



CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Congregation Agudas Achim

Updated July 2023



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Child Safety Policy

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Values Statement

Congregation Agudas Achim (CAA) is a community that holds the safety and well-being of our children as our highest priority and views that commitment as sacred.

CAA aims to joyfully engage children with Jewish experiences and skills, inspiring them to lead an empowered Jewish life. We are deeply committed to safeguarding the young people in our community so they feel — and are — safe at all times. To that end, we strive for the highest standards towards protecting children from abuse and harm.

All members of the CAA community are required to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with being a positive role model (*Dugma*) for children and other adults.

This policy applies to all members of the congregation and community - including all staff members, congregants, volunteers and guests and will be posted publicly on the CAA website.

Definitions

CAA: refers to all of Congregation Agudas Achim including Congregation Agudas Achim Religious School (CAARS), Selah, Nachat, AAUSY, Chaverim, Geshet, Young Family events

Child: refers to any youth from birth through 18 years old.

Community Member: refers to CAA members, clergy, staff, volunteers, guests, visitors, community partners and contractors.

Staff: refers to all paid employees of CAA, CAARS, and Selah including but not limited to teachers, clergy, administrators, and facilities and kitchen staff.

Volunteer: refers to all individuals who volunteer through CAA.

Abuse: refers to all forms of mistreatment including but not limited to verbal, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.



Child Safety Working Group

In keeping with the CAA commitment to protect children from abuse and harm, a Child Safety Working Group has been established to oversee the development, implementation, and maintenance of the Child Safety Policy at CAA. The guidelines included in this policy, along with educational training for the entire staff and congregation, are at the core of our child protection program.

The Child Safety Working Group consists of the following congregational roles:

- Executive Director
- President
- VP of Education
- Clergy
- Director of Youth Education
- General Counsel, or other board member with relevant experience
- Community member with relevant experience such as a child behavioral health expert or victim advocate

The group's role is to coordinate and oversee:

- implementation of the policy,
- educational forums and trainings,
- ongoing maintenance of and compliance with the policy,
- advice to the congregation on questions of child protection,
- timely and responsible handling of policy violations and other allegations of misconduct, abuse or concern.

The group shall meet at least once per year to review the policy and associated training plan and update it as needed. The group shall also meet as needed to address any reports of abuse or community concerns that require its input.

Code of Conduct for Interactions with Children

Physical Contact

The appropriateness of physical contact will vary with different ages, the context of the interaction, and the stages of childhood development.



Three key principles regarding touch include: parental consent, child consent, and ensuring that at least one additional adult is present.

Parental Consent

Whenever possible, when an adult intends to pick up, hug or comfort a child, that adult should seek permission from the child's parent or guardian before doing so.

Child Consent

- Before touching whenever possible it is best to check first with the child, when developmentally appropriate and within context.
- An adult intending to pick up or hug a distressed child should first ask the child if that is acceptable and respect the child's response.

Ensure an additional adult is present

- Touching of a child should occur in a public space with another adult present.
- Whenever possible, when picking up a child in distress there should be two adults present; the individual picking up the child and one additional adult.

Appropriate physical contact

- Appropriate physical contact areas may include: shoulder, upper back, arms, hands.
- Other forms of touch in an appropriate context may include: a handshake, a fist bump or high five, side hugs, or comforting a distressed child by picking them up or providing a hug.
- Whenever possible, oral instructions and directions should replace physical contact.
- A hug may be appropriate at a moment of happiness, celebration, sadness, or comfort. Such sentiments should always be expressed in public, and never in private. Ideally, the child should be asked in advance if they approve of a public hug in these circumstances.
- A child's development and age must be noted when considering if contact is appropriate. For example, for school aged children and those older, nurturing touch may be appropriate especially during moments of distress in order to provide comfort.

Inappropriate Physical Contact

Under no circumstances should a community member have physical contact with a child that could be considered or result in sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect of a child, as defined in this policy.

Example of inappropriate touch may include contact that:

- is private, in a one-on-one setting, or otherwise out of sight of other adults.



- is initiated against the wishes of the child.
- includes the touching of body parts that would normally be covered by a bathing suit or would appear to a reasonable person to have a sexual connotation.
- is intended to cause pain or distress to the student or child, including physical punishment.
- is overly physical and may include roughhousing, tickling, wrestling or carrying children.
- includes lap sitting unless it is a parent/guardian/family member, or in their presence.

