

Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne  
*Guidelines Addressing Abusive Behavior*

“Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation.”

Our purposes and principles reiterate the truth that we welcome all to join with us in fellowship. We affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere that allows our members and friends to continue the “free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” As such, when any person's physical and/or emotional well being or freedom tastefully express his/her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be promptly addressed in a firm, respectful and caring manner.

This policy seeks to address the following concerns with regard to abusive behavior:

1. Perceived threats to the physical and/or emotional safety of any adult or child;
2. The disruption of church activities;

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne has instituted the following policy guidelines to deal with these issues:

1. Situations requiring an immediate response: The Minister (s) and/or leader of the group involved will undertake action. This may include asking the offending person (s) to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required the Police Department may be called. Immediate notification of the Minister (s) is required in the event that the above actions were conducted in his/her absence. In the case of the removed

individual (s), the Minister (s) is responsible for conducting a follow-up conversation in an attempt to assess the problem and generate possible solutions. The Minister (s) will issue a follow-up letter detailing the steps that must be taken before the individual (s) can return to the activities involved. In the case of the 'removed' individual (s), the Minister (s) will discern the need for further dialogue and support.

2. Situations not requiring an immediate response: These will be referred to a standing committee of the Board, the Safe Congregations team. The team will respond in terms of their own judgments observing the following:

a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise and each circumstance will be independently reviewed. Attempts to categorize behavior in advance are strongly discouraged.

b. Persons identified as abusive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes are to be avoided.

c. The committee will collect all necessary information.

d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:

(1) DANGEROUSNESS- Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to themselves or others?

(2) DISRUPTIVENESS - Has the individual *been* the cause of interference at on going church functions?

e. In determining the necessary response, the following points will be

considered:

- (1) CAUSES: Reasons for the discerned behavior. Are there existing conflicts between the individual and others in the church? Is the situation exacerbated by a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
- (2) HISTORY: Frequency and degree of past incidences.
- (3) PROBABILITY OF CHANGE: Has the individual made a committed effort to accept responsibility for their role in the situation as well as make movement toward implementing solutions that will ensure that there are no repeat incidences?

f. To reiterate, the committee will decide on a necessary response on a case by case basis. The following constitutes three recommended levels of response:

- (1) LEVEL ONE: The Safe Congregations team shall inform the Minister (s) of the problem and either the Minister (s) or a member of the committee shall meet with the individual in question, to communicate the concern with the possibility of exploring solutions to the problems together.
- (2) LEVEL TWO: Should the abusive behavior prevail, the individual will be excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a defined time period, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear. The committee and/or Minister (s) will meet with the individual involved to strategize support and safety structures which might be offered to them once they return to prevent further abusive incidences.

(3) LEVEL THREE: The individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Prior to this, the Safe Congregations team and Minister will confer with the Executive Team of the Board for the purpose of making a decision. If expulsion is agreed upon, the President will issue a letter to the individual explaining that course of action as well as the individual's rights and possible recourse. A. The Board must vote. If this step is taken, the matter is considered settled and will not be revisited for a period of five years, after which the former member may petition the Board to be reinstated.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences - seeking "Justice, equity and compassion in human relations." However, concern for the safety and well being of the congregation as a whole is of paramount importance and cannot be compromised. Where abusive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect an emphasis on safety for **all**.

*The Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne expresses its appreciation to the West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church of Rocky River, Ohio for their work in the development of this policy.*