

POLICY REGARDING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Emerald Coast (UUFEC)

INTRODUCTION

The UUFEC (referred to hereafter as the fellowship) is a place of comfort, safety and integrity for each person's mind, body and spirit. We strive to be a supportive and nurturing faith community, honoring and respecting the rich diversity of each individual. Recognizing that warmth, beauty, kindness, and passion will shape us as a congregation of goodwill, generosity, and presence, we affirm and promote:

- Honesty and authenticity in our relationships
- Words that are supportive and caring, not belittling or demeaning
- Welcoming and non-judgmental attitude
- Respect for each person's boundaries of mind, body, and spirit
- Control of tempers
- Ways to honor the gifts and blessings of thought and deed

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. Concern for the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. This policy shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing situations in which individuals' behavior threatens the emotional and/or physical security of our members and friends.

Since it is serious business to file a formal complaint against a fellow member, doing so should never be taken lightly. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern, before resorting to the use of this policy.

INDIVIDUALS SUBJECT TO THIS POLICY

This policy may be applied to any persons involved with UUFEC activities, including both members and nonmembers of UUFEC.

DEFINITION OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior of an individual on UUFEC property, at Fellowship sponsored events or arising out of relationships originating at the Fellowship may lead to concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child.
- Disruption of Fellowship activities.
- Diminished appeal of the Fellowship to its potential and existing membership

Incidents of harassment, abuse and misconduct toward member(s) of the fellowship by another member whether on UUFEC property, at UUFEC-sponsored events or at other locations, including virtual spaces on-line or through other electronic media, are considered disruptive behavior under this policy.

REPORTING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Any person who believes that they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior or who has had a disruptive behavior incident reported to them should report it to any member of the Committee on Ministry (COM).

If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the minister or a designated member of the Fellowship will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

The Fellowship will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint.

The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained at all times, except in cases in which he/she poses a threat to others.

This policy outlines two distinct responses to a disruptive behavior. Either or both of these processes may be pursued as outlined in sections 1 and 2.

1. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

When a person's disruptive behavior requires an immediate response, it will be undertaken by the minister and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or temporarily suspending the meeting or activity until it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called.

- a. Anytime such actions are required and a COM member or the Minister is not present, then the minister, the COM and President of the Board of Trustees must be notified as soon as is practicable.
- b. A follow-up letter or document detailing what steps must be taken by the offending party or parties before he/she/they may return to the activities involved will be sent by the Board of Trustees to the offending party or parties.

2. MORE DELIBERATE RESPONSE TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

For ongoing situations and those not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or people who witnessed it, to any member of the COM. The COM will research and investigate the situation and will decide whether or not to recommend the formation of an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees, (that committee shall include at least three members) to further investigate the matter. Alternatively, the COM may agree to investigate the matter itself, without the formation of an ad-hoc committee. When appropriate and whenever possible, the COM will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.

Either committee (the COM or the Board appointed ad-hoc committee) will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgment-

- a. People and situations will be dealt with individually.
- b. Stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.
- c. Either committee will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.
- d. When either committee considers such information essential to performing its task, the Board shall authorize funds to pay costs for a professional background check, to provide such facts as the correct identity of the person in question and records of past criminal activity involving threats, harassment, or actual harm to other persons or property.

Members of either committee will collect all necessary information. To aid in evaluating the problem the following points will be considered:

- a. **DANGEROUS**—is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- b. **DISRUPTIVE**—how much interference of functions is occurring?
- c. **OFFENSIVE**—how likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away by the disruptive behavior?

To determine the necessary response, the following points may be considered:

- a. **CAUSES**—why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the Fellowship? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition or mental illness?
- b. **HISTORY**—what is the frequency and degree of disruption in the past?
- c. **PROBABILITY OF CHANGE**—how likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

Initial feedback to an individual(s) reporting suspected disruptive behavior will be provided within 15 calendar days by a member of the committee investigating the situation.

RESOLUTION TO DELIBERATE RESPONSE TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

The COM or an ad hoc committee are responsible for making recommendations concerning the resolution of the conflict. Either committee will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. One or more of the following levels of response will be followed. It is expected that conflicts will initially be addressed and resolved starting with Level One, but any of the Levels may be chosen in any order, as deemed appropriate by the COM or its ad hoc committee.

LEVEL ONE— The committee will meet with the person or persons and other related parties to implement the conflict management process described in this policy statement. Committee members will communicate their concern about the disruptive behavior. If the behavior cannot be resolved, it would proceed to level two and the full Board will intervene. Additionally, the behavior will be referred directly to the Board:

- If the individual has been in significant resolutions before, a committee will infer that repeated attempts at conflict resolution have not worked.
- If the issue affects the larger congregation.

LEVEL TWO—It may be determined that the offending individual(s) actions need to be referred to the full Board of Directors. If attempts to implement its normal process does not resolve the situation and the disruptive behavior continues, the full Board will become involved. It may be determined that the offending individual(s) needs to be excluded from the Fellowship and/or specific Fellowship activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons for such action and the conditions of return made clear in a written notification.

LEVEL THREE— The Board, after careful consideration, may determine that the offending individual(s) may be removed from membership and, if appropriate, excluded from the premises of the Fellowship and all Fellowship activities. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing, and will explain the individual's right and possible recourse.

APPEALS

Any action taken under Level Three or under the Immediate Response to Disruptive Behavior may be appealed, in writing, to the Board within thirty days of the letter of notification. An ad hoc appeals committee shall be formed by the Board in the event of an appeal. The appeals committee shall be composed of two members of the executive committee of the Board, two members selected by the COM who are not COM members nor members of the Board, and a fifth member being an active member of the Fellowship, chosen by the removed person. In a case where the individual does not have a member to propose, the fifth member would be selected by the other four members of this appeals committee. The majority decision of the appeal committee shall be final and not subject to further appeal.

The removal of an individual from membership in the Fellowship will be announced in the members' section of the UUFEFEC website with this statement: "In accordance with the Disruptive Behavior Policy a member has been removed from membership. Any member who wishes to know the identity of the removed member may ask the minister or any member of the Board of Directors." The name of the individual will be listed in the annual report with any previous members who have been removed from membership during the past year.

After an individual is notified of the implementation of this policy upon them, if that person continues to act in breach of this policy, then the minister, Board president or a COM member may call the police and may ask the individual to leave the relevant church-sponsored function or church property as is necessary to effectively uphold the application of this policy towards that individual.

POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT OF REMOVED INDIVIDUAL

Any request for reinstatement must be made by the member who was removed from membership. The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement: 1) a statement of understanding of the reasons for which s/he was removed from membership and 2) an explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified. The request shall go to the Board of Trustees. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the removed member. 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. In the event that 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.