



volunteer training handbook

Everything you need to know to be a volunteer

what we are trying to accomplish.
the plan for kids' and youth ministry.
safety policies and procedures.



What Do Children Need on Sunday Morning?

By the Reverend Lowell Brook

They need to light a candle, and have a quiet moment to enjoy its mystery.

*They need to sing a song, to hear their own voice and other voices joined
together,*

And to feel the feelings that are stirred by music.

*They need to hear a story and have a chance to share their own,
remembering that we are each different and also very alike.*

*They need to create something, realizing that by expressing themselves,
whether using words or materials, helps to bind the different parts
of ourselves and life together.*

That's what religion is.

*They need to be with an adult who is interested in the world and who feels
the privilege and responsibility of their trust—one who is glad to be
with them, and regards them positively.*

*Into this safe and encouraging context, we may weave the content of our
religious traditions.*

*The history and common threads of our identity are important to be sure,
but without this essential loving embrace the education will not be
religious.*

Getting Started on Volunteering

Leadership & Volunteering

Thank you for considering becoming a volunteer in our Children and Youth Programs at East Shore. Your contribution is vital to our community, and we are excited to have you join us in creating a welcoming and nurturing environment for our children and youth.

Our programs are founded on the principles of community ministry, where staff and congregants collaborate to lead and develop meaningful experiences for our young members. We encourage you to connect with our wonderful staff to start your UU journey at East Shore.

Volunteer Roles

One of the most significant ways you can make a difference is by volunteering in our Sunday programs. As an East Shore Kids or Youth Advisor volunteer, you will become part of a teaching team responsible for leading small groups of kids, fostering a sense of community, and nurturing confidence and self-awareness. Your commitment typically involves volunteering approximately two Sundays per month.

Support and Safety

East Shore Kids and Youth Programs are supported by our dedicated Religious Education team, which operates under the shared ministry model of UU congregations. We are committed to upholding the UUA's youth safety and inclusion guidelines to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for all participants.

Volunteer Application Process

To begin your journey as a volunteer in our Children and Youth Programs, there are a few essential steps to follow:

1. **Interest Expression:** Fill out the volunteer interest form to let us know about your interests and availability.
2. **Application and Assessment:** After expressing your interest, you will be provided with a volunteer application form to complete. This application will help us better understand your background and interests.
3. **Training:** As a volunteer working with children and youth, you will be required to undergo training. This training will provide you with the necessary skills and knowledge to create a positive and enriching experience for our young members.
4. **Background Check:** For the safety of our children and youth, all volunteers will undergo a background check as part of the application process.

Get Started

We appreciate your willingness to share your time and talents with us. To get started and express your interest, please fill out our volunteer interest form. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to our staff.

Thank you for your commitment to making East Shore a place where our children and youth can learn, grow, and thrive in a loving and supportive community.

East Shore has specific policies and procedures that ensure we align with your community's values and expectations. We also provide ongoing support and resources to volunteers to help you excel in your roles.

Dimensions of Faith Development with different age groups to emphasize that individuals may experience various dimensions at different stages of their lives. This arrangement highlights that individuals may go through various dimensions of faith development at different ages, reflecting the diversity of spiritual journeys within a community.

Building Trust	Building Narrative	Building Community	Deconstruction (Unbuilding)	Building Unitarian Universalism	Building the World We Dream About
New Members	1-2 Year Members	2-4 Year Members	5 – 7 Year Members	7 to 10 Year Members	Long- Term Members
Ages Birth – 2	Ages 2 – 12	Ages 12 –18	Ages 18 – 25	Ages 25 – 45	Ages 45+

Dimension: Building Trust, Infants and Toddlers (0-2 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Trust vs. Mistrust of Environment and Caregivers; Foundation of all Faith Development. No differentiation between "self" and "other." Trust in needs being met.
- **Implicit Goals:** Creating a safe and welcoming environment, avoiding punishment, exclusion, or harm.
- **Broad Strategies:** Welcoming newcomers, providing a safe nursery, training caregivers, and celebrating new births in the congregation. Provide a loving, safe space, comfortable facilities for nursing mothers, and gender-neutral family restrooms. Ensure caregivers are well-trained and welcoming.

Dimension: Building Narrative Part 1, Preschool and Early Childhood (3-5 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Differentiation of self from primary caregiver, Soaring imagination. No differentiation between reality and fantasy; stories are real and form the basis of identity.
- **Implicit Goals:** Fostering a sense of love, acceptance, and kindness, engaging in core teaching stories, and understanding Unitarian Universalism.
- **Broad Strategies:** Repeating core teaching stories, engaging stories through various means, and teaching UU identity and history. Encourage engagement through art and play, and introduce the "UU Story."

Dimension: Building Narrative Part 2, Early Elementary (6-8 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Understanding stories in detail, belief in reciprocity of the Universe. Stronger Curiosity, "Investigative Journalism." Symbolic Thought and Categorical Thinking.
- **Implicit Goals:** Promoting inclusivity, kindness, and respect, practicing good decision-making, and understanding UU principles and values.
- **Broad Strategies:** Teaching and reinforcing UU principles, engaging in social justice work, and offering fellowship opportunities. Encourage questions, confront stereotypes, provide diverse representation in stories, and offer novel experiences.

Dimension: Building Community, Late Elementary (9-11 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Identity through roles in relationships, attuned to judgments and expectations. Can see from another person's point of view and empathize. Logic.

- **Implicit Goals:** Cultivating a sense of acceptance, deep listening, and belonging, serving others, and supporting integration into the congregation.
- **Broad Strategies:** Creating opportunities for service, offering mentorship, and organizing meaningful events. Creating small groups based on mutual respect, promote personal expression, and offer meaningful experiences outside the congregation.

