

# All Souls Unitarian Church

## Safe Church Policy

**Overview:** Child abuse – whether sexual, physical, or psychological – is a problem faced by every community of faith. Ours is no exception. As a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we have covenanted to affirm and promote the equal worth and dignity of every person; justice, equality and compassion in human relations; and acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation. By virtue of this covenant and the deep moral commitments that underlie it, we are obligated to take reasonable steps to protect our community’s most vulnerable members – particularly children and youth – from abuse within our church, and to care for those who have been victimized by abuse. Therefore, we strive to do the following:

### **Education:**

- Provide age appropriate information about development, sexuality, and personal safety. This shall include our OWL program, and other RE offerings.
- Train our Religious Education volunteers in safe practice and recognition and response to child abuse.
- Support members of our community, including our religious education teachers, youth leaders, and parents, in the areas of parenting skills, growth and development, sexuality-related issues, safety, and indicators of child abuse;

### **Prevention:**

- Establish policies and procedures for protecting children from both abuse and common safety concerns while under the care of adults in the Religious Education program. These policies include the following:
  - Children of preschool age and younger must have a parent or the person responsible for the child sign them in and out of child care. Release to any other person must be pre-authorized.
  - A ratio of adults to children will be established for all classes. If that ratio is exceeded another adult must stay in the classroom.
  - The DRE, or an assigned representative, will be available to the classes during the Religious Education period. This person will check in on the classrooms and be available to assist with discipline and safety issues as needed.
  - Criminal background checks and reference checks will be conducted on adult volunteers working with children.
  - Volunteers will be provided with a Code of Ethics to guide them in working with children who are under the care of the Religious Education program or other All Souls sponsored activities
  - Parents or the responsible adult are expected to supervise children when children are not in RE classes.
  - There must be a minimum of two adults in the building, at youth group meetings, and at other events involving children and youth in the church. In the event of an emergency, an exception can be made at the discretion of the responsible adult(s) at the event.

### **Response Actions:**

- All Souls members, friends and employees shall promptly and appropriately respond to any reported incident of abuse within our community;
- Cooperate with law enforcement and child protection authorities;
- Comply with all applicable child abuse reporting requirements and support compliance by individual mandated reporters;
- Offer emotional and spiritual support and healing for victims of abuse.

While our obligation to safeguard vulnerable members of our community is paramount, our Unitarian Universalist principles include respect for the worth and dignity of *every* person – even those who have committed or are accused of committing abuse. Therefore, to the extent possible while maintaining safety and honoring the needs of those victimized by abuse, we will also strive to offer emotional and spiritual support to those who have engaged in past abuse but have committed not to repeat their crimes; who are struggling to overcome a predisposition to abuse; or who have been accused of abuse but maintain their innocence.

### **Oversight:**

The Safe Church Team will be comprised of the Minister, Director of Religious Education, The Religious Education Chairperson, and a fourth member to be chosen by the Team. The Safe Church Team will be responsible for overseeing implementation of the policy and goals described above. In particular, the Safe Church Team will be responsible for advising the Board of Directors, committees, and other lay leaders on formation and implementation of practices and procedures consistent with the above goals, and cooperating with the RE Committee, and appropriate others, to provide information, education, and training consistent with the goals set forth in this policy. The Safe Church Team will also be responsible for receiving reports of suspected child abuse, contacting the appropriate authorities to report suspected abuse, and advising the Board regarding any other action that may be necessary to respond to suspected abuse. If an allegation of child abuse is made against any professional clergy member or other member of the Safe Church Team, that individual will not participate as a member of the Team in any response regarding the matter. While All Souls cannot provide professional counseling, legal advice or medical care, members of the Safe Church Team are always available to provide pastoral support and care to those affected by abuse.

### **Reporting Child Abuse**

Child abuse can be stopped only if it is reported to someone in a position to do something about it. Anyone who **SUSPECTS** that a child has been or is in danger of being abused is strongly encouraged to notify the appropriate authorities. If you need assistance, you may contact any member of the Safe Church Team.

Any All Souls employee, officer, Board or Committee member, religious education teacher, youth advisor, and any other volunteer with responsibility for supervising children or youth, who **SUSPECTS** that any child or youth involved in any All Souls sponsored program or activity has been or is in danger of being abused, **MUST**

immediately report the suspected abuse to the professional clergy or another member of the Safe Church Team.

Anyone affiliated with All Souls who believes that a child may be in imminent danger should immediately contact law enforcement authorities and then notify the professional clergy or another member of the Safe Church Team. The names and telephone numbers of the members of the Safe Church Team will be posted on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall, or in a similar prominent location.

Anyone who is required to report child abuse to appropriate authorities under applicable law (i.e., who is a “mandated reporter”) must also comply with their legal reporting obligations.

