



2017 - 2018

R.E. HANDBOOK

For classroom teachers and program leaders
working with children and youth

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A NOTE ABOUT 2017-2018... This year, the RE realm at First UU is undergoing a change in staff leadership, from a DRE (Director of Religious Education) to a Development Director of Family Ministry. The term “RE staff lead” used herein refers to both of these positions.

Teaching on Classroom Sundays

RE STEWARD ROLES

LEAD TEACHERS are skilled, passionate people who experience growth and fulfillment in the classroom teaching role. First UU provides the curriculum which the teacher borrows. There are generally 20 Classroom Sundays in a year and Leads are asked to commit to one of four, 5-Sunday blocks (though some may choose to lead for more than one block).

ASSISTANTS are expected to support the lead teacher with in-room preparations, clean-up, behavior management, help with planned activities, taking attendance, and following up at the end of the morning with parents as needed. Given that no prep is needed on their part, Assistant blocks are a bit longer: there are three, 6-7-Sunday blocks, each bridging the transition from one lead to the next.

STORYTELLERS are essentially lead teachers in our Spirit Play classrooms. They prepare and tell the morning’s story and hold the circle for sharing time and “feast” (snack) time. Each Spirit Play team has up to four Storytellers, each with a 5-Sunday block.

DOORKEEPERS are like assistants in our Spirit Play classrooms. They prepare the room, welcome the children, and assist as needed during the class time. On Spirit Play teams, there are up to three Doorkeepers, each with a 6-7 Sunday block.

SUBSTITUTION COVERAGE is provided by others on the same teaching team, preferably with the same role. While the initial commitment is to one block of Sundays, it is to be understood and expected that stewards will substitute for each other as needed.

TEACHING TEAMS are comprised of the leads and assistants, or storytellers and doorkeepers working with the same group.

Detailed job descriptions for these roles are provided by RE staff.

Roughly 20 classroom Sundays run from early October – April school vacation. The Children’s RE Calendar is distributed to parents and classroom stewards, with reminders about types of upcoming Sundays shared electronically on a regular basis.

TEACHER AND CLASS SUPPORT

WEEKLY EMAIL FOR TEACHING TEAMS

“Sunday to Sunday” emails are sent by the RE staff lead on Wednesdays to the Classroom Sunday stewards. They include brief general reminders and an overview on who’s leading and assisting in each class for the upcoming Sunday.

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MONTHLY EMAIL FOR RE FAMILIES

“We Are Going” is compiled especially for families and parents, though anyone may subscribe to it. It is thoughtful and reflective, includes parenting resources, ideas for illuminating UU values at home during the week, and highlights what’s going on in RE at First UU.

CURRICULUM AND SUPPLIES PREPARATION

We work hard to take extra duties off teachers’ plates by ensuring that, as fully as possible:

- Curricula and resources are vetted and annotated so that teachers don’t have to weed through an inordinate amount of content and potential activities;
- In advance, lessons are chosen, sequenced, and aligned with the classroom Sundays in the program year;
- Supplies and materials necessary and particular to the curriculum are acquired in advance and kept in a bin in the classroom.

The RE Office takes overall responsibility for this, and greatly welcomes the assistance of volunteers who want to support the program in ways other than Sunday teaching roles.

Curricula, Supplies, Resources

CURRICULA

For all our print curricula, we have multiple copies, which are available to be checked out at September program kickoff sessions, or directly from RE staff. We have several copies of each *Tapestry of Faith* curriculum printed in binders, but these are accessible and free online as well (links for children’s curricula are at: [Children's Tapestry Curricula](#) and middle/high school youth are: [Youth Tapestry Curricula](#)). Spirit Play materials, including story scripts, will be available in classrooms and emailed to storytellers in advance.

UU LIBRARY RESOURCES

Our library includes a notable children’s collection, which features many books that speak to UU values, anti-racism themes, multiculturalism, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender families, God, death, and more. We draw from this collection to supply book resources for some classes. We also have collections for youth, young adults, and adults. There are books about Unitarian Universalism, religion, and teaching. A collection for parents lives on a cart which is wheeled into the Community Room on Sundays. A collection on death and grief can be found on a cart in our parlors. The library is self-serve and you are free to check out a book any time!

