

Guidelines for Ministry Policy on Disruptive Behavior

These guidelines are intended to assist ministries in choosing how to address persons who disrupt ministry activities. These guidelines are written as a starting point for a ministry to create its own approach for addressing these issues. Each ministry is independently responsible for how it handles attendees and members it considers “disruptive.” UWM recognizes that state and local laws, and the independence of each ministry, may call for different approaches.

These guidelines are organized in the form of a model Policy, but they contain additional language amplifying matters for ministry consideration. Each ministry should review and determine how best to address these situations. The Policy is adapted from Unitarian Universalist with their permission. We invite each ministry to check their website [<http://www.uua.org/safe/44145.shtml>] in creating its own policy in this area.

Unity of _____

Disruptive Behavior Policy

Policy No.

Approval date:

Purpose Statement

Unity of _____ endeavors to be welcoming and open to all persons. Therefore, it is important that community credentialed leaders and members realize that they have the responsibility to provide a safe and welcoming environment for children and adults—both regular attendees and visitors. This Disruptive Behavioral Policy establishes behavioral guidelines that consider the community's well-being first and foremost.

Disruptive behaviors may impact the perceived safety of any adult or child, church activities, and/or the ministry’s appeal to the potential and existing membership. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her opinions is threatened, action must be taken. The guidelines provided by our Disruptive Behavior Policy hold all to the same set of standards, and provide a fair and unbiased process for handling disruptive behavior when it occurs.

Unity affirms and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of every person and supports leaders in creating a safe space within their congregations. We encourage healthy relationships among those who are part of the congregation, and between the congregation and the larger community.

Disruptive Behavior Policy

Unity of _____ affirms the inherent worth of all people, and seeks to create an open and

inclusive spiritual community. This requires a safe and supportive environment, which includes addressing any situation which impinges on the individual's or the community's well-being. Such situations will be addressed promptly, directly, clearly and with compassion and consistency.

Disruptive behavior can be summarized as one or more of the following:

- **Dangerous:** The individual is a threat or perceived threat to people or property.
- **Disruptive:** Individual's behavior has a significant negative impact on ministry activities and/or significantly interferes with the development of healthy relationships in the spiritual community.
- **Offensive:** Individual's behavior drives members of the community and/or newcomers away.
- **Harassment:** This is the act of systematic and/or unwanted and annoying actions of one party or group towards another person or group, including threats, demands, and coercion. The purposes may vary including prejudice and personal malice.

This policy provides a coherent process for addressing these situations:

1. Since prayer is foundational to who we are, when disruptive behavior arises, the leadership will respond first with prayer—holding the situation and all those involved in a space of love and wholeness. Throughout this process leaders will maintain a prayerful space in all discussions.
2. In order to address disruptive behavior fairly and effectively, it is essential that leaders are diligent in keeping accurate and timely records which document observed behavior and actions taken. Written records provide context and continuity should similar issues arise again either involving the same individual or someone different.
3. It is the responsibility of the board of trustees together with the credentialed leaders to prayerfully discern when action needs to be taken on disruptive behavior (using the criteria specified above). Persons identified as disruptive will be responded to as individuals of sacred worth; stereotypes will be avoided. To determine the necessary response, all of the following will be considered:
 - a. Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church?
 - b. Is there a known professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
 - c. What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
 - d. How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
4. The board, with prayerful consideration and rational decision-making, will decide upon the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of

response are recommended:

- a. LEVEL 1: The board being duly and fully informed will assign a team of at least two people to meet with the individual. This team should consist of a board member and/or credentialed leader, and a lay leader within the congregation. This team will clearly articulate concerns and work with the individual to co-create a plan of action which addresses the impact of their behavior on the community and to ensure the behavior doesn't continue.
- b. LEVEL 2: The individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons, timeframe, and conditions of return made clear both verbally and in writing.
- c. LEVEL 3: The individual's membership is revoked, and he/she is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. A letter will be sent to the individual by the board explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse, if any. It is preferable that the letter be presented during a face-to-face conversation, unless safety is a concern.

5. Appeal: Any action taken may be appealed to the board of trustees.

6. **If the disruptive behavior presents an immediate danger to anyone in the ministry, an immediate response is required.** In such circumstances, those in the most responsible position should take action to establish safety. Action could include:

- a. Asking the individual to leave
- b. Suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed.
- c. Calling the police department and requesting assistance.
- d. Behavior requiring any of these actions is extremely disruptive and harmful to the community. Therefore, an appeal will not be considered.

Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without a board member or minister(s) being present, the board and minister(s) must be notified by phone as soon as possible, and a written report must be submitted promptly.

A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the board /minister(s) to the offending party or parties.

Unity strives to be inclusive and affirming in our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual. To the degree the disruption compromises the health of a congregation, our actions as a spiritual community must reflect this emphasis on security.