Community Members should gently block and redirect a child who attempts to touch them in an inappropriate or sexual manner. They will discourage children from inappropriate expectations of touch in a gentle manner, being mindful not to embarrass the child. Community Members should gently set limits when children seek excessive, inappropriate, or sexual attention and obtain support services for children who continually struggle with these limits. See [Support Resources](#) at the end of this policy.

Additionally, all Community Members should be mindful of the child's behavior and actions, taking notice of behaviors that may be suggestive of past abuse, as communicated during training. Such behaviors should be communicated to a member of the Child Safety Working Group as soon as possible.

Nurturing touch is an important part of healthy child development. This policy does not ban all physical contact between adults and children, but rather limits such contact according to the principles outlined in this policy.

Interactions with Children

All interactions with children, including both instructional and non-instructional interactions, are to take place in spaces that are both **observable and interruptible (issur yichud)**. This includes but is not limited to classrooms and spaces with observable windows, unlocked doors and that are used for instructional purposes. These interactions should take place at a time and in a space known and designated for instructional use.

This policy applies when a parent/guardian engages a CAA community member for private teaching, such as tutoring and/or instruction to be conducted off the CAA premises, whether in the child's home or in a restaurant, library or other public space.

In addition to the above, the following guidelines apply in all instances of one-on-one interactions with children:



- One-on-one interactions should occur at times when additional staff and/or adults are present in the building.
- During one-on-one conversations, meetings, or instruction, the room door should be open or with an unobstructed window view with clear visibility into the room. The door should be unlocked, and the adult should not physically be between the child and the room exit.
- Use of CAA or CAARS spaces for Youth Group activities, tutoring, meetings with B'nei Mitzvah sponsors, and other similar interactions with children should be pre-arranged with CAA/CAARS administration.

Language

Words, what we say, and how we communicate with others can be nurturing and supportive. Language and communication can also be destructive and hurtful. All members of the community should be careful and cognizant of the language used at all times, and especially when we speak to and/or are in the presence of children.

All CAA Community Members, including but not limited to teachers, tutors, peers, staff members, volunteers or guests, must refrain from making any sexually suggestive comments, jokes, innuendos; engaging in sexually suggestive behavior or actions; or using inappropriate language with a child or in the presence of a child.

In addition:

- Communications with children should include language that is encouraging, respectful and confidence-boosting.
- Adults may not use language that teases, belittles or shames a child.
- Adults should never ask a child to keep a secret.
- Adults should never share with children explicit or implicit sexual material including; pornography, photos, videos or other media.
- Inappropriate language/conversation may include, but is not limited to:
 - Cursing;
 - Using lewd or sexually suggestive language;
 - Comments about the way a child or Community Member looks, is dressed, or about the child or Community Member's body;
 - Questions about a child's sexuality;
 - Information about an adult's intimate behaviors, relationships, desires, or body.



Communication

The following guidelines apply to staff and volunteers:

- Personal contact information (home address, personal email addresses, personal home/cell phone numbers, social media accounts) should not be exchanged or shared with an individual child or groups of children.
- Staff and volunteers should not accept social media “friend” requests from a child utilizing a personal social media account. They also:
 - Should not communicate with children using social media.
 - Should not tag children in photos, videos, or any other recordings of synagogue events on their own private social media accounts.

Staff and volunteers who communicate electronically with children within the scope of their professional responsibilities shall observe the following guidelines:

- Staff and volunteers who have extracurricular responsibilities such as tutoring, b’nei mitzvah sponsoring, and youth group activities, may use text messaging or email to communicate with students who participate in the extracurricular activity over which the staff or volunteer has responsibility. A staff member or volunteer who communicates with a student using text messaging or email shall comply with the following protocols:
 - They must include at least one of the student’s parents or guardians as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and parent receive the same message;
 - Or in the case of group communications, (e.g. youth group advisor communicating with youth group participants) they shall include their immediate supervisor as a recipient on each communication to the students so that the students and supervisor receive the same message
 - They shall not communicate directly with any student between the hours of 8:30 pm and 8:00 am Central Time. A reasonable exception to this is when they are chaperoning a CAA/CAARS/USY sponsored overnight activity such as a youth group convention, or confirmation trip and it is necessary to communicate outside of the designated time frame. The appropriate CAA, CAARS, or youth group director must be included in the communication.
 - They shall limit communications to matters within the scope of their professional responsibilities (e.g., for classroom teachers, matters relating to class work, homework, and tests; for an employee with an extracurricular duty, matters relating to the extracurricular activity).
 - They are prohibited from communicating with students through a personal social network.



