

# **Child and Youth RE Policies**

## **1. General Information**

The supervision of children and youth while on church grounds and during church functions is a very important aspect of maintaining a safe congregation. Parents or guardians of children and youth are responsible for their children at all functions and field trips, unless specifically left in the care of a childcare volunteer or staff member during religious education programming.

Nursery care is available from 10:45 am-12:15 pm. When beginning together in worship for services, children will be released to classes and meet with their teachers in the Narthex to walk together to the classroom.

15 minutes after service, parents are expected to pick up their children from the respective teacher or nursery staff. At this time, parents again resume supervision responsibility for their children until leaving the grounds. No child through elementary grades will be dismissed from religious education without an appropriate parent or guardian. Children and youth in middle or high school may be dismissed on their own.

### **1.1 Definitions & Forms**

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term "volunteer" means anyone involved in a Sunday morning Religious Education, Childcare, or in overnight activities involving minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

The following forms can be found in the Director of Lifespan Religious Education's (DLRE) office:

Registration for Children and Youth Registration Cards	Visitor
Volunteer Application Conduct	Code of
Incident Report Activity Permission Slip	Youth
Our Whole Lives Permission Slip Permission Slip	Coming of Age

## 1.2 Selection of Volunteers

All persons who desire to volunteer with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

### **1. Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with GUUF for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

### **2. Transportation Rule**

For any volunteers who will be transporting children or youth, they must have a current driver's license, current automobile insurance, and be 25 years or older.

### **3. Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous congregational affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the GUUF.

### **4. Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position. This will occur with the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE), Religious Education (RE) Coordinator, or the Minister.

### **5. Training**

The Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) will provide training on these policies, the state laws regarding mandated reporters, curricula to be administered in the program, and classroom behavior management. Training is a requirement to volunteer or work in the program. All volunteers must have completed training within the last three years to volunteer in the program.

### **6. Code of Conduct**

All volunteers will be required to sign the code of conduct regarding ethics in working with children and youth.

## **7. Sexual Predators Database**

Every volunteer shall have their name screened in the registered sex offenders database to ensure there is no sexual assault or crime committed by the individual.

## **8. Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteers as defined above. The background check should be resubmitted every three years.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing GUUF to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the GUUF.

## **1.4 RE Staff Members**

Religious Education (RE) Staff are required to submit to a criminal background check every three years. RE staff includes the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE), the RE Coordinator, a Youth Director, Child Care Workers, or any individual receiving compensation

from GUUF for providing services to children and youth. RE Staff should be aged 25 or older, with the exception of child care workers who may be 18 or older.

All RE Staff, as well as the Minister, are considered mandated reporters by South Carolina in regards to the abuse or neglect of minors.

## 1.5 Supervision of Children and Youth

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation by the Minister or DLRE.

Groups of children and/or youth shall not be left unattended in a classroom.

Any social event taking place outside the church, attended by church youth, that does not have approved sponsors is not a church-sponsored event. Parents retain responsibility for their own youth in these situations.

If a child or youth leaves or “disappears” from a class, meeting, event or activity, a reasonable attempt will be made to find him/her. If a child in 8th grade or under has not been found within 10 minutes, parents will be contacted and, if necessary, the police will be called. If a youth in

9th grade or older has not been found within 30 minutes, parents/ guardians will be notified.

### 1.5.1. Coming of Age Mentors

During the Coming of Age Program, an adult volunteer is assigned as a mentor to each youth. These meetings are one-on-one and should only occur in the public eye; such as a coffee shop or public area in a library or in the Fellowship Hall at GUUF during other activities. Mentors should take extra caution to never be alone with youth out of the line of sight of others.

