

First Parish Unitarian Universalist,  
Arlington

HANDBOOK FOR RE  
TEACHERS,  
GRADES PREK-7



Updated September 2017

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The following resources were extremely helpful in organizing and preparing this handbook:

- *Teacher Handbook*, by the First Unitarian Universalist Society, Burlington, Vermont
- *Manual for Sunday School Teachers, 2010-2011*, by Rev. Daniel Harper, Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, California

We are very grateful to our wise and generous colleagues, who saved us from having to reinvent the wheel!

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## WELCOME

Thank you for volunteering your time as an RE teacher at First Parish! RE teachers are *invaluable* members of our community, with a unique opportunity to be a positive influence in the lives of our children. Our hope is that teaching will be a spiritual practice for you and that you will receive as much as you are giving to the children of our congregation.

This handbook is designed to offer guidance and support and to answer some questions that new teachers often have. It is a living document; if you have suggestions for anything to add or change, please contact Wendy Fields and Janis Fleishman, RE Committee Co-Chairs (*re@firstparish.info*), or Tina Schultz, Director of Religious Education (*dre@firstparish.info*).

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

### RE STAFF

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### RE OFFICE HOURS

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 8–4; Sunday 8–1, 6–9; Tuesday evenings by appointment

### RE COMMITTEE

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## LEARNING GOALS

We want the children in our RE classes to have fun.

We want them to feel like they are part of a community.

We want them to gain the basic religious literacy expected in our society.

We aim to prepare them to become Unitarian Universalist adults, should they choose to become UUs when they are old enough to make their own decisions.

Toward this end, we strive to help our children become sensitive, moral, justice-seeking, and joyful people—people who have intellectual integrity and spiritual insight and who have a basic understanding of our faith.

The curriculum has been selected to meet these goals by addressing different aspects in different years with age-appropriate lessons.

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## GENERAL INFO FOR TEACHERS

### WHO CAN BE AN RE TEACHER?

There are no prerequisites. You do not need to have children currently enrolled in the program to be an RE teacher. You don't even need to be a parent!

However, if you are new to First Parish, please don't feel the need to rush into teaching right away. We encourage you to take a year to get oriented to our community before taking on a major role.

The best RE teachers:

- ⊕ enjoy spending time with children
- ⊕ are willing and able to discuss religion and the “Big Questions” with children
- ⊕ have a good answer to “What is a Unitarian Universalist?”
- ⊕ are willing to grow and develop as RE teachers

### SHOULD I TEACH MY OWN KIDS?

If you have kids in RE, you may choose to teach your own children—but you don't have to. In some cases, both parents and children are happier in separate rooms! Teachers often find that wearing both the “teacher hat” and the “parent hat” can be challenging.

On the other hand, some children are not comfortable being separated from their parents, so volunteering to teach in your child's class can help your child participate more fully.

Some parents thoroughly enjoy teaching their own kids, and many kids are proud to have their parents as teachers. Being in RE together can be a bonding experience and a chance to see a different side of each other.

Some questions you might consider when deciding whether to teach your own child:

- ⊕ Does your kid tend to act better with you in the room, or does your presence encourage your child to push limits or seek your undivided attention?
- ⊕ Will you be able to juggle being a parent, attending to all the other children in your class, and doing what needs to be done to prepare for and teach your class?
- ⊕ If your child is “acting up,” how do you feel about the other teacher disciplining your child?
- ⊕ If you have more than one child, how will the other sibling(s) feel about you teaching?

## CO-TEACHERS

Every class has two teachers at minimum.

Generally, teachers take turns being the “lead” teacher (the one responsible for planning and running the lesson) and the “assistant (helper)” teacher.

In the preK class, it is always helpful—and usually necessary, especially for the fall term—to have a third person (adult or youth) helping in the classroom.

Depending on the size of your class (or any challenges they present), you may need additional teachers. Let Tina know if you would like another set of hands in your classroom.

Teens are wonderful additions to teaching teams. If you have or know a teen whom you'd like to teach with, talk to Tina.

### WHEN YOU THOUGHT I WASN'T LOOKING

When you thought I wasn't looking, you displayed my first report, and I wanted to do another.

When you thought I wasn't looking, you gave me a sticker, and I knew that little things were special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking, you put your arm around me, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, you smiled, and it made me want to look that pretty too.

When you thought I wasn't looking, you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking—I looked . . . and I wanted to say thanks for all those things you did when you thought I wasn't looking.

—Mary Rita Schilke Korzan

If you are a seasoned and confident teacher, please consider teaching with a newer teacher. This is one of our most effective methods of teacher training!

Sometimes a group decides to teach RE as a team, where different pairs take turns teaching. The advantage of this approach is that people teach on fewer Sundays. The disadvantage is that it requires a great deal of coordination and communication.

It's ideal to talk over some things with your co-teacher before the term begins, for example:

- ⊕ What are your co-teacher's religious or spiritual beliefs?
- ⊕ How will you handle the tough questions that might arise (e.g., about God, Unitarian Universalism, death, what you believe)?
- ⊕ How much noise/chaos/disruption is your co-teacher comfortable with? Is your co-teacher more inclined to nip it in the bud or to take a more laid-back approach?
- ⊕ What strategies would you prefer to use if the class is getting out of control?

You will have an opportunity to meet and talk with your co-teacher (and to visit your class) at the Bagel Breakfast, held on the last Sunday of each teaching term.

### **TIME COMMITMENT**

A teaching term comprises eight or nine Sundays (see the [RE Calendar](#)) over three months, with some Sundays off for holidays and other low-attendance weekends. (The schedule is slightly different for preK teachers, who teach almost every Sunday—though substitutes are available when needed.)

Lesson planning can take as little as 30 minutes and as much as 2 hours—it depends on how much prep you want and like to do.

Teachers are asked to arrive no later than 9:30 on the mornings when they are lead teacher. RE classes begin immediately following Time for All Ages, which is generally around 10:15, and end promptly at 11:30. RE teachers are asked to tidy the classroom and return it to its original setup, which can take 15–20 minutes.

