

FINAL: Passed by the Board of Trustees

POLICY TITLE: Child and Youth Safety Policy

DATE: March 9, 2021

Replaces Policy: **Child and Youth Safety Policy**

Date: **2014, revised 2018, revised 2021**

The following policy has been approved by the Board of Trustees of the Washington Ethical Society to ensure a safe and secure environment for our children and youth¹:

I. Supervision of Children and Youth at WES

- A. Each group of children² and/or youth will have two or more adult workers³ present at all times (see Section III below: Child/Worker Ratio). If there are insufficient numbers of adults present, the Director of Lifelong Learning (DLL) or their designee may combine classes-
- B. Window coverings and/or the door to any classroom or meeting space will remain open at all times unless a video or other lesson is being projected and two or more adults are present in any classroom.
- C. The DLL and/or designee shall circulate amongst the classrooms and monitor classroom activity randomly during regular classes.
- D. All SEEK/lifelong learning employees are supervised by the DLL. In the absence of a DLL, SEEK/lifelong learning employees are supervised by the chief of staff. All hiring procedures for SEEK/lifelong learning positions must follow Board policies and by-laws, such as the diversity in hiring policy and the background check policy. All hires must be approved by the Senior Leader.

II. Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Youth

Those who provide direct care or supervision for children and youth at WES must meet the following criteria:

- A. All *paid* workers must: complete an application for employment; consent to such reference-checking procedures as WES, at its discretion, deems necessary; complete a screening form, successfully complete a criminal and sex offender background check;

¹ Part of this policy is adapted from the Child and Youth Safety Policy of the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo, CA, with deep thanks for their efforts and generosity.

² A child is a person under the age of 18 years. A youth is a person age 11-18.

³ SEEK workers are persons who are engaged with WES children and youth as classroom teachers, volunteers, or assistants, COA or youth group advisors, whether they are paid or unpaid, permanently assigned or occasional.

read this Safety Policy and agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct set forth here; and sign the Code of Ethical Conduct.

- B. All *volunteer* workers must successfully complete a criminal and sex offender background check; read this Safety Policy and agree to be bound by it; and sign the Code of Ethical Conduct set forth here. Background checks will be renewed periodically, as required by WES.
- C. One-time/infrequent guest speakers, volunteers, or teacher's aides, if they are background checked, must be paired with at least one staff person or background-checked volunteer. The background check may be waived for one-time guest speakers only if they are accompanied by two background-checked staff or volunteers.
- D. Regular teachers must have attended WES for at least six (6) months, attend a teacher training, and receive training annually. Regular teachers are defined as those on core teaching teams, who normally volunteer at least once per month.

III. Worker to Child Ratio

As stated above, there must be a minimum of two workers at all times. Volunteers who are background checked and have received training count as workers for the purposes of this policy.

- A. For infants and toddlers in the Nursery (children under three (3) years of age), the desirable ratio is one (1) worker for two (2) children, but should not exceed three (3) children per worker.
- B. For the preschool classroom, the desired ratio is one (1) worker for five (5) children, but should not exceed seven (7) children per worker.
- C. For older children, including elementary school-age (kindergarten through 5th grade), middle school (6th through 8th grade), and high school (9th through 12th grade), the preferred ratio is one (1) worker for seven (7) children or youth, but should not exceed ten (10) children or youth per worker.
- D. If the above worker to child ratios are exceeded during SEEK classes or youth group, teachers must request assistance from the DLL or their designee. Combining classes may be a strategy for rebalancing the worker to child ratio.

IV. Diapering and Toileting Policy

- A. Workers may change diapers of children under the age of three (3) only who are either being cared for in the WES-nursery or at child care provided for a WES function. **Workers will not diaper children who are in the preschool class or older.** Diapers should be changed by workers (other than the child's parent or guardian) only when two (2) workers, or that worker and one other adult, are present. Each and every time after changing a diaper, the worker shall thoroughly wash his or her hands with plenty of soap and hot water, and shall clean the changing area. WES will provide gloves and hand-sanitizer for this purpose.

