



# First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Connect. Inspire. Engage.

## Disruptive Behavior Policy

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and is expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we affirm the fact that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any disruption threatens this secure atmosphere, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

Disruptive behavior is defined by:

1. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child, *or*
2. The interruption of, interference with, or inappropriate behavior during church activities, *or*
3. Ongoing and intentional diminishment of the appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership, *or*
4. Creation of a publicly perceived image of the Society which has strong negative connotations or is contrary to UU principles.

The following shall be the policy of First Unitarian Society of Ithaca in dealing with these issues:

### I. Immediate

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister(s) if available, and/or a member of the Safety Team, and/or the leader of the group involved, and/or any available member of church leadership. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, and as a last resort, the Police Department (911) will be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) being present, the Minister(s) must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to any church activities will be

sent by the Minister(s), or the Safety Committee described below, to the offending party or parties.

2. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to a Safety Team Committee. The Safety Committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

- a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. The committee will determine on a case-by-case basis which behavior is unacceptable within the limits defined by this policy. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals and treated with respect; stereotypes will be avoided.
- c. The committee will collect all necessary information.
- d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:

DANGEROUSNESS - Is the individual the source of 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?

- e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:

CAUSES - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?

HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?

PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

- f. The Safety Committee will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended.

Repeated, but relatively minor, disruptions may require a step-wise progression through each level:

LEVEL ONE - The committee shall inform the Minister(s) of the problem and either the Minister(s) or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.

LEVEL TWO - The committee shall inform the Minister(s) of the situation and the Minister(s) AND at least three members of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern, verbally and in writing.

LEVEL THREE – The Minister, in conjunction with the Safety Committee, may elect to exclude the offending individual(s) from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear. A restraining order may be sought if necessary.

g. Any action taken under item f. (above) may be appealed to the Safety Team Committee and/or the Minister(s).

LEVEL FOUR - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Before this is carried out, the committee will consult with the Minister(s). If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister(s) explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse.

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca 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 faith must reflect this emphasis on security.