Teachers are *strongly encouraged* to log in to the [RE Teacher Web area](#) (via Google Docs) and record some notes about how the lesson went, which may take another 15–20 minutes. Your time is deeply appreciated!

**Note:** All new teachers will be e-mailed a link to the RE Teacher Web area before the term starts. You'll need to have a

Google account to access this area (which is very easy to set up). Once you've logged in, you'll see that the curriculum is divided into individual folders for each grade.

Teaching on Sunday mornings means that you miss eight or nine Sunday worship services, which we understand is a sacrifice. If you want to read the sermon after a service, printed copies are usually available.

### **TEACHING MORE THAN ONE TERM PER YEAR**

Some teachers choose to teach two terms in one teaching year (often because they have children of different ages and want to give each a turn with mom or dad as their teacher). However, many find it harder to teach back-to-back terms (and to miss that many months of Sunday services) than they expected. We encourage teachers to be careful to avoid burnout. Teaching the fall and spring terms, for example, might be more manageable than teaching fall and winter, or winter and spring.

One of our goals in RE is for the children to get to know and to develop relationships with many different adults and teens in the church, who are part of their faith community. We also are mindful that some teachers' styles are a better fit for some kids than others—children benefit from a variety of voices, affects, and teaching styles in the classroom. For these reasons, we discourage teachers from teaching more than one term of the same grade each year.

### **COMMUNICATION**

News and updates regarding the RE program are delivered in a number of ways:

- ⊕ Direct e-mails from DRE Tina Schultz
- ⊕ The Religious Education News section of the e-mailed weekly [E-Bulletin](#)
- ⊕ “[This Week's RE Announcements](#)” on the First Parish website
- ⊕ “What's Happening in RE” in the monthly First Parish newsletter, *The Spire*

Most program-wide or class-wide communication comes from Tina, but if you want to send a message to your class (e.g., to remind them to bring something to the next session), Tina can give you those e-addresses.

## CLASS SIZE

It's important to know that attendance in your RE classroom can fluctuate quite a bit from week to week. In addition, new kids can show up at any time. This requires teachers to be both flexible in their planning and ever-welcoming!

When there are lots of new faces in the room, it can be hard to have a feeling of continuity from lesson to lesson. It might be a good idea to do a brief review of anything important for kids who missed it the first time.

If you want to try to predict how many children will show up on a given Sunday, we do have attendance data from previous years—ask Tina if you're interested.

We had the preK kids color chalice placemats during the first class; we then put them in plastic sleeves to use each week. But then for *weeks* afterward new kids would show up and they didn't have one, and even if we gave them a uncolored one with their name on it, there wasn't an opportunity for them to color theirs because everyone else had already done that. Not a way to make new kids feel welcome . . . !

—A First Parish teacher

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## TEACHER TRAINING

Different types of teacher training are offered throughout the year. A “nuts and bolts” session for brand-new teachers is offered before each teaching term, usually on the Saturday morning immediately preceding the first Sunday of the new term. (See the [RE Calendar](#) on the First Parish website)

Topic-specific trainings for all teachers are also offered once or twice during the church year. Past topics have included “Promoting Cooperative Behavior in the RE Classroom,” “Religious Literacy,” “Answering Difficult Questions,” and “Teaching Our Kids What It Means to Be a UU.”

If you have an idea for a training topic, please share it with Tina or the RE Committee.

### Teacher Transition Breakfast

On the last day of the fall and winter teaching terms, the current and upcoming teachers are invited to share information about classroom management, curriculum, and students over breakfast.

After breakfast, the upcoming teachers visit their RE class and see it in action.

This is the best possible way to prepare yourself for the class you're about to teach. If you are not able to attend the breakfast, please make arrangements to talk with the current teachers and visit the classroom on another date.

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## RE CURRICULA

All the curricula we use are available both in print (in white binders in the RE Library) and [online](#). We also use some UUA Tapestry of Faith curricula, which are available on the UUA website ([uua.org](http://uua.org)).

Teacher Notes on some lessons are available in white binders (in the RE Library) or online.

[Descriptions of the curriculum](#) we will teach during the church year in grades preK through 8<sup>1</sup> are available on the First Parish website.

More detailed information can be found online in the [RE Teacher Web area](#) in Google Docs, which has a folder for each grade and PDFs of each lesson. When available, lesson plans and notes from previous teachers are also included.

**Note:** We strongly encourage all RE teachers to add notes on the lessons you teach, particularly if you found or created new resources that would be useful for future teachers.

Before the term begins, you will be sent a link to the Google Docs folder. We recommend that you bookmark it for easy access later, since links to Google Docs are not easily remembered.

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## LESSON PLANNING

An RE lesson generally comprises the following: opening circle, lesson, activity, snack, and closing circle.

For the Sundays when you're the lead teacher, here's a way you might approach planning a lesson:

- ⊕ Read the lesson plan for the upcoming week. Decide if you will use it as is or if you'll adapt it.

**Note:** If you'd like to adapt, supplement, or replace a lesson, try doing an online search for "lesson plan: [whatever your topic is]." If you find something you like, run it by Tina.

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<sup>1</sup> Upon completing Coming of Age in the spring, the eighth-graders are welcomed into the Youth Group, which they attend in grades 9–12.

You might also see if teachers who taught this session in the past had any notes to share, which will be in a white binder in the RE Library or online.

- ⊕ Write an outline of the lesson: how much time each component will take, what materials you'll need, etc.
- ⊕ Make sure that you've included a range of activity types (see Differentiated Instruction, below.)
- ⊕ Gather any books or other materials you will need, or request them from Tina and the RE Assistant, preferably by the Thursday before you will teach the lesson.

**Note:** If you need to purchase supplies yourself (please clear this with Tina ahead of time), save your receipts and submit a reimbursement form. (See "Reimbursement for Purchases" in the Supplies and Resources section.)

One of the best things we can do is show the children in our classes that living your faith is a matter of joy, not of drudgery and burden. So, have fun in your classes! Seek out joy. While curriculum and content are important, it's more important that you and your class *live* your faith rather than *talk about* your faith.