The Safe Church Team will assist anyone who reports suspected child abuse to report the suspected abuse to appropriate law enforcement authorities, and will take any immediate steps necessary to respond to the alleged abuse. This includes, but is not limited to;

- immediately suspending any individual accused of abuse from all volunteer or employment positions at All Souls,
- notifying the individual that he or she is barred from All Souls property and activities,
- immediately notifying the President of the Board of Directors of the situation.

The Safe Church Team will not investigate allegations of abuse. Rather, all investigations of alleged abuse will be entrusted to law enforcement officials and legal counsel.

However, the Safe Church Team will coordinate with the relevant authorities, the Board of Directors and All Souls legal counsel to ensure that All Souls is taking appropriate steps in response to any allegation of abuse.

All Souls is not responsible for supervising contact between alleged victims and alleged offenders who attend the church, or for supervising an alleged offender's contacts with children in the church. However, All Souls may choose to hold a victim's right to safety as paramount and bar alleged offenders from church property and participation in church-sponsored activities. The Safe Church Team may take immediate action as needed to bar an alleged offender from All Souls property and All Souls-sponsored activities. Any decision to exclude an individual in this manner will be immediately reported to the President of the Board of Directors.

The President of the Board of Directors will keep the Board informed, on a confidential basis, of any reports received from the Safe Church Team under this Policy. An individual who has been removed from any position with All Souls or barred from All Souls property or All Souls-sponsored activities in connection with an allegation of abuse will be allowed to return only upon approval by the Board of Directors acting upon the advice of legal counsel and appropriate child welfare and law enforcement authorities.

All Souls prohibits retaliation against any person for making a good-faith report of abuse or participating in good faith in an investigation of alleged abuse. Any person who believes he or she has been subjected to retaliation in violation of this policy should immediately report the

retaliation to a member of the Safe Church Team or the Board of Directors.

Policy adopted November, 2012

## **Contact number for Indiana Department of Child Services**

Marion County: 317-968-4300 (office hours 8:00am – 4:30 pm)

Hamilton County: 317-773-2183 (office hours 8:00am - 4:30pm)

## **Child Abuse Hotline**

### **Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (24 hours)**

**1-800-800-5556**

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call Indiana's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline today. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You do not have to be afraid anyone will find out who made the report because you can report abuse and neglect anonymously.

[The Indiana Department of Child Services Structured Decision Tool and Manual at Intake](#)

#### **What is the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline?**

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) established the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (Hotline) to ensure consistent handling of calls alleging child abuse and neglect. The Hotline serves as the central reporting center for all allegations of child abuse or neglect in the State of Indiana. The Hotline is staffed with 62 specially-trained Family Case Managers, known as Intake Specialists, who are professionally trained to take reports of abuse and neglect. These Intake Specialists gather information from callers, determine whether the information provided meets statutory criteria for DCS to conduct an assessment, and if appropriate, route reports directly to DCS local offices for response and assessment.

#### **The History and Benefits of the Hotline**

The centralized Hotline was developed to bring consistency to the way abuse and neglect calls were managed across the state. The Hotline streamlines the Agency's approach to taking reports, improves the Intake Specialists' ability to gather information from callers, and expedites the process of preparing comprehensive reports and disseminating those reports to local offices for assessment. The Hotline also allows Family Case Managers in the local offices to spend more time partnering with children and families because they are no longer responsible for handling intake functions. It also allows DCS Intake Specialists to ask more probing questions to obtain comprehensive information about factors that may impact worker safety.

The Hotline's computerized call system provides DCS with an opportunity for quicker data entry, as well as the ability to track the number of calls received and the timeliness and

quality of responses to callers. The state of the art system allows staff the opportunity to listen to individual calls. If specific concerns regarding a particular call are raised, staff can utilize these features to review the call and address any concerns.

The centralized Hotline unit began taking calls January 1, 2010 in Marion County. Throughout 2010 DCS continued a gradual, planned transition of counties to the new system. This transition was completed on August 30, 2010.

### **Who works at the Hotline?**

The Hotline is staffed with trained Intake Specialists and at least one Supervisor every shift, twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, 365 days per year. The Hotline staff includes: the Hotline Director, Assistant Director, 9 Intake Supervisors, 62 Intake Specialists and an Administrative Assistant.

Intake Specialists must have a bachelor's degree and at least 15 credit hours in a social service related field. A recent snapshot of the staff illustrates the diverse background of the Hotline staff:

- 48 Hotline staff have field experience working for the Department of Child Services
- 2 individuals worked for the Marion County Child Abuse Hotline
- 10 people worked for agencies that contracted with DCS
- 1 person worked for Indiana State Police (ISP)
- 1 person is an Attorney
- 1 person worked in Probation

### **Making Reports to the Hotline**

#### ***Who is required to report child abuse or neglect?***

Under Indiana law any individual who has a reason to believe a child is a victim of abuse or neglect has the duty to make a report; therefore, each citizen of Indiana is considered a "mandated reporter." While reporting child abuse is everyone's responsibility, Indiana law requires some in certain occupations to do so. These professional reporters are staff members in a medical or other public or private institution, school, facility, or agency. These reporters are legally obligated by their profession to report alleged child abuse or neglect.

