

First Unitarian Universalist Church of West Volusia

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR POLICY

Statement of Purpose

The goal at First Unitarian Universalist Church of West Volusia (1UUCWV) is to maintain a safe, welcoming and healthy environment for everyone who participates in our congregational life. As a UU community, a balance often needs to be maintained between individual expressions/needs and that of the community as a whole.

There have been times when disruptive behavior of an individual in the church building, the church grounds, or on social media has led members to voice concerns about one or more of the following:

1. Evident violation of our commitment to Right Relations.
2. Perceived threats to the physical safety and/or well being of any adult or child.
3. The disruption of church activities.
4. Diminishing appeal of the congregation to its potential and existing membership.

The application of this Disruptive Behavior Policy (DBP) is the remedy of last resort. As members of our beloved community committed to honoring our *Right Relations For a Healthy Congregation*, we are encouraged to resolve conflicts directly or at the lowest possible level. As adults, we can firmly and compassionately set boundaries for our interactions with each other. At times of disruptive behavior, it is imperative to call each other back to our Right Relations and remind ourselves of our commitments to each other and the mission of our church.

Should it be necessary to go further in returning us to Right Relations, the following DBP shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing such situations. This policy does not condone preventing discussion of different, diverse, or controversial subjects.

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

Definition of Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior as defined in this policy is any speech or action that threatens the emotional or physical safety of one or more individuals of the congregation or that threatens to disrupt the normal function of congregational activities or that is offensive or disturbing enough such that it threatens to inhibit prospective or existing members from wanting to attend church or other congregational activities.

In addition to the definition of disruptive behaviors defined in this section, it is important to draw a distinction between behavior that is rude, behavior that is mean, and behavior that is characteristic of bullying. (see appendix)

Reporting Disruptive Behavior

Any person who believes they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior, or who has had a disruptive behavior incident reported to them, should submit a Disruptive Incident Report (DIR) describing the nature of the incident, time of occurrence, place, person(s) involved and witness(es). In no case, should anyone send an email or other electronic communication outlining the disruptive behavior to the congregation membership or a non-member of the congregation. The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. While the church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, the church will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individual(s) involved only on a "need-to-know basis" and as necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

Situations Requiring Immediate Response

If an immediate response is required, the responsibility for interrupting the course of disruptive behavior may be undertaken by the leader of the group involved, Board President/designee, Board member or any congregant, staff, or visitor observing or experiencing the disruptive behavior. This may include:

- Identify the problematic behavior to the offender(s), offer alternatives to the behavior, and identify the consequences if the behavior persists;
- Ask the offending person(s) to leave;
- Remove the victim of disruptive behavior to a safe area;
- Suspend a meeting or activity until such time that it may be safely resumed;
- In situations of physical threat, the Police Department may be called.

The Board should be informed as soon as possible in writing, the nature of the incident, giving date and time, place, and person(s) involved and/or witnessing the incident. A letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Board President to the offending individual(s).

Evaluating the Situation

Whether or not the situation requires an immediate response, the Board will either take up the issue directly, or appoint (1UUCWV Bylaws - Article Twelve) an ad hoc Mediation Council (MC), to investigate the situation. Problems will be responded to as they arise. There will be no attempt to define

acceptable behavior in advance. People and situations will be dealt with individually. In either case, the evaluation process will involve determining:

- *Dangerousness*: Is the behavior a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- *Disruptiveness*: How much interference with church functions is going on?
- *Offensiveness*: How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

The Board or MC will assess the necessary response on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration:

- *Causes* – Why is the situation occurring?
- *History* – What is the frequency and degree of disruption in the past?
- *Probability of change* – How likely is it that disruptive behavior will not recur? How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish without intervention?

If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the board president, board member, or other church leadership will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

Mediation Council Levels of Response.

If a MC has been appointed, after investigating the situation it has two options:

1. Notify the Board that it recommends implementing a conflict resolution process. The MC will attempt to engage the parties involved in the situation in a conflict resolution process. The MC will determine whether or not it feels that the situation has been resolved through its efforts, and will confidentially report its assessment in writing to the Board.
2. Confidentially report the findings of its investigation directly back to the Board in writing.

Board Levels of Response

The Board has options of progressive action and may respond at whatever level it deems appropriate. The Board President/or designee and two additional Board members will offer to review/explain Board Level Responses 2 through 5 with the offending individual(s) to ensure a full understanding of all written documentation at each level of response. The Board will have discretion on how to communicate complaints and resolutions to the Congregation.

Level 1: No Action: It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the Board President/or designee will explain and discuss this with the person who filed the complaint.

Level 2: Clarifications of Expectations: Clarification will be in the form of a written document clearly outlining the expectations that the Individual(s) needs to meet in order to be in good standing at 1UUCWV.

Level 3: Restricted Participation: Restrictions may be in the form of activities, places, and/or people; or it can be complete restriction of involvement of any kind with 1UUCWV for a limited period of time (and clearly outlined in written documentation).

Level 4: Prohibited from Participation: This response indicates that the behavior has been egregious enough that the offender(s) shall be permanently restricted from the church premises and all church activities. A majority vote of the Board will approve this recommendation. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing, explaining the rights of the individual(s) and possible recourse, and sent by certified mail.

Level 5: The Board may offer an alternate proposal that a majority agree to.

Reinstatement

Any request for reinstatement must be made by the individual(s) being limited.