Dimension: Deconstruction (Unbuilding), Early Adolescence (12-14 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Sense of Self, Boundaries. Critical thinking and reflection on values. Rigid boundaries or sense of binary and absolutes. Insistence on being right.
- **Implicit Goals:** Encouraging self-reflection, understanding UU faith deeply, and welcoming questions and struggles of faith.
- **Broad Strategies:** Providing classes for deeper UU history exploration, classes to deconstruct stories, encourage deep listening, and maintain covenant. Gently confront absolutes with paradoxes.

Dimension: Building Unitarian Universalism, Late Adolescence (15-18 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Grasping deep symbolic meanings, open to exploring other cultures and ideas. The Ability to See Paradox. Integrity
- **Implicit Goals:** Celebrating family diversity, recognizing life milestones, understanding the holiness in everyday life, and nurturing continuous spiritual growth.
- **Broad Strategies:** Teaching theology, Bible literacy, and UU history, and offering spaces for ritual, storytelling, and celebration. Offer classes on world religions, explore faith stories deeply, provide opportunities for justice-making, and encourage teaching and mentoring.

Dimension: Building the World We Dream About, Young Adults (18-35 years)

- **Key Characteristics:** Becoming an instrument of the Spirit of Life/Universe, Leadership characterized by a commitment to serving others and greater good.
- **Implicit Goals:** Aligning with the congregation's mission, embodying UU values, and having a passion for ministry and social justice.
- **Broad Strategies:** Deepening theological understanding, exploring faith development, and engaging in anti-oppression work. Increase opportunities for serving, leading, and shared ministry. Provide chances to confront systematic oppression.

Adapted from the work of Natalie Briscoe, Southern Regional Lead, Unitarian Universalist Association.

Nurturing a Vibrant Community of Communities in Religious Education

Today, we stand at an extra ordinary moment in our journey as Unitarian Universalists, where we are breathing new life into the shared values and covenants that will shape the future of our faith.

Whether we consider faith formation, growth, social justice, or dismantling white supremacy, it's clear Unitarian Universalists are in need of an identity update. Paula Cole Jones, a beacon of innovation and an unwavering advocate for anti-racism, invites us to step into a new paradigm. Instead of merely considering our congregations as "families," she challenges us to envision them as something more profound: a "community of communities." How can this new way of thinking help us build an inclusive, welcoming, and joyful "Beloved Community" here at ESUC?

Our religious exploration community has responded to this call, weaving a vibrant tapestry that includes children, youth, and families and wholeheartedly embraced this concept. We see ourselves as a microcosm of vitality within the broader congregation and the sweeping current of the UU faith movement. Our mission extends far beyond conventional religious education; it's about nurturing a space where profound and authentic relationships flourish.

This shift in perspective holds the key to our future and is intrinsic to the realization of the Beloved Community. By embracing this dynamic perspective, we unlock the potential to build an inclusive, welcoming, and joy-filled "Beloved Community" right here at ESUC.

This handout serves as a guiding light for our dedicated volunteers, illuminating the path to effectively nurture this profound sense of community and unite us on our spiritual path. It's a journey towards facilitating a love-centered, inclusive, and incredibly engaging religious exploration experience.

Creating Community:

1. **Inclusive Community:** RE strives to create a tapestry of inclusion, weaving together diverse members – parents, grandparents, church members, children, youth, and RE staff.
2. **Co-Creation:** This vibrant community is co-created by its members, including elders, visitors, families, staff, children, youth, members, and volunteers.
3. **Community of Learners:** Our collective focus is on crafting a dynamic community of learners, doers, and intrepid explorers.
4. **Active Participation:** We enthusiastically encourage everyone to play an active role in shaping and nurturing this diverse and inclusive community.

Effective Facilitation:

1. **Prioritize Experience:** We fervently believe in prioritizing the children's experiences over mere facts, ensuring their journey is rich and transformative.
2. **Engagement is Key:** If a lesson isn't sparking enthusiasm, let's be flexible and ignite our spirits with activities like games.

3. **Create a Sense of Community:** Our foremost goal is to envelop the children in a supportive and loving community that cradles their growth.
4. **Flexibility:** Let's embrace adaptability, readily adjusting our lessons to maintain an environment that is vibrant, welcoming, and filled with positivity.
5. **Meaningful Experience:** Every moment is an opportunity to craft a profoundly meaningful experience, one that transcends the boundaries of mere content delivery.
6. **Building Connections:** Our primary focus is forging connections – between teachers and students, hearts and minds.
7. **Individuality Matters:** We celebrate the uniqueness of each child, holding genuine interest in their beautiful individuality.
8. **Connect with Unitarian Universalist Faith:** We see every moment in class as a sacred opportunity to engage deeply with UU faith and East Shore's mission, embracing love, respect, and interdependence.
9. **Empower Participation:** Let's create a space where children can actively participate and take ownership of their learning journey.
10. **Foster Responsibility:** We empower children to take responsibility for their words and actions, guided by the profound principles of UU faith.

Shift Towards a Love-Centered Approach:

1. **Gentle Reminders:** Our journey is adorned with gentle reminders and moments of reflection, guiding us through the year with warmth and wisdom.
2. **Consider Children's Experiences:** We challenge ourselves to deeply consider the experiences and motivations of our children, understanding why they come to church.
3. **Focus on Connections:** Our North Star is the art of building connections, nurturing a profound sense of belonging and unity.
4. **Understand Challenging Situations:** In the face of challenges, we explore what's happening within the child and why they are here, cherishing each teaching moment as an opportunity for growth.
5. **Love-Centered Perspective:** Together, we embark on a transformational journey, shifting from a goal-oriented approach to one that is truly love-centered. We understand that meaningful connections are the essence of our work, transcending the confines of lesson plans.

These instructions serve as a vibrant and passion-filled roadmap for our volunteer teachers. Together, we embark on a remarkable journey, crafting a transformative and love-centered religious exploration experience for our children.