### 1.5.2 Teenage Volunteers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for volunteers who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage volunteers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must complete an application and provide references.
- Must be at least 5 years older than the group of children they are volunteering with.
- Must have guardian/parental permission.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

## 1.6 Check-In/Check-Out Policy

Early drop-off is available for children age 5 and under, who are remaining in nursery care, 15 minutes prior to service. All children/youth

are welcome in the service. Children/youth in Kindergarten through High School begin Sunday programming in the Sanctuary with the rest of the congregation, unless supervised by an adult in the classroom. Teachers are not responsible for children until the program begins. Approximately 15 minutes after the service begins, children and youth will be dismissed to their classes.

Children ages Pre-K age 5 and under are to be escorted to their appropriate class by parent/guardian/designee. Unregistered newcomers/visitors of all ages should also be brought to class and checked in until they have completed the registration form.

The RE Program runs approximately 15 minutes after the start of service to 15 minutes after the scheduled end of service. Please allow the classes to finish their closing before picking up your children/and youth.

Dismissal and pick-up for children will work as follows:

- Ages Infant through elementary age will be held in their classes for parents to pick up. Children must be picked up by 15 minutes after the service. There will be a sign out sheet and any adult or teen picking up an infant or child must be listed on the registration form. Identification will be requested if the individual is not recognized by the RE teacher or child care provider.
- Middle and High School will be released without parent pick-up and parents should communicate with their middle/high school youth what the family expectations are when class is released.

***There is no supervision for children and youth after the end of class.*** The expectation is that children/youth will not leave the building

without expressed parental consent. Families are responsible for communicating these expectations.

Parents/guardians who, on occasion, will not be on the premises while children/youth are attending RE or other church-sponsored activities are required to communicate with the teacher/sponsor and leave a phone number where they may be contacted, or a name and phone number of an alternate contact person. Children in elementary school and younger, must either be with an older sibling or paired with another family or individual who will be the on-site adult contact.

## 1.7 Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at GUUF. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

If your child comes down with a communicable disease (such as chicken pox), this should be immediately reported to the DLRE.



## 1.8 Medications Policy

It is the policy of GUUF not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. An exception to this is for overnight trips in which children or youth have scheduled medication. There is a special form for parents to sign releasing GUUF to administer medication at that time.

Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) to develop a plan of action. Parents of children and youth who have serious medical concerns and allergies are required to specify issues on the program registration form. Please discuss your child/youth's condition with the DRE and RE teacher(s). Parents are responsible for providing updates to ensure information is current and accurate and emergency medications are carried in clearly/appropriately labeled packaging.

## 1.9 Food Allergies

Parents are asked to list all food allergies on their registration forms each year as well as communicate directly to the RE staff or volunteer in their child's classroom. Allergies are noted on attendance records for staffing purposes in the case of a substitute.

## 1.10 Discipline Policy

It is the policy of GUUF not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Issues of discipline will be addressed through redirection, naming the classroom or church covenant, and asking the DLRE or parents to pull

the child out of class in cases of extreme disruption or where the safety of any child is a concern. Workers should consult with the DLRE if further assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## 1.11 Behavioral Guidelines

The Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship's principles respect the uniqueness of each individual and support the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means. Our RE classes and church-sponsored activities endeavor to provide engaging opportunities for young people with a wide range of temperaments, interests, and learning styles.

We expect children and youth to behave in ways which respect the feelings, opinions, and actions of others, as well as any property belonging to others and to the church community.

A concern for safety predominates. Behavior that risks or inflicts physical harm to oneself or to others is never an acceptable choice.

Teachers, sponsors or caregivers who see children or youth making inappropriate choices of behavior shall discuss it with them. Alternate choices may be offered, along with potential consequences. Sometimes the only effective means of intervention is to empathize and then to re-state behavioral expectations. If necessary, the individual may need to be separated from the group and brought to their parent/guardian/family.

We will make reasonable accommodations as appropriate to meet the needs of children and youth with special needs. Please work with our DLRE to help us best know how to help your child be a part of the community and thrive with us.

