

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
UNITY OF AUSTIN

The Board of Unity of Austin has adopted the following Child Protection Policy. All adult persons charged with ministering to or supervising any minor on Church property or at a Church sponsored event attended by minors are required to comply with the Child Protection Policy of Unity of Austin. No variation from the Child Protection Policy will be tolerated. It is intended that this policy apply to any adult person who is introduced to or associated with a minor whose initial contact or continued contact with the minor occurred at or on Church property or at a Church sponsored event.

We at Unity of Austin value our young people and their safety highly. As stated in our Youth Ministry Mission and Vision, our goal is to create a nurturing and respectful environment in which our young people can grow spiritually. A basic and essential element of this environment is that it be emotionally and physically safe. Children and youth are vulnerable human beings. Therefore, The Board of Unity of Austin has established and will implement policies and procedures setting out standards of behavior that ensure to the degree that it is within our power, that safety is a permanent feature of our Youth Ministry Program.

This policy applies and must be adhered to by all those, (volunteer and paid staff), who work with youth (birth through 18 years) through Unity of Austin.

Volunteers and paid staff associated with Unity of Austin need to be able to identify child abuse. The below Definitions will help identify a child or young person who is at risk of abuse or has been abused.

I. DEFINITIONS

There are four major types of child maltreatment: physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services-DFPS) Child maltreatment can occur in person, through correspondence, or via electronic media such as computers and cell phones.

A. Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse is physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child. The physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) can result from punching, beating, shaking, kicking, biting, throwing, stabbing, hitting, burning, choking, or otherwise harming a child. Injury resulting from any of the above is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

You Should Suspect Physical Abuse When You See a Young Person Exhibiting:

- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes, or burns without adequate explanations

Child Protection Policy, Unity of Austin
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- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Burns or bruises in unusual patterns that may indicate the use of an instrument or human bite; cigarette burns on any part of the body
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Aggressive, disruptive, and destructive behavior
- Passive, withdrawn, and emotionless behavior
- Fear of going to a particular place or seeing particular adults
- Injuries that appear after a child has not been seen for several days
- Unreasonable clothing that may hide injuries to arms or legs

B. Neglect

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused.

You Should Suspect Neglect When You See a Young Person Exhibiting:

- Obvious malnourishment
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn or dirty clothing
- Stealing or begging for food
- Child unattended for long periods of time
- Need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Frequent tardiness or absence

C. Emotional Abuse

Emotional Abuse is mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in a child's growth, development, or psychological functioning. It includes extreme forms of punishment such as confining a child in a dark closet, habitual scapegoating, belittling, and rejecting treatment for a child.

You Should Suspect Emotional Abuse When You See a Young Person Exhibiting:

- Over compliance
- Low self-esteem
- Severe depression, anxiety, or aggression
- Difficulty making friends or doing things with other children
- Lagging in physical, emotional, and intellectual development

- Caregiver who belittles the child, withholds love, and seems unconcerned about the child's problems

D. Sexual Abuse

1. General Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

(Adapted from National Sexual Violence Resources Center, website 2014)

Child sexual abuse definitions vary from state to state and there are many forms of child sexual abuse, including but not limited to rape, fondling, sexual assault, exposure, voyeurism, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Sometimes, child sexual abuse is considered a type of child maltreatment, which also includes physical and psychological abuse as well as forms of neglect. In a more common sense, child sexual abuse is:

“Any sexual activity with a child--whether in the home by a caretaker (including relatives), in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.” (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992)

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types Of Sexual Abuse That Involve Touching Include:

- Oral, genital, and anal penetration
- Fondling
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of Sexual Abuse That Do Not Involve Touching Include:

- Verbal Comments
- Pornographic videos or pictures or other materials
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

Possible Indications of and Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse:

- Physical signs may include:

- Lacerations and bruises
- Nightmares
- Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody underclothing
- Venereal disease
- Behavioral signs may include:
 - Anxiety when approaching a particular area
 - Dramatic changes from prior behavior
 - Nervous of hostile behavior toward adults
 - Sexual self-consciousness
 - “Acting Out” of sexual behavior
 - Withdrawal from activities or friends
 - Depressed mood
- Verbal signs may include:
 - “I don’t like (a particular person)”
 - “(name) does things to me when we are alone”
 - “I don’t like to be alone with (a particular person)”
 - Vague complaints of being afraid
 - Overly sexual comments or sexual knowledge that does not match maturity level

These Definitions are not all inclusive. The Definitions are intended to familiarize volunteers and paid staff with the outward signs of abuse so that you will be aware of these signs and will be in a better position to help eliminate and prevent child abuse.

II. REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

CHILD ABUSE BY A VOLUNTEER OR PAID STAFF OF UNITY OF AUSTIN IS NOT TOLERATED AND WILL BE TREATED AS AN ILLEGAL ACT. ALL ACTUAL OR SUSPECTED ACTS OF CHILD ABUSE WILL BE REPORTED TO THE APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY.

Reporting Suspicious Behavior

Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between a youth worker (whether volunteer or paid) and a youth or between youths must be confronted immediately and investigated. Anyone who sees any inappropriate activity must immediately inform the adult in charge on the premises.

When the youth is in clear and immediate danger, the behavior should be interrupted by the adult in charge and if necessary the police should be called. It is mandatory that the adult in charge contact the senior minister or his/her designee promptly, and file a written report on the incident (see attached incident/accident report). In addition to reporting it to the church authorities, it is state law that anyone who suspects that a child has been abused or neglected is required to report it directly to civil authorities

If a staff member or volunteer suspects, witnesses, hears about or suspects a case of child abuse they are mandated reporters in the state of Texas (as that term is defined in State laws). This law applies whether or not the abuse involves Unity of Austin staff, volunteers, or members and whether or not the alleged or suspected abuse occurred on Unity of Austin property or at a Unity of Austin event. All suspected cases of child abuse must be reported to church authorities and civil authorities as quickly as possible. **In the state of Texas this includes calling the DFPS Child Protective Services 24-hour Child-Abuse-Hotline at 1-800-252-5400. Reports may also be made online via the Texas Abuse Hotline (www.texasabusehotline.org).** Anyone who does not report suspected abuse may be held liable for a misdemeanor or felony. Reporting to the Youth Director and/or Senior Minister does not discharge the staff member or volunteer from his/her reporting duty under State law.

No report should or may be made about child abuse if there is no evidence of child abuse or if the report is made with the intent to punish or inflict damage on a person by charging that person with child abuse.

When filing a report, the reporter is required to provide his/her name to CPS, his/her name is entered into the record but will be held confidential. Reporting to State law protects from liability those who in good faith report actual or suspected abuse, as long as those persons or his/her designated representative has not intentionally or in bad faith or maliciously made a false report. If there is any doubt, CPS staff will assist the caller in determining if a report should be filed.

Care will be taken to ensure that a report made to church officials does not have the potential to be buried by a single individual or group of individuals who may engage in overprotection of the church or individuals at the expense of a child's safety. The church will process the allegation and report back to the person who makes the initial report regarding the status of the allegation within the confines of confidentiality.

The senior minister or his/her designee must then report the incident to an appropriate agency within 24 to 48 hours. If deemed necessary by the senior minister, reports will also be made to the Austin Police Department and to the church insurance company within 24-48 hours. Failure to report leaves the church legally vulnerable.

Youth workers should also be alert to any marked change in a youth's behavior or demeanor, such as becoming withdrawn or showing a marked personality change. This should be watched as it may indicate a problem that deserves attention.

The definitions of child abuse as defined in this policy are clear and so care will be taken to handle all reporting with integrity and consciousness. Staff and volunteers will be made aware of and discuss cross cultural considerations and issues of racial, social, and professional privilege in teacher and volunteer trainings. Every effort will be made to handle any concern for a child's safety with cultural considerations and the effects of privilege in mind.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE LAWS

Criminal Sanctions

Sexual misconduct with a child or youth can lead to a felony conviction and imprisonment. The law views child abuse very seriously, as it should. It is highly unlikely that the church insurance policy will provide funds for legal defense in a child abuse case, or pay any portion of a jury verdict assessed against a person who perpetrates or participates in the abuse of a child or children.

