

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF CONCORD, NH

### Policy for Safely Including Sex Offenders in Our Church Community

Created: 12/02/2021 (JC/LM)

Last updated: 2/22/2022 (OLT) and 3/16/2022 (LS) and 9/20/2023 (ML/LM/LS)

Approved by OLT: 3/22/2022

Effective date of 3/1/2023 (per vote on 5/24/2022)

To be reviewed on: 03/22/2023

As Unitarian Universalists we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We believe in the healing power of involvement in a spiritual home. As a faith-based community, we can provide support and compassion with awareness and vigilance so that all are safe, as those who have sexually offended participate in the life of our church community.

#### Confidentiality

The people who are working with a sex offender to facilitate their participation will only disclose the sex offender's identity to those with a need to know so that the person may safely participate. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

A sex offender who is not in compliance with the steps of this process will forfeit confidentiality.

#### Purpose and Related Policies

The purpose of this document is to provide a process to comply with [Governance Policy 4.10: Sexual Offender Policy](#). The Executive will affirm annually to the Board that the church is in compliance with this Sex Offender Policy and Governance Policy 4.10.

This policy is in addition to our existing [Child Protection Policy](#), which provides safeguards against abuse by requiring background checks and other accountability measures for all volunteers and staff working with children and youth.

#### Scope

This policy applies to sex offenders and registered sex offenders as defined below.

This policy does not apply to:

- **Any persons accused of a sexual offense within our church community who have not been legally investigated or charged with a crime.** If any staff person becomes aware of a person in this category they will inform the Executive, who will consult with the Minister of Lifespan Faith Development and the Director of Membership and Administration about how to proceed.
- **Any persons accused of a sexual offense who were found not guilty or whose charges were dropped.** The Executive may pursue other methods to resolve conflict, create healthy community, or address disruptive behavior.

## Definitions (for the purpose of this policy)

**Sex offender:** a person who is under criminal or civil investigation for sexual offense(s), charged with or convicted of sexual offense(s), or has self-identified as being at risk for sexual offending.

**Registered sex offender:** A person who has been convicted and is on the [national sex offender registry](#). **Registered sex offenders** are expected to self-identify to the Executive or the Minister of Lifespan Faith Development. This policy and expectation will be publicized annually to the congregation at large, and will be covered in Exploring Membership groups.

**Behavioral Covenant:** In response to a sex offender's request to participate in congregational activities a [Behavioral Covenant](#) will be created on a case-by-case basis. The intention of the covenant is that a sex offender is welcome to participate in appropriate events and that they must covenant with the congregation to create safe boundaries for the congregation and the sex offender. Upon entry into the congregation and depending on the circumstances, a sex offender may be asked to sign the Covenant annually. All persons with past histories of sexual offenses shall be asked to sign a Behavioral Covenant even if they have already been attending church activities without notifying the church of their history.

**Behavioral Covenant Team (BCT):** a group of up to three individuals responsible for carrying out the elements of this policy related to developing, implementing, and monitoring of the Behavioral Covenant. The **Behavioral Covenant Team** includes the Executive and Minister of Lifespan Faith Development, and may include a third member as needed on a case-by-case basis, as determined by the Executive.

**Inclusion Support Team (IST):** a small group appointed by the Behavioral Covenant Team, consisting of approximately five persons, who have agreed to offer pastoral support for the sex offender and accompany them in worship and other church activities. The IST will include the Executive and at least one person with relevant professional training in mental health, working with sex offenders, or pastoral care.

## Steps to Take:

1. The Executive (or Acting Executive) shall meet privately with the sex offender to discuss the situation. The Executive shall check the national sex offender registry before meeting with the person. If the person has a partner who also attends the church, then the Executive shall reach out to the partner as well.
2. The Executive will ask the sex offender to meet with the BCT.
3. The Executive will ask the sex offender to complete a [questionnaire and sign a release form](#) authorizing a member of the BCT to contact their sex offender treatment provider, current therapist and probation or parole officer, as appropriate.
4. The BCT representative shall ask the professionals listed above if they are members of ATSDA, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. The professionals shall be asked for their assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will re-offend and what restrictions ought to be placed on the sex offender's participation.