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WIKI

The RE Program hosts a wiki, a virtual shared platform to upload and reference material, tips, and resources pertaining to First UU RE curricula and class groups. It is accessible via our website (uusociety.org) or here: [UURE wiki](#). It is meant to capture, hold, and transfer institutional wisdom such as suggested activities, videos, recipes and other resources that teachers have used successfully with class groups. Borrow from it and add to it!

SUPPLIES, EQUIPMENT, & RESOURCES

In your classroom you’ll find a number of basic supplies, as well as items specific to your curriculum. There are tote bins with pens, pencils, tape, scissors, glue sticks, markers, sticky notes, a stapler and a ruler. These should stay in your room. You’ll also have paper. The RE wiki has a list of craft supplies we keep on hand in the main supply closets, so check to see if what you’ll need is likely to be here, or peruse the closets in person!

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- **ARTS & CRAFTS SUPPLIES:** In the supply closets in the Community Room you'll find a variety of supplies for craft projects. We also have kits for specialized projects, such as glitter, fabric, craft sticks, candlemaking, and embroidery. The supply closets (numbered 1, 2, and 3) are in the Community Room against the north wall, near the ramp to the library. #1 currently contains mainly craft kits; #2 has a wide array of craft materials. Check out what's there and try to keep it as neat and organized as you found it! #3 has lots of paper, bulletin board materials, yarn and fabric. Avoid taking entire bins of supplies to your classroom; take what you'll need and leave the main supply for others.
- **MEDIA EQUIPMENT:** Boom boxes (several with iPod docks) may be borrowed from supply closet #1 for classroom use, and there are a couple sets of small speakers which can be plugged into smartphones, laptops, or digital audio devices. These are available on a first-come, first-served basis. We also have a large DVD/TV on a cart kept on the second floor in a closet as well as a digital projector (with laptop, if needed) both of which may be borrowed (NOTE: the digital projector is getting more regular use in worship, so may not be available when you want it.) Please plan ahead for using these items. They should be reserved using the space reservation form in the members section of our website (Password: uusbm3mb3r) OR by emailing Bob Furrer, Facilities Manager, directly: bob@uusociety.org. When you arrive at the UU, seek help in the front office to access the equipment you have reserved.
- **BOARD GAMES, OUTDOOR TOYS:** Behind the chalice wall (west/lake side) we keep board games and outdoor toys such as jump ropes, hula hoops, balls, and parachutes. Most of the outdoor items are in a large black plastic bin. Have at it!
- **REIMBURSEMENT FOR YOUR PURCHASES:** Please submit receipts for supplies you purchase. Complete a check request slip (small pink form; copies in your classroom binder and also available on the RE wiki). Staple it to your receipt and submit to the RE staff lead to have a reimbursement check cut and sent to you. Copies of our tax-exempt certificate are in classroom binders, or can be obtained from the RE staff lead. These should be presented at time of purchase to avoid having to pay tax (we are a 501c(3) organization). We will not reimburse tax paid.
- **KITCHEN USE:** Cooking can be great learning! Reserve the kitchen in advance online (members section for our website; password uusbm3mb3r) to avoid running into another group with the same idea at the same time!
- **WI-FI** is available and works in most locations in the meetinghouse. Look for FUU_Public. Our password is hookup2010.

SNACK

The RE program provides non-perishable snack for class use. These are kept in classroom snack bins; please keep the bin tightly shut to discourage mice. Those who wish to may provide fresh and/or homemade snack for classes, or special food to accompany a lesson, being mindful of food limitations (some life-threatening) that children in the class may have. We post signs outside classroom doors, depending on food needs and make "no nuts" a practice throughout the RE Program. Snacks such as fruit (fresh or dry) and rice cakes are safe for almost any child to eat.

Class Time

SUPPORT WITH LESSON PLANNING AND PREP

As much as capacity allows, RE staff support teachers by annotating curricula to fit with our RE calendar and acquiring curricular supplies and stocking classroom bins with them. We will remind teachers of our availability to procure special supplies, if they give us ample lead time.

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ARRIVAL ON SUNDAYS

Teachers (Doorkeepers for Spirit Play) should arrive early to prepare the room and supplies for the class' activities. On Sundays when we all start in the sanctuary, at least one teacher needs to come upstairs before worship starts, so that you can escort your class to their room when we sing the children from the sanctuary.

PROCEEDING TO CLASSES FROM WORSHIP IN THE SANCTUARY

Those who are escorting a class group should gather with the children in their class for the Reflection for All Ages. Younger children usually gather on the west side (near the piano) and older children on the east side. If you are nearest the exit, please lead the way out and set a slow pace. Others, please model and enforce walking feet for everyone's safety, and keep an eye on the group to make sure no one wanders astray.

CLASSROOM BINDERS

Your classroom binder will be in your classroom, typically on your work table, prior to the start of the morning's activities. Please be sure not to inadvertently take it home with you! Your binder includes:

- Special info about children in your class, including allergies, health issues, or other special circumstances. Please read and heed this!! (It is on brightly colored paper in the inside front cover and will be updated as needed during the year)
- Attendance roster
- "Today's Class Notes" sheet clipped to the front
- Fire Drill Plans
- Lockdown Response Procedures
- First UU Safe Congregation Policies
- A copy of this Handbook
- Pink check request forms for supplies reimbursement

CHILD GUESTS & VISITORS

We have instructions and a special form for those who come with children here for the first time.

When we call children up for the Reflection for All Ages, we will ask that newcomers and guests to be accompanied by parents or responsible adults and told that they need to fill out a "Child Visitor and Guest form" for the child's teacher, before returning to the sanctuary. Copies of this form will be available in all classroom binders and in the RE Welcome area (next to the Jordan-Latimer Room). The RE staff lead or their designee is responsible for making sure these forms are completed and provided to adult leads of appropriate classes.

CLASS TIME PATTERNS & RITUALS

With teachers and assistants changing several times in the year, classroom rituals provide comforting familiarity for children. The following rituals hold each Sunday's lesson and activities within the wider context of UU RE. A simplified version of this is provided in poster form in each class.

- Take attendance each Sunday using the roster in your classroom binder. Please write guests or visitors in by hand. The RE Assistant will track their registration status and put fresh class rosters in your binder periodically. If you have a newcomer or visitor, check the "Child Visitor and Guest form" to see if there is anything special you should know to support the child's safety and comfort.
- Encourage children to wear nametags. Some have pin-style ones, but you might want to have a first class activity of making nametags that live in the room for Sunday use.
- Light the chalice. This is a central ritual in Unitarian Universalism. Chalice and flameless tea lights are in all classrooms. Accompany the lighting with special words. Most curricula have suggested ones, and you may wish to choose and post words in your classroom. A very

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common chalice lighting reads: *We light this chalice to celebrate Unitarian Universalism. Ours is a faith of the open mind. Ours is a faith of the helping hand. Ours is a faith of the loving heart. Together, we work for peace and justice in our community.* Some classes like to sing “This Little Light of Mine.” Other chalice lighting words can be found in the UU hymnal or online. “Illuminations” is a UU app with all sorts of words to choose from. Using special words regularly with your class helps everyone learn them!

