

**Emerson Unitarian-Universalist Chapel**  
**Safe Congregation Guidelines**  
**Adopted Board of Trustees 8/17/06**

We members of Emerson U-U Chapel recognize the importance of creating a community where all adults and especially our children and youth are safe. We recognize that religious communities – which should be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all their members – are particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, the welcoming spirit and the strong reliance and need for volunteers, especially in children’s and youth’s programs.

We recognize the importance in a religious community of those very factors of trust, welcome and volunteer commitment and the necessity to adopt “reasonable precaution” as a watchword for any ensuing guidelines and requirements regarding the issue of abuse. We further realize that institutions operating in the best possible manner with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free setting.

We recognize that to adequately address the need for safe environments, it will mean change and sacrifice of some convenience, yet we know our responsibility to respond to the reality of our situation and to our children and youth.

In this spirit, we endorse the following guidelines for Chapel events and youth-inclusive activities.

**Screening and Selection of Religious Education Workers**

With the exception of parents assisting in their child’s program or volunteers assisting as required, all other workers who provide direct care or supervision of children at Emerson events must meet the following criteria:

- All volunteers with regular duties in child (through age 10) activities shall have been attending consistently at Chapel activities for at least six months. Advisors with youth (11 – 18) should be active members of the Emerson congregation for at least one year before working with youth, and shall be at least 25 years of age.
- All those adults having regular teaching duties or babysitting duties with children and youth will be screened prior to the start of their duties for criminal and sex-offender convictions. Such screening will be made by appropriate database search.
- The results of such searches shall be known only to the minister, the Director of Religious Education and the Youth Advisor. This group shall determine if any positive database search results shall affect the placement of the teaching or babysitting applicants. Possible responses include deferral, placement with additional supervision, or unlimited placement.
- The documentation of the results of this search shall be kept secured at the church in a locked cabinet or drawer.
- All teachers shall be re-screened at least every three years.

- Paid minor-age babysitters who are not members of the church shall provide at least two references.
- Adult advisors and teachers will sign the **Code of Ethics** form.

### **Supervision Guidelines**

- For all Emerson-sponsored child- and youth-related activities a minimum of two adults be present. Exceptions shall be made only by the Director of Religious Education or, in his/her absence, the Chair of the Religious Education Committee.
- Classrooms shall have a window in the door allowing unobtrusive viewing of the classroom.

### **Transportation Guidelines**

During Emerson-sponsored activities for children and youth that occur off-site from the Chapel:

- All children and youth shall be driven by adults at least 25 years of age who can provide proof of auto insurance. This will not apply to youth drivers that drive to Chapel events from home.
- All passengers in vehicles will wear a seatbelt (one seatbelt per passenger).
- Written permission of the parent/guardian of all minor passengers will be obtained prior to driving to events. This permission will include all relevant details pertaining to the event, i.e. date and location of event, name of driver, times of departure and return.
- Children and youth will not be left unsupervised in a vehicle.

### **Safety Guidelines**

While not inclusive of all safety policies for the Chapel, the following are recommended policies to ensure a physically safe environment for children at Emerson:

- Alcoholic beverages shall not be stored unsecured on Chapel premises between events, such as in the refrigerators.
- An annual survey shall be undertaken to identify significant safety hazards on the Chapel premises.

## **Behavior Guidelines**

While behavior by children toward children cannot be controlled, it will be important to foster an environment of right relations between participants in our community. Toward this:

- Classroom participants are encouraged to develop among themselves at the beginning of each church year a Covenant of Right Relations.
- Reports of inappropriate child behavior that cannot be managed effectively by classroom teachers shall be referred to the Director of Religious Education.

Inappropriate behavior by an adult toward children or youth is a troubling possibility but when suspected must be met with objectivity and firmness, with the spiritual and physical well-being of the child/youth kept as primary importance. A more detailed procedure may be adopted by the congregation but the following shall be the minimum response:

- Suspicions of inappropriate adult-to-child behavior shall be made to the Director of Religious Education, or alternately to the minister.
- Such reports may be kept confidential within the limits of the law at the DRE or minister's discretion, pending investigation. It is understood that the DRE will comply with the law regarding reporting cases of suspected child abuse.
- The DRE or minister may investigate the allegations but shall consult with the District Religious Education consultant. The DRE, or alternately the minister, may remove an adult from child or youth contact, and shall inform the President of the Board of Trustees of the removal, either in consultation before or after the decision is made.