VI. CHURCH RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Designated Spokesperson and Position Statement

If an allegation of child abuse occurs within the context of our church activities, the senior minister or her/his designee will be the only official designated spokesperson to represent the church to the congregation, media, and public.

All communications must be conducted in a discrete, informed, and diplomatic way. A clear position statement will be issued by the senior minister. It will include copies of this policy and all procedures used in implementing it, as well as indicating our awareness of the problems of child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse, our concern for victims, and the extensive steps our church has taken to reduce the risk and to create a safe environment for our youth. We will proactively let the public know that we take child sexual abuse seriously, and that we have acted responsibly.

Steps To Take

In the case an actual allegation occurs, these guidelines will be followed:

1. Document all efforts at handling the incident.

2. Report the incident immediately to the Austin Police Department, the Church insurance company, Church attorney, and denominational officials.
3. Contact the Texas State Child Protective Services office to report the incident, following the guidance of our insurance company and attorney.
4. Notify the parents if it would not further endanger the child.
5. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the youth is secured.
6. Do not prejudge the situation but take allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family, extending pastoral resources where needed. The safety and care of the victim are the first priority. If a family member is the suspected perpetrator of abuse to the child, inform Child Protective Services.
7. Treat the accused with dignity and support. The worker will be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is finished. If the person is an employee, arrangements will be made to either maintain or suspend his/her pay until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. Maintenance or suspension of pay will be decided by the Board of Trustees.
8. A report will be made back to the person who makes the initial report regarding the status of the allegation within the confines of confidentiality.
9. Use the prepared public statement to answer the media and to convey news to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

IV. YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER AND STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND SCREENING PROCESS

Qualifications

Our youth workers are people who are committed to excellence in the spiritual education of our youth. They exhibit the highest standards of integrity and conduct in all of their interactions with our young people. They are aware of and uphold healthy interpersonal boundaries. They must be regular attendees of Unity of Austin for a minimum of six months. Transfers from another Unity ministry will be evaluated on a case by case basis to include reference checks from the former ministry.

Any person who is known to have committed a previous act of sexual abuse, misconduct, or physical abuse is absolutely prohibited from serving in any capacity as a youth worker.

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse

Research indicates that an adult who was a victim of abuse or molestation while a minor may possibly find working with children as an adult upsetting to the degree that the adult has not resolved that childhood trauma. In terms of the safety of the children there is some possibility that an adult who has childhood trauma issues not resolved, may act in one of two extremes – may either be oblivious to unsafe conditions or being hyper vigilant and over cautious.

Therefore, it will be the policy of Unity of Austin to meet individually with adult survivors of abuse as we consider their potential role as a volunteer or staff member working with children and youth. Persons who are adult survivors of abuse will not be automatically disqualified from consideration in working with minors. However, adult survivors of child abuse must meet with the minister and the Youth Education Director before beginning their work to address issues that may impact their safety and the safety of our children.

Screening Process

All people, paid or volunteer, who work with minor (under the age of 18) at Unity of Austin, **MUST** complete a confidential screening/application form. Interactions between youth and persons visiting youth for a brief time who are not volunteers or staff (i.e. guest speakers) must be supervised by a screened volunteer or staff member. A child or group of children may at no time be left alone with someone who has not been properly screened.

Persons interested in volunteering to be youth workers at Unity of Austin may contact either the Youth Education Director or the Minister regarding their interest. They will then be required to complete the confidential Application for Youth and Family Ministry Volunteer (see attached form). This form requires disclosure of previous work with young people, information regarding accusations and convictions of child abuse, and three character references. (If applying for a staff position, three professional references will be required). It also includes a required release form authorizing Unity of Austin to conduct a criminal, employment, and administrative records check on the individual. Upon completion of the form, the applicant is personally interviewed by the Youth Education Director under the supervision of the senior minister. The interview process is highly structured and will attempt to ascertain the reasons that the person is volunteering and their personal understanding of Unity principles. Several sample scenarios will be given in the interview that will assess the applicant's maturity level in regards to boundaries with young people. The Youth Director, under the guidance of the senior minister, reserves the right to deny the privilege of volunteering to any person who does not align with the goals of the Youth and Family Ministry and this Protection Policy.