- Share Joys and Sorrows. Most classes have a basket of stones or shells, which children choose, then drop back in the basket when they share their joys and sorrows.
- Have snack: Non-perishables are kept in large bins; volunteers may provide fresh snack, but should check with teachers and/or RE staff about food limitations. Rooms each have a black bussing bin containing cups and a pitcher for water. 9:00 classes, please leave clean cups stacked if an 11:00 group will be in your room. Dirty cups, utensils AND compostables can all go in the black bussing bin. 9:00 classes, if you’re sharing with an 11:00 group, leave the bin for them. 11:00 teaching assistants can help greatly by delivering bins of dirty dishes and compostables to the kitchen.
- Ending class: tell the children who will be teaching next week and what the lesson will be about before you say Goodbye. Many curricula, especially those in the Tapestry of Faith Series, have “taking it home” sheets to distribute and support continued dialogue and wondering with parents in the coming week. We encourage your use of these; let the DRE know if you’d like copies on hand.

TWO-WAY-RADIOS

Otherwise known as walkie-talkies, these add to our classroom support system. There are several in use on Sunday mornings, for urgent/emergency needs. They are:

- carried by the RE staff lead (or their designate)
- in the main office with the Sunday staffperson
- carried by the Lead Usher
- in the kitchen on the wall over the sink
- on the wall just outside the door to the Susan B. Anthony room

These last two are meant for your shared use, and have usage instructions posted next to them. If you use them, please specify whose help you need and where you want them to come to. Note that what you say will be audible on all radios in use, so keep your message clear and succinct.

CLASSTIME SUPPORT

On Sundays, the RE staff lead or RE Assistant (designated substitute) will make sure everyone settles in, and will discretely peek into classrooms through the window to assess how things are going. They will also ask for your attendance (NEW practice this year!). If you would like a visit on a particular Sunday for a particular activity, let the RE staff lead know. Otherwise, they plan only to come in if it appears assistance is needed. They will check in after class with as many teachers as possible; if you have something urgent and/or confidential to bring to their attention, please do so; they will usually be in the Community Room during dismissal time.

DISMISSAL OF CHILDREN

Classes are over at quarter past the hour: 10:15 and 12:15 (OWL ends at 12:30). Children fourth grade and up may be dismissed independently. Preschool – third grade teachers: Please keep children in your classroom until parent/guardian picks them up. Check the special information sheet in your classroom binder in case you have a child who is not to be dismissed to a particular person. We require a name and photograph of such individuals, which we would make available to you.

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CLEAN UP, WRAP UP

Assistants and Doorkeepers are primarily responsible for this. Please wipe off your tables. Cleaning supplies, including small bottles of cleaning spray, paper towels, and a dustpan and broom, are available in each classroom. Compostable items (non-meat food scraps and paper napkins) and dirty dishes go in the black plastic bussing bin. Please clean up things like glue, glitter, paint, etc. thoroughly. Unless another group is coming in after yours, chairs should be stacked (no more than 7 high, please; this keeps chair feet from breaking) so that floors may be cleaned. Tables can be left standing. Put supply closet items back when you are done so they are there for others. If a supply is low or missing, please list it on the sheet hanging inside the supply closet doors, or note it on your “Today’s Class Notes” sheet.

Group Management & Behavior Tips

FOR A CLASS GROUP

These general tips can help when you’re leading class:

- Make eye contact with the participants because many kids respond positively to such personal contact. If it doesn’t work for a particular kid, don’t force it. Respect their different need.
- Smile, be yourself, and be prepared to tell amusing anecdotes because kids love to laugh at funny stories about adults!
- Organize as much as you can in advance, and lean on your assistant for help, because the hour is short and kids can have a hard time waiting.
- Engage kid-helpers when you set up and distribute materials, samples, pictures, and handouts because kids love to feel important and helpful.
- Be consistent with hand-raising (or using a talking stick or other item) in order to participate, or you risk everyone talking at once.
- Invite the quiet ones to share more and the vocal ones to practice listening. Everyone stretches this way!
- Wonder aloud with the children. When you don’t know something, say so, and offer to research it or think about it in the coming week. Invite the children to go home, discuss it in the coming week, maybe do a little research, and bring back what they learned!
- Model good safety practices because kids learn by following role models.
- Wait to give handouts to participants until it is time to read or use them because if the students have the handouts while you are speaking they will more likely be distracted.
- Wait several seconds before calling on participants to answer a question because the whole group needs time to think about the question before someone answers it. This helps make a safe space for the introverts.
- Emphasize process over content. Be yourself in as relaxed and genuine way as you can and don’t sweat the facts and details. This is more about modeling and building loving relationships and inspiring curiosity and wonder than it is about accurate information.
- Praise attentive or helpful behavior because this is the behavior you want to encourage.
- Have a backup plan, and be prepared to change gears if what you’d planned is not going smoothly.
- Remember that everyone learns differently. Try to engage the kids with opportunities for listening and speaking, as well as looking/watching, touching/handling things or doing things, and full-body activities, such as dance, yoga, or movement games. All kinds of intelligence call out for a setting in which to shine!
- To quiet the group and get their attention before you give directions, try these techniques (ideally, agree on a primary method with your class’ other leads and assistants):

