

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.

A. Purpose Statement

Unity of _____ endeavors to be welcoming and open to all persons. Therefore, it is important that community credentialed leaders, officers, employees and others with leadership duties act appropriately to provide a safe and welcoming environment for children and adults—both regular attendees and visitors. This Disruptive Behavioral Policy establishes guidelines that consider the community's well-being first and foremost.

Disruptive behaviors, defined below, may impact the perceived safety of any adult or child, ministry 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.

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.

B. 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 under this Policy means one or more of the following behaviors:

- **Dangerous:** The individual's behavior is a threat, or reasonably perceived to be a threat, to people engaged in the ministry's activities or to property for which the ministry is responsible.
- **Disruptive:** The individual's behavior has a significant negative impact on ministry activities and/or significantly interferes with the development of healthy relationships within the spiritual community.
- **Offensive:** The individual's behavior is such that a reasonable person's regularly attending ministries activities could **reasonably** decide to leave or not join the community.

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 (including, to the extent possible, when immediate action under Section 5 is necessary) – holding the situation and all those involved in a space of love and wholeness. Throughout this process ministry leaders will maintain a prayerful space in all discussions.
2. In order to address disruptive behavior fairly and effectively, leaders should endeavor to keep 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, the following questions may be appropriate:
 - a. Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the ministry?
 - 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. The following three levels of response are recommended for consideration:
 - a. LEVEL 1: The board, after or as part of an initial investigation, assigns 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 any disruptive behavior on the community and works to assure that such behavior doesn't continue.
 - b. LEVEL 2: The board in writing excludes the individual from ministry activities as appropriate for a defined period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear and supplemented as appropriate orally.
 - c. LEVEL 3: The board in writing excludes the individual permanently from ministry activities and/or premises .The board sends a letter to the individual explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse, if any. If appropriate, the letter should be presented during a face-to-face conversation.
5. **IMMEDIATE RESPONSES: 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. Immediate one time action could include:
 - a. Asking the individual to leave
 - b. Immediately suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed.
 - c. Calling the police department and requesting assistance.

Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without a board member or minister(s) being present, the senior minister and president of the board, or those acting as same, must be notified by phone as soon as possible. The senior minister, or person acting as same, should assure that in all situations a written report is submitted promptly.

6. The Board will review the immediate response and shall send a follow-up letter to those individuals whose behaviors appropriately require further restrictions or exclusions. The letter in reasonable detail will explain the further restrictions or exclusions and what steps, if any, must be taken before returning to the activities involved

7. Whether and how an individual's membership in the ministry is implicated as a result of disruptive behavior is not the focus of this Policy. While disruptive behavior may be a cause for the loss or restriction of membership rights, such issues should be addressed separately, normally through the ministry's bylaws.
8. **Appeal:** Any action that restricts or excludes future participation by an individual the board or spiritual leader determines to be disruptive may be appealed to the board of trustees. [A process is suggested, such as requiring a timely, written letter to the Board requesting review of any decision, setting forth reasons for any action requested]. Whenever the board cannot meet in a timely manner to make decisions under this Policy, the spiritual leader of the ministry may act on its behalf, bringing such action to the board for its review as soon as possible.

Appendix

For more information on healthy relationships please visit: <http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/do-you-want-thrive>

http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/sites/unityworldwideministries.org/files/JointStatementsJointStatements_0.pdf