

Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing



Disruptive Behavior

APPROVED 6/13/18

Board of Trustees

REVISION HISTORY

New document adopted 1/13/16.

Updated to specifically mention Sexual Harassment. Approved by the Board of Trustees on 6/13/2018.

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing (UUCWC) is a congregation committed to creating a safe and welcoming environment where differences are respected and the individual's quest for authenticity and spiritual deepening are nurtured. Our Covenant of Right Relations establishes clear expectations for behavior.

When the behavior of an individual causes concern for safety or for the overall well-being of the congregation, we need clear, impartial policies and procedures to guide our response. As a faith community our intention is to respond to disruptive situations fairly and without prejudice.

POLICY

The Minister and the Right Relations Committee (RRC) will implement approved procedures in order to mediate or intervene when behavior is perceived as disruptive.

Disruptive behavior may include any of the following:

1. A person or persons feel harassed, intimidated or threatened. As stated in the policies of the Committee of Ministry, "harassment is defined as an act of unprovoked, unwelcomed, aggressive behavior. Behavior shall be considered aggressive when it is in fact discomforting or humiliating in the view of the person[s] towards whom it is directed, or has the effect of creating a hostile environment when viewed from the perspective of reasonable person[s] witnessing such behavior."
2. There is a perceived or actual threat to property.
3. There is interpersonal conflict that threatens to involve others or negatively impact the community.
4. Interrupting worship services or other church activities.
5. There is intentional violation or disregard for UUCWC policies, procedures and official decisions.
6. Intentionally spreading misinformation in an attempt to discredit the ministers, leaders or member(s) of the congregation.
7. There is a serious breach of our Covenant of Right Relations and/or our Unitarian Universalist Principles.
8. Any behavior that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the mission of UUCWC.

9. Sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and/or other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature where:
- Submission to or rejection for such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term and condition of an individual's employment or participation in volunteer service;
 - Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or volunteerism or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.
 - All individuals are prohibited from offering, promising or granting preferential treatment to any other individual or applicants for employment or volunteerism as a result of that individual's engaging in or agreeing to engage in sexual conduct. Likewise, all individuals are prohibited from using any other individuals or employment applicant's refusal to engage in such conduct as a basis for an employment decision or volunteerism decision affecting that individual or others.

The policy applies to a situation occurring on UUCWC property, off-site church sponsored gatherings and all forms of electronic, written, and verbal communications. This policy applies to any individual or individuals whether a member, staff, friend or visitor. The privileges and inclusion of any individual must always be balanced by concern for the congregation as a whole. This is a living document that may be changed or added to based on future experience.

PROCEDURE

If a possible instance of disruptive behavior has occurred, the Minister and/ or member(s) of the Right Relations Committee will meet with the party or parties involved to evaluate the situation and to seek to understand what has occurred. If a disruptive behavior, as defined in (1) – (8) in the Policy section, is identified, the following procedures will be followed:

1. If immediate response to a disruptive behavior is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister, if present, or by the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the person(s) exhibiting disruptive behavior to leave, or suspending the meeting or gathering until such time as it can safely resume. If further assistance is required, the police should be called. Any time any of these actions take place in the Minister's absence, the Minister and the chair/co-chair(s) of RRC should be notified immediately. The RRC will promptly review the circumstances and if appropriate will write a follow-up letter to the person who has engaged in disruptive behavior, detailing next steps.
2. After a disruptive behavior has occurred the RRC will determine the appropriate next steps. The sequence of potential levels of actions by the RRC are outlined below.

LEVEL I – *Review and Remind*. Two designees from the RRC will meet with the person or persons whose behavior is perceived to be disruptive. The purpose of this meeting is to hear from the involved person/ persons to understand the situation, and to try to reach agreement about future behavior. The Disruptive Behavior Policy and Procedures and the Covenant of Right Relations should be reviewed with the person. If there is an agreement regarding appropriate future behavior, the process is ended. The person making the complaint will be notified that appropriate action has been taken, while still maintaining confidentiality.

LEVEL II – *Warning*. Two designees from the RRC will meet with the individual(s) whose behavior is perceived to be disruptive to communicate the concern and behavioral expectations with reference to our Disruptive Behavior policy and procedures and the Covenant of Right Relations. After RRC review, there should be a written summary including a warning as appropriate given to the person/ persons who have engaged in the disruptive behavior. The warning will clearly describe what future action will be taken if the disruptive behavior recurs.

LEVEL III – *Suspension*. The individual(s) whose behavior is determined to be disruptive may be excluded from UUCWC and/or specific activities for a limited period of time in order for the individual to demonstrate that he or she is able to remedy the disruptive behavior. The reasons for the individual’s suspension and the conditions of return shall be made clear in writing. The RRC shall forward the recommendation for suspension to the Board of Trustees who shall take appropriate action. If suspension is approved, the Board shall write a letter to the individual regarding the action taken via registered mail.

LEVEL IV – *Expulsion*. If the requested behavioral change is intentionally or repeatedly ignored, or the nature of offense is so serious, and after a thorough assessment and meeting with the person(s) involved, the RRC may recommend to the Board of Trustees that the individual(s) be expelled from membership and/or participation in the congregation. The Board of Trustees may accept or reject the recommendation. If expulsion is approved, the Board shall write a letter to the individual regarding the action taken via registered mail.

Factors to consider. To aid in evaluating a situation the following points should be considered:

1. Once a matter regarding disruptive behavior is brought before the RRC, confidentiality will be maintained at all times except in cases in which a behavior poses a threat to self or others and then the decision to reveal information must be thoroughly considered by RRC. All applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child and elder abuse will be followed.
2. In determining an appropriate course of action in response to a disruptive behavior, the RRC will be guided by the practice of restorative justice.
3. The Minister would not typically be involved in implementing the responses outlined in Levels 1- 4 so that she or he would still be able to minister to those involved.
4. Due to the multitude of potential factors involved, the RRC will decide on action and response on a case-by-case basis.
5. In determining an appropriate course of action in response to a disruptive behavior, the RRC will consider the following questions (among others):

- Why is the disruption occurring? Are there ongoing conflicts with individuals within the congregation?
- Has the incident occurred due to mental or physical illness?
- What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
- How likely is it that the problem behavior will reoccur?

Records. Those records related to the actions under this policy shall be maintained by the office as confidential records along with other personnel records as directed by the Parish Minister in locked file cabinets, except as may be otherwise directed by the Board of Trustees. In addition, the Board of Trustees and the Right Relations Committee is ultimately accountable to the congregation.

Prepared by the Right Relations Committee