

Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist Questionable Behavior Response Policy

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Preamble
3. Response Process for Questionable Behavior Incidents
 - a. How to report an incident
 - b. Safe Congregation Response Team Process
 - c. Board Discussion and Approval
 - d. Safety Actions
4. Reinstatement request by an individual
5. SCRT Qualifications and Guidelines

1. Introduction

Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist (CCUU) is guided by our Covenant, Covenant of Right Relationships, Mission, and Vision. We believe in mutual respect and personal responsibility.

Covenant

"We unite to strengthen the bonds of kinship among all persons; to promote human dignity and increase reverence for life's creating, sustaining and transforming power through worship, study and service."

Covenant of Right Relationships

In my relationship with the CCUU community, and in keeping with our UU values, I will strive to:

- Take responsibility for my words and actions by being honest and respectful in my speech, while listening to others with an open mind and heart;
- Be sensitive to possible conflicts, and be willing to work toward solutions using available resources, accepting that some differences may not be resolvable;
- Respect and support the diversity within our congregation, and work to create and maintain a safe and welcoming environment for all.

Mission

In pursuit of Beloved Community, we welcome all to create belonging, inspire curiosity and heal our world.

Our Vision Statement

We envision a Beloved Community that is a dynamic community, ever widening the circle to be inclusive of everyone and where diversity can flourish. We envision and realize an interdependent relationship of love and mutual respect for each other and our environment, and a place where we can also learn from each other while we honor an all-encompassing free and responsible search for meaning and truth in this world.

2. Preamble

CCUU recognizes that openness to a wide range of individuals, the expression of a wide variety of beliefs, and contextual awareness are among the prime values of our congregation. These values are expressed in our bylaws and in our denomination's purposes and principles. Also, it is our policy that the congregation should maintain a safe and secure environment where such openness can exist.

The essence of this policy is to support a vibrant and resilient congregation by addressing behavior that could compromise that vitality. Questionable behavior may consist of a single major incident, an accumulation of behaviors, or an on-going situation especially if directed toward a particular person (even including themselves). Typical questionable behaviors are defined below but may include other behaviors that make others feel unsafe or unwelcome. This policy applies to anyone who has reached

the age of majority and applies to members, friends of the church, and visitors. Responses to staff behaviors are addressed in existing personnel policies.

Definitions:

- **Conflict:** Conflict is present when people are unable to “agree to disagree.” When people are in tension over personality differences, a decision or direction, or a matter of opinion, they might be in conflict. Conflict is a normal and healthy behavior when addressed with spiritual maturity. We value a diversity of views and perspectives and affirm that “we do not need to think alike to love alike.”
- **Abuse:** Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, mental, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors, including physical actions and/or words that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, slander, or wound someone. Abuse may be expressed as slurs, microaggressions, and phobias and such behavior directed toward others is not acceptable.
- **Bullying or Harassment:** Bullying or Harassment is when abuse, as noted above, continues over time; especially when the person has been asked to stop. These are actions that hurt, demean, or disempower another person.
- **Harmful Behaviors:** Harmful Behaviors are actions and words which cause harm to church properties, people or relationships in the congregation. Actions that attack leaders, violate our values, or wrongfully present the church in ways that are counter to our mission are of great concern. Generally, but not always, Harmful Behaviors are actions that continue after a request to stop, amend, or alter one’s actions.

We encourage members, employees, and others to report any violation of this policy. To support our policy, we have established a Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT) that will work alongside our Board members, Minister, and staff to assist in the response to questionable behavior incidents. In the event of a conflict of interest (e.g. connection to or involvement in a particular incident), impacted Board members and SCRT members must recuse themselves from participating in any aspect of the incident oversight and review process.

3. Response Process for Questionable Behavior Incidents

The congregation will attempt to respond to questionable behavior incidents by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern. Persons identified as behaving questionably will be responded to as individuals of dignity and worth. We recognize the personal and social ramifications of these situations and will seek to address with them in the least restrictive manner appropriate to the level of severity.

If an immediate response is required, it will be undertaken by the Minister, Board President or meeting convenor. This response may include asking the offending person or persons to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such time as it can be resumed safely. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called, or an alternative to calling the police may be pursued. In general, we hope we can avoid involving the police as this can escalate the possibility of violence and may fail to address the harm in a way that is healing for both the individual(s) and the community affected. However, when there is an imminent risk of physical self-harm or harm to others, or if that has already occurred, the police should be called at 911 for an immediate response. Anytime any of these

responses are undertaken without the Minister present, the Minister and the President of the Board of Trustees must be notified promptly. All plans for follow up steps will be referred to the SCRT.

A. How to Report an Incident

- i. Reports of Questionable Behavior may be made by either victims or witnesses of incidents. These reports should be in writing, include a timeline, any relevant antecedents and context.
- ii. Reports should be made directly to the Minister and Board President with an initial description of the incident(s). If only one of these persons is informed, they will inform the other unless that person is part of the incident.
- iii. The Minister and Board President have the option of not engaging the Safe Congregation Response Team (SCRT) members if the incident is reasonably deemed by them, after consultation and discussion, to be at a low level and easily resolved.
- iv. Those who report incident(s) need to be prepared to support the SCRT in assembling a more complete and objective incident description with relevant supporting materials such as emails, witness statements, and photos, as available and applicable. All incident reports should be made in good faith, and should not be used as pretense or retribution for personal disputes.
- v. If needed, the SCRT may consider engaging a trained mediator. The SCRT will inform the board if such a decision is made.