—Rev. Dan Harper, Unitarian  
Universalist Church of Palo Alto

- ⊕ Make sure that you have a back-up plan, in case any of your activities aren't successful or run short (see Back-Up Activities, below).

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## SUNDAY MORNING SETUP

- ⊕ The lead teacher should arrive between 9:15 and 9:30 to start the classroom setup.

**Note:** The assisting teacher and other helpers should arrive by 9:45. The assisting teacher often attends the first 15 minutes of the worship service and walks to class with the kids.

- ⊕ If a tenant uses your classroom on weekdays, move or conceal from sight any toys or materials that could potentially be damaged or are too distracting. Tina can provide specific guidance as needed.
- ⊕ From the classroom supply bin, take out the class list, some blank nametags, and a marker so that new children can make a nametag. Make a nametag for yourself if you aren't wearing one.

- ⊕ If you're going to do a messy craft, cover the tables with tablecloths (available in the RE supply area upstairs or the kitchen) or another type of covering.
- ⊕ Have the materials completely set up before the children arrive, so you are ready to engage them in the lesson right away:
  - Fill the pitcher with water from the kitchen.
  - Set up the snack with small paper cups from the bin: about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cup of Goldfish crackers and  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cup of water for each kid. Gluten-free snacks are available if needed—check with Tina or the RE Assistant.
 

**Note:** Children often ask for seconds; some teachers allow or offer that, while others do not. Decide with your co-teacher(s) what your snack policy will be.
  - Gather your craft materials and arrange them for quick access when the time comes.
  - Make a sample of the finished product to show the class before they start the craft project.
  - Arrange the books you've gathered (whether from our RE Library, from the local library, or those you've requested from Tina ahead of time) on the theme of the day.
- ⊕ If there is a possibility that the class will go outside, post a large sign at the door letting parents know that kids will need their coats. Let Tina know so she can announce it to the congregation.
- ⊕ Have a few permission forms on hand for any new children who attend.

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## TEACHING A LESSON

While each class and each lesson can have its own structure, we recommend that there be continuity week to week so children know what to expect. The following elements should be part of each class (not necessarily in this order):

- ⊕ Arrival and attendance
- ⊕ Opening rituals: Opening circle, lighting the chalice, introducing the theme, sharing time
- ⊕ Snack
- ⊕ Activities, such as a craft, outdoor play, a story, or music and movement

⊕ Closing ritual

⊕ Dismissal

Each element is described in more detail below.

## **ARRIVAL AND ATTENDANCE**

Kids will arrive for class all at once, between 10:15 and 10:30, depending on how long the Time for All Ages runs.

**Note:** If you attend the first part of the service, be sure to leave a little earlier than the kids do so you can be at the classroom door when they arrive.

Trying to check in all the kids as they arrive is a challenge. Do your best! It's very important that we keep accurate records on attendance in our RE classrooms.

**Note:** This is a good activity for the assisting teacher.

If any new children are in attendance:

⊕ Ask their parent or guardian to fill out a permission form. At the very least, get the child's and parent's names and ask about allergies before the parent leaves.

⊕ Add the names of any new children to the bottom of your classroom list.

⊕ If the child is nervous about being left, ask the parents to sit near the back of the Sanctuary in case their child needs them.

Be sure that everyone has a nametag that you can read—sometimes kids write their own name and it's not legible. Kids who object to wearing a nametag at all can usually be persuaded to wear one on their arm or their back.

**Note:** Encourage kids to make and use a reusable nametag (often a great first class activity!), rather than waste the resource of a sticker nametag each week.

## **OPENING RITUALS**

Using the same rituals from class to class helps children know what to expect. (See Rituals, below, for more on opening rituals.)

### ***Opening Circle***

Particularly for younger grades, “opening circle” is a good way of signaling that class activities are starting. The lead teacher invites the children to the circle

(usually, sitting on the rug, though you can set up a circle of chairs if that works better for you).

**Note:** During the opening circle, the assistant teacher and helpers can clear off tables, wipe up spills, and set up the supplies for the planned activity.

### ***Lighting the Chalice***

Once students have gathered in the circle, you can light the chalice.

**Note:** Rotating through the children so that all have a chance to do it can be challenging. Decide on a strategy in advance (e.g., alphabetical order) and keep careful track of whose turn it is. Fairness is of utmost importance to children (right behind being first in line!).

Some teachers prefer to have snack and “sharing time” before lighting the chalice, so the class can settle in.

### ***Introducing the Theme***

Introduce the theme and give the children a broad idea of what you’re going to do that day.

### ***Sharing Time***

You can do “Joys and Sorrows” (see Rituals, below), have the kids relate something that happened that week that was important or fun, or share something about themselves to help get to know one another better. It’s also important to offer the option to “pass” if someone doesn’t feel like sharing that day.

### **SNACK**

Teachers’ opinions differ on the best time to offer the snack. Some teachers offer it right away, finding that fed children focus better. Other teachers offer it later in the lesson, during story time or craft time. Discuss this with your co-teacher and decide when to offer snack.

**Note:** The snack is, simply, Goldfish crackers and water. A gluten-free snack will be provided for children who can’t eat Goldfish crackers.

### **ACTIVITIES**

See Differentiated Instruction, below, for information on selecting a range of activities.

### **Going Outside**

- ⊕ When taking the class outside, try to plan the activities so that you are back in the classroom by 11:30 for pick-up.
- ⊕ If you take only part of the class outside, make a list of everyone who is out. Then, when parents arrive at the classroom for pick-up, you can tell them with certainty where their child can be found.
- ⊕ If the whole class goes out, leave a sign on the door saying where the children are.
- ⊕ Encourage children to go to the bathroom before you leave the building.
- ⊕ Bring your cell phone with you. Make sure that you have Tina's cell phone number and that she and/or the RE Assistant has yours.
- ⊕ Make sure that there are at least two adults with the group at all times.

### **Crafts**

Some teachers love to do crafts, and others shy away. Talk with your co-teacher about how he or she feels and what his or her “craft style” is (clean and precise vs. the more mess, the better).