Helping Children Define, Understand, and Embrace A Unitarian Universalist Identity

Religious Exploration programs in UU Congregations instill a foundation for values, self, and community. Facilitators must be equipped with a sense of the dimensions of faith development and be ready to support the learning goals of individuals and their classes.

1. Exploring UU Values and Covenant:

- Introduce the core concepts of Unitarian Universalism. Using stories, games, or interactive activities, discuss concepts like justice and compassion.

2. Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment:

- Foster an inclusive and accepting atmosphere where children express thoughts and questions about identity. Encourage open dialogue and active listening.

3. Storytelling and Personal Narratives:

- Share stories of UU history, songs, leaders, etc. Allow children to share their own stories, experiences, and observations related to UU values and beliefs.

4. Community Building:

- Help children understand that they are part of a larger UU movement, a community of shared values. Engage in activities that promote belonging.

5. Exploring Spirituality:

- Introduce children to the idea of spirituality. Explore different spiritual practices and rituals that align with UU values.

6. Service and Social Justice:

- Engage children in service projects and social justice activities. Connect their UU values to actions and making a positive impact on the world.

7. Role Models and Mentors:

- Connect children with your own story as a Unitarian Universalist as well as UU role models and mentors within the congregation and surrounding movement.

8. Encourage Self-Reflection and Understanding Belief Systems:

- Have children reflect on their own values, beliefs, and what being a UU means to them. Journaling, artwork, or discussions can facilitate this process.

9. Celebrate UU Traditions and Rituals:

- Participate in UU rituals and traditions, such as lighting the chalice or celebrating UU holidays. These practices reinforce a sense of UU identity.

10. Peer Support:

- Create opportunities for children to connect with peers who share UU values. This can include youth groups or activities that encourage bonding and friendship.

11. Family Involvement:

- Involve parents and families in the process of defining a UU identity. Encourage families to engage in UU activities together and discuss UU values at home.

Remember that the process of defining one's identity is ongoing, and it may evolve over time. Be patient and supportive as children explore their UU identity, and let them know that it's okay to have questions and uncertainties along the way. Ultimately, the goal is to help them develop a strong sense of self rooted in UU values and principles.

Sophia Fahs' "Laboratory Sunday School"

Sophia Fahs provided a groundbreaking approach to religious education that aimed to provide children with a more interactive and experiential learning experience. Here are some key aspects of the Laboratory Sunday:

1. **Experiential Learning:** Fahs believed that children learn best through direct experience and exploration. Instead of traditional lectures and rote memorization, her approach encouraged students to actively engage with religious and ethical concepts.
2. **Hands-On Activities:** In Laboratory Sunday Schools, children participated in various hands-on activities, including drama, art, music, and storytelling. These activities were designed to help them connect with religious and moral ideas on a personal level.
3. **Open-Ended Questions:** Fahs encouraged teachers to pose open-ended questions to students, allowing them to explore their own thoughts and feelings about spirituality, ethics, and the world around them. This approach fostered critical thinking and encouraged children to ask questions and seek their own answers.
4. **Interfaith and Inclusive:** Fahs promoted an inclusive and interfaith approach. She believed that children should learn about a variety of religious and philosophical traditions to foster understanding and respect for different beliefs.
5. **Respect for Children's Insights:** One of Fahs' core principles was that children have valuable insights and perspectives to offer. She encouraged teachers to listen to and respect children's ideas and interpretations of religious and moral concepts.
6. **Parent Involvement:** The Laboratory Sunday School approach often included parents in the educational process, emphasizing that religious education should not be limited to the classroom but should extend into the home and daily life.

Sophia Fahs' innovative approach to religious education has had a lasting impact on Unitarian Universalist religious education and beyond. Her emphasis on experiential learning, inclusivity, and the value of children's perspectives continues to influence how religious education is conducted in many UU congregations today.

Engaging Youth in Leadership

1. **Youth Advisory Board:** Form a diverse youth advisory board that meets regularly to provide input on program planning, curriculum development, and decision-making.
2. **Co-Design Workshops:** Host interactive co-design workshops where young people collaborate with program staff to brainstorm ideas, design activities, and create program content.
3. **Youth-Led Needs Assessment:** Conduct a needs assessment led by young people using surveys, focus groups, or interviews to identify their interests, concerns, and preferences for program planning.
4. **Youth Facilitators:** Empower young people to become facilitators or peer educators within the program, allowing them to lead discussions, workshops, or activities related to their interests.
5. **Youth-Led Evaluation:** Involve young people in the evaluation process by having them design surveys, conduct interviews, or create assessment tools to gather feedback from peers and participants.
6. **Project-Based Learning:** Organize project-based learning experiences where young people take the lead in planning and executing projects, fostering leadership and responsibility.
7. **Youth-Led Committees:** Establish specialized committees or working groups led by young people to focus on specific aspects of program planning.
8. **Mentorship Programs:** Pair experienced youth with newcomers for mentorship in program planning, promoting knowledge sharing and leadership development.
9. **Resource Allocation:** Include young people in decisions about how program resources are allocated, such as budgeting exercises or choosing materials and equipment.
10. **Showcasing Youth Talent:** Provide opportunities for young participants to showcase their talents and skills within the program through talent shows, exhibitions, or presentations.
11. **Feedback Loops:** Create regular feedback loops where young people can share thoughts and suggestions about program activities, actively incorporating their feedback into planning.
12. **Cultural Competency Training:** Train program staff in cultural competency to better understand and respect diverse perspectives and needs of young participants.
13. **Youth Voice in Decision-Making:** Include young people in decision-making processes, such as selecting program themes, guest speakers, or making policy decisions affecting the program.
14. **Youth-Led Advocacy:** Encourage and support young people in advocating for issues they are passionate about, both within the program and in the broader community.
15. **Recognition and Celebration:** Recognize and celebrate young people's contributions in program planning with appreciation events or award ceremonies.