B. Safe Congregation Response Team Process

Upon referral to the SCRT by the Minister and Board President, the SCRT will follow this written process to ensure transparent communications and uniform records-keeping. The level of confidentiality will be determined on a case-by-case basis and so noted in the case notes. The SCRT is encouraged to attend carefully to the need for an expeditious process that balances appropriate diligence and timely resolution.

- i. The SCRT will meet with the Minister and Board President to discuss and review initial incident descriptions and supporting materials provided by involved parties. The time and date of the meeting, the attendees, decisions reached, and actions requested will be recorded in formal minutes to be maintained in secure CCUU archives for the duration of the inquiry. All documentation developed while investigating and resolving allegations of questionable behavior will be kept confidential. The President and Vice-President of the Board of Trustees will be responsible for determining access to such documentation and for ensuring its security.
- ii. As determined by the initial SCRT meeting with the minister and the board president, the SCRT may collect additional evidence/information by establishing interviews with involved parties, reviewing physical or digital artifacts, and seeking advice from expert professionals.

- iii. SCRT shall consider the context of the individual involved and our church community by considering the potential physical, psychological, and social danger to our congregational community. The committee will review any relevant prior events and contributing factors that will help them determine the severity of the incident, the urgency and type of intervention, and the incident level. To aid in evaluating the problem and determining the appropriate response, the following points will be used in assessing the nature and severity of referred incidents:
 - a. Dangerousness: Is the individual a source of threat or harm to persons or property?
 - b. Destructiveness: How potentially destructive is the behavior to CCUU's mission or functions?
 - c. Congregational Integrity: How likely is it that the alleged behavior would make congregants and visitors feel unsafe or unwelcome?
 - d. Causes:
 - i. Why is the behavior occurring? For example, is it due to a conflict between an individual and others at CCUU?
 - ii. Is it due to a temporary situation that can be addressed?
 - iii. Are there multiple parties potentially at fault? Should the inquiry cover the behavior of more than one party involved?
 - e. Probability of Change: How likely is it that the problem behavior will continue or diminish?
 - f. History: Does this individual have a history of behaving in questionable ways?
- iv. Based on the evidence and careful deliberation, the SCRT shall proceed with the escalation process as indicated below. The committee shall seek consensus among itself in determining incident severity level, but in the absence of consensus will report incident level voting records of SCRT members to the board. If possible, the SCRT should collect the relevant evidence within 5 working days of notification of the incident and complete their formal report of findings and recommendations within 10 working days of notification of the incident.
 - a. Level One: After collecting relevant evidence as described in Bii, above, an SCRT member or members shall contact the person named as the source of the questionable behavior and inform them of the nature of the concern. The person's viewpoint of the matter will be explored, understood (not implying *agreement* of perspective) to the satisfaction of the person behaving questionably, and documented. SCRT members will then assess the situation.
 - b. Level Two: If the basis of the original concern is determined to be valid, this finding will be communicated to the person in question. A written contract for behavior change will be negotiated and this process and findings will be fully documented.
 - c. Level Three: If the person in question refuses to negotiate a contract, refuses to abide by a contract or is engaging in behavior of sufficient severity, they may be excluded from CCUU for a specified period with conditions for return, clearly communicated and documented.
 - d. Level Four: If the person in question continues to demonstrate harmful behaviors after those specified in Level 3 and needs consequently to be permanently excluded from church membership and the CCUU premises, steps will be taken as needed to enforce this decision. Possible reinstatement is set forth in Section 4 below.

- v. SCRT develops findings and recommendations for the Board that will be recorded in formal meeting minutes.

C. Board Discussion and Approval

After the SCRT has compiled their findings and recommendations, they will present them to the Board, who may then accept, reject or modify these recommendations. If rejected or modified, the SCRT will return to the Board with adjusted recommendations within a period jointly agreed to with the Board.

When a final report and recommendations have been approved by the Board, these will be shared with the involved parties and then implemented.

The final report will be secured in the church office and can only be accessed by the minister, Board President, and SCRT members.

D. Safety Actions

It is recommended that the Board secure educational and training resources to prepare the congregation and the SCRT to handle questionable behavior situations, implement de-escalation procedures, and restorative actions as needed.

Further, a list of referrals needs to be developed and maintained for counseling options (e.g. anger management, family counseling, and other sources of stress or dysfunction).

We hope to avoid calling the police. However, when there is an imminent risk of physical self-harm or harm to others or if that has already occurred, the police should be called via 911 for an immediate response. Information from the UUA on alternatives to calling the police is available at <https://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/alternatives-calling-police>

4. Reinstatement from Removal from Membership

Any request for reinstatement must be made by the member who was removed from membership. The request must contain the rationale for the reinstatement including:

- i. an acknowledgement of the reasons for which they were removed from membership
- ii. an explanation in detail of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified.

The request shall go to the Board. The Board will review the request and respond within 60 days. The decision of the board shall be final and not subject to further appeal.

A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the removal. If a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent reinstatement requests may be made no

sooner than one year following the member being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

5. SCRT Member Qualifications and Guidelines

- i. Membership will consist of 3 congregation members to be appointed by the board and reviewed by the board on an annual basis. It is recommended that the board consider members who have experience or exposure in the helping professions.
- ii. This team will be established and functional at all times, with the names and phone numbers of team members available to all members and friends of CCUU.
- iii. Team members in cooperation with the minister will update available professional services for counseling, anger management, or public safety intervention (as needed).
- iv. In cases of a conflict of interest, a team member must be excused from participation and replaced by a suitable alternate.
- v. Team members will review this policy and update themselves, as needed, on available resources for adults, youth, and children. Their function, individually and collectively, will be to offer confidential support, advice, and counsel with concern for the safety of all parties involved.