Kids vary just as widely. You never know how long the craft will take or how well-received it will be—sometimes the children finish it in five minutes, sometimes they just don't want to do it, and sometimes they love it and get totally involved and want to make two and are still working hard when their parents arrive for pickup.

Make sure that everything you need is easily accessible at the time you're doing the craft. See Supplies and Resources below for more information.

### **CLOSING RITUAL**

Having a consistent ritual to end the class is as important as having one to start it. Form a circle, extinguish the chalice, hold hands, and say a benediction together. Some classes use the same benediction as the congregation, and others use one suggested by the lesson. (See Rituals, below, for more on closing rituals.)

### **DISMISSAL**

- ⊕ Children in grades 4–7 are dismissed at 11:30 to meet their parents at Coffee Hour.
- ⊕ Children in preK–grade 3 **must be** picked up by a parent or guardian. Be sure to keep the kids inside the classroom until their parents come. They will want to

run out into the hall to look for their parents after class—and they will just keep running, down the stairs, if they don't see them . . . !

## AFTER CLASS

All of our rooms are shared with tenants or other groups in the church; therefore, it's important to return the room to its original setup.

- ⊕ Return art supplies to the RE supply area upstairs and books to the RE Library.
- ⊕ Paper towels, cleaning spray, and other cleaning supplies are provided (in a bucket in your classroom) for you to wipe the tables.
- ⊕ Pack everything specific to your class back in the classroom supply bin.

This is also a good time to check in with your co-teacher on how the class went and talk about any adjustments for future classes.

Finally, write up your lesson notes online in the [RE Teacher Web area](#). These notes are an invaluable resource for all the teachers who follow you!

In addition, please write a quick note on the Lesson Log (which can be found on the teacher clipboard behind the attendance sheets). This helps the RE Committee improve the curriculum, and lets the next term's teachers (or substitutes in your term) know what lessons you have done. Here's an example:

<b>Fall 2017 Lesson Log for Grade <u>  2  </u></b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fill in the lesson name from the curriculum, or a short description if you created it yourself</li><li>• Add brief comments on anything that was particularly successful or not</li><li>• Rate the lesson on a 1–5 scale (<b>5 is best</b>)</li></ul>			
Date	Name of Lesson and Teacher	Comments	Rating 1 (low) – 5 (high)
Sept 20	<i>Experiences with Trees - Jane Smith (lead teacher) and Sam Jones</i>	<i>The kids loved going outdoors. I added one of my favorite books, <i>The Tree Lady</i> by Joseph Hopkins, which I read to them while they ate snack.</i>	4

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## DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Different people have different strengths when it comes to learning. The best RE classes include a variety of teaching methods and activities, rather than rely solely on mini lectures and discussions. Here are some suggestions for different types of teaching and learning:

**Differentiated instruction** is a philosophy for effective teaching that involves providing different students with different avenues to learning so that all students can learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability.

- ⊕ **Acting, skits, and plays.** If the kids in your class can't read, you can narrate the skit or play, or the children can memorize simple lines.
- ⊕ **Cooperative games.** Cooperative Musical Chairs is a favorite, and you can find many great suggestions online.
- ⊕ **Songs.** Many of our curricula include songs, or you can ask Tina for suggestions. If you can't sing, other adults in the congregation will be happy to help.
- ⊕ **Creative movement.** Most children like to move, and you don't need to be a dancer to do movement with children. You can do silly hand motions with songs, create weird dances together, take stretch breaks.
- ⊕ **Go outdoors!** (But please stay on church property unless you have signed permission slips from all the parents.)

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## RITUALS

Rituals provide a sense of identity and continuity and can help children handle transitions. A satisfying and thorough ritual has three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every time you involve children in a religious ritual, you are giving them a template for creating the rituals they'll need and use all their lives.

**Note:** These rituals are not required; teachers may organize their lessons in a way that works best for themselves and the children in their classes.

The four rituals described below are commonly used in our RE classrooms.

### OPENING CIRCLE

This generally includes a chalice lighting, opening words, sharing of joys and sorrows, and a brief overview of the lesson.

The opening circle is an excellent way to provide a regular age-appropriate worship experience for children. Having the same worship experience every time they meet can give children a sense of stability. It also calms them down after their mad dash to get to the classroom!

**Note:** During circle time (or Joys and Sorrows), you may learn about events happening in the life of the children. Please be sure to tell Tina of any dramatic or life-altering events so she can convey them to Marta and the Lay Ministers. If you feel uncomfortable or ill-equipped to discuss the event with the child, encourage the child to talk more about it with Tina after church, or bring the child directly to Tina's office.

## CHALICE LIGHTING

This is a central ritual in Unitarian Universalism. Each classroom's supply bin includes a chalice and a flameless tea light (or a candle and matches, for older kids).

You are encouraged to say some words as you light the chalice. These can be the same words each week, or you can choose opening words that relate to the theme of the day. One option is to reinforce the name of our church with the children. As you light the chalice, say:

We are the church of the:  
Open minds (*both hands with open palms facing down on head*)  
Loving hearts (*hands with open palms crossed over heart*)  
And helping hands (*both hands held in front with open palms facing ceiling*)

### Unitarian Universalism 101

"What's a UU?" This question will come up in almost every RE class you teach. Our creedless religion can be challenging to convey to children.

Here is one very simple way to express the heart of who we are and what we believe:

*We are the church of  
The open minds,  
The loving hearts,  
And the helping hands.*

**The open minds:** "No one's opinion [regarding the mystery of death] is discounted or officially endorsed, and that adds to the bracing atmosphere of open-mindedness and searching that makes the UU faith so attractive."

**The loving hearts:** "[We assume] that children are born innocent and full of promise, and have it within their own capacity to live a good, moral life."

**The helping hands:** "For UUs there is not . . . any prevailing ideal of personal holiness or evangelism to save souls in some way. If there is any noticeable ideal, it well may be to be useful: useful in fostering democracy and justice, useful in defending the inherent dignity of every person, useful in building peace, education and toleration among people everywhere."