5. If the sex offender refuses permission to contact relevant professionals or refuses to consent to an assessment, the BCT shall refuse the sex offender participation in any congregation activity.
6. If the professional assessment indicates that the sex offender is at high risk for re-offending, the BCT will deny involvement in the faith community until treatment is successful at reducing the risk.
7. If the BCT determines to exclude the sex offender from all congregational activities for any reason, the BCT will decide which church leaders need to be aware of this sex offender's identity and notify them that the sex offender is not allowed to be present at church activities.
8. The BCT is responsible for determining whether the church can provide the expertise and resources required for safe participation of the sex offender.
9. If the assessment indicates that the sex offender has completed or is participating successfully in treatment, is not a high risk for recidivism, and the church can provide the resources to facilitate safe participation, the BCT shall develop a [Behavioral Covenant](#).
10. The BCT shall meet the sex offender, their parole or probation officer, and other appropriate people so that clear boundaries can be established for the protection of all congregants and to reduce the likelihood of false allegations or suspicions. If the sex offender has a partner in the community, that person shall be involved in developing the Behavioral Covenant as well. Additional family members may be included if deemed appropriate by the BCT.
11. The BCT shall consult with the church's insurance provider to determine if they have any additional requirements of the church or the sex offender.
12. In almost all circumstances, the sex offender will not be permitted to participate in activities with youth or children. Although not all offenses involve children, this policy exists to provide maximum protection to the most vulnerable among us, to ensure families feel safe letting their children participate in church activities, and to protect the offender from false accusations.
13. The Executive will inform the Board Chair that a Behavioral Covenant has been created and signed by all parties, without identifying the sex offender by name. When there is a transition in the Board Chair, the Executive will inform the new Chair of the existence of a Behavioral Covenant.
14. A representative of the BCT shall then set up an Inclusion Support Team (IST) if required by the Behavioral Covenant.
15. The BCT will inform the IST about the Behavioral Covenant and any therapeutic program the sex offender has undergone or will continue to be part of. The IST will operate alongside other agencies in a multi-agency approach to the sex offender's rehabilitation.
16. The IST will develop systems to support the sex offender's inclusion, in keeping with their Behavioral Covenant.
17. The BCT, in consultation with the sex offender, will create a schedule of meetings as part of the Behavioral Covenant. This schedule will be reviewed annually by the BCT. During these meetings, they will review the Behavioral Covenant and its implementation, and modify as appropriate.
18. Copies of files, including the Behavioral Covenant, shall be treated with care and kept in a secure file drawer or secure digital file.

If the Executive is accused of a sexual offense, these steps do not apply. Instead, the Chair of the Board shall be contacted immediately and the Chair shall contact the Director of Congregational Services at the UUA and/or the Congregational Life staff serving the congregation.

## **Excluding a person from all congregational activities**

### **Reasons for exclusion**

1. Refusal to permit a Behavioral Covenant Team representative to contact the treatment provider and/or probation or parole officer
2. Refusal to submit to a risk assessment with a qualified therapist
3. Report by a treatment provider and/or probation or parole officer that the individual's involvement in the congregation is not suitable, or that the individual is at too high risk for repeat offense
4. Refusal to sign a Behavioral Covenant
5. Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Behavioral Covenant

### **Consequences**

Anyone who has been excluded from all congregational activities will be informed by the Executive or a member of the Behavioral Covenant Team that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked to leave by the BCT, IST, and/or staff. Other church leaders with knowledge of the situation are also empowered to ask the offender to leave. If the person further refuses, the police will be called for assistance.

If later an individual decides that they can comply with all required conditions, the process will begin again, at the discretion of the Executive to reassess the individual and determine if they can be welcomed into the life of the congregation anew.