

**A Mental Health Accessibility Statement for the UUA**  
**Drafted by Rev. Barbara F. Meyers of the UUA Accessibility Committee**

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The Unitarian Universalist Association encourages congregations and individuals to examine their hearts, their theology, and their actions to see that there is no judgment of or avoidance of persons who live with mental health issues. Of particular importance in this theological pursuit are the UU Principles advocating:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person,
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and
- Acceptance of one another and spiritual growth in our congregations.

The following are ways that congregations can become accessible to those with mental health issues by acknowledging their presence, doing active outreach, engaging in advocacy and becoming an employer. It is anticipated that all congregations will conform to those items that acknowledge the presence of mental health issues. Other congregations may want to become more actively engaged by doing outreach and advocacy. Many congregations are already and will become employers of people with mental health issues.

A congregation which is accessible to people with mental health issues and their families...

### **Presence**

- **assumes the presence of people with mental health issues and their families**, learns to support them, and, with their permission, includes their stories in worship, religious education and other programs
- **has a minister who has been trained** in how to work with people with mental health issues and their families, including knowing how, when and to whom to make referrals
- **includes and addresses the needs** of people with mental health issues to the best of their capability **at every level of congregational life**—in worship, in programs, in social occasions, for children, youth and adults—welcoming not only their presence, but the gifts of their lives as well. When people with mental health issues are on committees or in social programs, reasonable accommodation (as defined below on the section on employment) should be made for their participation.
- **encourages development of spiritual resources** – exploration of a personal sense of truth and meaning in a place of safety and acceptance – to aid in caring for and helping to heal those with mental health issues and their families
- **provides pastoral care** for people with mental health issues and their families, as is done for people with other kinds of situations of need
- **includes a nondiscrimination clause** in by-laws and other official documents affecting congregational life, and acts to fulfill it
- **has guidelines for appropriate behavior** in church which apply to all church members and visitors
- **has church services that focus on mental health**

### **Outreach**

- **gets training about mental health** using a curriculum, such as the Caring Congregation program written by UU community minister Barbara Meyers, that helps congregations become more intentionally inclusive and supportive towards people with mental health issues

- and their families
- **encourages, provides, and/or gives referrals to support groups** for people with mental health issues and their families
- **engages in outreach** to those with mental health issues in its advertising and by actively supporting groups that address mental health, both secular and sacred. For example, supporting organizations that provide low-cost housing and/or a drop-in center, or encouraging volunteerism in mental health facilities
- **is aware of resources** to address mental health issues in their community and provides referrals for people with these issues and their families
- **sponsors educational events** to provide information about mental health, giving opportunities for people to speak openly about their mental health issues, and counter stigma

### Advocacy

- **engages in actions** such as the following:
  - **having a mental health task force or committee** which is charged with leading mental health policy for the congregation
  - **knowing who has the power** to make decisions affecting the mental health of residents in the community, particularly those who are homeless or veterans with mental health problems
  - **knowing the mental health issues most needing attention** locally, state-wide and nationally at any given time
  - **keeping track of legislative developments** at the local, state and national levels, and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society
  - **speaking out** when the rights of people with mental health issues and their families are at stake
  - **working with other mental health advocacy groups** such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and their state and local chapters

### Employment

- **provides a model as an employer** by offering jobs to those with mental health issues with reasonable accommodation for their disability to those who are hired. The following components have been identified as satisfying the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) for mental health disabilities:
  - *Job restructuring* – Reallocating non-essential job functions.
  - *Sick Time* – Allowing for extra time off or accrued paid or unpaid leave for medical appointments.
  - *Modified or Part-Time Schedule* – Altering work schedules (to accommodate someone on anti-depressants, for example, who may be groggy in the morning).
  - *Modified Work Place* – Making physical changes in the workplace, such as adding partitions for someone who has difficulty concentrating, or putting a desk by the window for a person who grows depressed if there is too little light. Or allowing people to work from home part time, or wearing headphones that block out distractions.
  - *Modified Policies* – Change work policies that govern personnel. Examples: Radio at work to relax them; taking detailed notes during meetings, different dress policies.
  - *Supervision* – Employer to provide someone to train a qualified individual with a mental disability. Supervisor giving feedback more frequently.
  - *Reassignment* – Provide a job reassignment to another position whose essential functions more closely parallel the skills of the employee with disabilities.