These strategies aim to actively involve young people, ensuring their voices are heard, ideas valued, and that they have a sense of ownership and responsibility within the program.

Understanding Neurodiversity and the Congregational Setting

Introduction: Children come from diverse backgrounds and have unique needs, including those who are neurodivergent (ND) and neurotypical (NT). It's essential to recognize these differences and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all children. This handout provides guidelines for building positive relationships with children, including those who are neurodivergent and neurotypical.

Different Diagnoses, Different Supports:

- Children may have different needs and diagnoses. Some may have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), while others may not. Remember, our goal is to support each child's unique needs.

All Behavior is Communication:

- Keep in mind that all behavior is a way for children to communicate their needs. When you see challenging behavior, try to understand what they might be trying to tell us.

Building Trust and Connection:

- Building trust takes time, especially with neurodivergent children. Be patient, listen actively, and show consistent care and support.

Collaborate with Parents:

- We collaborate with parents. Respect their choices regarding services and remember, our role isn't behavior modification. It's about providing a supportive environment. We can work with parents to emphasize the importance of routine and regular attendance.

Creating a Positive Experience:

- Focus on creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Ensure each child leaves feeling loved and cared for. When in doubt, ask for help and have another trusted adult support the child when you can not.

Consistency and Flexibility:

- While we have a curriculum, it's okay to adapt if needed. Prioritize the children's emotional well-being, relationships, and group dynamics over strictly following the lesson plan.

Communication and Redirection:

- Use positive communication, maintain eye contact, and speak calmly. Call parents and program staff when there are persistent safety concerns.

Volunteer Huddle and Debrief:

- Volunteer huddles and debriefs are for sharing experiences and seeking advice. Use real-life scenarios to make discussions practical. Bring these discussions to our regular volunteer huddles for collaboration with program staff.

Conclusion: Remember that building relationships with neurodivergent and neurotypical children is a shared responsibility. By understanding children's unique needs and working together, we can create a nurturing and inclusive environment where all children can thrive.

Children's Participation in Worship Services

Unitarian Universalist Congregation

We believe that children and youth are valued members of our community, and we encourage their active participation in our worship gatherings. These guidelines are designed to help your family create a worship experience that accommodates the unique needs and abilities of children and youth while fostering a sense of community and spiritual growth. Here are some overarching guidelines to create an inclusive and enriching worship experience for all ages:

1. Welcoming Atmosphere:

- Create a warm and welcoming environment where children and youth feel valued and included.
- Encourage families to sit together for a sense of community.

2. Respectful Behavior:

- Emphasize the importance of respectful behavior during the service.
- Encourage minimal phone use to reduce distractions.

3. Active Engagement:

- Encourage your children and youth to actively engage in responsive readings, prayers, and singing.

4. Age-Appropriate Resources:

- Utilize age-appropriate resources and materials for children and youth to enhance their understanding and participation.

5. Reflect and Discuss:

- Foster post-service reflection and discussion to deepen your family's understanding and connection to the worship experience.

Now, let's look at age-specific recommendations:

Affirming Children in Church:

- Use affirming statements to show appreciation for their presence.
- Avoid commenting on behavior but instead express gratitude for their participation.

Whispering in Church:

- Whispering should enrich the worship experience, not just correct behavior.

- Use it to connect with your child during worship.
- Share insights, encourage participation, and spark reflection.

Little UU Toddlers (1 and 2 year-olds):

- Toddlers are naturally curious and active.
- Bring soft, quiet toys for comfort and engagement.
- Utilize dedicated spaces for quiet play.
- Feel free to take breaks outside the Sanctuary when needed.

Little UU Preschool Children (3, 4, and 5 year-olds):

- Arrive early to secure a good seat near the front for clear visibility.
- Understand that preschoolers have short attention spans and love to explore.
- Allow limited movement within the Sanctuary.
- Use provided busy bag books and drawing resources.
- Encourage simple participation and preparation for specific parts of the service.

Discovery Year Lower Elementary Children (6, 7, and 8 year-olds):

- Arrive early for a good view.
- These children have increased listening capacity and can participate.
- Utilize provided resources like busy bag books and drawing materials.
- Help them engage with readings and hymns.
- Encourage participation in simple ways.

Stepping Stones Upper Elementary Children (9, 10, and 11 year-olds):

- Actively engage in worship.
- Utilize resources like busy bag books.
- Encourage reading from materials.
- Model authentic participation.
- Encourage participation in songs, readings, stories, and chalice lightings.

YES-UU and YUUP Junior High and High School Teens:

- Sit together to foster community.
- Actively participate in responsive readings, prayers, and singing.
- Reflect on the service with age-appropriate materials.
- Encourage journaling or note-taking during the sermon.
- Engage in post-service discussions to express thoughts and opinions.
- Seek guidance and discuss spiritual questions with your available adults.
- Explore youth-focused programs and build a sense of belonging with peers.

Covenant for Religious Exploration Learning Community

This covenant frames Unitarian Universalist values in a way that helps us to understand what is required of us to be in good relationships.

Love is at the Center: We start and end with love, treating each other with kindness, empathy, and respect. Love brings us together as we show kindness and learn together.

Justice: Make sure everyone gets a chance and has their voice included. Treat each other with care and respect. We're all friends here!

Pluralism: We're curious about different cultures and ideas. Let's explore and share what we learn.

Interdependence: Take Care of Nature and all the elements of life on planet Earth. We look after our planet and the animals on it. It's like taking care of our home.

Generosity: We're generous and help each other when needed. Sharing is caring!

Equity: Be inclusive. Everyone is special and important. We make friends and stand up for each other.

Transformation: Grow Together. We're always learning and changing. That's a good thing!

