

U. U. A. NEW HAMPSHIRE/VERMONT DISTRICT ETHICS AND SAFETY GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Our religious heritages –Universalist, Unitarian, and Unitarian Universalist – compel us to address the important, widespread, and complex social issues of interpersonal violence and abuse. Our faith is a covenantal faith with a relational theology at its core. Hospitality and justice are essential elements of our covenant with one another and with the sacred. The lifeblood of our covenant is community: worshipping community, lifespan learning community, social justice community, caring community. Where we gather in peer, intergenerational and/or family communities of faith and trust, we call that place holy ground. When we gather we welcome others – newcomers and strangers – and we welcome our true, best selves. As we elicit the best in others we elicit the best in ourselves and strive to faithfully live our Unitarian Universalist values and principles.

We, the New Hampshire/Vermont District of Unitarian Universalist Societies, recognize the importance of creating communities where everyone - children, youth, adults and elders - are safe. We recognize that religious communities must be dedicated to the creation of safe environments for all our members and friends. In our religious communities we recognize the presence of a high level of trust, a welcoming of newcomers, and a strong reliance on volunteers to serve in our programs. Given these factors we deem it necessary to adopt ethics and safety guidelines to guard against incidents of interpersonal violence. And we further realize that institutions operating in the best ethical manner possible with all due concern for children, youth and vulnerable adults still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free environment.

Our faith calls us to create the kind of safe and non-violent environments that lend themselves to justice in human interactions. In this spirit, we endorse the following guidelines for events conducted under the purview of the New Hampshire/Vermont District, and encourage our member congregations to adopt similar guidelines for local activities involving children, youth, adults and elders.

CODES OF ETHICS for RELIGIOUS LEADERS

[available on District Website www.nhvt.uua.org]

Our professional religious leaders agree to be aware of and to abide by their respective codes of professional ethics:

for district staff, the *Code of Professional Practice for Members of the UUA District Staff*;

for ministers, the *UUMA Code of Professional Practice*;

for religious educators, the *LREDA Code of Professional Practices*;

for church musicians, the *UU Musicians Network Code of Ethics*; and

for church administrators, the *Association of UU Administrators Code of Ethics*.

Leaders of our youth and young adult communities abide by their codes of ethics:

for adults, the *Code of Conduct for Adults Working with Youth*;

for peer leaders, the *Code of Ethics for Peer Leaders in Young Adult and Campus Ministry*;

for youth, the *Code of Ethics for Continental YRUU*.

SAFETY GUIDELINES

Safety Guidelines will encompass the following topics:

- I. Safety and Protection for District Leaders
- II. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth
- III. Supervision Requirements
- IV. Response and Reporting Procedures
- V. District Education and Training

These guidelines will apply to all New Hampshire/ Vermont District (NH/VT District) sponsored events such as, but not limited to:

- District Conferences, Annual Meetings, Retreats for Religious Professionals, Trainings;
- Religious Education Conferences, Trainings and Cluster Events;
- District Youth Council (DYC) Meetings, DYC Conferences, DYC sanctioned Youth Conferences hosted by congregations, and DYC sponsored Trainings; and
- Star Island Conference Center events, if co-sponsored by the District.

I. Safety and Protection for District Leaders

These guidelines cover two varieties of security procedures. Reference checks seek non-public information, and concentrate on application process, interview procedures, and reference examinations with persons who are acquainted with the person under consideration. Background checks, as we use the term, search public data banks such as criminal conviction records. In order to get the most complete and accurate representation of workers, it is important to complete both of these complementary procedures.

District Staff (District Executive and Program Consultant) and volunteer District leaders working with children, youth, and adults in vulnerable circumstances will complete primary screening procedures and participate in safety education and risk management trainings. District Staff and volunteer leaders acting in the name of the District are protected and insured by the District's legal counsel.

It is the responsibility of the District Staff (District Executive and Program Consultant) or the designated District conference coordinators and DYC conference adult coordinators to obtain these security documents for adults working with children and youth. District Staff or designated District leaders will secure the reference checks and background checks. The District will pay for these security procedures and the screening documents will be stored in a locked file in the District Office.

II. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth

Screening

With the exception of parents assisting in their child's program, all other workers who provide direct care or supervision of children or teenage youth at New Hampshire/

Vermont District events, including adults serving on the District Youth Council, must meet the following criteria:

- Advisors for youth must have been active in a NH/VT District congregation for at least six months. It is strongly recommended that advisors for high school aged youth be at least 25 years old, with a recommended minimum of 22 years of age for middle school youth. For nursery care and all other grade-levels, it is recommended that workers be at least 18 years of age.
- All compensated workers must consent to a criminal background check and such check must be performed.
- We require a criminal background checks for volunteers who work with any at risk populations. We recommend building a directory of screened adults to work as advisors during youth events.
- All applicants must complete an application form and supply three references. These references should be people who have known the applicant for at least three years, preferably in relation to previous work with children or youth. References should be contacted and essential information recorded.
- All workers must sign the *Code of Conduct for Persons Working With Children and Youth*.