The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement:

1. A statement of understanding of the reasons for which they were limited from congregational life.
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. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the limited individual(s). 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 limitation. 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(s) being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

Record Keeping

All events and reports of behaviors outlined in this policy and any ensuing responses taken will be documented and kept by the Board. These records can be used to provide context and continuity should similar issues arise. All records will be kept strictly confidential. Only members of the Board and MC will have access to these records, which will be kept in electronic and paper format in a dedicated, locked filing cabinet. The Board President and designated alternate will have keys to this cabinet.

NOTE: It is recommended that an electronic copy (on a “flash drive” or CD) of the reports, recommendations, and actions taken by the Mediation Council and the Board be kept in a safe deposit box, accessible by the President of the Board and designated alternate.

Conclusion

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of West Volusia strives to be an inclusive community, affirming 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 the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of the congregation must reflect this emphasis on security.

Behavior Characteristics

It is important to draw a distinction between behavior that is rude, behavior that is mean, and behavior that is characteristic of bullying.

Rude - Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else. Incidents of rudeness are usually spontaneous, unplanned inconsideration, based on thoughtlessness, poor manners, or narcissism, but not meant to actually hurt someone.

Mean - Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone. The main distinction between “rude” and “mean” behavior has to do with intention; while rudeness is often unintentional, mean behavior very much aims to hurt someone. Sometimes mean comes in the form of “humor.”

Bullying - Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power. Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Bullying may be physical, verbal, relational, or carried out via technology. An imbalance of power can be as simple as being a member of the majority in the congregation, being with a group of supportive friends, against someone who is not in the majority or is alone. Religious professionals and staff are not immune from bullying or being bullied. (Source: Whitson, Signe. [“Rude Vs. Mean Vs. Bullying: Defining the Differences.”](#) Bullying Behavior)

Most of us have experienced bullying. It can happen in committee meetings, on our boards, within our staff teams, and even between laity and staff (in either direction). Thom Rainer talks about common traits of people who bully others in congregations:

1. *They do not recognize themselves as potential bullies.* To the contrary, they see themselves as necessary heroes sent to save the congregation from its self.
2. *They have personal and self-serving agendas.* They have determined what “their” congregation should look like. Any person or ministry or program that is contrary to their perceived ideal congregation must be eliminated.
3. *They seek to form power alliances with weak members in the congregation.* They will pester and convince groups, committees, and persons to be their allies in their cause. Weaker congregation members will succumb to their forceful personalities.
4. *They tend to have intense and emotional personalities.* These bullies use the intensity of their personalities to get their way.
5. *They are famous for saying “people are saying.”* They love to gather tidbits of information and shape it to their own agendas.
6. *They find their greatest opportunities in low-expectation congregations.* Many of the members have an entitlement view of congregational membership. They seek to get their own needs and

preferences fulfilled. They therefore won't trouble themselves to confront and deal with church bullies. That leads to the next issue, which is a consequence of this point.

7. *They are allowed to bully because members will not address their behavior.* Religious professionals and lay leaders who have been attacked by bullies report that, while the bully brings them great pain, they have even greater hurt because most of the church members stood silent and let it happen.
8. *They create chaos and wreak havoc.* A bully always has their next mission. While they may take a brief break from one bullying mission to the next, they are not content unless they are exerting the full force of their manipulative behavior.
9. *They often move to other congregations after they have done their damage.* Whether they are forced out or simply get bored, they will move to other congregations with the same bullying mission. Some bullies have wreaked havoc in three or more congregations.

(Rainer, Thom S. "[Nine Traits of Church Bullies](#)")

Pathways to Conflict Resolution

Whenever a member of the congregation finds themselves in an interpersonal conflict with another member, they are encouraged to follow the steps in this Pathway towards resolution and reconciliation.

Steps	Title	Description	Tips
Step 1	Personal Reflection	Self-reflection and empathy: The person who is feeling in conflict (Person A) spends time reflecting on the situation – what is their role in the conflict, and what factors could be causing Person B's behavior?	Try writing down what happened and why, to get it clear in your mind. Calmly try to put yourself in Person B's position without vilifying them. Sleep on it before jumping into action.
Step 1a	Support with self-reflection	Person A asks a member of the Mediation Council (MC) to be a listening ear to help them process their concerns. The MC member will listen calmly, stay neutral and offer guidance.	
If step 1 has not resolved Person A's sense of conflict / being out of right relations with Person B, they may choose to move on to step 2.			
Step 2	Person A meets with Person B	Address concern with other person calmly and clearly.	Calmly convey feelings using "I" statements. Be clear about issues. Listen openly, reflect back on what you've heard. Speak from the heart.
Step 2a	Assistance with facilitation of discussion	Person A or B invites an MC member to help facilitate the discussion between the two parties and assist each in understanding the issue to reach resolution. They should be open to hearing guidance from MC member.	
If step 2 has not resolved the conflict, or person B refused to participate in step 2, person A may choose to move on to step 3.			
Step 3	Consult with MC member(s)	If the above steps have not resolved the issue/concern satisfactorily, consult with 1-2 members of the MC regarding next steps. MC may recommend Board involvement.	Be clear with MC and yourself that you want resolution. Discuss issues/concerns that you feel remain unresolved.
Step 3a	Conflict referred to Board	Board conflict resolution process: Two board members conduct information gathering, bring written reports to Board. Board agrees on a plan – usually mediation, but could limit A or B's participation in the church.	