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Introduction

Triratna is a worldwide network of friends in the Buddhist life. This is for many of us a source of great richness, support and strength. However, it also carries a risk that we may fail to notice, question or act on behaviours of concern, out of naivety, loyalty to friends or lack of awareness; or an assumption that “it couldn’t happen here” or “they would never do a thing like that.”

This policy is an expression of the first ethical precept taught by the Buddha: to avoid harming living beings. It refers to law and good practice as defined in England and Wales.

The purpose of this document

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre activities (and those of any outreach groups run by this centre) as employees, volunteers, leaders, teachers or parents.

It aims to provide

- protection for children (anyone under 18) who visit or receive Mid Essex Buddhist Centre services including children of Buddhists and other users of this Buddhist Centre and
- protection for Friends, Mitras and Order members who may have contact with children.

It sets out

- practices and procedures contributing to the prevention of abuse of children.
- a course of action to be followed if abuse is suspected.

Our values

Although we do not run activities specifically for children, we recognise that they may happen to visit from time to time.

The trustees of the Mid Essex Buddhist Centre recognise their responsibility to ensure the welfare of all those aged under 18 visiting or involved in Buddhist Centre activities.

Sthiranaga is our Safeguarding officer, responsible for the protection of children and adults who may be at risk at The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre (See also our Safeguarding Adults policy.)

We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from harm
- partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

This policy applies to all staff, including the Centre team and trustees, paid staff, volunteers, parents and anyone else working on behalf of The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre, whether as a Friend, Mitra or Order member.

We will seek to safeguard children and young people by:

- valuing them, listening to and respecting them
- adopting child protection guidelines and a code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- recruiting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring checks are made where necessary
- sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents, staff and volunteers
- sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know and involving parents and children appropriately
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training.

Who is a “child”?

In the United Kingdom a “child” is a person who has not yet passed their 18th birthday.

What is “child abuse”?

The World Health Organisation defines “child abuse” as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”

Types of abuse

- **Physical abuse** including hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning, or smothering.
- **Sexual abuse** including direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in inappropriate sexual activities.
- **Emotional abuse** Repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.
- **Neglect** The persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education, and medical attention.

A child who is being abused may experience more than one type of cruelty. Discrimination, harassment, and bullying are also abusive and can harm a child, both physically and emotionally.

Signs of abuse

These are many and varied. Some have perfectly acceptable explanations. It is useful to bear in mind:

- Any injuries that cannot be explained
- Injuries not consistent with falls or rough games
- Malnourishment
- Any allegations made by children concerning abuse
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing
- Self harm
- Eating disorders.

Engaging safely with children in person

Outside of our own personal and family relationships we will not arrange to meet any child under 16 individually *anywhere* without written permission from their parent or guardian.

Having gained such permission we will conduct individual meetings with a child under 16 in public spaces such as our Buddhist Centre reception area or a room with the door open.

We do not need parental permission to meet those aged 16-17 but we will take care to meet in public spaces such as our Buddhist Centre reception area or a room with the door open.

We will not give lifts to those under 16 on their own, other than for very short journeys. If nobody else is in the car, we will ask the child to sit in the back of the car.

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna'.

Engaging safely with children online and on social media

We are aware that individual contact with under 18s online or using social media carries the risk of accusations of "grooming"; relationships established with a view to sexual contact.

We will not engage *personally* by email, text or online with anyone under 16 using social media, for example by befriending them on Facebook or including them in WhatsApp groups or similar.

As a Buddhist Centre, we may receive emails from school pupils wanting information about Buddhism. Having answered their questions, we will not engage in more personal correspondence.

Welcoming school visits safely

Schools and other youth groups visit our Buddhist Centre. We will require every group to bring at least two adults capable of supervising the group. We will make clear that we are not to be left alone with their pupils and we will ensure that all those who lead such visits on behalf of our Centre are DBS checked.

DBS checks

We will ensure that the core team (Mitras or Order members, paid or voluntary) running *any* Mid Essex Buddhist Centre activities or events specifically intended for those under 18 have been security checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service. Anyone else (paid or voluntary) who has not been DBS checked must be supervised at all times by someone who is DBS checked.

(This does not apply to general activities at which someone under 18 may happen to attend from time to time.)

This is because we understand that children are **most** at risk in classes and other events specifically provided for them (especially regular, repeated events) because those who wish to gain access to children look for opportunities to become a familiar and trusted figure to children, for instance seeking to join the team running children's activities.

