

	Healthy Relations Policy, First UU Church of Columbus Ohio	
	Chapter II. Congregational Responsibilities	Effective Date:
	Original Source: UUA Policy; West Shore UU, Cleveland; First UU Columbus' former Disruptive Behavior Policy	Date of Origin:
	Last Reviewed by: Coordinating Team	Date of Review: March 2019
	Last Approved by: Coordinating Team	Date of Approval: March 27, 2019

### **A. Background and Purpose:**

As the creation of a beloved community open to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our Association's purposes and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. While any two people may disagree with one another on any number of points, when people do not feel respected or heard, conflicts can develop which, over time, may grow and impede the fostering of healthy community and ability to work toward the stated goals and promise of the congregation. Furthermore, when any person's emotional and/or physical well-being or freedom to safely express their beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons. Additionally, while differences of belief are welcome, expressions of belief that threaten the identity of anyone are damaging to the health of the community. Actions to address conflict and disruptive behavior between members or parties within the congregation are undertaken with compassion and the hope of reconciliation.

There may be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual, either within the church building or through social media, has led members to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of an adult or child;
- Disruption of church activities;
- Diminishment of the appeal of the church to existing and potential members.

First Unitarian Universalist Church strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. In some cases, however, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual. To the degree that disruptive behavior compromises the health of

this congregation, our actions, as people of faith, must reflect our commitment to maintaining an inclusive and yet safe community.

## **B. General Steps Toward Restoring Healthy Relations**

### **1. Direct Communication**

Whenever possible, parties to a conflict should make every attempt to resolve the conflict by talking directly with the person (fellow member or friend, staff member or minister) with whom they have a disagreement. This is also the case when conflict has arisen through or as a result of communication such as social media. In doing so, all parties should examine their role in the conflict, why it is important to them, and what our Mission, Vision and Covenant say to them about the conflict. It may be helpful to get a “reality check” by comparing one’s perceptions with a third party. In all cases, parties to a conflict should take ownership of their concerns: anonymous complaints are not acceptable.

### **2. Mediated Conversation**

If the parties involved do not feel comfortable talking directly about the conflict, or if previous discussions fail to achieve a resolution or reconciliation, all parties should seek mediation through the Healthy Relations Team, by contacting the chair or another member. At this point, the Healthy Relations Team will begin deliberations on the best means by which to address the conflict, including identifying a mediator or mediators to the conflict.

The mediator(s) may be a minister, a member or friend of the congregation, or a person from outside the church community chosen by the Healthy Relations Team. The role of the mediator(s) is to bring the conflicted parties together for discussion of the ways in which the conflict can be resolved and to facilitate an agreement, if possible, which meets the needs of the parties and the church. The mediator(s) is not a judge and cannot force a resolution of the conflict on the parties, make awards or advocate on behalf of one side or the other. The mediator(s) can discuss church values and principles with the parties and lead discussion, express opinions, suggest compromises, and recommend solutions or settlement to the conflicted parties. The mediator(s) shall report findings, recommendations and impressions of the conflict to the Healthy Relations Team, for further deliberation and action as needed. Other than these reporting options, all meetings and discussions between the parties and the mediator(s) are confidential.

If any member of the Healthy Relations Team is a party to the conflict, the member(s) shall recuse themselves from all or part of the mediation deliberations. If a staff member(s) is a

party to the conflict, the chair of the Healthy Relations Team will inform the chair of the Personnel Committee, and a designee from the Personnel Committee may be part of the mediation process if appropriate. If the conflict involves important matters of church governance, the chair of the Healthy Relations Team will inform the chair of the Board of Trustees and the Board may be part of the mediation process if appropriate. If the conflict is between a congregant and a minister or director of religious exploration the Healthy Relations Team will follow the guidelines of the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) and the UU Ministers Association (UUMA). If the Healthy Relations Team determines that outside conflict mediation is required, the Healthy Relations Team chair will consult with Central East Region (Unitarian Universalist Association) staff, who either will serve as or recommend an outside mediator(s). In these and all other cases, the Healthy Relations Team will determine the best means by which to address the conflict, in the best interests of the parties involved and the wider church community.

The mediator(s) will keep records of the mediation process that document the conflict while allowing for privacy considerations. The mediator(s) is empowered to set standards and formulate behavior agreements for consideration by the parties in conflict. They not limited to achieving compromises. When the mediator(s) believe that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to our church, or demonstrated behaviors do not express the Mission, Vision and Covenant of our church, the mediator(s) may recommend one or more of the following: 1) Counseling for one or more of the parties involved; 2) Specific limitations to the participation in the active life of our church by one or more of the parties involved; 3) Suggest other demonstrable and/or observable behavior-changing strategies for one or more of the parties involved.

If the mediation process delineated above does not resolve the conflict, upon agreement of the parties, the matter may be appealed to the Healthy Relations Team for consideration and resolution. The Healthy Relations Team may consider recommendations coming from the mediator(s) and shall hear appeals from the parties. In the event of a failed mediation with the Healthy Relations Team or upon recommendation to the Coordinating Team from the Healthy Relations Team, the Coordinating Team may take one or more of the following actions: soliciting assistance from the UUA, taking such other action as is permitted by the church governing documents including a recommendation to remove someone from church membership, or taking no action.