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- Turn the lights off until all are quiet.
- Use the “quiet coyote” symbol (thumb touching middle and ring finger, with index and pinkie extended like ears), while being quiet yourself, because many children (especially young ones) are familiar with this symbol.
- Say quietly, “If you can hear my voice, clap once,” then clap once. Repeat, adding a clap, until the group is listening to you and clapping in rhythm together.
- Affirm and name children who are quiet and listening.
- Issue a challenge: “I wonder how many seconds it will take for everyone to...”
- Do something out of the ordinary like singing a song or ringing a bell.
- Enjoy the children, their enthusiasm, their imaginations, and their sense of wonder because they have a fascinating perspective on the world, and they will teach YOU again and again!

Teaching teams should be in conversation with one another and the RE staff lead about the group’s behavior, what their collective tolerance is, and how they agree as a team to manage group or individual behavior. Clarity and consistency is the goal, and will help both the children and all the teachers on the team.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS

There are many reasons why a child’s behavior on a given day may not be a fit with what you are trying to do with the group. Two of our UU Principles need to be held in creative tension, here:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person, and
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

In other words, hold sacred the child’s worth and dignity as you manage the class’ learning experience. Ask for help from your teaching assistant or the RE staff lead. Also, communicate the situation early and directly to the RE staff lead. In addition, you can report difficult situations on “Today’s Class Notes” sheet without using individuals’ names and ask that the RE staff lead follow up with you privately. The sooner RE staff know about the situation, the better we will be able to respond to help you, the child, and their parents towards a more successful future class time.

Please try these techniques for intervention with an individual child:

- Ask for help. If what is needed is more than what you and your Assistant can provide, reach out to the RE staff lead or their designated substitute who will be carrying a 2-way radio. Radios available for your use are in the kitchen and outside the Susan B. Anthony room (refer to details about our radios included in an earlier section)
- Check the brightly-colored sheet in the front of your classroom binder to see whether there are any special needs, challenges or issues the child’s parents have alerted us to. If there are, parents have usually provided suggestions for how to best support them.
- Silently move yourself - or ask your assistant to move - up close to the child’s physical space (just being near him/her is often enough to disrupt and adjust behavior).
- You or your assistant can silently touch the child on the shoulder as you continue to lead the group.
- Separate the child from others who may be “feeding” the disruptive behavior.
- Use “name dropping” while giving directions for a project: e.g. “Now, after cutting this out, Maria, here, will take the glue and do a great job of putting it on like this...”
- Praise the child’s behavior if it is currently under some control: “Albert, you’re doing a good job with keeping your hands to yourself right now.”

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- Invite the child to quietly do a different activity in the room, separate from what the group is doing (some children will be relieved by this option).
- 1:1 time with the RE staff lead outside the classroom could help a child who needs to disconnect from the class situation until they are ready to return to class. Please don't hesitate to ask for it!

Over the long run, make an effort to get to know the tricky, special children in your midst. Ask them and their parents what makes them happy and what their skills are. When you know this, you begin to know how to structure the class' time so as to make room for these children's success, and when they shine with success, chances are their behavior will show it!

