Harmful Behavior Policy
UU Oakland
February, 2026

UU Oakland Covenant

In the spirit of love and in service to our shared commitment to build an intentionally multigenerational, multiracial, multicultural, anti-oppressive religious community, we covenant to:

- Encourage and grow relationships with one another based on mutual understanding and respect;
- Work intentionally to counter oppression and prejudice among ourselves and in the world;
- Listen actively to the needs of others, assume best intentions, and acknowledge differences among us;
- Value and speak our truth, and uphold the truths spoken by others in our common search for meaning;
- Engage in direct conversation when we have conflicts or concerns, and seek equitable solutions;
- Give generously of our spiritual gifts and material resources;
- Offer help when we can and ask for help when we need it.

In caring for each other and ourselves, we intend to live by this covenant to build a beloved community.

— Adopted by congregational vote, March 18, 2012

Purpose
Conflict is a natural part of human communities. It may arise from personality differences, decisions, the direction of the congregation, or differences in values. Conflict is normal, especially in a diverse community, and can be an important part of spiritual growth. When conflict is addressed well, it can strengthen the health of the community and support the growth of individual congregants. For more information, see the church's Conflict Policy.

Harmful behavior, on the other hand, is destructive to the community and is not welcome at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland.

If a guest, congregant, or other participant experiences harmful behavior from another church participant and needs support in addressing the situation, the steps in this policy should be followed. If all relevant parties agree that the situation is a conflict rather than harmful behavior,

the situation may be addressed under the Conflict Policy, using the practices of Nonviolent Communication. This may include a request that the Committee on Shared Ministry provide a mediator to support resolution.

If a person is unsure whether an encounter is conflict, abuse, harassment, a rupture of covenant, or something else, a discernment conversation with one of the ministers, a religious educator, or a member of the Committee on Shared Ministry is appropriate.

Reporting Harmful Behavior
Any person who believes they have witnessed or experienced harmful behavior or who has had an incident of harmful behavior reported to them, is invited to report it to any of the following:

- The minister(s)
- The Religious Educator or Music Director
- Any member of the Committee on Shared Ministry

If required by law, ordinance, or similar regulation, the senior minister or a designated member of the church staff will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. However, unfounded complaints brought forward with malicious intent are a violation of covenant and may require a pastoral and/or harmful behavior response.

The church will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identities of individuals involved only on a need-to-know basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the concern. However, when a pattern of abusive behavior may be present, providing pastoral support, safety, and healing may require wider disclosure and additional conversations.

Immediate Response
The minister(s) and/or the leader of the group involved will undertake an immediate response to harmful behavior when necessary. This may include asking the person or persons engaging in harmful behavior to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until it can safely resume.

Any time such action is taken, the Senior Minister and a member of the Committee on Shared Ministry must be notified. They will consult with the full Committee on Shared Ministry to determine what steps must be taken before the person or persons involved may return to the affected activities. A letter detailing these steps will be sent to the person or persons involved.

More Deliberate Response
The matter will be referred to the Committee on Shared Ministry. This referral may come from the group leader involved in the initial incident, the person harmed, the person engaging in

harmful behavior, or any third party with knowledge of the incident. This referral should happen whether or not the situation required an immediate response.

The Committee on Shared Ministry will use its judgment in responding, guided by the following principles:

- The Committee on Shared Ministry will respond to problems as they arise.
- The policy does not attempt to define all unacceptable behavior in advance.
- Persons identified as having engaged in harmful behavior will be treated as individuals.
- The Committee on Shared Ministry is expected to use wise cross-cultural understanding and to be attentive to the ways culture of origin, generation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, mental health, past trauma, and other factors may shape behavior and conflict.

Any time the church may have legal exposure, the Board must be informed.

The Committee on Shared Ministry will inform the person whose behavior is under review of the substance of the concern and provide them a reasonable opportunity to respond and provide relevant information.

A Committee of Shared Ministry member who has served as a mediator, pastoral support person, or has a conflict of interest in a matter should not participate in determining the church's response to that matter.

