

Destructive Behaviour Guidelines

Why We Need a Destructive Behaviour Guidelines?

In the past, many UU congregational safety policies have included what were called *Disruptive Behaviour guidelines*. Our faith reminds us that revelation is ongoing. In recent years, particularly while examining white supremacy culture, we have learned that *disruptive behaviour* is sometimes the only way institutions with ‘power-over’ are called to be more just, more welcoming, more whole. Disruptions of patterns of behavior that have excluded others may be considered *good* disruption. In other words, some disruption can lead to *positive change for justice*.

Using an alternate title, “**Destructive** Behaviour Guidelines”, support healthy and vital congregations in dealing with harmful behavior that is antithetical to well-being and vibrance, things like bullying, harassment, abuse, intimidation, and other behaviors that might be destructive to the common good and make others feel unsafe or unwelcome. Thus, the name “Destructive Behavior Guidelines” is more to the point and more reflective of the purpose. This document acts as an addendum to both the Respect and Dignity Policy and the Conflict as an Opportunity Policy to assist in assessing, identifying and addressing destructive behaviour within our congregation.

Our congregation strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, in some cases, concern for personal safety and the well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual. To the degree that destructive behavior compromises the health of others and of the congregation, our actions must reflect our commitment to maintaining both security and beloved community.

Destructive behavior may involve actions that create concern for the physical or emotional safety of children or adults, staff, members, or even visitors. A baby crying in worship does not threaten the physical or emotional safety of the congregation. It may be distracting, but it is not destructive. However, someone standing and yelling racial epithets during the service does indeed threaten the physical or emotional safety of those in attendance. This is Destructive. Destructive behavior may involve actions that disturb activities or weaken the congregation’s ability to serve current and future members and friends. These incidents can occur on the congregation’s property, during a congregational event, or via email and social media.

Not all conflict is destructive. We hope that most conflicts can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to live our covenant and principles. This includes where possible, directly approaching the individual with whom they are having a conflict or consulting directly with the minister or an appropriate team member (from the Healthy Congregation Committee) with whom she/he/they feel comfortable, for support and guidance. However, when behaviors are seen to be dangerous (creating concern for the physical and emotional safety of children and adults), destructive (disturbing or interfering with essential congregational activities), or image tarnishing (weakening the congregation's ability to serve current and future members and friends), additional steps may be necessary.

Four Steps for Addressing Destructive Behaviour

Step 1: Does the situation call for an immediate response?

Note: It may be prudent to train "Peace Ambassadors" within the congregation to assist in assessing potential problematic situations. Ideally, this decision will be made in consultation with more than one trained person to decide how to proceed should an incident occur.

As we assess any given situation, we must first discern whether an immediate response is required.

For example: moments before service begins, you are alerted about a member who is engaging in our congregation's closed Facebook group sharing articles, videos, and their own strong opinions about the dangers of including and welcoming trans folks into the congregation. Their posts are seen as attacking, trans-phobic, harmful, and antithetical to our UU beliefs.

You will undoubtedly need to address the situation sooner rather than later. The communications chair or committee would need to remove this person and their posts from our Facebook page right away. Then a plan should be made to address the concerns with the offending member within a timely manner (i.e. after service). If the situation was different, and the person was distributing anti-trans leaflets to congregants during the offertory, that would call for an immediate and direct response with that person.

When a destructive situation occurs where an immediate response is required, this will typically be undertaken by the Minister, if available, and/or the Board President or Vice President or designated Peace Ambassadors. During service that *might* be a trained greeter. Their response may include asking the offending person to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If physical assault takes place or further assistance is required, the police may be called. (See the [De-escalation](#) section below for help discerning when to call the police.) Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being involved, the Minister and/or President of the Board must be notified at the earliest opportunity.

Step 2: Evaluate: dangerousness, disruptiveness, offensiveness

Situations not requiring an immediate response will be referred to the appropriate group i.e. the Healthy Congregation Committee or a designated committee.

The team will respond to problems as they arise. They will also follow the steps outlined in the Respect & Dignity policy.

In evaluating the problem, the following points should be pondered:

Dangerousness: Is the behavior a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?

Disruptiveness: How much interference with congregational functions is going on?

Offensiveness: How likely is the offending persons behaviour to have a lasting and negative effect on members and visitors to our congregation?

Step 3: Consider: causes, history, probability of change

To determine the necessary response, the following points should be considered:

Causes: Why is the behaviour occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the congregation? Is it due to mental health concerns? Is it a cultural difference?

History: What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused by this person in the past? Is the person going through a challenging time in their life or does the behaviour connect to past and/or long-standing challenges?

Probability of change: How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

Step 4: Discussion/ Meeting

Meet with the person demonstrating the destructive behaviour. Address the situation with curiosity.

Step 5: Response

The designated team dealing with the situation should decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis and will inform the appropriate persons (generally the Minister, the Healthy Congregation Committee, and the Board all need to be informed) before acting. Written recommendations will be provided to the persons involved as well as those mentioned above. The agreed upon document will be signed, dated and kept in a specified folder, locked in the main office.

Any of the following levels of response can be recommended:

No action: After meeting with all persons involved, it may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, or a resolution may be reached without further action needed. The minister and

another member of the team would jointly explain and discuss this with the person(s) who filed the complaint.

Warning: The Minister and/or a member of the team will meet with the offending person(s) to communicate the concerns and present a covenant stating clearly defined parameters of unacceptable behavior to be signed by the offending person(s).

Suspension: The offending individual is excluded from the congregation and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing, signed by both the individual and Board President and/or Minister. In some circumstances a restorative justice circle may be in order before a covenant is signed regarding conditions for participation within the congregation.

Expulsion: The committee recommends that the offending individual should be expelled from membership. Such a recommendation will require the approval of the Board. The Board President and/or Minister will then write a letter to the individual(s) explaining the reasons.

Policy Reviewed and Updated: January 2024