A nationwide criminal background check will be performed on all applicants and character references will be contacted. Once all information has been gathered and is found satisfactory, the individual may begin training to work with youth.

CPR and First Aid Training

Staff members of Unity of Austin who work with youth should maintain a valid CPR/First Aid certification from a program that is a certified provider of CPR courses by the American Heart

association. The program should cover infant and child CPR and first aid. It is highly desirable that volunteers in the department also have this certification.

Training

All youth workers will receive training in appropriate behavior toward youth as covered by this policy. Their training will include: symptoms of child abuse, what adult behaviors are prohibited, reporting procedures, legal consequences of child abuse, and church responses to allegations of abuse.

V. YOUTH WORKER SUPERVISION POLICY

This section applies to supervision of youth while signed in to a church activity, meeting, or class. When youth or a group of youth are on Unity of Austin property, but under the care of their parent or guardian they are required to be within adult supervision at all times. It is the responsibility of the parents or guardians to maintain proper supervision of their children when they are not signed into a church program and under the direct care of the Youth and Family Ministry.

The Two-Adult Rule

It is highly desirable that a minimum of two unrelated adult youth workers shall be present during any church youth activity or meeting that is conducted on the church premises concurrently with regular church services or other church activities where adult church participants are present. It is mandatory that a minimum of two adult youth workers be present in the vicinity during any church youth activity or meeting that is conducted on the church premises when no other adult attended activities are occurring. It is mandatory that a minimum of two adult youth workers be present during any church youth activity or meeting that is conducted off the church premises, and including transportation to and from such activities or meetings. No person younger than 18 can have sole responsibility for children and youth. The individual should be at least 5 years older than members of the group being supervised.

No worker may be alone with a youth or youths in an isolated area on or off the church premises. If there is a legitimate reason, such as the youth's confidentiality, for a youth to meet for a private session with a youth worker, then there must be at least one other church authorized adult present on the premises and aware of the session. All such sessions will be in an observable and interruptible location.

Parental Permission Rule

Parent or guardian permission must be obtained anytime a youth participates in a church activity. If this activity is off church premises and the youth's parent is not present, written permission must be obtained. The senior minister must be informed in a timely manner before any such activities and meetings take place.

All youth must be properly checked in and out of church activities. No child will be released to a person who has not gained approval from the child's guardian(s) to pick that child up. In the case that a staff member or volunteer doubts the authority of the person to pick the child up, the parent or guardian must be contacted to confirm their approval.

Open Door Rule

All classrooms and other areas used by youth are "open door." This means that these spaces are as open and visible as possible- through the installation of glass windows and/or through leaving doors open or cracked open as much as is logistically feasible. They may be visited randomly at any time by church leaders and by youths' parents. It is expected that these visits are conducted with respect for the youth and the workers.

Bathroom doors to the hall are to remain open when children are in the bathroom, and children who use the facilities must be self-sufficient in taking care of personal hygiene needs. No volunteer, child or staff will wipe another (with the exclusion of the staff childcare attendant in the process of changing a diaper in the presence of another approved volunteer or staff person). Parents will be contacted if this need arises.

Youth Interaction Rule

All interactions with and discipline of youth must be respectful, non-violent, non-abusive, and non-physical. **It is mandatory that youth workers do not engage in any of the behaviors listed in the definitions of child abuse found earlier in this policy.**

This Child Protection Policy is intended to be for the benefit of the Church, its volunteers, employees, members, children and parishioners. If the Policy is strictly followed it is less likely that there will be an opportunity for child abuse to be committed, and it will be less likely that a volunteer or employee will be wrongfully charged with child abuse.

Signatures of the Board of Trustees of Unity Church of Austin:

Dan Wilson, President

Julian Bruno, Vice President

Gayla Harris, Treasurer

Carol Moncada, Secretary

Charlotte Brundrette, Member

Janice Goodsell, Member

Steven Fisher, Member

Rev. Anna Shouse, Ph.D., Senior Minister

Date Policy Revision Passed