III. Supervision Requirements

A minimum of two adults must be scheduled to supervise groups. Exceptions may be made by the primary on-site adult leader.

For the purposes of these requirements a “group” is defined as those minors who have been assigned to a nursery, preschool, or children’s program as well as youth who are taking part in a planned, organized component of their program.

In addition to the two-adult rule, minimum adult-to-child/youth ratios are as follows:

- Nursery/Preschool—1:3/1:5
- Elementary—1:6
- Middle School—1:8
- High School—1:10

If the host site for an event involving children and youth has established more stringent adult-to-child/youth ratios, those of the host site will be used instead of the above ratios.

Corporal punishment may not be used under any circumstances.

If an adult other than a parent or guardian has a private one-to-one meeting with a child or youth during the event, another worker in the program shall be notified about the meeting, either before the meeting or promptly afterward.

No adult, other than a parent, guardian, or sponsor is to be alone with a child or youth off-site.

Youth who are attending a NH/VT District sponsored event must be accompanied by an on-site advisor. Each advisor may sponsor up to ten youth per event. It is the responsibility of the organizers of each event to ensure that each youth has a sponsor.

Transportation To and From District Events

It is the responsibility of the participant's parents/guardians or local congregation to provide safe transportation to and from NH/VT District events. The NH/VT District recommends that all children and youth ride with adults who meet the requirements below.

Transportation During District Events

- All drivers must be at least 25 years of age, hold a valid driver's license, and must provide proof of automobile insurance.
- The vehicle must be equipped with seatbelts for all passengers, and everyone wears seatbelts.
- Written permission of the parent/guardian of all minor passengers will be obtained prior to being transported. This permission will include all relevant details of the event, such as date and location, name of driver(s), time of departure and time of return.
- No driver may consume alcohol or use any form of drug that can affect physical or mental performance during or before carrying out his/her duty as a driver.
- A minimum of two adults must accompany a group going off-site. Exceptions may be made by the primary on-site adult leader.

IV. Reporting and Response Procedures

Reporting Procedures

All persons affiliated with a NH/VT District event, including compensated workers, volunteers, adults, or youth, who acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that one or more youth at a District event has been sexually molested or exploited, injured or been the victim of significant objectionable conduct shall immediately report the incident to the person in charge of the event.

Every person in charge of an event to whom a report of molestation, injury, or objectionable conduct is made shall immediately:

- determine whether they occupy the status of a person required under the law of the jurisdiction in which the incident occurred to report such incident to law enforcement authorities, and if so, the person shall report the incident to such authorities;
- report the incident in writing to either the District Executive and the Program Consultant of the NH/VT District; and
- report the incident to the parent of the apparent victim (unless the parent is the abuser). In addition, it is advisable that the incident be reported to the Minister of the congregation with whom the apparent victim is affiliated, unless otherwise advised by the District Executive and Program Consultant of the NH/VT District.

Adults who, although neither a person in charge of an event nor a person affiliated with the event, nevertheless acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that one or more

youth at a NH/VT District event has been sexually molested or exploited, injured, or been the victim of significant objectionable conduct,

- must consider whether they are required to report the incident to the law enforcement authorities of the jurisdiction in which the incident occurred, and if so, report the incident,
- notify the parent of the apparent victim (unless the parent is the abuser), and
- should, unless good reasons exist for doing otherwise, report the incident to the District Executive and Program Consultant of the NH/VT District.

Definitions of persons required to report, and what must be reported, under the laws of New Hampshire and Vermont, and an explanation of procedures to follow when making a statutorily required report, are found in Appendix A to these guidelines.

Response to Media

Only the District Executive or Program Consultant (or her/his specific designee) may speak for the NH/VT District in response to media inquiries concerning an alleged incident of abuse, injury, or objectionable conduct. Please see Appendix B to these requirements for further information.

Removal of an Adult Advisor

Should circumstances or events arise that indicate that an adult advisor is no longer a suitable person for working with children or youth, said adult will be removed from involvement or contact with children or youth. If the advisor in question is a minister, the UUA's Office of Ethics and Safety must be contacted (617-948-6462). Any person with concerns about an adult advisor shall contact the District Program Consultant or District Executive, who will assess the need for removal. The District Staff then will consult with necessary parties, including appropriate leadership of the advisor's local congregation and the New Hampshire/Vermont District Youth Council (NH/VT DYC) to determine whether such action is necessary. The District Staff then will inform the NH/VT District Board President and their appropriate supervisor in the District Services Staff Group of the UUA.

In taking any such action, the District Staff will afford the affected worker or advisor an opportunity to know the charges against him or her, to know the evidence, and source thereof, supporting such charges, and the right to reply to or rebut such charges.

It is understood that such action will be handled with due caution and discretion, and that the District Staff of the NH/VT District has the full backing and support of the NH/VT District Board in implementing this policy. Because of potential exposure to charges of discrimination or other legal issues, the Executive Committee of the Board shall be promptly advised of the circumstances surrounding any removal action under this policy.