Then the Committee on Shared Ministry shall collect all necessary information. In evaluating the concern, the following questions will be considered:

- **Danger:** Is the individual a source of current threat, or perceived threat, to persons or property?
- **Impact:** How much harm or damage is the behavior causing to the church's mission, identity, and communal life?
- **Exclusion:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away by the behavior? The Committee will pay particular attention to whether people who have been marginalized may be further marginalized by the behavior.

To determine the necessary response, the following questions will also be considered:

- **Causes:** Why is the behavior occurring?
- **History:** What is the frequency and severity of harmful behavior in the past? Has the person been asked to stop, and have they failed to do so?
- **Commitment to repair:** Has the person engaging in harmful behavior sought restoration and healing of the relationship? Are they willing and eager to return to covenant?

The Committee on Shared Ministry will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, the Committee may conclude that the situation is conflict rather than harmful behavior and invite the parties into mediation and healing. When it is determined that harmful behavior is occurring, the following levels of response will be used.

Levels of Response

Level One
The Committee on Shared Ministry will inform the Operations Team and minister of the concern. Designated members of the Committee on Shared Ministry, the minister, and/or a member of the Operations Team will either write to or meet with the person who engaged in the harmful behavior to communicate the concern and request that they refrain from repeating the behavior.

Specific efforts should be made to prevent future incidents of harmful behavior. This should include clear guidance about what behavior was considered harmful and what behavior must be avoided in the future.

Level Two
The Committee on Shared Ministry may determine that the matter should be referred to the full Board of Trustees. In making this referral, the Committee on Shared Ministry will make a recommendation for action, which the Board may accept or amend.

The Board may determine that the person who caused harm should be excluded from the church and/or from specific church activities for a limited period of time. The reasons for this action and the conditions for return will be clearly stated in writing.

Level Three
After careful consideration, the Board of Trustees may determine that the person who caused harm should be removed from membership and, if appropriate, excluded from the church premises and some or all church activities. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing and will explain the individual's right of appeal and possible recourse.

Any action taken under Level Three may be appealed in writing to the Board of Trustees within thirty days of the letter of notification.

If a Level Three action is appealed, the Board of Trustees will form an ad hoc appeal committee. The appeal committee will be composed of:

- Two members of the Board of Trustees;
- Two members selected by the Committee on Shared Ministry who are not members of the Committee on Shared Ministry or the Board of Trustees; and
- A fifth active church member chosen by the removed person.

If the individual does not propose a fifth member, the fifth member will be selected by the other four members of the appeal committee. The majority decision of the appeal committee will be final and not subject to further appeal.

The removal of an individual from membership in the church will be announced in the Chalice Chatter with the following statement:

In accordance with the Harmful Behavior Policy, a member has been removed from membership. Any church member who wishes to know the identity of the removed member may ask the minister or any member of the Board of Trustees.

Possible Reinstatement of a Removed Individual
Any request for reinstatement must be made by the person who was removed from membership. The request must include:

1. A statement demonstrating understanding of the reasons for removal from membership; and
2. A detailed explanation of how circumstances and conditions have changed such that reinstatement would be justified.

The request should also include a plan for repair and healing for those harmed.

The request will be submitted to the Board of Trustees. The Board may consider the behavior of the former member during the intervening period. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days. The decision of the Board will be final and not subject to further appeal.

A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year after removal. If a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent request may be made no sooner than one year after the former member is informed of the negative decision.

Healing Those Harmed
In addition to providing pastoral support to those harmed by harmful behavior, the persons most affected or targeted by the behavior shall be consulted and informed about decisions involving boundaries, participation, appeal, and reinstatement.

A person who has experienced this kind of harm should be forewarned about the presence of the person who harmed them when that presence is reasonably foreseeable.

Children and Youth
The harassment or abuse of children and youth is especially serious and is covered by the Child and Youth Protection Policy.

Regional Staff as Resource
The ministers, Committee on Shared Ministry, and Board of Trustees are encouraged to consult with UUA Pacific Western Region staff, including the congregation's Primary Contact and/or regional safety point person, for best practices, resources, and, if necessary, outside evaluation.

Staff
Special considerations apply when a staff person is involved. Staff are subject to the church's personnel policies and the oversight processes described in those policies. This Harmful Behavior Policy applies to participants in the congregation who are not staff, including when those participants are interacting with staff.