[All quotes from *The ABC's for UU Newcomers* by William Cleary, 2002, pages 45 and 55.]

Next, lead the children in practicing saying the name of our church. Say it, one or two words at a time, and have them repeat after you, then do the whole thing a second time.

First Parish . . .  
Unitarian . . .  
Universalist . . .  
of Arlington

Other chalice-lighting words can be found in the UU hymnal or online.

**Note:** The children will likely all want a chance to light the chalice. Decide on a strategy in advance for whose turn it is (e.g., alphabetical order) and keep careful track.

### JOYS AND SORROWS (SHARING TIME)

There are a number of ways you can structure this:

- ⊕ Circulate a basket of stones, and have each child choose one. Ask them to think about a joy or sorrow they are holding in their heart—something they are happy or sad about. As children share their joys and/or sorrows (or choose not to speak), they return their stone to the basket.
- ⊕ Alternative stone activity: Put a bowl of water in the center of the circle, and have the children gently place their stones in the water as they share their joy or sorrow. Say, “Just as the ripples spread through the water, our thoughts go out to all those we love and care for in the world.”
- ⊕ Say, “In just a moment, we will go around the circle, and each person will get a turn to speak. When it is your turn, begin by saying your name. Then tell us one good thing and one bad thing that has happened to you in the past week. You may also choose to pass, which means you only say your name. Only one person will speak at a time.”
- ⊕ You, as the group leader, should begin the sharing. Know in advance what you will say, so you can set the tone for everyone else. When one person is talking, you should make sure no one else talks. And don’t fall into the common trap of responding yourself to what someone has said—be sure you bind yourself to the rules as well!

*We become Unitarian Universalists because we believe that humans need the freedom to grow toward their own beliefs. We gather in community to encourage one another in our spiritual growth, to learn how to live together in loving diversity, and to work together for good purpose in the world.*

—Rev. Kathleen Hepler

## CLOSING CIRCLE

A closing circle gives the group a sense of closure. It allows you to sum up the session and take another look at what you have learned together. In your closing circle, you might do a simple review of the session, say some closing words, have the children stand and hold hands for the benediction, and then do a power squeeze (send a squeeze around the circle)!

**Note:** The “power squeeze” is another time where children vie to be first. Having a system planned in advance for whose turn it is will make this easier.

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## SUPPLIES AND RESOURCES

### ART SUPPLIES

In the RE supply area upstairs, you’ll find a variety of supplies for craft projects. Please keep the supply area as neat and organized as you found it! Also, please don’t take entire bins of supplies to your classroom; take what you need and leave the main supply for others.

### AV EQUIPMENT AND WI-FI

A DVD/VCR/TV is kept on a cart in the Bailey Room. Please contact Tina in advance if you will need this for your class.

CD players, an iPod dock, and a computer projector may be borrowed for classroom use—again, let Tina or the RE Assistant know ahead of time if you need one for your class.

Wi-Fi should be available in most locations at First Parish, if you’d like to use a laptop as part of your RE lesson. Ask Tina for the password.

### BOOKS

Our vast [RE Library](#) includes a number of books that are suggested in our curricula and speak to UU values. Our books are catalogued by title, author, and subject, and a full list is available on the Google Docs website. The library is self-serve, and you may check out a book any time (check-out cards are found at the back of each book). Put your name on the card and leave the card in the blue basket.

If you’d like to request a particular book for your RE lesson, let Tina or the RE Assistant know before that Sunday.

## GROSS MOTOR PLAY TOYS

Jump ropes, hula hoops, and balls are stored in the Bailey Room closet and may be used indoors and outdoors.

## REIMBURSEMENT FOR PURCHASES

It happens—you waited until Saturday night to plan your lesson, and you realize you *absolutely need* a bag of navy beans and 12 peacock feathers, something we're unlikely to have on hand. After you visit the 24-hour navy bean and peacock feather store, please submit your receipts and a Request for Reimbursement form, and you will be reimbursed. But please don't make a habit of this!

**Note:** Purchases in excess of \$50 must be pre-approved by Tina.

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## BACK-UP ACTIVITIES

- ⊕ Active games, such as “Duck, Duck, Goose” “Concentration 54,” “Red Light, Green Light,” and “Simon Says”
- ⊕ Cooperative games: *The New Games Book* and *More New Games* by Andrew Fluegelman offer tons of great suggestions, and these books are available in the RE Library. A good list of cooperative games can also be found [here](#).
- ⊕ Theatre games, which work particularly well for young teens and older kids (we have a fine book on theatre games in the RE Library, or you can do an online search for “theatre games” and get some great ideas)
- ⊕ Getting-to-know-you games, such as [name games](#) or step in/step out (form a circle, pose a series of yes/no questions, and have kids “step in” if their answer is yes)
- ⊕ Other games:
  - The Telephone Game: Arrange children in a circle. Have one person whispers a message to another and so on around the circle. Have the last listener announce the message to the entire group. Although the objective is to pass

Over time, you usually discover that there is some activity that always works with a certain group of children. I remember a third grade class that loved to draw, and you could always get them to settle down by bringing out paper and crayons. Another group of fifth- and sixth-graders really liked to do guided meditations, so I always had a guided meditation ready to go. If you can find what it is that they love to do, back-up activities are easier to plan.

—Rev. Dan Harper

around the message without it becoming misheard and altered along the way, part of the fun is that, regardless, this usually ends up happening.

- Make a [Human Machine](#): This fast and physical activity gets participants moving and working together in a way that generates energy and promotes collaboration. One at a time, members of the group become parts of the “machine,” each one making a distinct physical motion and a sound, until the whole group is working together in motion, as one human machine.

⊕ Singing

⊕ Reading aloud

**Note:** Some kids love to color while they’re being read to, so have coloring sheets or blank paper available.

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## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Though we have all raised our children perfectly and they are angels at home, sometimes the children in RE classes can present their teachers with a number of challenges, behavior-wise. Our hope and intent is for the classroom experience to be fun for everyone—teachers and participants. Sometimes teachers will need to be more structured with their management techniques to retain an acceptable level of energy.

