

# **Auckland Buddhist Centre**

## **Adult Safeguarding Policy 2021**

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Registered charity no: CC20695

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in the Auckland Buddhist Centre activities as employees, volunteers, leaders, teachers or parents. It sets out practices and procedures contributing to the prevention of abuse of adults. It also sets out a course of action to be followed if abuse is suspected.

It is aimed at protecting adults attending Auckland Buddhist Centre activities, and providing guidance to Friends, Mitras and Order members working with them.

We have a general duty of care to prevent or address harm to adults in the course of our activities, including adults who may be at risk of harm or have care and support needs.

Vasudhara and Vajrajyoti are our Designated Safeguarding Officers, responsible for the protection of children and adults at the Auckland Buddhist Centre. (See also our Child Protection Policy.)

### **Who is an adult'?**

For the purposes of this policy an adult is a person aged 18 years.

An adult at risk of harm may be a person who:

- Has a physical or sensory disability
- Is physically frail or has a chronic illness
- Has a mental illness or dementia
- Has a learning disability
- Is old and frail
- Misuses drugs and/or alcohol
- Has social or emotional problems
- Exhibits challenging behaviour
- Is a refugee or asylum seeker

Whether or not a person is vulnerable in these cases will vary according to circumstances. Each case must be judged on its own merits.

### **What is 'abuse'?**

'Abuse' is not a legal term, but covers a number of ways in which a person may be deliberately harmed (legally or illegally), usually by someone who is in a position of

power, trust or authority over them, or *who may be perceived by that person to be in a position of power, trust or authority over them*; for example by a Friend, Mitra or Order member who is helping to run Auckland Buddhist Centre activities for those newer to such activities. The harm may be physical, psychological or emotional, or it may exploit the vulnerability of the person in more subtle ways.

However, harm can also occur less consciously, through naivety, idealism or lack of awareness.

## **Types of abuse**

Types of abuse include physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, financial/material and, also, discriminatory language.

## **People who might abuse**

Abuse may happen anywhere and may be carried out by anyone, including Order members, Mitras and Friends, whether financially supported or volunteering, other users of the Auckland Buddhist Centre and strangers or visitors to the Auckland Buddhist Centre. In addition, an adult might talk to an Order member, Mitra or Friend about abuse they are experiencing at home or in other aspects of their daily life.

## **Vulnerability can be variable**

Vulnerability and resilience can vary throughout a person's life. Many people are generally emotionally and psychologically stable in most aspects of their lives, but on occasion they may find themselves in a more vulnerable position, e.g. after a bereavement, serious illness, or breakdown of a relationship. They may be new to the practice of meditation and their practice may make them more sensitive. For example, we will bear in mind that a person who is emotionally vulnerable for any reason may not be able to make balanced decisions regarding giving money or becoming more involved with Triratna, or entering into intimate relationships, whether friendship or relationships which are more romantic or sexual in nature.

We will take great care to help each other avoid exploiting people in such everyday situations of vulnerability.

## **Protecting those with psychological disorders**

We are aware that those attending our centre and its activities include adults experiencing psychological disorders ranging from mild to severe.

We recognise that as Buddhists we do not have the professional skills to diagnose or help people with psychological disorders and that they may not be helped solely by the kindness of Buddhists. In such cases we may need to advise them to seek professional help.

We are aware that for people with serious psychological disorders traditional Buddhist practices involving recognition of the illusion of self could be extremely dangerous. We may need to encourage them in traditional Buddhist practices involving the calming of body and mind, or to avoid meditation altogether. This may also be needed during periods of relapse.

Where we believe a person to be at risk of suicide or self-harm, or to pose a risk to others, we will alert our Safeguarding Officers who will refer to local mental health services and to the police if there is an immediate risk.

## **Protecting those with psychological disorders - online**

Buddhism and meditation are increasingly taught using online media. In person, it is *relatively* easy to notice where a person may have compromised mental health but online it is much more difficult.

We recognise that among those seeking *individual* online guidance from members of the Triratna Buddhist Order there may be some reporting meditation experiences which are an indication of serious psychological disorder.

In engaging in individual guidance online by email, blog, social media or text we will take great care at the start to establish with local Order members the identity, location, and suitability of the participant, and which local Order members are available to support them in person. We will gain permission from the person to contact those Order members if we believe the person is at risk. (This does not apply where the participant is an Order member and therefore well known to us.)

**(Responding to children online:** With anyone under 18, we will not engage in written online communication except in carefully defined ways. See Auckland Buddhist Centre Child Protection Policy 2021.)

## **Managing those who pose a risk to others**

There may be cases where it is known that a person attending our activities is likely to pose a risk to others, for example, a person who is known to have a previous criminal conviction for sexual or other violent offences, or someone who is under investigation for possible sexual or other violent offences.