Boundaries

A staff or volunteer educator shall maintain appropriate professional educator-student relationships and boundaries based on a reasonably prudent educator standard as outlined in this policy. Staff and volunteers should always remember they are not a child's friend and therefore should not engage in peer-like behavior with children.

Staff and volunteers:

- Must not engage alone in activities with children or young people who are members of our organization outside authorized programs, such as socializing outside of the structured programs/activities.
- Must not seek contact with children or young people (or former participants) outside of official CAA responsibilities.
- Must not engage in any behavior that might seem inappropriate if observed by others.
- Must not lavish disproportionate attention on a given child or give gifts to a child. *This does not include, for example, an appropriate Bar/Bat Mitzvah or other special gift from the institution.*
- Must not be present at a child's home without an invitation from the parent/guardian or at any time when a parent/guardian or another adult is not present.
- Must not permit a child to be present at the employee or volunteer's home unless the child's parent/guardian is also present, or another adult is present and the parent/guardian has given permission via a signed release.
- Should not hang out or interact socially with a child outside of synagogue activities.
- Should not encourage a child to ignore rules implemented by the child's parents/guardians.
- Should not direct a child to keep a secret from, or not share information with, the child's parents.
- Should not discuss their own sexual or romantic lives or reveal other intimate details about their personal lives. Should not discuss the child's sexual or romantic life.

Sexual Misconduct

Under no circumstances is any form of sexual behavior to occur between, with, or in the presence of children. Engaging in sexual behavior even if the young person involved may be above the legal age of consent is strictly prohibited.

'Sexual behavior' needs to be interpreted widely, to encompass the entire range of actions that would reasonably be considered to be sexual in nature, including but not limited to:

- 'Contact behavior', such as sexual intercourse, kissing, fondling, sexual penetration or exploiting a child through prostitution.



- 'Non-contact behavior', such as flirting, sexual innuendo, inappropriate text messaging, inappropriate photography or exposure to pornography or nudity.

Drugs and Alcohol

Supplying drugs or alcohol to children is a criminal offense and is strictly prohibited. It is also prohibited for adults or teens to interact with children while under the influence or in possession of drugs or alcohol.

Peer-to-Peer

CAA seeks to promote and foster healthy childhood and teen peer-to-peer relationships. We are committed to preventing emotionally and/or physically harmful peer interactions. Prohibited behaviors (including those between adults and children) include but are not limited to:

- sexual harassment
- sexually explicit language
- bullying
- sexting
- online bullying and harassment
- unwanted physical contact
- sexual pressure and/or coercion
- stalking

Transportation

CAA staff and volunteers are prohibited from transporting children, other than their own children, to or from CAA sanctioned events, without the consent of the parent or guardian. CAA staff and volunteers must not provide unauthorized transportation. Any authorized transportation must be communicated to the parent/guardian and to another CAA staff member before the journey takes place. This communication must include notification of the departure and a notification of the completion of the journey.

Photography

The following rules apply to photography and videography of children at CAA:



- Permission from the child's parents/guardian must be obtained prior to the public posting of any photographic images or video recordings taken of children at CAA. These images may include those used for promotional purposes (including, but not limited to: website, Facebook pages, promotional flyers and other electronic or printed means of communication).
- This permission may be obtained through an annual permission/consent.
- No photography may be conducted inside changing areas, bathrooms, or while a child is in a state of undress.
- Images of children may NOT include identifying personal information including the child's name.
- All photographers/videographers seeking permission to photograph at CAA must agree to and adhere to the guidelines set forth by this statement.
- Any image (digital or other) of a child taken with permission should maintain tzniut (modesty). Any image which unintentionally reveals private body parts violates these rules and is not suitable for public display. Any such image(s) are to be destroyed and/or deleted.

Reporting Procedures

Employees and volunteers have a duty under this policy to immediately report suspicions of child abuse, harm or maltreatment. Any employee who suspects or receives direct or indirect notice that a student or group of students has or may have experienced prohibited conduct or crossed boundaries shall immediately notify one of the following: the Executive Director, the Director of Youth Education, a member of the clergy, or a member of the Child Safety Working Group and take any other steps required by this policy.

The first action taken should be to ensure that the child is in a safe environment and to call 911 if there is an immediate and present danger.