Each classroom has a poster to remind you of the 1-2-3 steps for supporting children's behavior:

1. Remind the child(ren) of your class covenant (which the group will have worked on in the beginning of the year)
2. Offer the child a quiet separate activity (fidget fix items are in small bins for use in such times!)
3. Call the RE staff lead for help via the 2-way radio

Justice Sundays & "FUNdays"

Justice and "FUNdays" (formerly Vacation Sundays) are one-room-schoolhouse-style learning and playing settings which occur several times a year. Typically, for Justice Sundays, a guest presenter leads special activities for the participants. We start by gathering, typically in a circle, in the Community Room. There, we introduce the guest and/or activities and also introduce ourselves to each other. On Justice Sundays, we explicitly connect what we're going to learn to Unitarian Universalist faith and principles. FUNday activities are essentially playful and social; they provide fun times to make new connections in a more informal setting. Attendance ranges from about 10-30. With guest presenters, a few adults are recruited to help supervise the children and support their engagement. Older children serve as wonderful helpers on these days.

Safety in our Faith Community

Good, fun learning depends on everyone being safe in our programs. We have nearly completed a recent revision of Our Safe Congregation Policies, and underscore the importance for all religious education stewards to familiarize themselves with these policies. Their main concern is to protect the safety of those most vulnerable among us, especially children and youth. The policies are particularly concerned with abuse and sexual abuse, harassment and other inappropriate conduct. Further, they address incidents, accusations, and reporting procedures. They are posted in hard copy on two bulletin boards in the meetinghouse, as well as on our website. A self-guided online overview about the policies is required of all who volunteer with children and youth. In addition, the following protocols guide us in other realms of safety and are listed alphabetically:

ACCIDENTS

Anyone, child or adult, who has an accident here must complete and submit an accident report form. These are kept in the main office along with submission instructions. There is a special accident form for staff as well, and also a form expressly for motor vehicle accidents.

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ALLERGIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

On the RE Registration form, we ask for information about allergies or any other special needs or information pertaining to children. We then share with teachers any such information provided, via a brightly-colored sheet kept in the front pocket of each classroom binder, which is updated whenever new children register for the class. It is the teachers' responsibility to refer to this sheet before leading a class.

CHILD MISSING

If you suspect a child has gone missing, notify the front office immediately, using the 2-way radio if necessary. Staff will work swiftly and thoroughly to locate the child.

CLASS CANCELLATION POLICY

The RE Program at First UU states a safety policy of two unrelated adults in the classroom. If you unexpectedly find yourself without a co-teacher, the RE staff lead or another screened teacher **might** be able to join you. Alternate solutions include merging with another class group or dissolving the class with participants either joining their siblings, or returning to their parents in the sanctuary.

To communicate a **late-breaking cancellation of a class or unexpected absence** of a teacher or assistant, **call First UU at 862-5630 and press "6"** at the initial recording, to access a **voicemail box dedicated for this purpose**. Tell us your name, the stewardship role which is vacant, which class is affected, and which service time. We will check this voicemail box at 8:30 Sunday mornings, so as to make appropriate announcements during worship.

FIELD TRIPS

For field trips, we require signed permission slips. In the case of a class such as Building Bridges, which will take multiple trips over the course of the year, a blanket permission slip is used at the start of the church year. If chaperoning, please provide all details of the trip to the RE Office, so that we can be of assistance in case anyone has questions. Please let us know specifically where and when the group will meet and return, and any other pertinent details.

LOCKDOWNS

We will continue to practice lockdown drills, and will alert parents and stewards to them, while providing a time for practicing and asking questions. Lockdown Response Procedures are in all Classroom Binders, and posted on classroom walls near the designated "Lockdown Safety Zone" where children should gather.

OVERNIGHTS

For overnights, we require signed permission slips. An Overnights Binder, which includes a planning checklist and copies of pertinent forms, is available in the RE Office or from our Youth Ministry Coordinator. Please borrow it two weeks in advance of any planned overnights.

REGISTRATION

All who intend for their children to become regular participants in our Children's RE Program must complete our online registration form. This gives us basic information about the children and their families, which helps us to support their safety and provide them with necessary information.