Community Guidelines for Religious Education

We can create a positive and respectful learning environment within our religious education program. These guidelines help to set clear expectations, behavior standards, and promote a sense of responsibility and ownership among participants. Here are some steps toward implementing these community guidelines and how you can play a role.

1. **Introduction to Children and Parents:**

Children and families should be made familiar with these guidelines in your classes, emphasizing why they are important and how they contribute to relationship-centered learning.

2. **Consistent Reinforcement:**

Discuss these guidelines during your lessons and conversations and include the statements as an integral part of your class routine.

3. **Positive Reinforcement:**

Motivate, engage, and encourage children to learn these guidelines.



I Can Stay Safe – This statement covers everything from “keep your hands to yourself” to “don’t climb on that table” and allows kids to take responsibility for their choices and actions. We discuss unsafe behaviors for our area and agree together to stay safe at church.

I Can Listen – Listening is extremely important, and with our “I Can Listen” statement, kids know they are expected to listen to whoever is speaking, whether it is a leader up front or a friend in small groups. Listening builds empathy and awareness, creating friendships and building bridges.





I Can Learn – We want kids to know that church is a place where they can learn. This “I Can” Statement reminds kids that they will see, hear, and experience, new things. Knowing this expectation helps kids prepare their loving hearts and open minds to contribute to our learning community.

I Can Respect – Kids need reminders about what respect looks like. Respect means listening when the teacher is listening. Respect means not talking to your friend during the lesson because then they can’t hear. Respect is not making fun of someone. With our “I Can Respect” statement, kids are given a friendly reminder in a positive way.



I Can Participate – Participation looks different based on the different activities we are doing, but it basically means going with the flow and joining in on whatever is happening. If we are worshiping, participation looks like lighting the chalice and singing. If we are playing a game, participation looks like joining in and supporting your team. The most important aspect of this “I Can” Statement is having FUN! When kids participate, they have more opportunities to have fun. We want kids to know that a) they will have fun at church and b) it is OK to have fun at church. Yes, it is a place of learning, and it is also a place of joy and excitement!

Adapted from the Christian Deeper Kids Ministry Resources.

De-Escalation Techniques Working With Children And Youth

Volunteers working with children may experience emotional or behavioral challenges. All behavior is communication. Our goal as volunteers is to respond with a desire to affirm and engage children and youth.

1. **Stay Calm:** One of the most critical aspects of de-escalation is for the volunteer to remain calm. A calm demeanor can help reassure the child and prevent the situation from escalating further, focusing on self-regulating and co-regulating.
2. **Maintain Personal Space:** Respect the child's personal space and ensure you maintain a safe distance. Avoid getting too close, as this may increase anxiety or agitation.
3. **Use Non-Threatening Body Language:** Maintain an open and non-threatening body posture. Avoid crossing your arms or appearing confrontational. Make eye contact if the child is comfortable with it, but don't stare.
4. **Speak Calmly and Softly:** Use a calm and soft tone of voice when speaking to the child. Avoid raising your voice, as this can escalate the situation. Speak slowly and clearly.
5. **Active Listening:** Listen attentively to what the child is saying or trying to communicate. Acknowledge their feelings and validate their emotions, even if you don't agree with their behavior.
6. **Offer Choices:** Whenever possible, provide the child with choices to give them a sense of control. For example, you might ask, "Would you like to take a break in the quiet corner or continue with this activity for a few more minutes?"
7. **Redirect Attention:** Gently redirect the child's attention to a calming or distracting activity. This can help shift their focus away from the source of distress.
8. **Give Time and Space:** Sometimes, children need time and space to calm down. Respect their need for a break or quiet time in a safe and designated area.
9. **Involve the Child in Problem-Solving:** For older children, involve them in problem-solving. Ask questions like, "What can we do to help you feel better?" or "How can we make this situation better?"
10. **Behavior Modification:** If de-escalation techniques are not effective, and behavior is preventing positive interaction between volunteer and student or student and peers, seek help immediately from program staff.
11. **Safety Concerns:** If the child's behavior includes a safety concern, or they are at risk of harming themselves or others, seek help immediately from program staff.
12. **Follow Post-Incident Support:** After an incident of escalation, it's important to provide support and debrief with the child, if appropriate, to help them process their emotions and learn from the experience.
13. **Document Incidents:** Record details of the incident, including what led to the escalation, the child's behavior, and any de-escalation techniques used. This information can be helpful for future planning and communication with parents or professionals.

Remember that every child is unique, and what works for one may not work for another. Effective de-escalation requires flexibility and a personalized approach.

Restorative Justice Practices with Children and Youth

The restorative justice framework challenges us to unlearn punitive behaviors ingrained through socialization and encourages us to prioritize relationships and the process of repair. Recognizing that marginalized children and youth disproportionately experience infractions and punishment compared to those from dominant identities, it becomes evident that this work is essential in advancing anti-oppression and liberation efforts.

Restorative justice techniques include skills in facilitation, communication, listening, empathy, mutual understanding, and repair that volunteers are not expected to have in place. Rather, please always seek the support of program staff to implement these strategies effectively. It is necessary that the focus of adult RE Facilitators remain on the act of mentoring children and youth and accompanying them, rather than parenting or behavior modification such that you can focus on your unique role of providing the loving presence of a trusted adult.

