

1st Congregational Unitarian Universalist Church of Harvard
Procedure for Reporting and Responding
to an allegation of abuse to a child or youth

Physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse of any child or youth is wrong. Such abuse by an adult or youth working, either as a volunteer or in a paid capacity, is a violation of the church's Code of Ethics for Leaders of Children and Youth.

All persons working with children or youth are required to sign a Code of Ethics, which acknowledges one's understanding of the church policy regarding abuse and affirms one's willingness to refrain from such abuse.

Reporting an alleged abuse

Anyone witnessing or hearing about an alleged incident of abuse to a child or youth by an adult or older youth who is a leader in the religious education program, or is him or herself a victim of such abuse, must report the allegation to either the Minister, the Director of Religious Education, or to the President of the church immediately.

The Minister, Director of Religious Education, and the President of the church are Primary Contacts.

A written incident report will be required of the reporter as witnessed by the Primary Contact. A Response Procedure Handout will be given to initial reporter upon making the report.

Responding to an allegation of abuse

Upon notification of alleged abuse, a Primary Contact notifies the two other Primary Contacts.

The Minister contacts the alleged perpetrator and informs him/her that a report of alleged child abuse in which s/he is the accused has been filed in church. The Minister requests that the accused meet with the Minister to document the accused's response to the alleged abuse incident(s).

A Response Procedure Handout will be given to the accused during the meeting with the Minister.

Minister must notify the Primary Contacts and the Response Team of the allegation. It is the duty of the Minister to call a meeting of the Response Team. The Response Team will investigate the incident and determine a course of action for all parties involved and, if needed, the congregation as a whole.

The Response Team will contact all parties involved in the allegation and notify them of the decided course of action. The Minister will be required to keep a secured file of 1) the initial report, 2) the accused's response report, and 3) a written course of action (to be completed by a Response Team member).

Response Procedure Handout

The First Congregational Unitarian Church of Harvard does not tolerate abuse within the church community. Believing that a safe environment for all adults and all children is crucial to the well being of the life of our church community, we acknowledge the we need to prepare ourselves to be able to immediately respond to allegations of abuse. Our major goal is prevention; however, where is prevention appears to fail, our responses will be swift and timely.

- At the first incident, notification, or witness of alleged abuse, an Initial Reporter should contact, and file a written report, with the Minister, the Director of Religious Education, or the current Church President. These individuals are known as the Primary Contacts.
- The Primary Contact will notify the two other Primary Contacts, as well as the members of the Response Team. *This notification will be done within 24 hours of filing the initial report.*
- The Minister will contact the alleged perpetrator and informs him/her that a report of alleged child abuse in which s/he is the accused has been filed in church. *This will be done immediately after the filing of the initial report.*
- The Minister will request that the accused meet with the Minister, *within 24 hours*, to document the accused's response to the alleged abuse incident(s). This documentation, along with the initial report, will be presented to the Response Team (see Definitions page).
- The Minister and other members of the Response Team will respond to and investigate the allegation of abuse and determine a course of action appropriate to all involved individuals and the church community as a whole.
- The Healing and Justice Making document (attached) will provide guidance to the Response Team in carrying out their main focus, which is the promotion of healing and justice for all involved.
- In accordance the Mass. General Laws ch.119, 51A, if illegal actions are suspected, the Minister or Director of Religious Education will report the incident to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services and/or to the local police.
- To the degree that it is possible, the Primary Contacts and the Response Team will maintain confidentiality in regard to the investigation of an alleged abuse and to the course of action determined as a result of confirmed abuse.

The Response Team

Members: The Response Team of the First Congregational Unitarian Church of Harvard is made up of members, who include the Minister, either the Director of Religious Education or the current church president, and two members appointed annually by the Board of Trustees of the church.

The two appointed members will be members of the church in good standing, deemed to be of reputable character, and able to ensure the confidentiality with regard to specifics of their work.

All Response Team members will be well educated on the Right Relations policy of the church, which includes the Code of Ethics for working with children and youth and will become knowledgeable about available resources for adults and children. They will also become familiar with the Massachusetts state law regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse of children and youth.

Charge: The Response Team will respond to and investigate allegation(s) of abuse and determine a course of action appropriate to all involved individuals and the church community as a whole.

The Healing and Justice Making document (attached) will provide guidance to the Response Team in carrying out their main focus, which is the promotion of healing and justice for all involved.

The Response Team does not have the legal authority or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. Their charge instead is to protect members of the church community, both children and adults, both victims (alleged or actual) and the accused.

The Response Team will work to protect and support all parties involved in a manner that allows the church community to feel safe.

The Response Team will be responsible for:

1. coordinating support for all parties involved, including the reporter;
2. oversee a process in which all parties are treated with dignity and respect;
3. responding to questions from the public media; and
4. facilitating a healing process for the church community.