Teachers, sponsors and caregivers shall bring to the attention of the DLRE and the parent any patterns of inappropriate behavior on the part

of a particular child or youth, so that they may work together to seek a mutually acceptable solution to the problem.

Teachers, sponsors and caregivers shall bring to the attention of the DLRE and the parent if the child/youth leaves or “disappears” from a class, meeting, event or activity.

## **1.12 Confidentiality**

Information about the health or abilities of any child or youth, or a family’s status will be considered confidential. Such information will only be shared with staff or volunteers as necessary to meet the needs of the child/youth, or upon family request. Files related to RE families containing confidential information shall be stored in the DRE office in a protected manner.

## **2. Nursery & Child Care**

Church-sponsored child care is provided by paid and volunteer caregivers as follows:

- To infants and children up to age 5, during Sunday morning worship services,
- To multi-age groups of children during church events such as congregational meetings and membership orientation classes, etc.

### **2.1 Restroom Guidelines**

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available,

workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

## 2.2 Diapering

Diapers should be changed in the nursery. Under no circumstances should one volunteer take a child into a bathroom or other separate room for a diaper change. For children over age 3, parents are required to handle all diapering needs.

## 2.3 Ratios

- One provider — not to include more than one infant/toddler, or more than 5 children. A member of the group must make a visual check on the provider once per hour.
- 5–10 children, with no more than two under age 2: two caregivers.
- 5–10 children, with two or more under age 2: three caregivers.

- 10 or more children: three or more caregivers, based on ages of children enrolled.

*In the case of one provider, parents/guardians are expected to make a visual check at least once per hour.*

Church-sponsored childcare shall utilize the following procedures, detailed above:

- Visitor Registrations (for non-registered children), and Incident Reports
- Caregivers shall have easy access to a telephone and first aid kit.
- RE policies and procedures shall be followed by caregivers.
- Caregivers shall receive information about childcare and emergency procedures at the church. A summary information sheet for caregivers shall be readily available.

### **3. Youth Ministry**

Youth ministry refers to programming for middle and high school youth or youth between the ages of 13 and 18 alternatively.

Volunteers wishing to work with middle school students must meet all the volunteer requirements above and be 25 years of age or older.

Youth may not drive one another home from events unless they arrived together or parents have given permission for them to ride home

together. Ideally, parents should include the driver on their release form of adults who can transport their student home.

Youth must have a parent or guardian complete a permission slip for all events which occur off grounds.

### 3.1 Off-site and Field Trips

For church-related field trips and off-site functions, the following guidelines must be adhered to:

1. Volunteers and paid staff must receive specific permission to pick up children/youth to/from home from the RE and parents and shall have said permission in writing.
2. Permission slips and medical release forms for each child/youth must be signed and submitted to the activity supervisor prior to the start of the trip/activity.
3. Group leaders must have a list of participant names, emergency contacts, medical conditions and allergies with them at all times.
4. Every person transported in the vehicle must wear a seatbelt.
5. Every driver must have a valid driver's license and an actively insured car.
6. No driver may consume alcohol or use any form of drug which can affect physical or mental performance before or during the carrying out of his/her duty as a driver.

## 3.2 General Sleepover Guidelines

1. Adults supervising youth sleepovers must be approved by the DRE. They will have been active participants at GUUF for at least six months and have had previous youth group experience or training in a UU setting.
2. There will always be a minimum of two adults present during sleeping hours regardless of the numbers of youth attending. Two adults must remain awake until all youth are sleeping. During a sleepover at GUUF, there should be a minimum ratio of two adults at each overnight, also one adult to six youth with one additional adult required for each additional four youth.
3. During sleepovers at GUUF, all outside doors will be locked against entry once the last youth has arrived, and will remain locked until morning programming begins. If camping or otherwise sleeping outdoors, youth will be in a predetermined area and parents/guardians will be made aware of the sleeping arrangements.
4. The adult supervisors will maintain a list of attendees.
5. Youth will sleep only in areas equipped with a functioning smoke detector.
6. Youth must sleep with separate bedding from one another.