1. **Positive Reinforcement:** Encourage students when they take responsibility and follow community guidelines. Support them to get there.
2. **Stay Calm:** When a child is not regulated or acting out, focus on your breath and maintaining a calm and composed presence as a role model.
3. **Active Listening:** Listen attentively to what the child has to say. Show empathy and understanding with body language. Let them express their thoughts and feelings.
4. **Acknowledge Feelings:** Validate the child's emotions. You might say, "I understand that you were upset," or "It sounds like you were frustrated."
5. **Restorative Questions:** Focus on resolving the issue rather than assigning blame. Use supportive and non-confrontational language. Focus on helping the child understand their actions and make better choices. Use restorative questions to guide the conversation toward resolution. Some examples are:
 - o "What can you do to make things right?"
 - o "How can you repair the harm you caused?"
 - o "Who else has been affected by your actions, and how can you make amends?"
6. **Create a Plan:** Work with the child to come up with a plan to repair any harm caused and create more alignment in the future with expectations. Agree upon this plan with the child and others in the community.
7. **Follow-Up:** Check in with the child to see how they're doing with their plan. Provide support and encouragement along the way.
8. **Involve the Community:** If necessary, involve other members of the learning community, such as staff, parents or caregivers, and other volunteers, to ensure consistency in addressing the issue. Maintain open communication. Parents can provide valuable insights and support strategies that work both at school and home.
9. **Reflect and Learn:** After the situation has been resolved, take some time to reflect with the child on what they've learned from the experience. This helps reinforce positive behavior and personal growth.

Classroom Safety Plan for Children and Youth Program Volunteers

For all Emergencies...

...DIAL 911

Bellevue Police Non-Emergency Line:

(425) 577-5656 (NORCOM)

ESUC Address:

12700 SE 32nd Street

Bellevue, Washington 98005

ESUC Phone:

425-747-3780

Director of Religious Education:

Amanda Alice Uluhan

(206) 403-0071

Religious Education Coordinator:

LeAnne Struble

(206) 550-4731

Facilities Manager:

Dianne Upton

(425) 505-3744

Introduction:

At East Shore Unitarian Church (ESUC), the safety and well-being of our volunteers and young participants are our utmost priorities. This safety plan outlines procedures for responding to various emergency situations, tailored to our church's unique environment and needs, including fire, earthquake, active shooter incidents, missing child situations, and attendance tracking. We urge all volunteers to read and familiarize themselves with this plan to ensure a safe environment for everyone involved.

General Safety Guidelines:

1. **Emergency Contacts:** Emergency Contacts are listed at the start of this manual.
2. **Communication:** Communication in our program relies on volunteers alerting program staff to any safety concerns immediately through use of personal phone by call or text. Parents should be notified that they will be contacted by cellphone text or call in the case of all behavior, bathroom, or safety situations.
3. **ESUC Orientation:** Provide new volunteers with an ESUC orientation that includes information on emergency procedures, evacuation routes specific to our facility, the use of ESUC safety equipment, and the attendance and missing child protocols.

Background Checks:

1. **Mandatory Checks:** All volunteers working with children and youth at ESUC are required to undergo background checks as part of our commitment to safety.
2. **Screening Process:** Background checks will include criminal history and reference checks to ensure that volunteers meet our safety standards.
3. **Approval Criteria:** Volunteers will be approved for participation based on the results of their background checks. Individuals with certain criminal histories may be ineligible to volunteer.

Preventing Abuse:

1. **Code of Conduct:** Utilize our code of conduct for all volunteers working with children and youth at ESUC. Ensure you understand the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries and behaviors.
2. **Reporting:** Encourage all volunteers to report any suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior to ESUC program staff or minister immediately.

Mandated Reporting Laws in Washington State:

1. **Reporting Obligation:** Under Washington State law, any volunteer who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect is legally obligated to report it to the appropriate authorities, such as the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). We ask that volunteers, as best as they are able, make every effort to include program staff and the minister in any issues involving reported or suspected abuse.
2. **Immunity and Protection:** Volunteers who make a good-faith report of suspected abuse or neglect are protected from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in accordance with Washington State law.
3. **Confidentiality:** Volunteers should be aware that their reports are confidential and will not be disclosed to the alleged abuser or anyone else not authorized by law.

Two Adults Present:

1. **Always Two Adults:** Our policy ensures that there should always be at least two, unrelated adults present when supervising children and youth. Never be alone with a child. This policy should be strictly adhered to during all ESUC activities.

Physical Boundaries and Affirmative Consent:

1. **Respect Personal Space:** Educators must respect the personal space of children of all ages. Physical contact should be limited to what is necessary for instruction, comfort, or safety.
2. **Age-Appropriate Touch:** Recognize that appropriate touch varies with the age and developmental stage of the child. Always err on the side of caution when determining appropriate physical contact.
3. **Affirmative Consent:** Teach children the concept of affirmative consent from a young age. Ensure that they understand the importance of giving and receiving consent for physical contact, including hugs, high-fives, or any form of touch.
4. **Permission for Physical Contact:** Educators should seek affirmative consent from children before engaging in any form of physical contact. If a child does not wish to be touched, their boundaries must be respected.
5. **Avoid Forceful Contact:** Never use physical force or coercion to discipline or punish.
6. **Monitoring and Reporting:** Encourage children to report any uncomfortable or inappropriate physical contact to a trusted adult. Our organization must take such reports seriously and follow established reporting procedures.

Bathroom Procedures:

1. **Bathroom Escort:** Ensure that young children go to the restroom in a group of three or more people. For older children, children can go themselves however volunteers should be aware of using bathroom passes and the length of time gone. Asking that parents take children to bathroom ahead of time helps volunteers manage the classroom better.
2. **No Alone Time:** Volunteers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom or any secluded area. Always ensure another adult is aware of restroom breaks.

Diapering:

1. **Parent Duty:** Parents should be notified that volunteers are not trained to provide diapering or bathroom assistance. Parents should be asked to change and clean children before our programs.

2. **Designated Area:** There is no designated diapering area for volunteers. Should ESUC wish to set up a designated diapering area, it would need to be easily accessible and visible to other adults.
3. **Two Volunteers:** Diapering should always be done by at least two volunteers – one to handle the child and one to handle the diapering process.
4. **Parental Consent:** Ensure that parental consent is obtained for diapering and that any specific instructions provided by parents are followed.