Incident Report of Alleged Abuse of a Child or Youth

Today's date: _____

Name of reporter: _____

Name of Primary Contact (Minister/DRE/President): _____

Reporter's relationship to the alleged victim: _____

Reporter's relationship to the accused: _____

Description of incident (include who, where, when, witnesses names, and all other pertinent details. Add additional pages as necessary):

I have received a copy of the Response Procedure Handout. (Reporter's initials) _____

By signing below, I (reporter) attest that this is a true and honest report.

Signature of Reporter _____

By signing below, I (primary contact) attest that this information has been presented to me as stated in description above.

Signature of Primary Contact: _____

The Accused's Response to an Allegation of Abuse of a Child or Youth

Today's date: _____

Name: _____

Name of Primary Contact (Minister/DRE/President): _____

Accused's relationship to the victim: _____

Accused's relationship to the accused: _____

Accused's response to allegation. Please include description of incident (include who, where, when, witnesses, and all pertinent details. Add additional pages as necessary):

I have received a copy of the Response Procedure Handout. (initials) _____

By signing below, I attest that this is a true and honest report.

Signature of Reporter _____

By signing below, I (primary contact) attest that this information has been presented to me as stated in description above.

Signature of Primary Contact: _____

Definitions for Abuse Policy

Abuse: any emotional, physical, verbal, or sexual act or expression towards another that is harmful

Accused: one charged with committing alleged abuse

Alleged abuse: abuse that is asserted to be true but not proven

Child: person under the age of twelve

Incident Report: a form to be completed by the Initial Reporter and witnessed by the Primary Contact, giving details of the alleged incident(s) of abuse.

Initial Reporter: a victim or witness who first reports an incident of alleged abuse to a Primary Contact

Primary Contact: Either the Minister, the Director of Religious Education, or the current church president. This person is the first member of the Response Team to be notified of an allegation of abuse and will help the Initial Reporter complete an Incident Report .

Response Team: a team made up of two Primary Contacts, specifically the Minister, the Director of Religious Education, or the church president, and two Board appointed members of the congregation. The team as a whole will respond to and investigate allegations and confirmed incidents of abuse and determine a course of action appropriate to all involved individuals and the church community as a whole.

Victim: one who has been harmed by act or aggression of another

Youth: a young person 12-18 years old

Healing and Justice Making Guide

The following is adapted from “The Elements of Justice-making” published by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. It is included to provide guidance to the congregation as a whole and the Response Team in particular. It describes some elements in the healing process following allegations of abuse.

1. Truth telling: This element of justice making is concerned with breaking the silence that usually surrounds abuse, the silence that allows it to continue. Truth telling is not the same as fact-finding. By “truth” we mean not only the facts about the abuse, but also the emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the person’s experience. When people speak out about abuse, the abuse loses some of its potency.
2. Acknowledging the Violation: The victim must be heard and know that s/he is heard. The individuals and institutions to whom the victim tells the truth must listen, and then acknowledge what happened was abusive and should never have happened. If the individuals and the institutions listen to the victim’s account but never condemn the alleged behavior, they are in part sanctioning the behavior and participating in the injustice. Acknowledging the violation means, in essence, saying “We believe you. You have been harmed by these actions. The behavior was wrong and should never happen. We regret that it happened to you.” Setting in motion the appropriate response procedures as soon as a disclosure or complain is made can provide a partial acknowledgment of the violation.
3. Compassion: Compassion means “suffering with”. When we hear accounts of others’ suffering, we often try to take action too quickly, try to explain it away, minimize it, or avoid dealing with their emotions so as to avoid our own anger or pain. If we can instead listen empathically and communicate our emotion about what the person tells us, and be witnesses to the pain, we can help counteract the isolation which victims and offenders feel. Compassion creates a connection between the victim and us. This connection is the first step toward healing the damage brought about by the abuse.
4. Protecting the Vulnerable: Once we are aware of the potential abuse, we must do whatever we can to prevent it. If someone is accused of abuse, steps must be taken to prevent possible further harm. If we do not do so, we are colluding in the harm which may already have occurred.
5. Accountability: Institutions rightfully hold their representative accountable for their actions in their institutional roles. When individuals violate their roles, the institution should confront them officially and, based on their misconduct, impose consequences. If the consequences are minimal, the behavior may continue. Holding abusers accountable for their actions provides them with an opportunity to acknowledge the repercussions of their actions and to begin to take

responsibility for them. Holding an abuser accountable is an important step in the restoration of their health and is also part of the victim's healing process.

6. Restitution: What is lost or damaged when abuse occurs can never be fully restored. Nevertheless, some restitution can and must be made. Restitution does not mean "Fixing"; it is a "returning to the rightful owner what was taken away", or "payment for damages." Restitution is a tangible means of acknowledging the harm done while contributing to the repair of the damage. In addition to its symbolic value, it is helpful in a material sense, since victims may incur expenses such as therapy costs, medical bills, and time lost from work.
7. Vindication: Vindication for a victim is the ultimate goal of justice. The key to physical, emotional, and spiritual healing is to be set free from the multiple layers of suffering created by the abuse.