**Such a person will be asked by the Safeguarding Officers to agree to a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation in Auckland Buddhist Centre activities** within agreed boundaries and based on a risk assessment carried out by an Order member with professional experience in risk assessment. If our Safeguarding Officers are not qualified to do this we will ask for help from the Triratna European Chairs Assembly Safeguarding team or another professionally qualified Order member. (See the document 'Managing those who pose a risk 2021'.)

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

## **Reporting abuse**

- All allegations or suspicions are to be treated seriously. No abuse is acceptable.
- Some abuse may be a criminal offence and should be reported to the police as soon as possible.
- The employee or volunteer's primary responsibility is to protect the vulnerable adult if they are at risk.
- Each employee or volunteer has a duty to take action.

## **What to do if a vulnerable adult reports abuse**

### **We understand that we need to**

- Stay calm
- Listen patiently
- Reassure the person they are doing the right thing by speaking up
- Clarify issues of confidentiality early on. Make it clear that we will have to discuss their concerns with others
- Explain what we are going to do
- Write a factual account of what we have seen and heard

### **We will do our best to avoid**

- Appearing shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry
- Pressing the individual for details
- Making comments or judgments other than to show concern
- Promising to keep secrets
- Confronting the abuser
- Risking contaminating any evidence

### **What we will do next**

We understand that our first concern must be the safety and wellbeing of this person and that we must not be distracted from this by loyalty to the person who has been accused or a desire to maintain the good name of Triratna or our charity.

If the person receiving the disclosure is not one of our Safeguarding Officers, they must tell the Safeguarding Officers *only*, who will co-ordinate the handling of the matter on behalf of the charity's officers. However, if a Safeguarding Officer is not immediately available the matter should be communicated to the Chair of the Auckland Buddhist Centre. If the person may be in immediate danger the Safeguarding Officer, Chair, or person receiving the disclosure will phone social services or police straight away. A telephone referral will be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

We understand that every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights and data protection legislation; therefore if possible we need to get the person's consent to share the information they have given us, within the limits described here and below.

However, it may be necessary, and therefore legally 'reasonable', to pass on information without their consent if a child is at risk of harm, the adult is at immediate risk of harm once they leave your company and/or a crime has been or is about to be committed.

Meanwhile, the person receiving the disclosure will make detailed factual notes about the conversation/concern/incident as soon as possible, including time, date and location, and pass them to one of the Safeguarding Officers. As far as possible what the person has said should be recorded in their own words, as these could be used in court.

We understand that no sangha member should attempt to investigate a criminal allegation; that this is the job of the police and that to attempt this could prejudice a court case and put the parties in danger.

### **Who else needs to know?**

We understand that sharing information only on a need-to-know basis is very important. Under data protection legislation nobody has a right to know about a case except for safeguarding purposes with those in a position to prevent further harm and our Chair who holds ultimate responsibility for the governance of the charity. For example, where there is a criminal allegation against a Mitra it could be justifiable for the Safeguarding Officers, Chair and Mitra convenor to know about it.

This is intended to protect all concerned from further harm. It will also protect our sangha from fear, rumour and disharmony which could make it much harder to deal with the matter effectively without causing further harm.

### **Secure, confidential record-keeping**

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Safeguarding Officers will keep a detailed log of all safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations, actions and the reasoning behind them. These can be stored on the charity's computer, only if in a password-protected section accessible only to the Safeguarding Officers and one or two others approved by our officers.

If this is not practicable, we will keep them on an external hard drive or memory stick. To guard against loss in case the files, hard drive or memory stick become corrupted these will be backed up to another hard drive or memory stick and/or printed off. Any such memory sticks, hard drives and paper copies will be stored in a locked cabinet, box or drawer accessible only to the Safeguarding Officers and one or two others approved by our officers. We understand that such records must not be stored on individuals' own private computers.

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

### **Reviewing our policies annually**

This document was adopted by the officers of the Auckland Buddhist Centre on 28 June 2021 and will be reviewed and updated by the Safeguarding Officers and officers of the Auckland Buddhist Centre on or before same date 2022.

**Auckland Buddhist Centre**

**Safeguarding Officers**

**Dh Vasudhara, Dh Vajrajyoti**

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**Safeguarding officers' signatures**

**Date**

*This Auckland Buddhist Centre Adult Safeguarding policy is to be read in conjunction with the*

- *Auckland Buddhist Centre Child Protection Policy 2021*
- *Auckland Buddhist Centre Child Protection Code of Conduct 2021*
- *Auckland Buddhist Centre guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna 2021'and*
- *Auckland Buddhist Centre guidance document 'Managing those who pose a risk 2021'*