

# UUA Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth

## Background

Adults working with children and youth in the context of the Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial and privileged role, one that can carry a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as a youth advisor, chaperone, childcare worker, teacher, minister, registrant at a youth-adult conference, or in any role, adults have a special opportunity to interact with young people in ways that are affirming and inspiring to young people and adults.

Adults can be mentors, role models for, and trusted friends of children and youth. They can be teachers, counselors, and ministers. To help our children grow up to be caring and responsible adults can be a meaningful and joyful experience for the adult and a lifetime benefit to the young person.

While it is important that adults be capable of meaningful friendships with the young people with whom they work, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in using their influence with children and young adults and refrain from using young people to fulfill their own needs. Young people are in a vulnerable position when dealing with adults and may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior by adults.

Adult leaders need to possess a special dedication to working with young people in ways that affirm the Unitarian Universalist Association Principles. Good communication skills, self awareness and understanding of others, sensitivity, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and a positive attitude are important attributes. Additionally, adult religious leaders need to be people who:

- have a social network outside of their religious education responsibility in which to meet their own needs for friendship, affirmation, and self-esteem
- are willing and able to seek assistance from colleagues and religious professionals when they become aware of a situation that requires expert help or intervention.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation or conference community, *not just those in leadership positions*, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth.

With the aforementioned in mind, the following statement is a Code of Ethics for adults working with children and youth.

## Code of Ethics

Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable

children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationship is to be realized.

There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore, **leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with children and youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.**

Leaders shall be informed of this code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violating of this code, appropriate action will be taken.



**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Newark – Agreement to Follow Code of Ethics**

I have read and understand the *UUA Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth* and agree to abide by it in my volunteer ministry with the UUFN religious education program.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_