TUUC. The designated spokesperson is free to discuss steps we have taken to guard against abusive situations.

11. Acceptance of this Policy & Code of Conduct

- a. Any church employee or volunteer working with children and youth who disagrees with any provision of the above described Children and Youth Safety Policy and/or Code of Ethics is free to discuss their opinion with the leadership of TUUC, but must abide by the Policy and Code as written and approved by the Board of Trustees.
- b. This policy will be made widely available to the congregation, on TUUC's website, and a paper copy may be requested.
- c. Guardians of children and youth will receive this policy via email or paper copy when they register their child for RE programming after 3 visits to the congregation. By registering their child, guardians are agreeing to abide by the Child and Youth safety policy and acknowledge they have read the policy in full.
- d. Volunteers and staff with children and youth programming must sign a Code of Ethics approved by the Board of Trustees. By signing the Code of Ethics, the volunteer signatory acknowledges they have read the Policy and Code and agrees to abide by them. The signatory further acknowledges that failure to abide by the Code or provisions in the Policy will result in dismissal from paid or volunteer positions involving children and youth at TUUC.

Last updated by Shawn, Director of Religious Exploration at TUUC, and approved by the Board of Trustees in September of 2025.