

CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL

Safety in CUC Sponsored Children and Youth Programming

Those who choose to serve in our faith communities with children and youth contribute much to the potential development in the lives of individuals, local communities and the world. This is integral to our purpose of being part of a faith community - to “bring our principles to action in the world” in a compassionate and ethical way. Affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and justice, equity and compassion in human relations are the two principles we affirm and promote in this area on community.

One reality we face with nonprofit and not-for-profit organizations [including churches and associations of churches (the CUC)] is a requirement of insurance coverage for our communities, because of but not limited to:

- Organizational liability related to working with vulnerable and at risk populations
- Directors' and Officers' liability
- Staff/Volunteer liability for programs and services delivered

(Note: Risk management in notes below refers to what volunteer sector organizations do to establish that they are exercising due diligence in delivering and managing their programs and services, in order to reduce potential liability. Vicarious liability is when a person or organization is held liable for the negligent actions of another, even though they are not directly responsible for the actions.)

How will implementing safe community policies and practices impact on the CUC and national/regional youth programming?

Volunteer Canada’s Screening in Faith initiative, of which CUC was a part recommends 10 “safe steps” to good volunteer management, based on risk inherent in the position. Mitigating risk is always addressed first. It is the position, not the person, that determines the level of risk, and thus the screening required. In a high risk position, we may require all 10 steps of screening, a medium risk, fewer steps a low risk position fewer still.

But for emergency preparedness we must always know the name and emergency contact information for our volunteers.

We will always share with volunteers our expectations through a position description and provide an orientation to the position and follow up processes.

Volunteer Canada’s Ten “Safe Steps”

1. Identify the volunteer or staff position and determine the nature of the risk:
 - Participants
 - Setting
 - Activity

- Supervision
 - Relationship
2. Write a clear position description for the volunteer position.
 3. Recruit potential applicants, based on the position description and the skills required. Indicate what screening measures required as part of the application process whenever known.
 4. Use an application form to keep track of important information about the applicants, including emergency contact. Applicant is asked to provide (minimum) two references for medium and high risk positions.
 5. Interview prospective candidates. The degree of formality will depend on the task. This may be a phone interview.
 6. Check all references provided.
 7. Request a police records check for the highest risk positions – based on factors outlined in item 1. ie: those involving regular one-on-one interaction, not in a public setting, where the activity or programming undertaken is higher risk, significant trust is involved and vulnerable individuals are impacted.
 8. Provide appropriate orientation and training for all volunteers.
 9. Provide supervision and feedback regularly and formally, as appropriate to the position.
 10. Check with participants in the program on how the volunteer or staff person is doing. Encourage open communication.

Any time you can reduce the risk of harm to vulnerable individuals in program planning, you would first look to do that. This is risk management (or alternately, mitigating risk).

The risk is often inherently higher with volunteers working with youth in UU community, for a number of reasons. They often meet as youth groups outside of regularly scheduled busy Sunday morning times, or are often off site from regular regional or national conferences. They require overnight supervision for conferences. They often require rides in volunteers' cars.

Junior youth and youth are living through a period in their lives of huge transition and upheaval, may be dealing with sensitive and intimate issues around self-esteem, and require a safe, trusted individual to be available to them. Children and youth are inherently more vulnerable to the potential “abuse of trust/abuse of power” through inappropriate adult interaction.

In the USA as in Canada, UU religious educators have found that most church insurance companies suggest either a "2 non-related adults with each group" rule, or assurance that any small group meeting with one adult has an open door policy or window in the doorway of a meeting room (minimizing the risk) and an additional staff person or volunteer in close proximity providing supervision (again, minimizing the risk, having 2 adults available.)

In highest risk positions within CUC sponsored programming, areas we term *high trust ministries*, a criminal records background check...or police records check for all people working with children and youth, along with the other appropriate volunteer forms and processes, is required. Examples of "high risk" programming in the CUC may be where we are offering Our Whole Lives Lifespan Sexuality programming, Coming of Age programming or conferences and in areas of youth ministry.

People sometimes think this police records check is "the way" to clear a person for a high trust role and therefore sometime neglect other procedures such as personal reference checks. Understand that a criminal background check or police records check (PRC) is only as good as the day it is done, it does not "catch" those that are not yet caught and convicted by the criminal justice system and a PRC can therefore be a falsely secure feeling that allows a sense of "OK, we've covered that, our kids are "safe". This is one reason why guidelines are in place at all CUC sponsored events around risk management for children and youth programming, through the Lifespan Learning office.

The CUC Crisis Response protocol is also in place, as it applies to all human interactions at all levels, not just specifically adult interaction with children and youth.

Here is what our best practices currently dictate:

Safe Community Practices and Risk Reduction in Youth Programming

We welcome youth in leadership positions, youth advisors and volunteers who promote our spiritual, moral and ethical principles, have a clear understanding of the need for boundaries and demonstrate personal integrity. We seek individuals who nurture and empower youth community, and who demonstrate that they are worthy of our trust.