SICK CHILDREN

Children may not be in our care if they have a temperature at or above 100 degrees; have been vomiting or have had diarrhea in the past 24 hours; have an infectious or unidentified rash; have any illness that interferes with participation; or if any of these symptoms develop while in our care.

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CONCERNING OR UNSAFE BEHAVIOR OF AN ADULT

If an unfamiliar person enters your classroom or if you encounter someone exhibiting strange or concerning behavior, respond with vigilance. If you feel comfortable doing so, approach them in a friendly manner. If you need backup, find the RE staff lead, another staff person or other adult. If necessary, you can send someone to the Nursery or first floor office, where panic buttons are located. These instantly bring law enforcement to the meetinghouse. Members of The Safety Team (info available on bulletin boards) are also an important resource in such situations.

WINDOWS INTO CLASSROOMS

Nearly all classrooms have a window in the door, or into another actively used space. Please keep windows as clear as possible for safety reasons. Most, if not all of these door-windows have shades, as do basement rooms with exterior windows. Please keep them up at all times; they are there for use only in a lockdown situation.

PLANNING, EMERGENCIES, AND FOLLOW-UP: TRIPS AND OVERNIGHTS

Following is a comprehensive, best-practices resource for those leading trips or chaperoning overnights:

Review and follow our safety protocols, which you should have received from RE staff. If you disagree with them, bring this through the appropriate channels in the church rather than just doing it your way. Look at it this way: if you don't follow policy and something happens—it's your tail. If you follow church policy and something happens—it's the church's tail. There's never any harm in taking additional safety precautions, though! Safe Congregations Resources: <http://www.uua.org/cde/education/safecong.html>

Arrange for adequate numbers of competent, qualified adults: Look to your Safe Congregation's policy, RE staff lead's insight, and your own judgment about what is an adequate number. Follow the Safe Congregation's policy to be sure the adults are vetted and approved. Clearly communicate your expectations to these adults. If you have qualms about how seriously they take this responsibility, consider recruiting others. If you don't feel safe doing what you're doing, don't do it. Consider making the recruitment of these adults work you share with the youth—they should help recruit, but you should communicate your expectations directly.

Create a supervision plan: It's not safe if there are adults hanging out at a coffee shop while youth roam a city. Remember you are responsible for the youth, in lieu of their parent/guardians. Do not allow an adult to be alone with a youth—even in public. It would be hard to locate witnesses to anything that made the youth uncomfortable. Be sure the youth and parents understand this plan ahead of time so you're not arguing with youth on your trip.

Medical release forms and permission forms: The forms need to be with the youth, ideally in the car that the youth is riding in. One suggestion is to make copies of all the forms for all the cars. Don't forget forms for adults in case of medical emergencies, too! Look at these forms ahead of time, remembering that information is confidential, to alert yourself to potentially life-threatening medical issues including anaphylactic allergies, diabetes, and asthma. In such cases, consider asking the youth and their parents/guardians to tell you what kinds of emergencies might happen, what signs and symptoms to look for, how you can assist and support the youth, and when to seek definitive medical care. Remember you are liable for medical care you provide for which you have not been trained, but you can still assist and support the youth in self-care. Any epi-pens, diabetic equipment, and inhalers must travel with the youth. Consider including a permission form for parents/guardians to indicate

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which over the counter medication youth may self-administer (particularly pain meds like Advil and Tylenol).

Pack a first aid kit appropriate to the excursion: include, at least, bandaids, sterile gauze, tape, iodine or other wound cleansing packets, and two menstrual pads.

Plan, plan, and plan: What risks are there? What emergencies might happen? What will you do? What will you do if a youth needs emergency medical care? Who will follow them to the hospital? What about if an adult is injured? Is there any potential for weather impacting your plans? What other emergencies might happen? What's your "Plan B" if your original plans are no longer safe? Have you packed the items you might need in an emergency? Will you have cell phone coverage? If adventuring outside, will you be in reach of EMS and what emergency plans does the area you're traveling to recommend? Do you have anyone traveling with you who is certified in wilderness first aid and qualified to give care between injury and the arrival of EMS? Plan so that you can keep everyone safe.