V. District Education and Training

Education

Program Consultant and trained facilitators will be available to lead annual risk management workshops for District leaders and for congregational lay and professional leaders at District conferences or cluster events.

Resources will be available to congregations and leaders. Recommended resources and training materials will be purchased for the NH/VT District Library. A list of available resources will be included in District mailings to the congregations.

To ensure that District leaders continue to maintain the ethics and safety of district events, a task force appointed by the NH/VT District Board will review the Guidelines and make appropriate revisions every two years.

These Ethics and Safety Guidelines have been developed specifically for District events and an implementation process was followed where input from lay and professional congregational leaders and District stakeholders was solicited. See Appendix C for further information.

These Ethics and Safety Guidelines pertain to events conducted under the purview of the NH/VT District, though congregations are strongly encouraged to use these to develop their own safe congregation guidelines and practices.

District Safety Forms

[available on District Website www.nhvt.uua.org]

- *Code of Conduct for Adults Working With Children and Youth*
- *Accordance with Code of Conduct*
- *Child Care and Youth Worker Application Form, Part 1*
- *Child Care and Youth Worker Application Form, Part 2*
- *Emergency Medical Release and Authorization Form*
- *Incident Report*

Appendix A

Mandatory Reporting Statutes in the New Hampshire/ Vermont District

Mandated reporters of child or elder abuse or neglect in all 50 states and District of Columbia are: medical personnel, school personnel, daycare providers, social service personnel, mental health care personnel and law enforcement personnel. New Hampshire requires all aforementioned persons, (**including** clergy members) to be mandated reporters. In addition, the state of New Hampshire requires **all persons** to report abuse. The state does not recognize privileged communication except between an attorney and their client.

The state of Vermont does recognize privileged communication for clergy when acting in their role as spiritual advisors and when that communication is intended to be confidential by the parties involved. Clergy must report any abuse/neglect that they observe while performing their duties, including some other role different than “priest and penitent.” When a member of the clergy receives information about abuse or neglect of a child in a manner other than as described above, he or she is required to report on the basis of that information even though he or she may have also received a report of abuse or neglect about the same person or incident in the manner described above.

The extent of the knowledge that triggers the legal duty to report is “a reasonable cause to suspect” abuse/neglect. The report must be made to a child protection agency or a law enforcement agency. Reporting only to a parent or relative will **not** satisfy the reporter’s legally-mandated duty to report. Every state and the District of Columbia has a law that absolutely protects any reporter of abuse/neglect from civil and criminal liability as long as the report was made in “good faith.”

New Hampshire and Vermont have child abuse/neglect hotlines:

- ◆ New Hampshire: 800-894-5533
- ◆ Vermont: 800-552-7906

THE NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT HOTLINE TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

- ◆ Call: 800-422-4453
- ◆ TDD: 800-222-4453

Appendix B

Responding to the Media

If the media contacts a congregation's leader or District entity about an alleged abusive situation involving the District, only the District Executive or Program Consultant (or her/his specific designee) should speak for the New Hampshire/ Vermont District. In general, the following requirements apply for these situations with the public media:

- As long as the speaker has reason to believe that the incident has been reported to the District Executive or Program Consultant serving the New Hampshire/ Vermont District, the media should be referred to these professional staff for a substantive response to the inquiry.
- Because of the issue of confidentiality, in the best interests of the child or youth, we cannot discuss specific cases in a public context. Particularly if litigation seems possible, it is important that we protect both the District and the interests of the child or youth. An appropriate response to further media inquiry is for the speaker to state that s/he wishes to protect the confidentiality of the apparent victim and cannot comment on the details of the situation for that reason.
- The District Executive or Program Consultant can freely discuss the steps the District has taken to guard against abusive situations.
- In any subsequent litigation, details provided by any person with even apparent authority of the New Hampshire/ Vermont District or any of its member congregations may be used against those entities.

Appendix C

Implementation Process

October/November 2005 President + congregation on suggestions for revisions and	draft Guidelines mailed to every congregation with the recommendations that a congregational team (Board Religious Educator) presents and educates the the draft Guidelines and solicits notes concerns
November 5, 2005 Gathering	present draft Guidelines at Congregational Presidents
January 1, 2006 District	congregations send feedback to Program Consultant at office
November-February	District Staff present Guidelines and solicit feedback from stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NH/VT District Board and Staff• NH/VT District RE Committee• NH/VT District DYC leaders• NH/VT Ministers• NH/VT congregations' religious educators• NH/VT congregations' youth advisors• Site coordinators and staff for District events
March 4, 2006 District	Program Consultant presents revised Guidelines to NH/VT Board
March-April	Program Consultant meets with stakeholders to resolve concerns and further revise Guidelines
February-April on	publish Guidelines articles in <i>Progress</i> , <i>REConnections</i> , and District website
May	final revised Guidelines included in congregational packet
June	vote to adopt Guidelines at June NH/VT Board Meeting