Please talk with your co-teacher ahead of time about his or her level of comfort with noise, rambunctiousness, “chaos,” and letting go of the planned lesson if it doesn’t seem to be working.

**Note:** Please talk to Tina about any problems in your classroom. If a child is struggling in class, don’t hesitate to bring him or her to the RE office.

Below are some general suggestions for managing your class:

- ⊕ Discuss goals and expectations over the first few weeks. Have the kids brainstorm the list, go over it as a group, and have each kid sign the sheet. Refer to it periodically throughout the term.

**Note:** Using positive language (“We will be good friends and show consideration to one another”) is more helpful than a list of do’s and don’ts (“Don’t interrupt / hit / be mean”).

- ⊕ Particularly with younger children, maintain consistent routines from week to week. Start with more structure rather than less.
- ⊕ Kids love to feel important and helpful. Engage kids in helping you set up and distribute materials and snacks.
- ⊕ Wait several seconds before calling on participants to answer a question—the whole group needs time to think about the question before someone answers it. This helps make a safe space for the introverts and encourages the more vocal ones to practice listening.
- ⊕ Wait to give handouts to participants until it is time to read or use them; if the students have the handouts while you are speaking, they are more likely to be distracted.
- ⊕ Praise attentive or helpful behavior because this is the behavior you want to encourage: “I really like the way you came to the circle so quickly and quietly!” “I noticed that you handled your frustration very well.” “That was a very thoughtful and respectful question.”
- ⊕ Have a backup plan, and be prepared to change gears if what you’d planned is not going smoothly.
- ⊕ Remember that everyone learns differently. Plan lessons that include a variety of ways to learn—listening, speaking, looking/watching, touching/handling things, doing things, and engaging in full-body movement.
- ⊕ Use the teachers who taught the previous term as resources. A craft activity that was hugely successful for them (for example, making giant group posters with pictures cut from magazines) may not be successful for you because, well, the kids just did it five weeks ago! Same for the theme of the week.

To quiet the group and get their attention before you give directions, try these techniques:

**Note:** You might decide with your co-teacher how you will consistently ask for quiet.

- ⊕ Turn the lights off until all are quiet.
- ⊕ Use the “quiet coyote” symbol (thumb touching middle and ring finger, with index and pinkie extended like ears), while being quiet yourself—many children (especially young ones) are familiar with this symbol.

- ⊕ Say quietly, “If you can hear my voice, clap once,” then clap once. Repeat, adding a clap, until the group is listening to you and clapping in rhythm together.
- ⊕ Affirm and name children who are quiet and listening.
- ⊕ Issue a challenge: “I wonder how many seconds it will take for everyone to . . .”
- ⊕ Do something out of the ordinary—sing a song or ring a bell.

If any children are being particularly disruptive, here are some “in the moment” suggestions:

- ⊕ Silently move yourself (or have the co-teacher move) closer to the child; sometimes just being near him or her is often enough to disrupt and adjust behavior.
- ⊕ Silently touch the child on the shoulder as you continue to lead the group.
- ⊕ Separate the child from others who may be “feeding” the disruptive behavior.
- ⊕ Use “name dropping” while giving directions for a project: “Now, after cutting this out, Maria, here, will take the glue and do a great job of putting it on like this . . .”
- ⊕ Praise the child’s behavior if it is currently under some control: “You’re doing a good job with keeping your hands to yourself right now.”

After class, **please don’t hesitate to ask for help.** Communicate the situation early and directly to Tina.

With Tina, you can look up the child’s registration form to see whether there are any special needs, challenges, or issues the child’s parents have alerted us to. If so, the parents may have included suggestions for how to manage the child’s particular challenges.

If a child is having trouble transitioning to class, we encourage parents to stay with them for a few weeks. An additional parent in the classroom can be a huge asset.

Often, providing a “buddy” (from the Youth Group or Coming of Age class) for the disruptive child can be helpful. The buddy may also bring the child to a more neutral space or go for a walk until he or she is ready to return to class. Sometimes children find groups over-stimulating and simply need one-on-one time.

Again, talk to Tina about what the right strategy for your class and your situation might be.

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## MISC. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### ALLERGIES, FIRST AID, AND OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

On the Registration form, we ask for information about allergies or any other health issues. We then share with teachers any such information provided, via a class list (given to you on a clipboard), which is updated whenever new children register for the class. It is the teachers' responsibility to refer to this list before leading a class.

A gluten-free snack is provided for children who can't eat Goldfish crackers.

A first aid kit is available in every classroom. Please be sure you know where yours is located. In addition, there are more first aid supplies in the RE office behind the door.

Emergency supplies, including epi-pens and a defibrillator, are also available.

In case of an emergency, call 911, then send a runner to find Tina.

### BATHROOMS

Our new bathrooms have doors that lock from the inside. For students in the younger grades, we recommend that the lead teacher wedges the bathroom doors open so children have some privacy but the leader can be alert to any needs that arise. Should the wedge slip, a key will be available on top of the door jamb.

Depending on the location of the bathroom (i.e., whether it's in the teacher's sight or not), older children may go to the bathroom on their own or with a buddy. Use your best judgment.

### CLASS CANCELLATION

Rarely but on occasion (usually during a snowy winter), RE class will be canceled. Tina or the RE Assistant will send an e-mail to all teachers, and there will be an announcement on the church website.

### DISMISSAL

Class ends at 11:30. Children in grades preK–3 **must be** picked up by their parents or guardians. If parents are very late, the RE teacher may take a few children to the Vestry to find their parents.

Children in grades 4–7 may be dismissed at 11:30 to join their parents at Coffee Hour.

## EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS AND SAFETY DRILLS

First Parish conducts periodic safety drills, during which the RE wing is evacuated. Teachers will be notified well in advance if a safety drill is planned.

During both evacuations and drills, teachers should leave the building via the stairs, not the elevator. Make sure that you know where your assigned evacuation exit is. PreK and K teachers use the back stairs and the door that opens on the cemetery side. All other teachers should use the front stairs and the door that opens on the library side. If there is an issue with your assigned evacuation exit, please proceed to the next nearest exit to evacuate.