Driving Safety:

1. **ESUC-Approved Drivers:** Only volunteers who have been approved by ESUC and undergone a background check should be allowed to drive children and youth to off-site events or activities.
2. **Seatbelts:** Ensure that all passengers, especially children and youth, are properly secured with seatbelts or appropriate child safety seats during transportation.

Communication Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Children:

1. **Use Official Channels:** Communicate only through organization-approved channels for group interactions, and restrict communication to official class-related matters only.
2. **Transparency:** Include parents/guardians and RE program staff about the purpose and frequency of communication.
3. **No Private Meetings:** Avoid one-on-one meetings.
4. **Professional Behavior:** Use a professional and respectful behavior in all communication.
5. **Boundaries:** Establish clear boundaries and keep conversations strictly program-related, refraining from discussing personal matters and always including parents and program staff.
6. **No Personal Gifts:** Do not offer or accept personal gifts or favors. Gifts should be directed to the organization or class as a whole.
7. **Be Mindful of Media:** Do not share photos or videos even for class-related purposes. Our program staff must share this media as they have obtained permissions for the organization.
8. **Model Respectful Behavior:** Set a positive example for online interactions while maintaining the strict boundary of class-related communication only.

Fire Safety at ESUC:

1. **Candles and flame:** Battery operated candles are issued in all classrooms and stored in the Library cabinets. Youth and volunteers are encouraged to use these in lieu of open flame candles. Open flame should never be left unattended.
2. **Fire Extinguishers:** Fire extinguishers at ESUC are readily available and regularly inspected. Their locations are marked in the Education building hallways.
3. **Evacuation Routes:** Primary and secondary evacuation routes are specified in each ESUC classroom. Exit doors are marked with ESUC signage.
4. **ESUC Fire Drills:** Periodic ESUC-specific fire drills are utilized to familiarize volunteers and participants with evacuation procedures.
5. **Reporting:** In the event of a fire at ESUC, immediately call emergency services and inform ESUC program staff.

Earthquake Safety at ESUC:

1. **Drop, Cover, and Hold On at ESUC:** Teach participants the "Drop, Cover, and Hold On" technique to use in our ESUC building during earthquakes.
2. **Secure Objects at ESUC:** Heavy objects that could fall during an earthquake should be made secure in ESUC classrooms and common areas.
3. **ESUC Evacuation:** After an earthquake at ESUC, evacuate the building if it is safe to do so, using designated assembly points within our church grounds.

Active Shooter Safety at ESUC:

1. **ESUC-Specific Run, Hide, Fight:** In the event of an active shooter at ESUC, remember the ESUC-specific "Run, Hide, Fight" protocol.
 - Run: Evacuate the ESUC premises if it is safe to do so.
 - Hide: If evacuation is not possible, find a secure hiding place within ESUC facilities.
 - Fight: As a last resort, take action to incapacitate the shooter, considering the layout of ESUC.
2. **Communication:** Call 911 discreetly if possible, specifying that the incident is at ESUC. Share information about the shooter's location with authorities and ESUC program staff.
3. **ESUC Lockdown:** If necessary, initiate an ESUC-specific lockdown. Barricade doors and turn off lights.
4. **ESUC Reunification:** Establish an ESUC-specific designated reunification point for volunteers and participants within our church grounds after the incident.

Missing Child Protocol at ESUC:

1. **Immediate Notification:** In the event of a missing child, immediately notify ESUC RE program staff and other volunteers.
2. **Search within ESUC:** Conduct a thorough but discreet search within ESUC facilities, keeping other children and participants safe and engaged in activities. Ask for additional adult help.
3. **Contact Authorities:** If the child is not found within a reasonable timeframe, ESUC staff will contact local authorities and provide them with all necessary information. Volunteers will be asked to provide documentation and reporting.

Attendance Safety at ESUC:

1. **Check-in and Check-out:** Volunteers must ensure that all children and youth participants check-in and check-out of programs.
2. **Identification:** Ensure that volunteers are familiar with the children and youth in their care and verify the identity of anyone who comes to pick up a child.

Communication at ESUC:

1. **ESUC Emergency Contact Person:** The Director of Education and Education Coordinator are responsible for coordinating communication during emergencies. In case of their absence, the Facilities Manager can be contact directly by volunteers.

Medical Emergencies at ESUC:

1. **First Aid Kits at ESUC:** Small first aid kits are located in the classrooms. The larger supplies stock is located in the Library cabinets.
2. **Implementing Safety and First Aid Solutions:** In the case of any medical emergency, volunteers are expected to report immediately to program staff who will determine if parents/caregivers or medical professionals need to be alerted. Volunteers do not perform medical care except in case of immediate danger.
3. **ESUC Emergency Medical Services:** Call 911 in case of a medical emergency at ESUC. Volunteers have the opportunity to be trained in CPR and basic first aid for ESUC-specific needs.

Review and Drills at ESUC:

1. **Regular ESUC Drills:** ESUC will periodically conduct drills related to our Sunday programs and special events.
2. **Safety Review:** Updates to the safety plan will be issued at any time to better address changing needs and circumstances specific to our church.
3. **ESUC Feedback:** Please provide feedback on safety procedures to improve the plan, making it best tailored to our church's environment.

Conclusion:

By following this comprehensive ESUC-specific safety plan, including protocols for preventing abuse, always having two adults present with children, bathroom procedures, diapering, driving safety, and compliance with Washington State mandated reporting laws, we can create a safe and secure environment for everyone involved in our children and youth programs. Your commitment to safety, including mandated reporting, and the well-being of our volunteers and participants at East Shore Unitarian Church is of utmost importance.

Safety Drills

These role-play scenarios should help your volunteers gain practical experience and confidence in handling various safety, communication, and behavior management situations.