- A. When taking a child to the restroom, the worker should stay out of the restroom until the child is finished. Children need as much privacy as possible when using bathroom facilities and workers are to enter and assist only when necessary. Preferably, a worker should wait for the child to ask for help before assisting the child. If the child clearly needs help but does not request it, it is best to obtain the child's consent before assisting the child. Toddlers may need additional assistance.

V. Off-site Events and Transportation

- A. **All** WES-related/sanctioned outings must be pre-approved by the DLL. When there is no DLL on staff, or when the DLL is on vacation or otherwise off duty for an extended period, outings are subject to approval by the Senior Leader.
- B. Participating children/youth must have a signed permission slip from parent or guardian. A copy of this permission travel with the coordinator of each event.
- C. **All** drivers must submit a current, valid driver's license and proof of insurance before being assigned driving responsibilities.
- D. Drivers must be at least twenty-five (25) years of age.
- E. Drivers must have two (2) or more children/youth and another adult in the car when transporting children/youth to and from activities, unless the solitary child is the child of the driver.
- F. In compliance with DC law, each vehicle must have working seat belts for every passenger.

VI. Discipline:

- A. **Corporal punishment or abusive language shall not be used under any circumstances.** This includes behavior that constitutes verbal, emotional, sexual and physical abuse, and behavior or language that is threatening or demeaning.
- B. At the start of each program year, each teacher will present basic expectations for responsible classroom behavior, and will lead a discussion with the children/youth about what else the group members need for an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- C. Discipline guidelines can be found in the SEEK Classroom Behavior Policy at the end of this document.

VII. Maintaining Healthy Relationships

- A. **Intergenerational Friendships**

1. WES seeks to create an environment in which children can explore the spiritual and ethical nature of their lives. We actively encourage mentoring relationships between children and adults with such activities as intergenerational gatherings and our Coming of Age programs. We know that when these relationships are genuine and healthy, they can be enriching for both the adult and the child involved. WES programs aimed at fostering mentoring relationships are subject to the same safety guidelines applicable to other WES activities. **However, the monitoring of any outside interactions between children and adults of the congregation that stem from any WES-sponsored activities are the responsibility of the parents/guardians of the child(ren).**
2. Workers are expected to nurture the child's physical, emotional, and spiritual growth by treating them with kindness, trust, and respect and good humor. Interactions must be respectful, and never manipulative of the child's needs or vulnerabilities. The foremost goal of adult/child interactions always must be the best interests of the child.
3. Although we hope that children and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to a child or youth for a reciprocal friendship is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility for them. **The healthy adult/child relationship is one where the adult assumes responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries to maintain an atmosphere of health and trust.** The age of the child makes no difference in this matter. A teenaged child is no more responsible to maintain healthy boundaries than is a three-year-old. In fact, teens may have more confusion about appropriate boundaries.

B. Physical Affection

Physical expressions of affection such as hugs, handshakes, and high-fives are acceptable if consensual, but it is best to allow the child to initiate the contact, and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to become too frequent or prolonged. Children and youth are never required to make physical contact with an adult - including hugs, handshakes, or high-fives. Refusal of touch by a child or youth is to be accepted and honored by the adult. Teachers and youth advisors are given other options for responding to affection in the annual training.

C. Sexualized Behavior

It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexualized behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but to sexually provocative, seductive or erotic behavior or language. It is inappropriate to tell jokes or show photos/pictures to a child or youth with sexual content or connotations. This rule does not refer to content that parents/guardians review and consent to as part of the Our Whole Lives sexuality education series.

D. Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol

Workers shall not be under the influence of alcohol

and/or other drugs, and shall not use tobacco while working with children or youth, either at WES or off-site at WES-sponsored events. Workers also shall not encourage tobacco, drug or alcohol use, or permit children and youth under their supervision to use tobacco, drugs, or alcohol.