Bring that morning's attendance sheet with you. PreK and K teachers should bring the bandana chain (in the classroom crate) for kids to hold on to. Once downstairs, PreK and K teachers should have the kids hold on to the bandana chain (or some other kind of material that keeps them in a line, such as a rope) as they walk to the rally point (the place to meet and reorganize).

All teachers: Before leaving, turn off the lights in the room, and close the door behind you (which is required by the fire department). As you proceed to the rally point, have one teacher lead the line and one teacher at the end.

There are two potential rally points:

- ⊕ If weather permits (i.e., there is not too much snow on the ground), meet on the lawn between the library and Town Hall.
- ⊕ If there is a lot of snow, walk along Mass. Ave. and meet in front of Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Ave., to the west of the First Parish campus. Exercise utmost caution when walking with children along Mass. Ave.

Take attendance when you get to the rally point, to ensure that you haven't lost anyone.

For a safety drill, you will know ahead of time what time to evacuate the class and will be given a sign to post on your classroom door to let parents know where the kids are. Once classes have reached the rally point, you may return to the building. Parents will pick up their preK–3 kids in their classrooms, as usual.

During an emergency evacuation, the building alarm will sound. When the alarm sounds, gather your students, quickly and calmly, and leave the building immediately (turning off the classroom lights and closing the door behind you). Classes will not return to the building until given an "all clear." Parents may pick up their children while the class is still outdoors.

RE Committee members will be available to help with both safety drills and emergency evacuations. The RE Committee and RE staff will “sweep” the floors to be sure that everyone has evacuated the building and will assist the Nursery staff in carrying the littlest ones downstairs.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

If your class will go on a field trip, please let Tina and the RE Assistant know specifically where and when the group will meet and return, and any other details pertinent to the trip.

Driving field trips must be approved by Tina, and she will arrange drivers.

We require signed permission slips for children to go on field trips. (In the case of Neighboring Faiths or any class that will take multiple trips over the course of the year, a blanket permission slip is used at the start of the church year.)

General notes:

- ⊕ Encourage children to go to the bathroom before you leave the building.
- ⊕ Make sure that at least two adults are with the group at all times.
- ⊕ Bring your cell phone with you. Make sure that you have Tina’s cell phone number and she has yours.

## **GOING OUTDOORS**

You are welcome to take your class outside. If this is not your class’s usual practice and if the weather is chilly, please ask Tina to make an announcement from the pulpit that children will need their coats.

If you leave the classroom with your kids:

- ⊕ Please let Tina and/or the RE Assistant know where you are going!
- ⊕ Encourage children to go to the bathroom before you leave the building.
- ⊕ Leave a note on the door so parents know where to find their children.
- ⊕ Bring your cell phone with you. Make sure that you have Tina’s cell phone number and that she and/or the RE Assistant has yours.
- ⊕ Make sure that at least two adults are with the group at all times.

If you’re teaching the grade 2 nature curriculum or the grade 4 environment curriculum, there are areas on the grounds where children may dig and plant. Ask Tina for guidance.

## **KITCHEN USE**

Some lessons suggest a cooking project. The First Parish kitchen may be used on Sunday mornings, but you must reserve it with Tina by the Thursday before your lesson.

## **PARENTS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Particularly in the younger grades, some parents stay with their child for the entire class. Teachers usually appreciate having an extra set of hands—for example, if you need help taking a child to the bathroom or with the craft activity.

## **PHOTOS**

On the Registration form, we ask parents for permission to take and post photos of their children. We are very sensitive about using children’s photos via social media. Please check in with the RE staff before posting photos, videos, or names of the children in your class on social media.

At the beginning of each term, we will take a picture of your class, including both teachers, and post the photos on the RE Bulletin Board.

## **REGISTRATION**

Each year, a registration form must be completed for each child who attends the RE program. This gives us basic information about the children and their families, which helps us to support their safety.

The registration form is available [online](#). Parents may also download and print a [hard copy](#) of the form and bring it to the RE office or drop it off in Tina’s mailbox. Hard copies will also be available at the RE table during Coffee Hour.

Parents/guardians are also asked to complete a medical release form, in hard copy.

Encourage new families to register their children after they have visited your class two or three times.

## **SAFE CONGREGATIONS**

The UUA Safe Congregations Guidelines are designed to “provide clear procedures, policies and workshops for creating, supporting and nurturing safe and healthy boundaries in our faith communities.” The UUA’s [Safe Congregations Guidelines for First Parish Youth Programs](#) are available on our website.

All teachers must sign a Code of Ethics regarding working with children and youth, which is filed in the church office. In addition, all teachers must consent to a CORI

criminal background check. These forms are confidential, seen only by First Parish staff, and are kept in a locked, secure location.

If you would like to educate yourself about UUA Safe Congregations policies, a wealth of information can be found at the UUA website, as well as a list of resources for further reading.

### **SNACKS**

A snack of Goldfish crackers and water is provided for children each Sunday. A gluten-free snack will be available for any child who requires it.

Given the number of allergies and health issues among the children of our congregation, which we may or may not be privy to (or the number of parents who restrict their children's sugar intake), please don't bring additional snacks without clearing it with Tina first.

### **SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS**

If you know you will have to miss a Sunday that you are scheduled to teach, please let Tina know as soon as possible, and she can arrange a sub for you. (You are also welcome to arrange your own sub; the teachers who taught your grade previously are a natural starting point.)

If you wake up sick on a Sunday morning, please call the RE office right away.

If you are interested in being on the substitute teacher list (thank you!), let Tina or the RE Assistant know.

### **TOYS**

There are usually one or two children who bring a toy or stuffed animal to class. Some bring small cars, etc., that they like to play with but don't want to share. Unless it's a "lovey" that goes everywhere with the child and is needed to feel secure in the classroom, it's a good practice to ask the child to put it aside or leave it with the parent until it's time to go home.