With these statements in mind, the following assessment of risk is used in volunteer screening for CUC nationally sponsored youth programming. It is always recommended that the level of risk be reduced whenever possible. One way to reduce risk is to always have a minimum of 2 adults available at all times.

- Low-risk positions include anyone who has indirect or only casual, occasional contact with youth - the general regional or national conference general volunteers and staff, members of the Board of Trustees
- Medium-risk positions include those who are never alone with youth but who have contact by virtue of their positions or responsibilities - volunteers at special youth events, trainings and fundraising activities, kitchen volunteers and intergenerational event volunteers. Members of the CUC Board of Trustees when at Board meetings with the youth observer to the CUC Board.

- High-risk positions include those where adults have opportunity to be alone with youth or who have power or a position of trust – adults serving on regional Youth/Adult Committees or national Youth Advisory Group, conference on-site youth advisors and chaplains, overnight volunteers and those co-leading workshops or trainings as youth/adult teams.

Screening procedures for volunteers working with youth at regional or national events include: a minimum 6 month period of active participation in a local congregation, and congregational recommendation from the Minister, Director of Lifespan Religious Education or a Board member for this volunteer. If the volunteer is an advisor who has not been adequately screened through their home congregation, then a personal application for the advisor position/ interview with the Director of Lifespan Learning (DLL) or designate/reference checks /PRC and orientation for the role including a signed code of ethics to complete the process.

Many local and regional police departments require a memorandum of understanding, in order to process our CUC requirement of Police Record Checks (PRC) for adults serving in positions of high trust at CUC sponsored events.

A letter would then verify the individual as connected to the congregation, the fact that the conference requires a PRC for high trust volunteer positions and any process for payment. Some congregations may already have a memorandum of understanding with your local department as you may have policies which require PRCs for those serving within your congregation, in areas assessed by you as high risk/high trust as part of your duty of care.

Members of your congregation, in particular youth advisors, may be serving with our youth and others from across the country and it is our duty to assure them and their families – in fact everyone - that we are providing (to the best of our abilities) a safe and nurturing experience for the young people in our community.

CUC's Response to Allegations or Complaints:

- The Director of Lifespan Learning, Executive Director or designate, or a CUC Board representative should be notified immediately of any case of abuse involving a child or youth in our programs.
- The Canadian Unitarian Council complete policy manual can be found at http://www.cuc.ca/business/board/CUC_PM0606.pdf. CUC will appoint a Crisis Response Team (CRT) to respond to any issues or allegations of abuse that may arise out of CUC or CUC-sponsored events. In the event that an allegation of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse is made, the CRT will be informed and will act in accordance with their mandate. The CRT will be responsible to the CUC's Board of Trustees, and will be activated to deal with only those incidents arising out of any events undertaken by the national CUC body, such as the Annual Meeting and Conference, Regional Gatherings, and youth gatherings under the leadership of the Director of Lifespan Learning. For more information on safe congregations, other resources and links, please refer to the CUC's website at www.cuc.ca.

- The appropriate provincial Ministry Office of Children and Family Development, Community and Social Services or Child and Family Services requires all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to be reported to them. The number for this Ministry Office can be found in the Blue Pages of any phone directory.

Our congregations accept risk in the ministry we do all the time. We are well advised to make our decisions around risk management in an informed way. The acceptance of some risk is our reality. Often we can find ways to reduce or minimize the risk inherent in the work we do.

We all accept duty of care and acknowledge that we may be held responsible for the actions of others serving on our behalf.

We are not in the 'business' of mistrust in our faith communities and always assume good will, between and amongst adults and youth. But we are human beings and we may have people around us where factors unknown to us may cause some to make poor judgment at times.

We all have human frailties and so working to reduce risk of harm in faith community, to the best of our ability, is the best preventative measure – it is our due diligence.

Volunteer Canada's web site has some helpful materials on volunteerism and screening.

<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/CodeEng.pdf> is a good summary document and

<http://newvolunteer.ca/en/volcan/screening2/workbooksandresources> is an excellent link to Canadian policies and resources.

Here as well is the link to Canada's Family and Children's Services Act

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/legc/statutes/childfam.htm>

CUC has our own safe church link on our web site as well www.cuc.ca/safe

The UUA's Safe Congregation Handbook (2005) is an excellent resource, with a series of both 45 minute and 2 hour workshops in all areas of congregational life. It reflects many areas of nurturing healthy relationships in faith community. It can be purchased through the UUA bookstore.
ISBN 1-55896-498-3

In faith,
Sylvia Bass West
Director of Lifespan Learning

April 2004 Revised May 2005, July 2006, March 2007, Sept 2007