Everyone has an important role and responsibility to prevent child abuse and neglect. Children need everyone to stand up for their safety when they may be in harm's way or when families in crisis or turmoil need support from those close to them. By contacting the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline if you suspect a child is a victim of abuse or neglect, you can play your part in protecting a child and/or making it possible for a family in crisis to get the help and support they need.

#### **Can the person making the report remain anonymous?**

State law requires DCS to protect the identity of those reporting abuse or neglect allegations. DCS keeps the name and contact information of all report sources

confidential. While DCS accepts child abuse and neglect allegations from persons who wish to remain anonymous, DCS encourages individuals to provide contact information to Intake Specialists. Providing your contact information is helpful because it allows the Family Case Manager who is assigned the report to follow up with you to ask additional questions or to seek clarification when more information is needed.

### **What will I need to provide when making a report?**

If you call to make a report, an Intake Specialist will ask you for information about the circumstances creating a risk of harm to the child including **who** was involved, **what** occurred, **when** and **where** it occurred, the extent of any **injuries sustained**, and any other relevant information.

When you contact the Hotline, Intake Specialists will ask you for information about the parties involved (victim, parent(s)/guardian(s), perpetrator) and the specific allegations giving rise to the call. Information you will be asked to provide may include:

1. Child Information: name, age, address, current location, person caring for child, and need/receiving medical treatment
2. Parent/Guardian Information: name, address, phone number as well as any domestic violence, substance abuse, criminal history, mental health issues, or past CPS history
3. Alleged Perpetrator Information: name, address, phone number, relation to the child, behavioral issues, and other children who may be at risk
4. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect allegations: what happened, when, where, timeframe, and specific conditions

Even if you are unable to provide all of the information above, please contact the Hotline to make a report if you suspect a child is a victim of abuse or neglect. An Intake Specialist will review the information you are able to provide to determine whether it meets the statutory requirements for DCS to initiate an assessment. Please do not wait for someone else to make the call – your call may be the critical first step in protecting a child.

### **What happens once a report is made?**

The Intake Specialist will document the information you provide during the call and will review the allegations with you prior to ending the call. The Intake Specialist then sends the typed report to a Hotline Supervisor for review with a recommendation to either assign or screen out the report. If the Supervisor agrees with the recommendation to assign the report, the report is transmitted electronically to the DCS local office in the county where the allegation is claimed to occur so it can be assigned to a local Family Case Manager. The Family Case Manager is then responsible for initiating and conducting an assessment of the allegations.

### **Why wouldn't a report get sent to the local office?**

DCS is required to evaluate every report of child abuse and neglect that it receives and determine:

1. If the allegations meet the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect and should therefore be assigned for assessment; and
2. If the report contains enough information to identify or locate the child and initiate an assessment; and
3. How quickly the assessment must be initiated.

The terms “child abuse” and “child neglect” are defined by Indiana statute. DCS will not assign a report for assessment if the allegations do not meet the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect. If the report does not meet the Indiana guidelines to assign for assessment it is not sent to the local office for assessment. Child abuse and neglect intake reports that are not assigned for assessment are referred to as “screen-outs.” Hotline Supervisors must review and approve all screen-outs. In addition, each week a random number of screen-outs are reviewed by a committee of DCS field, legal and policy staff to ensure consistent application of statutory guidance.

When contacting the Hotline, please provide Intake Specialists with detailed and descriptive information about the situation you are reporting as this allows them to more accurately determine the need for an assessment.

For additional information on the Indiana statutory definitions of child abuse and child neglect please see [IC 31-33](#) and [IC 31-34](#). For additional information on DCS Child Welfare Intake Policies please see the [DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual, Chapter 3 – Intake](#). For additional information on the matrices DCS Hotline staff utilize to guide decision-making with regard to educational neglect, fatalities, insects, substance abuse, suicidal youth please see the [Hotline Decision Matrices](#)

### **What if I call the Hotline and I have to wait?**

There are times when all Intake Specialists are taking calls or entering reports. If you find yourself on hold please be patient and do not hang up. Your call will be answered by the next available Intake Specialist. The Intake Specialists are trained to handle each call as quickly as possible while ensuring quality reports are completed. If you are calling regarding an emergency situation and/or if you believe the victim is in imminent danger please dial 911 immediately.

### **How do Law Enforcement Agents report child abuse or neglect?**

Law Enforcement Agents (LEA) should call the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline especially in cases of emergency. DCS values its partnership with law enforcement and recognize the critical nature of their calls. To ensure law enforcement officials have the highest priority, they have an access code which routes their calls to the front of the call sequence. On average, law enforcement officials utilizing the access code are connected to the hotline within 46 seconds.

LEA may also fax or e-mail reports of abuse or neglect, but DCS strongly suggests LEA call in allegations to the Hotline.

[\*Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Statistics\*](#)

**Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline**

**1-800-800-5556**