E. Social Media & Communication

1. All approved WES social media policies must be followed.
2. Volunteers are responsible for advising WES staff of any concerns that arise during communication with youth. WES staff will report concerns to a supervisor.
3. Youth program registration will include a statement that allows parents to opt out of individual texting, email, messaging or other electronic communications.
4. For all day-to-day communication between volunteers and youth, a parent or guardian will be copied on the email or text. For any one-on-one or sensitive conversations, in-person discussion is preferred. However, if a youth member needs a safe space to share electronically, the volunteer must copy another Lifelong Learning staff member or Senior Leader on all such communication in order to remain in compliance with WES's two-adult policy.
5. Group communications, such as video conferencing or online chats will be announced, often through email, to applicable parents/guardians.
6. Adults, youth and children will be encouraged to share any concerns they have with any WES staff or volunteers by discussing the concern with the DLL or Senior Leader.
7. Phone calls and other communication, including social media, from WES staff to youth or children will be concluded before 10 p.m. Staff will report aberrations to the DLL or Senior Leader.
8. Those who serve children, youth and vulnerable adults are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Those who serve children, youth and vulnerable adults should not use their individual personal profile to submit “friend” or “follow” requests to minors, youth or vulnerable adults whom they serve. Children, youth and vulnerable adults may not feel able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and those sending the invitation. Youth may ask to be “friends” or to follow private profiles, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests. Facilitators, volunteers, and WES employees should consider using a professional social media profile to accept individual “friend” or “follow” requests from minors in the congregation. Though many parents of youth allow their youth independence on social media, adult staff and volunteers should get permission from parents before accepting individual “friend” or “follow” requests, even if the profile is specific to the youth-related role and is not a personal profile.
9. Social networking strategies for youth programming may include a closed group account that youth may join. This closed group must follow Safer Congregations requirements of having two unrelated adults online and they must follow the [Code of Ethics](#) guidelines for adult and older youth working with children and youth. WES staff members should be added to the group. Another possible strategy is to use public announcements on social media platforms and to avoid private messaging. The purpose of these strategies is to

create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends, and colleagues.

10. WES staff are expected to retain records of all email, text and social media communication with youth or children for a period of 3 years for inspection.

VIII. Reporting of Abuse

A. When Abuse of a Child Is Suspected

1. Any congregational leader, teacher, or youth group leader (paid or volunteer) who has reasonable cause to know or suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, or who has observed the child being subjected to circumstances or conditions which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect **must immediately participate in a report of such knowledge or belief to the police (911) or the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (202-671-SAFE).** This participation will include completion of an incident report for WES's own records, and immediate notification to the DLL or Senior Leader. In those cases where the child abuse is observed to be in progress, notification shall be made immediately to the law enforcement agency of that jurisdiction by calling 911. In general, when making a report you will be asked to provide as much of the following information as possible: the child's name, DOB, parent's name, details of suspected abuse, the name and residence of the offender, their relationship to the child, and if possible, the address where the abuse occurred. The Senior Leader and lifelong learning staff are available to support volunteers in making a report. Reporting suspected abuse will be covered in teacher training each year.
2. The Child Protection Act grants persons who report child abuse or neglect immunity from any liability that might otherwise be incurred, except for knowingly making a false report. **The legal responsibility of a WES employee or leader who suspects abuse or neglect is not satisfied by reporting that suspicion to another WES leader or staff member.** The person who observed the evidence of abuse or neglect must assure that an appropriate report is filed as defined in the previous paragraph. Violation of the Act's reporting requirement is punishable as a Class 3 misdemeanor and may create liability for any further injuries.
3. Except as otherwise provided specifically by law, report of child abuse or neglect, the name and address of any child, family or informant, or any other identifying information identified in such reports shall be confidential and shall not be public information.
4. When abuse or neglect is suspected, the DLL or Senior Leader should be contacted immediately, so that required actions will be implemented. If there is reason to suspect that a child will be endangered by returning home, and the DLL or Senior Leader cannot be contacted, the adult should contact the law enforcement in the area immediately, and then leave an emergency message for the Senior Leader.