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## **EXTRA NOTES FOR PREK TEACHERS**

Some aspects of teaching RE are particular to preK classes.

### **SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM**

- ⊕ Using the masking tape in the bin, tape the felt chalice board to the wall in the area where you plan to have Circle Time.

- ⊕ Gather your craft materials and arrange them for fast access when the time comes.

**Note:** Be sure to use only **blunt** scissors in preK classrooms!

- ⊕ Make a sample of the finished product to show the class before they start the project.
- ⊕ Arrange the books you've gathered on the theme of the day. You'll need at least two or three, and more is better. It's nice for kids who finish the craft project early (or don't really want to do it!) to have some books they can sit on the floor and read. Preschoolers tend to like books with big pictures and few words, both for reading aloud and reading alone.

### TEACHING A PREK LESSON

**Note:** If you attend the first part of the service, be sure to leave a little earlier than the kids do so you can be at the classroom door when they arrive.

- ⊕ Trying to check in all the kids as they arrive is a challenge. Do your best and then finish up once they're seated at the tables.
- ⊕ If you've got new children, ask their parents or guardians to fill out a permission form. At the very least, get the child's and parent's names and ask about allergies before the parents leave. If it's the family's first time attending First Parish, ask that they sit near the back of the Sanctuary in case their child needs to see where they are during the service or needs to be with them instead of in
- ⊕ Be sure that everyone has a nametag that you can read—sometimes they write their own name and it's not legible. Kids who object to wearing a nametag at all can usually be persuaded to wear one on their back.
- ⊕ Once every child is seated at a table, select a book to read and talk a little about the theme of the day. Read the book as the children finish their snack. Encourage the kids to talk about their experiences related to the theme.
- ⊕ When everyone has finished snack, the lead teacher moves the children to the rug for circle time.

**Note:** During the opening circle, the assistant teacher and helpers can clear off tables, wipe up spills, and set up the supplies for the planned activity, placing a little pile of

materials at each seat and some markers, glue sticks, and blunt scissors in trays in the middle of the table

- ⊕ Pass out egg shakers. Sing some form of the “Hello” song, going around the room and naming everyone, including teachers and visiting parents.

**Note:** For example, you can sing this “hello” song to the tune of “Frères Jacques”:

*Hello, [child’s name], hello, [child’s name]  
How are you? How are you?  
We’re so glad to have you,  
We’re so glad to have you,  
Here at school, here at school.*

- ⊕ Lead the children in practicing saying the name of our church. Say it, one or two words at a time, and have them repeat after you, then do the whole thing a second time.

*First Parish . . .  
Unitarian . . .  
Universalist . . .  
of Arlington*

Follow this with:

*We are the church of the:  
Open minds* (both hands with open palms facing down on head)  
*Loving hearts* (hands with open palms crossed over heart)  
*And helping hands* (both hands held in front with open palms facing ceiling)

- ⊕ Have the children, one by one, place their felt flames on the felt chalice that is taped to the wall.

**Note:** This can take **forever** if you don’t help things move along. While one child is at the felt board, have the next one in line take a felt flame from the basket. It helps to have one adult handle the board and another the basket.

Each teacher brings his or her own talents and interests to this group, allowing for change and flexibility.

Recently two Youth Group boys co-taught the spring term; they skipped craft activities altogether unless it rained. Instead, every week they took the whole group out to the playground for Frisbee, parachute play, or other games they organized. It was a huge success. This is a good lesson in how each of us has something unique to bring to teaching, and the flexibility in curriculum with this age really allows this to flourish.

—Barbara McCauley, First Parish  
preK RE teacher

- ⊕ Have the children sing the following song, to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”:

*Light, light, light the flame  
Peaceful as a dove  
Joyfully, joyfully, joyfully  
Fill the world with love*

- ⊕ Talk more about today’s theme and encourage the kids to talk.
- ⊕ Read another book.
- ⊕ They usually start to get restless at this point, so it’s a good time to have them stand up and do a song. It doesn’t have to be related to theme of the day; “Wheels on the Bus,” “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” etc. are fine. A movement activity works well at this point too.
- ⊕ Have the children return to the table for the craft activity.
- ⊕ To close the lesson, form a circle, hold hands, and sing, “The More We Get Together”:

*The more we get together,  
Together, together,  
The more we get together,  
The happier we’ll be.  
'Cause your friends are my friends,  
And my friends are your friends.  
The more we get together,  
The happier we’ll be.*

**Note:** You can hear the tune online  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lldmkrJXQ-E>).

Squeeze hands at the end.

**Note:** Don’t worry if most or all of the kids are outside at the end and you miss doing the closing circle.

**Be sure** to release children only to their parents or guardians!

## **SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT TEACHING PREK**

- ⊕ **“Over-plan and under-use”:** This advice is extremely applicable to working with this age group and their short attention spans. Teachers need to be ready to

burst into song, pull out an extra book, or play Duck, Duck, Goose or Simon Says, indoors, when the kids get restless. It's good to have some generic-themed coloring sheets, markers, and stickers (all of which they love) on hand, in case the craft is not well-received or is completed in five minutes. You may not need any of these extras, but when you do, it can help calm a rambunctious group.

- ⊕ **Age range:** The age range in preK classes can run from 3 to 5 years—there are usually kids who have just turned 3 and have come up from the Nursery (and may still be in diapers or pull-ups) in the same class with kids who have turned 5 and are very ready for kindergarten.
- ⊕ **Open curriculum:** The curriculum guide has useful suggestions re: themes for preK, but teachers may choose any subject of their liking. Birds, pets, and spring animals are just as acceptable as friends, sharing, and families! Holidays (Earth Day, Mother's Day, etc.) usually prompt themes with related books and crafts.
- ⊕ **Have fun!** One of the many great things about teaching preK is that the primary goal is to “have fun”—children are always allowed to opt out of anything they don't want to do. If this happens during craft time, it's nice to have a parent or helper who can sit in the corner with a group and read or sing or do a movement activity or, as the weather gets warm, go outside.

Teachers who love teaching  
Teach children to love learning