Any violation of Code of Conduct policy reported to the Child Safety Working Group will initiate actions that may include but are not limited to the following:

- Notification of the child's parents or guardians of the violations
- Immediate actions to protect the child, up to and including: separation of the alleged violator from the child and other children at CAA
- Police notification of the occurrence and report to the Director of Security at the Dell Jewish Community Campus



- Notification to the Texas Department of Family and Child Protective Services (CPS). If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, the law requires that you report it. [Texas Family Code Section 261.101 (a)] See [Texas Department of Family and Children Services website](#) for details.
- Upon completion of a CPS investigation, or during the course of a CPS inquiry an independent investigation may be conducted by CAA or its third party designee.
 - If the incident involves a CAA employee or staff member, an investigation will be conducted and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken, up to and including probation, suspension, and termination.
 - If the incident involves a CAA member, an investigation will be conducted and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken up to and including a warning, limited access, or termination of membership.
 - Notification of other Synagogues, summer camps, other Jewish communal organizations or United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) of the actions taken by CAA if it is determined that the individual may seek to participate in services at those Synagogues or groups.
- In those instances where a report is made to CPS and the authorities are unable or unwilling to move forward, CAA will continue to execute due diligence in responding, which may include enlisting the assistance of an independent investigator.
- If the behavior includes a violation of CAA's policies but does not rise to a required notification of CPS, then the actions taken may include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a discussion regarding the violation between the violator and a minimum of two members of the Child Safety Working Group. During that discussion the policy and the violation will be reviewed to ensure the violator understands the guidelines. There will be written documentation of the policy violation and subsequent discussion that will be added to the violator's file, and affirmation by the violator to abide by the policy going forward.
 - Initial discussions by the Child Safety Working Group about a violator should be encouraged, whenever possible, to be name/identity blind - excluding the violator's and the child's name.
 - a formal written warning may be delivered following an initial violation.
 - for subsequent violations, further discussion and/or warnings, a limited access agreement, may be initiated depending upon the circumstances and nature of the violation, with the Director of Security on the Dell Jewish Community Campus being notified.
- If an alleged perpetrator of abuse or a policy violator is a staff member or an individual who has regular interactions with children, the individual's access to children in the synagogue will be immediately suspended as soon as CAA learns of the allegations.



- Referral of the child for medical evaluation, psychological evaluation, and/or mental health supportive services.
- Dismissal of the violator from the community, with membership revoked.
- Consultation with outside counsel or expert.
- Referral of the violator for appropriate supportive and/or mental health assistance.
- Notification of other community institutions
- Alleged abuser's suspension of contact with children

Hiring and Screening

The objective of the Hiring and Screening section of this policy is to ensure that all employees and volunteers who will interact with CAA's children are appropriately vetted so that CAA can provide a safe and nurturing environment for all of our children. This process clearly illustrates to all employee/volunteer applicants and to our community that CAA is committed to protecting our children.

All staff members and volunteers, and those applying to become CAA employees or volunteers, who interact with children and adolescents will be required to read and acknowledge receipt of this policy prior to commencing their responsibilities at CAA. In doing so, these individuals affirmatively demonstrate their understanding of, and agreement to this policy.

Interview Process and Screening

The basic screening program for all staff and volunteer applicants may include the following elements depending upon the position applied for:

- A completed employment/volunteer application form
 - The application will inquire into, among other things, previous experience with children (to the extent relevant to the position), previous experience at communal institutions (to the extent relevant to the position), past employment information, and references.
- Personal interviews
- Reference checks
- Background check
- Social media and internet check



Subject to the above information obtained, the employee/volunteer applicant may be denied employment or permission to serve as a volunteer.

Applicants are informed during the initial conversation that CAA is vigilant in the protection of our children. During the interview, CAA shall explore the applicant's beliefs and values in relation to the treatment of children and young people (including beliefs about discipline and reinforcement), their reasons for wanting to work with children and young people, and general awareness and understanding of child protection issues and this policy. New employees/volunteers may not begin their engagement at CAA before the interview and screening process has been successfully completed.

References and Background Checks

CAA requires a current background check to be completed for all staff hires and tutors and will include a standard criminal background check, social security verification, and multi-state sex offender check. Frequency of background checks will depend on the person's role. Background checks will be paid for by CAA.

Annual: All CAARS/Selah teachers and staff, including clergy. Tutors including Hebrew, Trope, and B'nei Mitzvah tutors recommended by CAA.

Every three years: All other CAA staff

CAA has the discretion to re-screen any individual earlier than the defined period and to terminate employment at any point for concerns regarding an individual's ability/reliability to keep children safe.

