

## **GMUUC CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

It shall be the goal of Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church to provide a safe environment for the physical and emotional well-being of all children participating in church activities.

We recognize that religious communities are particularly vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, the desire to be a welcoming body, and the need for volunteers in children and youth programs. Understanding our responsibility to respond to the reality of these circumstances, we implement these necessary requirements and safeguards.

### **I. Definitions**

The term "child" or "children" shall include all persons under the age of eighteen years.

A "group" is defined as those children who are participating in a given class or specific program or activity.

"Supervision" is defined as the reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and responsibility by adults working with their respective age groups, realizing that the immediacy of such direct supervision will vary with the ages of those in a group and the context of the activity.

### **II. Requirements for Staff and Volunteers**

Workers who provide direct care or supervision to children at Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church (GMUUC) events or programs must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Children's Faith Development teachers and child care providers must have been active participants at GMUUC for at least six months. An "active participant" means regular attendance and involvement in church activities for that period of time. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation of suitability of the applicant for working with children.

The six-month rule may be waived with the authorization of the Children's Faith Development Committee Chair, as in the case of a new staff member.

All paid and volunteer teachers must undergo a national criminal background check before assuming their duties. The Chair of the Children's Faith Development Committee (CFDC) will be responsible for ensuring the background checks are completed. The results of the background check will be reviewed by the CFDC Chair and by the Personnel Committee who shall make a determination as to the candidate's suitability. The decision of the CFDC Chair and Personnel Committee is final. There is no appeal process. Teacher candidates may submit a claim for reimbursement for the cost of the background check.

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- 2) Teachers must be at least eighteen years old. Workers under eighteen years old may serve as helpers for nursery and event childcare. An adult meeting the Policy requirements must supervise them.
- 3) Before serving as a teacher, all paid and volunteer teachers must complete an approved course on maintaining healthy boundaries when working with children and youth.
- 4) All staff and volunteers working with children must sign the GMUUC Code of Conduct.

### **III. Responsibilities of Parents/Guardians/Responsible Adults**

- 1) Parents/guardians must complete an information sheet (contact information, allergy info, etc.) for each child participating in GMUUC classes or activities. Blank information sheets are available in the sanctuary as well as in the classroom, and will also be available online. Parents of children visiting for the first time will be invited to complete the forms upon arrival. Forms shall have space to list all adults who are permitted to pick up a child and all adults who are specifically prohibited from picking up a child.
- 2) Parents/guardians/responsible adults must remain on site while their children and their children's guests are attending GMUUC classes or activities unless by prior agreement with the Children's Faith Development staff.
- 3) Teachers are responsible for children until they are reunited with their parents/guardians/responsible adults at the end of a class or activity.

### **IV. Supervision Guidelines**

A minimum of two adults will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised regardless of the number of participants, location or activity. The only exception to this rule will be during transport of children from one location to another for a church-sponsored event.

Corporal punishment or abusive language will not be used under any circumstances.

No child shall be allowed to leave or be taken from GMUUC property, either unattended or in a group without specific parental permission.

To reduce the possibility of kidnapping, children will be released only to the adult who brought them unless prior permission has been given.

During field trips or other church events requiring transportation of children or youth, written consent must be given by the parent/guardian/responsible adult for the child to be transported.

## **V. Conduct for Adults Working with Children**

Adults who work with children and youth at GMUUC are expected always to have the best interests of children and youth at heart. They are expected to nurture their physical, emotional, and spiritual growth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and hopefully, fun. No one's enjoyment should ever be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. In this manner, we hope to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives.

To accomplish the above there are specific expectations that GMUUC has for employees and volunteers.

### **"Friendship" with Youth**

Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for friendship is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility. A "friendship" is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other does. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. Therefore, it is the adult volunteer or paid staff's responsibility to avoid or discourage inappropriate friendships.

### **Unofficial Contact with Youth**

Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. If an adult wishes to be in contact with a youth outside of the normal channels of church events, activities must take place with the knowledge and consent of the youth's parents/guardians. Adults can protect themselves from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the parents informed of their actions.

### **Sexualized Behavior**

It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is inappropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for instance, or to make "double entendres." Physical expressions of affection such as hugs certainly have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them.

### **Confidentiality**

If an adult learns that a child or youth is the victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc., it is GMUUC's policy that this information be communicated to the Church's professional staff immediately. **CONFIDENTIALITY IS NOT SECRET**

**KEEPING.** A covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence, however, when the information indicates harm to self or others report the incident to the Minister, President, or Children's Faith Development Committee Chair immediately.

## **VI. Reporting and Response Procedures**

If a worker, volunteer, or any other adult suspects abuse of a minor during a GMUUC program, event, or elsewhere, the adult must immediately make an oral report to the Minister. If the minister's position is vacant, the report should be made to the President or Children's Faith Development Committee Chair. It shall be GMUUC policy that suspected abuse of a child shall be reported immediately or as soon as practically possible to a child protective agency or a local law enforcement office. This shall be the responsibility of the Minister.

With the exception of the Minister, President and Children's Faith Development Committee Chair, the matter should remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution, could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, or may endanger the child.

If the reported abuse involves a worker or volunteer at GMUUC, that person shall immediately be relieved of any duties involving supervision, care or teaching of children and youth at GMUUC until the matter is resolved.

## **VII. Awareness and Implementation**

This policy will be communicated to the congregation and implemented as follows:

- 1) Upon adoption, this policy will be distributed to the congregation.
- 2) The policy will be posted and kept updated on the GMUUC website.
- 3) Staff and volunteers will receive a copy of the Policy and be asked to sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the Policy.
- 4) The Policy will be included in all new member information packets.
- 5) Staff and volunteers who supervise or care for the children and youth of our community will be required to agree to a national criminal background check. Background checks will be kept in a locked file.

## **Acceptance with this Policy and Code of Conduct**

Any church employee or volunteer working with children or youth who disagrees with any provision of the Policy or the Code of Conduct is free to discuss their opinions with the leadership of the church, but must abide by the Policy/Code as written. Signing the Code indicates the signatory has read the Policy and the Code and agrees to abide by

them. The signatory further acknowledges that failure to abide by the Code or the provisions of the Policy will result in dismissal from either paid or volunteer positions involving children and youth at GMUUC.

*Adopted June 8, 2014*

# Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church Code of Conduct

## **Statement of Position:**

Adults and older youth in leadership roles in this congregation are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relations is to be realized. Respect on the leader's part must include recognition of the absolute right of children and youth to the privacy of their bodies and minds.

## **Statement of Expectation of Behavior:**

As specified in the GMUUC Child and Youth Protection Policy all compensated and volunteer staff are expected to adhere to the following behavior:

- Religious Education Workers shall not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse; this includes behavior or language that is personally threatening or demeaning.
- Religious Education Workers shall neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior nor engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.
- Religious Education Workers shall not allow the use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol or any illegal activities among children or youth.

## **Statement of Agreement:**

I have read and understand the GMUUC Child and Youth Protection Policy and the Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by the provisions of this Policy and the Code of Conduct and to honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this congregation.

Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_