5. It is not the function of the congregation – neither the DLL, the Board President, nor any member – to conduct a formal investigation into a case of alleged abuse.
6. Only ask enough questions to determine whether, in your best judgement, abuse has occurred or not, and to make your best decisions about what further actions need to be taken. Tell the child you will contact the Senior Leader, DLL or both and that you will help them get help.
7. If a worker or volunteer has reason to believe that abuse has occurred during a WES program or event, the worker or volunteer must immediately report it to the Senior Leader or DLL. If the worker or volunteer ascertains that the child is in a situation of imminent risk, he/she/they (or another responsible person) should immediately remove the abusive adult or vulnerable child from the situation and take steps necessary to protect the child and follow reporting procedures. When abuse is alleged or suspected involving someone who is part of the congregation – but not occurring at a congregational event – reporting requirements must be met. In both situations, staff and leaders should attend to pastoral care needs and be prepared to make referrals as necessary.
8. All SEEK volunteers will be trained in the application of this policy and procedures on a regular basis. Group volunteer training is offered annually, with online training for individual volunteers offered as needed. New volunteers will participate in online or individual training and sign a behavioral covenant before beginning as a regular volunteer in the classroom. The Lifelong Learning staff will administer the training or the Senior Leader will appoint an appropriate trainer.
9. While these procedures specifically refer to abuse of a child, they may also be adapted to protect vulnerable adults within the congregation whose ability to withstand coercion may be impaired by age, disability, illness, or other circumstances.

B. Additional Reporting and Response Procedures

1. The worker should inform the DLL or the Senior Leader of disclosures that lead the worker to believe that a child is engaged in behavior that is harmful to themselves or to others. Workers should review the Behavior Policy for Children and Youth at the end of this document.
2. The DLL will alert the Senior Leader or the President of the Board of Trustees that a suspected abuse situation has been brought to their attention and shall ensure that it is reported to the Department of Children Protective Services and, if the incident occurred during a WES program or event, to WES's insurer as the matter requires. Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution of the offender, result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused, and/or endanger the child.

3. If the incident involves a WES employee, that employee will be placed on administrative leave, depart the premises, and will be relieved immediately of further duties involving the supervision, care or teaching of children until the matter is resolved. If the incident involves a WES volunteer, that volunteer will be relieved of responsibilities involving children and youth, and will not enter classrooms, until the matter is resolved.
4. The DLL shall keep a confidential written record of all reported cases of abuse including the name of the child, the name of the person who reported the incident, names of other people involved in the incident, the incident of concern, the investigation conducted, any findings and conclusions, and what action was taken.
5. If the media contacts WES about an alleged incident of abuse, only the President of the Board of Trustees shall represent WES to the public. In general, while no identifying information should ever be disclosed, the President may disclose steps taken to prevent such incidents, investigate this incident, and guard against abusive situations in the future.

IX. Integration into the Congregation of a Person Charged or Convicted of Child Sexual Abuse

- A. When someone who has been officially charged or convicted of child sexual abuse seeks to attend our Sunday morning Platform or participate in WES activities, it is the WES community's responsibility to respect the worth and dignity of the individual AND to ensure the safety of our children and youth. In order to attend Platform or participate in any other activities at WES, we **require** the charged, or convicted person to complete an agreement with the Senior Leader and the Board about their involvement at WES. This agreement would help prevent any further actions or accusations of improper behavior with children or adults. This process will define the limit of the offender's participation and access with the goal of providing a safe environment for children and adults.

X. Awareness and Implementation

- A. A copy of this Policy will be given to anyone who falls within its definition of worker or volunteer. All new and existing workers or volunteers will be required to sign a form indicating that they have read this Policy and agree to be bound by it.
- B. References to the Policy will be a standard part of every employment interview and training of new workers.
- C. Training on the Policy and on child abuse awareness and prevention will be conducted for any new employees and volunteers who are hired to work in WES programs for children and youth.

- D. At least one time each year, the names of approved workers and volunteers will be compared with the names of convicted sex offenders generated by the Sex Offender Registry. The DLL or Senior Leader will ensure that this process is completed.