Children's events where parents are not present

We understand that where a Mid Essex Buddhist Centre event for under 18s does not involve some or all of the children's parents, we must have written permission from the parent/guardian of each child and *both the core team and the Centre trustees must be DBS checked*. This is because in the absence of parents, the trustees assume legal guardianship for the children for the duration of the event, even if the trustees are not present.

(This does not apply to school group visits to our Centre, which are under the legal supervision of their own teachers.)

Managing those who pose a risk to children

We will not allow someone who is likely to pose a risk to children to have contact with children (i.e. a known sex offender or someone who has disclosed a sexual interest in children).

Such a person will be asked by the Safeguarding officer to negotiate a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation in The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre activities within agreed boundaries. (See the document 'Managing those who pose a risk'.)

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna'.

Reporting concerns or allegations

All reports or suspicions about abuse must be treated seriously. They may include

- something you see
- something you are told by someone else
- rumours about a person's previous behaviour
- behaviour you observe in a child and
- disclosure from a child directly.

What to do if a person under 18 alleges abuse

- Be aware the child may have been threatened and may be very afraid
- Look directly at the child
- Keep calm and reassure the child that they are doing the right thing and are not to blame, even if they have broken some rules
- Accept what the child says without judgment. Never suggest that the child may be wrong or mistaken. Your responsibility is to take them seriously, not to decide whether what they are saying is true
- Never push for information or question the child. Let them tell you as much as they are ready to tell you
- Be honest. Do not promise confidentiality; let them know you will have to get help for them but that you will *try* to agree with them what should happen next. This means that you will need to share what they say with others - on a need-to-know basis only.

What to do next

- Your first concern is the safety and wellbeing of the child. Do not be distracted from this by loyalty to the person who has been accused or your desire to maintain the good name of Triratna or your Centre.
- If you think the child is in *immediate* danger phone local social services or police straight away. A telephone referral should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.
- Every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights; therefore if possible you need to get the child's consent to share the information they have given you, within the limits described here.
- However, if necessary, it is legal to report without their consent, if you believe they may be at risk of significant harm.
- If you are not the Safeguarding officer, tell the Mid Essex Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding officer *only*. They bear overall responsibility for the future handling of the matter on behalf of the charity.
- The Safeguarding officer should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team for advice as to what to do next: safeguarding@triratnadevelopment.org
- Meanwhile, make detailed factual notes about the discussion as soon as possible, including time, date and location. Give them to the Safeguarding officer. If you are the Safeguarding officer, keep notes yourself and keep them either locked away or password-protected.

- Confidentiality, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis, is very important. Nobody else has a right to know about the matter. This is not a matter of concealment, but is intended to protect all concerned. It will also protect your sangha from fear, rumour and disharmony which will make it much harder to deal with the matter effectively without causing further harm.
- No sangha member should attempt to investigate a criminal allegation. This is the job of the police and to attempt this could prejudice a court case and put the person in danger.
- Finally, if the allegation is criminal, without giving full details you should tell the Charity Commission that there has been a Safeguarding incident, that your charity has addressed it according to your Safeguarding policies and that the police have been informed.

Secure, confidential record-keeping

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Safeguarding officer will keep a detailed record of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations and actions related to them. These are kept either in a locked cabinet or safe or in a password-protected electronic file on our computer system. Access to these records is only for the Safeguarding officer and one or two others approved by our trustees.

Keeping confidential records for at least 50 years

We understand that many allegations of abuse come to light 30 or more years later, and that we are therefore required to keep our records safe for at least 50 years. We will do this by giving a paper copy into the safe keeping of our solicitor or accountant at the end of each year.

If our Centre closes down, we will give our records to another Triratna Buddhist Centre to keep with their own past confidential records; i.e. with their solicitor/accountant.

Reviewing our policies annually

All our Safeguarding policies will be reviewed by the trustees and Safeguarding officer annually and the review recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre

Mid Essex Buddhist Centre

Chair's name and email address Vanaraji chair@mid-essex-buddhist-centre.org.uk

Chair's signature

Safeguarding officer's name and email address Sthirana safeguarding@mid-essex-buddhist-centre.org.uk

Safeguarding officer's signature

Date

Published 1st April, 2018 by the trustees of The Mid Essex Buddhist Centre

This document is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying Mid Essex Buddhist Centre Child protection code of conduct and the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna'.

This document is based on the model document published 2018 by the Triratna Safeguarding Team.
safeguarding@triratnadevelopment.org