Reviewing Criminal Background Check Results: If a conviction or arrest is discovered or disclosed in this process, the Executive Director, the clergy and/or the Education Director will review the circumstances of the incident. If it is determined that the individual should be hired (or retained or promoted) despite the incident, they must discuss the circumstances with the Child Safety Working Group.

Training

- CAA will require completion of an in-person group training on child safety and protection for all CAA and CAARS/Selah staff. Training for CAARS and Selah staff may be conducted separately as appropriate.
- CAA staff who begin their duties mid-cycle will be expected to complete the online training and read the Child Safety Policy at the time they begin their duties, and subsequently complete an in-person training at the next available session.



- All staff, tutors, sponsors, Board members, CAARS Advisory Committee members, Young Families Committee members, and other volunteers must sign an affirmation that they have read and will abide by CAA Child Safety Policy.
- One or more members of the Child Safety Working Group shall be responsible for creating and conducting training or arranging for another qualified representative to create and conduct training on behalf of CAA.
- In-person group training will be held once per year.
- Online training will be made available via the CAA website.

Support Resources

As a community that holds the safety and well-being of our children as our highest priority, we strive for the highest standards towards protecting children from abuse and harm. Our commitment to working to create a safer community for all children includes the protection and support of all who come forward with disclosures of maltreatment.

As such, information is provided below for local and national resources that may be helpful to youth, parents, and community members:

- Hotlines (call, text, or chat):
 - National Suicide Prevention hotline - 988
 - National Sexual Assault hotline - 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
 - National Domestic Violence hotline - 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
 - Local 24/7 SAFEline - 512.267.SAFE (7233)
 - Austin Travis County Mental Health Crisis Hotline - (512) 472-HELP (4357)
- RAINN (formerly known as the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network) - <https://www.rainn.org/>
- SAFE (Stop Abuse for Everyone) - <https://www.safeaustin.org/get-help/sexual-assault-exploitation/>
- Love is Respect - <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>
- Center for Child Protection - <https://centerforchildprotection.org/>
- JFS Austin - <https://shalomaustin.org/jfs/>
- Austin Child Guidance Center (ACGC) - <https://www.austinchildguidance.org/>
- Out Youth - <https://www.outyouth.org/>
- Trevor Project - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- City of Austin Legal Services
 - Police Department
 - Website: www.austintexas.gov/department/police
 - Call: (512) 974-5037 (Victim Services - bilingual operators available)



- Domestic Relations Office Resources
 - Website: www.traviscountytx.gov/dro/helpful-resources
 - Call: (512) 854-9216 (Family Court Services)
- Family Violence Protection Team
 - Website: www.austintexas.gov/page/family-violence-protection-team-information
 - Call: (512) 854-9216 (Family Court Services)
- Non-emergency stalking reports: 311 or (512) 974-2000. [Submit an online report.](#)
- Protective order office - <https://www.traviscountytx.gov/county-attorney/family-violence/protective-order>



Implementation Plan

Current Working Group Members:

- **Executive Director:** Rachel Rosenberg O'Brien
- **CAA President:** Susan Klein
- **VP of Education:** Suzanne Bazarian
- **Clergy:** Rabbi Neil Blumofe, Rabbi Gail Swedroe
- **Director of Youth Education:** Tammy Stone
- **General Counsel:** Adam Kruger
- **Community member with relevant experience:** Alyssa Gilden, Ph.D., LSSP

Implementation Task	Timeline	Person Responsible
Post Policy on CAA website	Sept 2022 Updated July 2023	Communications
CAARS/Selah Staff Training	Annual - Aug/Sept	Director of Education
CAA Staff Training	Annual - July/Aug	Executive Director
Background Checks	As part of hiring process and then... Annual or every 3 years as defined by the policy	Director of Education Executive Director
Tracking Policy Review Signatures	Upon hiring and/or training	Executive Director and Director of Education
Review Policy	Annual - between May-July prior to to annual trainings	Child Safety Policy Working Group
Online Training Video	TBD	



CHILD SAFETY POLICY ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM FOR EMPLOYEES

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of Congregation Agudas Achim's Child Safety Policy. I further acknowledge, that I have read, understand, and agree to comply with all policies outlined within it.

If I have any questions about the content or interpretation of this policy, I will contact the Director of Youth Education, Executive Director, or Senior Rabbi to discuss.

Printed Name

Signature

Date