Behavior Procedures for Children and Youth

At WES, we strive to live the values of Ethical Culture, which include respecting other people and supporting one another's learning and ethical development. Children and adults are expected to behave in ways that are consistent with these principles in SEEK classes and at SEEK events. Appropriate behavior includes:

- Listening to others who are speaking;
- Speaking respectfully to others;
- Taking care of the physical space and materials;
- Helping the teacher/leader and the other children when asked;
- Being respectful during activities and discussions; and
- Taking responsibility for one's words and actions.

At the beginning of the program year, members of each class are invited to discuss additional agreements that will help create an inclusive and welcoming environment. These agreements are in addition to the basic expectations listed above. New class members are invited to join the agreement when they enter, as well. Subsequently, class participants are reminded of the agreement at the start of each class. When children and youth behave in a way that violates that agreement, a member of the class (teacher/leader or child) will point out to the individual that they are violating the class agreement.

If the member of the class does not stop the behavior after this reminder, the teacher/leader should explain the consequences (as outlined below) should the behavior continue. If the child's behavior does not improve after the consequences are explained to them, the teacher/leader should take the following steps:

1. The child will have time in the classroom apart from the other members of the class; the length of time should be related to the age of the child; severity of the incident; and the child's willingness to follow the agreement. The goal during this time is not punishment, but rather a break and time to think.
2. If the disruptive behavior reoccurs, the child will step into the hallway outside the open classroom door with the assistant such that no adult is left alone with children. The assistant will ask the child to think over why such a behavior does not work for the class, and remain with the child. After the class, the teacher should let the DLL know of the incident. The length of the "out of classroom" time and whether the child should return to the classroom that day is up to the discretion of the teacher and assistant.
3. If these steps do not improve the behavior once the child returns to the classroom, the child's parent/guardian will be notified in the Main Hall. The DLL will follow up by contacting and speaking with the child's parent or caregiver.

These steps should be taken only when a child or children's behavior is disruptive to the class. **A child who does not choose to participate in the class but does not interfere with other children's learning is not behaving disruptively and may stay in the class.**

If the behavior is acutely aggressive, whether physically (hitting, biting, kicking, etc.) or verbally (swearing at someone, using ethnic or other slurs), the offending child should be removed from the classroom immediately and the DLL notified. The DLL will then notify the parents or guardians of the children involved and schedule a meeting to talk with the disruptive child's parent or guardian. Of course, the age of the child and context of the incident should be considered. For example, a

three-year-old swatting another child who grabbed their toy should be handled differently from a nine year-old punching a classmate.

Any worker/volunteer who knows of child/youth behavior that occurs off-site and may have ramifications for the safety of others at WES activities, should inform the Senior Leader or the DLL of this behavior as soon as possible. The Senior Leader and/or the DLL will determine whether the off-site behavior reported needs to be addressed further with the parents or guardians of the child/youth involved. All efforts will be made to keep such information confidential.

By insisting that each of us respect the dignity of every person, we teach one another how to live according to a central Ethical Culture principle. We also ensure that classrooms are a safe place for our kids, not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. We hope that our SEEK classes can be a place for our children to reveal their genuine and best selves, and to explore what's on their minds and in their hearts, and to be welcomed in a safe, supportive, and loving community.

I have read and agree to the Washington Ethical Society's Behavior Policy for Children and Youth

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

or, if paid or volunteering in SEEK or other children and youth programs:

Worker Signature _____

Washington Ethical Society
Code of Ethical Conduct

For Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth

Each person working with the WES children will be asked to sign this Code of Ethical Conduct.

As a WES member I dedicate myself to the nurture and care of the children in our congregation. Responsibility and trust are the most important features in this dedication.

I will never intentionally inflict harm on a child: physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually. As an adult who has assumed a role of leadership involving children, I pledge to fulfill this responsibility to the best of my ability by seeking and accepting guidance when necessary.

I have read the complete Child and Youth Safety Policy and understand the above statements of position, expectations, and action.

I do this in accordance with Ethical Culture principles knowing that I will be supported by SEEK, the Board of Trustees, the Senior Leader, and the members of WES.

Signature

Date

Senior Leader

Date

Director of Lifelong Learning

Date