

A: CODE OF ETHICS
Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto

Introduction: the role of adult leaders

Adults working with children and youth in the context of our Unitarian Universalist faith have a crucial role and a privileged one, one which may carry with it a great deal of power and influence. Whether acting as youth advisor, chaperone, child-care worker, teacher, minister, or in any other role, the adult has a special opportunity to interact with our young people in ways which are affirming and inspiring to the young people and to the adult. Adults can be mentors to, role models for, and trusted friends of children and youth. They can be teachers, counselors, and ministers. Helping our children and youth 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 maintaining meaningful friendships with the young people they work with, adults must exercise good judgment and mature wisdom in wielding their influence with children and youth. They must especially 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 our young people in ways which affirm the UUA principles. Good communication skills, self awareness and understanding of others, sensitivity, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and a positive attitude are all important attributes. Additionally, adult leaders should 1) have a social network outside of their religious education responsibility in which to meet their own needs for friendship, affirmation, and self-esteem, and 2) are willing and able to seek assistance from colleagues and religious professionals when they become aware of a situation requiring expert help or intervention.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire church, not just those in leadership positions, to create and maintain a climate which supports the growth and welfare of children and youth.

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Adults who are in leadership roles are in positions of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both 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 connection 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 or youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

Leaders shall be informed of the Code of Ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this Code, appropriate action will be taken.

-- adapted from materials published by the UUA, 1986, 1992.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please print your name: _____