1. Emergency Response Scenario: Fire Drill

- Volunteers are in the middle of an education session with children.
- Suddenly, a fire alarm goes off.
- Volunteers must lead the children to the nearest exit, ensuring everyone stays calm and orderly.
- They should practice evacuating the building safely and conducting a headcount once outside.

2. Family Communication Scenario: Parent Concerns

- A parent approaches a volunteer with concerns about their child's behavior during sessions.
- The volunteer must listen actively, empathize, and address the parent's concerns professionally.
- Practice providing constructive feedback and discussing strategies for improvement.

3. Dealing with Difficult Behavior Scenario: Disruptive Student

- During a class, a child starts acting out and disrupting the session.
- The volunteer must use positive behavior management techniques to address the child's behavior while ensuring minimal disruption to the rest of the group.

4. Safety Procedures Scenario: Unauthorized Pickup

- A person arrives at the education program claiming to be a child's relative and wants to pick up the child.
- The volunteer must follow the safety protocol, verify the person's identity and authorization, and handle the situation if there are any doubts or concerns.

5. Emergency Contact Scenario: Missing Child

- A child is unaccounted for after an activity.
- Volunteers must quickly and calmly search the premises, contact the child's parents, and notify appropriate authorities if necessary.

6. Conflict Resolution Scenario: Playground Dispute

- Two children have a disagreement on the playground, resulting in a small altercation.
- The volunteers need to step in, separate the children, and facilitate a conflict resolution process that promotes understanding and resolution.

7. First Aid and Medical Emergencies Scenario: Choking Incident

- During a snack time, a child starts choking on a piece of food.
- Volunteers must respond promptly, perform the Heimlich maneuver on the child if necessary, and administer first aid until medical professionals arrive.

8. Evacuation Drills Scenario: Weather Emergency

- Volunteers receive a simulated weather alert indicating the need to evacuate due to an approaching storm.
- They should guide the children to the designated shelter area and ensure everyone's safety during the simulated storm.

9. Safety Checklist Scenario: Session Preparation

- Volunteers are about to start an education session.
- They must go through a safety checklist, ensuring all safety measures are in place, including checking for hazards, having emergency contact information ready, and confirming attendance.

10. Emergency Response Plan Scenario: Lockdown Drill

- Volunteers receive a notification of a security threat, and a lockdown drill is initiated.
- They should follow the church's emergency response plan, secure the children in a safe area, and communicate with authorities as necessary.

Unitarian Universalist (UU) Resources

Materials on theology, values, and beliefs are helpful in your own faith development as a volunteer. When searching for materials, be sure to consider your specific interests within UU theology, as there is a wide range of topics and perspectives within the UU community. Whether you're interested in UU history, social justice, spirituality, or ethics, you can find resources that align with your areas of focus.

Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Website: The official website of the UUA

(<https://www.uua.org/>) offers a wealth of information on UU theology, principles, and values. You can find articles, publications, and resources that delve into UU beliefs.

UU World Magazine: UU World (<https://www.uuworld.org/>) is the magazine of the UUA. It features articles, essays, and stories that explore UU theology, social justice issues, and community life.

Books on UU Theology: There are several books written by UU theologians and leaders that delve into UU theology and philosophy. Be sure to check out our congregation's library online and in person. <https://www.librarycat.org/lib/EastShoreUnitarian> Some notable ones include "[A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism](#)" by John Buehrens and Forrest Church, and "[The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#)" by Susan Frederick-Gray.

UUA Tapestry of Faith Curriculum: The UUA offers a series of curricula for all ages, including children and youth. These materials are designed to help individuals explore UU principles and values. You can find them here: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry>.

Online UU Communities and Forums: Online communities and forums related to Unitarian Universalism often discuss theology, values, and beliefs. Websites like the UU Reddit community (<https://www.reddit.com/r/UUreddit/>) can be a source of discussions and shared resources.

UU Seminaries and Schools: UU-affiliated seminaries and educational institutions may offer theological resources, articles, and courses related to UU beliefs. Examples include Starr King School for the Ministry (<https://www.sksm.edu/>) and Meadville Lombard Theological School (<https://www.meadville.edu/>).

Local UU Congregations: Your local UU congregation may have libraries or resources available that focus on UU theology and beliefs. Contact your congregation's religious education director or librarian for recommendations.

UU Bookseller: Explore the UUA Bookstore that specializes in UU literature, including Beacon and Skinner Press. <https://www.uuabookstore.org>

UUA Webinars: The [Unitarian Universalist Association \(UUA\)](#) frequently hosts webinars on various UU topics. Check their website and events calendar for upcoming webinars.

The Fahs Collaborative Webinars: The Fahs Collaborative offers webinars that explore innovative approaches to UU religious education and community building. You can find more information on their website.

UUA's YouTube Channel: The [UUA's YouTube channel](#) features a variety of videos, including lectures, worship services, and discussions on UU themes.

The Church of the Larger Fellowship: This online UU community has a [YouTube channel](#) with videos on a range of UU topics and worship services. **The VUU:** Hosted by the

Church of the Larger Fellowship, [The VUU](#) is a weekly podcast that explores UU topics, featuring interviews with UU leaders and discussions on theology and values.

East Shore Unitarian Sermon Podcast: This podcast features sermons and discussions from the East Shore Unitarian Church, offering insights into UU theology, values, and beliefs. You can find this podcast on platforms like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or their church website.

The Fahs Collaborative Webinars: The Fahs Collaborative offers webinars that explore innovative approaches to UU religious education and community building. You can find more information on their website.

Side with Love: [Side with Love](#) is a UU justice campaign that focuses on love, justice, and activism. They offer resources, webinars, and campaigns related to social justice issues, aligning with UU values.

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC): The [UUSC](#) is a UU organization dedicated to advancing human rights and social justice. They work on various global justice initiatives and offer resources, publications, and webinars on pressing social justice topics.