Clearly communicate your plans to your RE staff leader, chaperones, and parents/guardians: Your RE staff lead, in particular, wants to know who, what, when, how, where... remember if parents/guardians need to contact you and lose track of the plans you gave them, they may call church staff in a panic.

Exchange contact information: Exchange cell phone numbers all the way around, including the minister and RE staff lead's emergency numbers. Consider printing up a sheet of contact information so this information is not just stored in electronic devices.

When emergencies happen

Medical Emergencies: Send someone to call 911, make sure the scene is safe, provide first aid, have the individual's form ready and available and have the adult/advisor who is following the ambulance to the hospital ready to go.

Someone whom the injured person knows should be with him/her until EMS arrives. But you may not be the best person. Someone needs to stay on top of the whole situation as much as possible and that person may be you.

Call the parent/guardians as soon as is feasible.

When EMS arrives, communicate clearly with them. Once the individual is in the hands of EMS, contact parents/guardians (again), then the RE staff lead, and possibly the minister.

The other youth need support and supervision and can be very useful in supporting the individual and taking care of necessary tasks; this also really helps them deal, in the moment, with the crisis. Take their capacities seriously—some of them are put in charge of younger children and in that role handle emergencies. But, remember that you are the "responsible adult" and thus responsible for overall safety. This is not a time for consensus or democracy—it's a benevolent dictatorship moment.

Safety before program: If your plans are no longer safe, even slightly so, prioritize safety and move to Plan B. If your gut says it's not safe, regardless of what your adult chaperones or youth argue, trust your gut. It's possible that you'll learn later that they may have been right and that's the preferred risk to take!

Gather information, make a plan, and execute it: Once immediate safety is assured, take the time to

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gather information, including asking youth leaders what they know. Use this information to form a plan and then get on with it. Neither excessive rush nor excessive delay is productive. To the extent possible, include youth in this process, but be clear that safety decisions must be made by the advisors. Let youth participate fully in the decisions in which they can. (“Without Bob, we don’t have enough adults to go for this hike, what should we do instead?”)

Follow-up

Process with the youth: Process, process, process. “What/So What/Now What” is an extremely useful model to use. After a scary emergency, it’s critical that youth have a chance to say how scary that was and to release all of that tension. Once they’re feeling better, engage them in what that meant, what all of you learned, and how that learning can be used in the future. If a medical emergency occurred with a youth, the group needs to process and the individual needs to process (not necessarily with you, the minister, RE staff lead, and/or parents/guardians who may be providing this support—ask). The individual may not wish to be part of the group processing, nor should processing wait to start until the individual returns to the group.

Find support and process the event with your co-advisors and chaperones: You need support, too! You’ve just been through something scary with the youth and then you poured forth more emotional energy supporting them. You may wish to ask the minister and/or RE staff lead to help with this, particularly if there are details of the incident that should be kept confidential. It’s okay to have a lot of feelings about what happened. If something really big happened, you may want to seek a referral to professional support. Please refrain from playing emotional superhero—there are costs to doing this and may affect your ability to be the best youth group advisor you can.

With your RE staff lead, consider what information to convey to the parents/guardians of all the youth: The parents know something happened—their youth told them. Communicating directly with the parents is necessary. They need to know some of what happened so that they can support their youth. They also need to know how seriously you and the congregation take safety so that they continue to entrust their youth to your program. If something big happened, consider having a meeting for parents and guardians so they can process. You may also need to share some information with the whole congregation so that they, too, know the youth are safe and understand why (if this is necessary) policy and procedures need to change.

Use what was learned to refine policy and future plans: After the dust has settled, have another meeting with the RE staff lead and/or minister to review what was learned and to use that learning to make future activities safer. Depending on the situation you may wish to do this with the youth as well.

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