

The Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester)

Child protection policy 2019

The Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester)
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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 in England and Wales.

The purpose of this policy

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in The Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester) 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 The Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester) 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

Our activities include children in the following ways, regularly or from time to time: eg school group visits, crèche, festival activities.

The trustees of the Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester) recognise their responsibility to ensure the welfare of all those aged under 18 visiting our Buddhist Centre or involved in Buddhist Centre activities.

Sthiranaga (Darren Barrenger) is our Safeguarding trustee. They are responsible for making sure Safeguarding is taken seriously by the trustees and appears regularly on their agendas, ensuring the trustees comply with their Safeguarding obligations as required by the Charity Commission.

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 Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester), 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 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. If this is unavoidable, we will ask the child to sit in the back seat.

See also the guidance document ‘Caring for teenagers in Triratna’, currently being drafted.

Engaging safely with children online and on social media

We are aware that individual contact with under 18s online, by email 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 18 using social media, for example by ‘friending’ them on Facebook or including them in WhatsApp groups or similar – except with written permission from their parent/guardian, specifying agreed medium and the named Order member who will be running it/them.

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.

See also the guidance document ‘Caring for teenagers in Triratna’, currently being drafted.

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 all members of the group at all times. 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

The Charity Commission expects that anyone working for a charity, paid or volunteering, including trustees, will be DBS checked wherever they are eligible. Since the rules on eligibility are complicated and change from time to time, our Safeguarding officer will check at least annually with external Safeguarding experts such as Thirtyone:eight (www.thirtyoneeight.org) and ensure everyone eligible for a DBS check has been checked within the previous five years.

We understand that where the Buddhist Centre runs activities or events specifically intended for those

under 18, or a child aged 15-17 attends activities not specifically targeted at those under 18.

- a) the core team (Mitras or Order members, paid or voluntary) must be DBS checked and
- b) the trustees must also be DBS checked, even if they have no direct involvement in the activity.
- c) Anyone helping with such activities (paid or voluntary) who has not been DBS checked will be supervised at all times by someone who is DBS checked.

a), b) and c) do not apply to general activities at which someone under 18 may happen to attend unexpectedly.

This is because we understand that children are most at risk in classes and other events specifically provided for them (especially regular, repeated events), or more general activities where it is known in advance that a child is likely to be attending; because those who wish to gain access to children look for opportunities to become a familiar and trusted figure to a child or children, for instance seeking to join the team running children's activities.

Children's events where parents are not present

We understand that where under 18s attend a Buddhist Centre event, if parents are not present at all, or are elsewhere on the premises, we must have written permission to take care of their child from the parent/guardian of each child.

DBS checks for trustees We are aware that the Charity Commission requires that where an event is targeted at unaccompanied 16-17 year olds or a wider age range of people including anyone under 18, *who are not accompanied by parents or guardians*, the trustees of the charity must be DBS checked even if they have no involvement in the event, whether or not it is residential.

(This does not apply to school group visits to our centre, which are under the legal supervision of their own teachers. However this means that the Buddhist teacher/leader must ensure they are never left alone with a child, which means ensuring schools bring enough adults to supervise the entire group at all times.)

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

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 anyone under 18 (for example, a person who is known to have a previous criminal conviction for sexual or other violent offences, someone who is under investigation for possible sexual or other violent offences 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 Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester) activities within agreed boundaries. (See the document 'Managing those who pose a risk'.)

Such a person cannot be asked to sign the Child Protection Code of Conduct as it would conflict with the terms of their contract and in any case it would be very unwise to permit such a person to have any contact with those under 18 in the course of Triratna activities.

Where it is felt that the charity does not have the resources to manage this relationship safely, we reserve the right to ask the person not to attend our activities.

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

Lettings/hireouts

Our charity rents or lends premises for the following activities which are not activities of our charity, even if they are led/run by a member of our Sangha: eg yoga classes, pilates, chi kung, acupuncture, counseling.

We understand that there is joint responsibility on our charity and those renting/using our premises for the Safeguarding of children and adults taking part in such activities, but that our trustees bear ultimate responsibility for the Safeguarding in all activities on our premises.

Therefore we will ask the organisation or individual using our premises to sign a lettings agreement which says they have read our Safeguarding policies and agree to abide by them, or that they have shown us their own Safeguarding policies.

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 Tri-ratna or your centre.

- If you are not the Safeguarding officer the first thing you should do is to tell the Safeguarding officer. However, if this is not possible and you think the child is in immediate danger phone 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 and data protection legislation; therefore if possible you should get the consent of the child's parent or guardian to share the information they have given you.
- However, it may be necessary, and therefore legally justifiable, to report without parental consent, if you believe that the child is suffering, or at risk of, significant harm and that informing parents/guardians would not be in the child's interest.
- If you are not the Safeguarding officer, tell the Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester)'s Safeguarding officer **only**. They will co-ordinate the handling of the matter on behalf of the charity's trustees.

If necessary The Safeguarding officer should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team for advice as to what to do next: safeguarding@triratna.community

- Meanwhile, make detailed factual notes about the conversation/concern/incident as soon as possible, including time, date and location. Give them to the Safeguarding officer. (See 'Secure, confidential record-keeping' below.)
- 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 may be criminal, without giving personal details of those involved you should email the Charity Commission that there has been a serious Safeguarding incident, that your charity has addressed it according to your Safeguarding policies and that the police have been informed. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity>

Who else needs to know?

Confidentiality, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis, is very important. Under data protection legislation nobody has a right to know about the matter – except, for Safeguarding purposes, with those in a position to prevent further harm, and your Chair, who holds ultimate responsibility for the governance of the charity. For example, where there is a criminal allegation against a Mitra it would be justifiable for the Safeguarding officer, Chair and Mitra Convenor to know about it.

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Where a person is believed/has been found to pose a risk to children it is often thought that parents have a right to know. However, this is not the case. Proper implementation of Safeguarding policy and procedures will ensure that your Sangha's children are as safe from such a person as they are from any others who pose a risk but have not been identified as such.

Secure, confidential record-keeping

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Safeguarding officer will keep a detailed log of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations, actions and the reasoning behind them. These will be stored on the charity's computer, in a password protected section accessible only to the Safeguarding officer and one or two others approved by our trustees. If this is not practicable, they will be written on a computer, printed out and the paper copies stored in a locked cabinet, box or drawer accessible only to the Safeguarding officer and one or two others approved by our trustees. In this case the computer files must be deleted promptly. We understand that such records must not be stored on individuals' own private computers.

We also understand that under data protection law we need to word our records in a form we would be happy for the subjects to read if they ask to, as is their legal right. This means notes should be factual and respectful, free of interpretations and value-judgements.

Keeping confidential records

We understand that because many abuse cases come to light 30 or more years later our insurers may require us to keep our logs for up to 50 years. (This is a requirement of the UK's Buddhist Insurance Scheme.)

If our charity closes down, we will give our records to another Triratna Buddhist centre/charity to keep with their own confidential Safeguarding logs..

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 Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester)

Chair's name and email address: Amalaketu (Robert Diamond)

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Chair's signature *Robert Diamond*

Safeguarding officer's name and email address: Sthiranaga (Darren Barrenger)

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Safeguarding officer's signature *Darren Barrenger*

Date 13/07/2019

This document is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying Triratna Buddhist Community (Colchester) Child protection code of conduct and the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted. This model document published June 2019 by the Triratna Safeguarding team, part of the Triratna Ethics Kula. safeguarding@triratna.community