### **3.3 Social Media & Internet Usage**

Social Media has become a viable platform for ministry for all ages, but is particularly useful for young people. It is required that any staff person, paid or volunteer, communicating with minors through social media, texting, or email never do so 1-to-1. There should always be a second adult copied on the exchange of messages. Communication should be visible to the DRE or Minister upon request.

If an adult leader is contacted one on one with significant pastoral issues by a youth they are encouraged to appropriately respond in the moment to support the youth including assisting the youth in finding local sources of support such as their parents, religious educator, minister, teacher, or counselor.

As always, any communication an adult becomes aware of which involve harm to self or others including, but not limited to, self-harm, suicidal ideation, child abuse, sexual crimes against a minor, and bullying, must be shared as quickly as possible with the DRE or Minister.

Social Media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, or others, maintained by RE staff should maintain the vision and mission of the congregation in its postings and interactions with congregants or youth.

## **4. Personal Safety & Prevention of Abuse**

The Children & Youth Programs RE Committee and the religious education staff are committed to creating and maintaining a church community in which all people can worship, learn, and play together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment,



exploitation, or intimidation. Such behavior is unethical and will not be tolerated within our programs.

We seek teachers, advisors, caregivers, mentors, and sponsors who promote a spiritual community that affirms the UUA principles and demonstrates personal integrity. We seek individuals who nurture, care for, respect, and support children and youth, and are worthy of our trust.

All people engaged in children, youth, and family programs at The Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions upon the individuals with whom they engage.

#### 4.1 Injury and Accident Prevention

Well-stocked first aid kits are stored in each classroom. These are well marked with a red cross symbol. Notice should be given to the DRE if any items need to be restocked. Ice is available in the freezer in the kitchen.

A first aid kit shall be carried by each driver on church-sponsored field trips. If the driver does not already own one, he/she may borrow a to go kit from the RE office. These must be returned after each event. Notice should be given to the DRE if any items need to be restocked.

Regular Religious Education Staff and paid childcare providers shall have up-to-date CPR and First Aid training.

All caregivers must be 18 years of age or older. Younger caregivers (under 18) must always be assisted by an adult and never left alone to care for children. (see exception Section 1.4)

Emergency telephone numbers, as well as information about the location of the church, are posted by the telephone in the main office.  
*(send back to Emergency Comm for specifics)*

Toddlers and young preschoolers are requested not to bring toys with small parts into the classroom.

Toys and supplies in the classrooms of infants, toddlers and preschoolers are reviewed, sorted and cleaned periodically. Those which are broken or unsafe are discarded.

Alcohol and illegal drugs are not permitted at any events for children and youth. If alcohol is served at a family or intergenerational event, it is the responsibility of parents, teachers, caregivers, other adults in attendance, and sponsors to ensure that it is not served to minors.

## 4.2 Injury and Accident Response

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the DLRE. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. Incident Reports are filed in the DLRE office.

### 4.3 Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this GUUF becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the DLRE for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

1. It is not the function of the Minister, Religious Educator or President of the Board of Trustees to conduct an investigation into accusations of child abuse. Rather it is both South Carolina law

and the policy of GUUF to immediately report any situation in which any person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected.

2. Once a report is made to the appropriate authorities, the Church will rely on the decisions of those authorities as to the validity of the complaint. It is also the Church's responsibility under these guidelines to develop an appropriate plan of response to the allegations.
3. In all cases, the Senior Minister will also notify the President of the Board and the UUA, and seek their advice and counsel. Additionally, the Minister will notify the Society's insurance company.
4. In the event the accused abuser is the Minister, reports will be filed by, and the notifications referenced above will be the responsibility of the Associate Minister, DLRE, or the Board President of GUUF.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at GUUF or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.

3. Civil authorities will be notified, and GUUF will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The congregation will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The Minister will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.