It is the hope of this congregation that most, if not all, conflicts can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to live our Mission, Vision and Covenant and directly interact with the individual with whom they are having a conflict. It is the hope of this church that

all who participate in the process will use the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes to inform their own actions and will treat everyone with compassion and dignity. Finally, when no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the congregation as a whole shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any one individual.

### 3. Responding to Situations of Safety

In all situations in which a conflict between church members or friends has or threatens to compromise the safety of anyone in the church community, the Response Team under the congregation's Safety Policy should be notified.

## **C. Responsibility, Authority, and Accountability**

Under church Governance Policy, the Coordinating Team has responsibility and authority to attend to the safety of the congregation and is accountable to the Board of Trustees. The Response Team and the Healthy Relations Team are accountable to the Coordinating Team.

1. Immediate Response. If an immediate response is required, the person with responsibility for responding (the Responsible Person) is the minister present; in the absence of a minister, responsibility falls to the Director/Minister of Religious Exploration or Director of Administration, if present and as appropriate; and next to the sponsor or leader of the activity or event.
  - a. The Responsible Person has the discretion to determine the response but is expected first to attempt to de-escalate the situation.
  - b. The response may include engaging the person in conversation; asking that person to leave; suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed; calling the police; or immediately directing evacuation or lockdown, as appropriate.
2. Follow-Up. After a disruptive behavior incident (whether or not there was an immediate response), follow-up is required.
  - a. Incident Report. In the case of an incident where there was an immediate response, the Responsible Person must submit an incident report in accordance with the Safety Policy. If there was not an immediate response, any person who witnessed

the behavior is expected either to submit an incident report or to contact a minister, who will submit an incident report based on information of witnesses.

- b. Referral of Member Behavior. If the behavior in question was by a member of the First UU community, the Associate Minister will refer the incident to the Response Team under the Safety Policy for follow-up with the person.
  - i. Exception. If, in the judgment of the Associate Minister, the behavior appears to have emerged from an interpersonal conflict, and there does not appear to be an ongoing risk to the safety of others, the Associate Minister is authorized to ask the parties to the conflict to work with a member of the Healthy Relations Team to resolve their conflict and seek to return to covenant with one another.
  - ii. If one of the parties refuses to work with the Healthy Relations Team to resolve the conflict, or if resolution is not accomplished, the Healthy Relations Team member must report the situation to the Associate Minister, who is required to refer the behavior to the Response Team.
- c. Referral of Non-Member Behavior. If the behavior was by a person not a member of the First UU community, the Associate Minister must refer the incident to the Coordinating Team for review of the incident and determination of appropriate follow-up.

#### **D. Healthy Relations Team**

The Healthy Relations Team described in Part B, Section 2 of this policy is to be established and in place at all times, with the names and phone numbers of team members available to all members and friends of the church.

The Healthy Relations Team, individually and collectively, offers confidential support, advice, and mediation, with concern for the respectful nature of interpersonal relations within First UU.

The goal of the Healthy Relations Team will be to bring all parties back into covenant with one another in line with the congregation's Covenant of Respectful Relations.

The Healthy Relations Team is comprised of no less than three and no more than five members of the congregation in good standing. Ministers serve on the Healthy Relations Team in an ex-officio capacity.

If, at any time, a conflict between parties affects the safety of anyone in the congregation, the Healthy Relations Team will immediately inform the Associate or other Minister, who will refer the matter to the Response Team (see the congregation's Child and Youth Safety Policy).

### **E. Principles for Evaluating Behavior**

This policy does not attempt to define either "disruptive" or "acceptable" behavior in advance. Members and friends are expected to honor the Covenant of Respectful Relations.

1. The Responsible Person, the Response Team, the Healthy Relations Team, and the Coordinating Team are to treat the individual whose behavior was disruptive with respect.
2. In follow-up, these questions are part of the evaluation of the behavior.
  - a. **Dangerousness:** Is the person the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
  - b. **Disruptiveness:** How much interference with church functions is occurred or is likely to be ongoing?
  - c. **Offensiveness:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
  - d. **Causes:** Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between an individual and others in the church? Is it likely due to a condition of mental illness?
  - e. **History:** Is there a recurring history of disruptive behavior?
  - f. **Probability of change:** How likely is it that the disruptive behavior will diminish in the future?

### **F. Recordkeeping**

1. To preserve institutional memory and consistent application of this policy over time, the Senior and Associate ministers are required to maintain a record of all incident reports filed under this policy, kept in a locked file in the Church Office.

2. Access to this record is restricted to the Coordinating, Healthy Relations and Response Teams, who have the authority to share this information as required to carry out their responsibilities.
3. The record includes the initial incident report, the identity of the offending individual, all communications between the individual and the church relating to the invoking of the policy, supporting documentation, and a statement summarizing the follow-up and any determination or resolution regarding the incident.

First adopted: