

Caring for Young Persons at the Wellington Buddhist Centre 2023

Guidance on the care of those aged 15-17

This guidance document should be read together with the Wellington Buddhist Centre Child Protection Policy 2023 and the Wellington Buddhist Centre Child Protection Code of Conduct 2023.

Is a teenager a child?

For the purposes of this policy a child is anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday.

While wishing to respond to the interest of many teenagers in Buddhism, we are aware of our ethical and legal duty to protect them from harm in the course of Wellington Buddhist Centre activities.

How old should a child be to attend our activities unaccompanied by a parent or guardian?

We consider 15 to be a reasonable lower limit. Thus, this document applies particularly to children aged 15-17. For further guidance on the care of all those under 18 please see our Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.

Written parental consent

Where a child aged 15-17 attends our *non-residential events regularly and unaccompanied by their parent/guardian* (i.e. if it's more than a drop-in or one-off visit and it's clear they are likely to keep coming) our Safeguarding Officer (Mettadharini) must make contact with their parent/guardian to ensure they know this is happening, and to record in writing that contact has been made, along with contact details and any medical conditions we need to know about.

Social media and meeting up

Where any sangha member becomes aware of behaviour which goes against the advice in our Child Protection Code of Conduct 2023 (for example befriending a 15–17-year-old outside Wellington Buddhist Centre activities or sharing/exchanging contact details with them or befriending them on social media) one of the Safeguarding Officers should be asked to look into the matter.

Nobody at the Wellington Buddhist Centre should engage with anyone aged 15-17 using email or social media except with permission from their parent/guardian, specifying the agreed medium and the named Order member/s who will be contacting them on behalf of the Centre and/or Young Buddhist group.

Any personal meetings between Order members, Mitras or Friends and a person 15-17 (whose parents have given permission by email or letter to one of the Safeguarding Officers) should be arranged to take place in public; eg at the Buddhist Centre when others are present or in a café, etc. Those 15-17 should only be invited home where there are group activities or other teenagers present and the parents have given permission by email or letter to one of our Safeguarding Officers.

Keep age ranges as narrow as possible

Events aimed specifically at, for example, 15–30-year-olds, are not a good idea. Older people might class them all as 'young Buddhists' but a 15-year-old will experience a huge difference, and power imbalance, between themselves and even a 20-year-old, which can make the younger person vulnerable to influence.

In pair work it is advisable to pair a person aged 15-17 with someone as near as possible to their own age, or to pair them with someone from the team – or put them in a three with one or two people as near as possible to their own age and/or someone from the team.

Meeting in public

All events, gatherings and study groups involving anyone aged 15-17 should take place in public settings (Centres, retreat venues etc), not at anyone's private home or in a Buddhist residential community.

No leader or team member - or anyone else on an event - should allow themselves to be alone in a room with anyone under 18 out of sight or hearing of others. If it is absolutely necessary to enter a room where a person under 18 is alone the door should be left open and another team member informed.

Residential events

Children's, young people's or family events

Where 15–17-year-olds attend *residential* events intended for those under 18 (or mixed age groups, such as family events) unaccompanied by their parent/guardian our Safeguarding Officer **must** get parental permission for them to attend by email or letter.

15–17-year-olds on general residential events

A 15-17 year-old on a residential event advertised more generally for adults must be accompanied by a parent/guardian and, preferably, share a room with their parent/guardian.

If that is not acceptable to the parent/guardian and teenager, the teenager could be in a single room, if possible adjoining the parent/guardian's room.

If not accompanied by their own parent/guardian, the teenager could be accompanied by an adult friend appointed by the parent/guardian as their carer for the event, in which case the Centre must obtain a written agreement made personally *between the parent/guardian and the carer* referring specifically to the event, and the carer and teenager should share a room or sleep in adjoining rooms.

More generally

Adult leaders should never share a room with anyone under 18. If they must enter the room to talk to the under-18, they should leave the door open.

15–17-year-olds should always sleep in rooms shared with others of the same sex and as close in age as possible, or in a single room if there is nobody of appropriate age and sex to share with.

Those under and over 18 should not share if possible (but close friends and siblings could be an exception.)

Over-18s should not go into under-18s' rooms. If they really need to enter the room, they should leave the door open.

Trans/gender diverse/non-binary teenagers

Current safeguarding advice recommends that trans or gender-diverse under-18s share sleeping accommodation with others of the gender they were assigned at birth or to have single rooms. However, this should be determined in dialogue with the trans or non-binary teenager in order to ascertain where they themselves feel safest and happiest being accommodated.

If single rooms are not available other options may be considered, e.g. all those sharing a room can dress and undress in the bathroom if they prefer, or a folding screen may be used to partition the room whilst changing. You may also find it helpful to ask the young person's school or parents/carers how they have managed similar situations for this young person.

Be aware that in supporting trans and non-binary teens to select the sleeping accommodation that works best for them, this room-sharing can sometimes bring unintended difficult consequences for cis-gender teens who may have valid reasons to feel unsafe sleeping in the same room with people who they read as being the opposite gender to themselves.

We need to approach this with discretion and sensitivity, in a way that supports both the trans/gender diverse teen and anyone else assigned to that shared room who may be significantly affected by their presence, or who has specific medical needs or needs related to disability.

As always, equalities legislation requires that you make 'reasonable adjustment' taking into account the resources and accommodation available and the needs of all concerned for safety, decency and privacy.

Safer transport

Where it is agreed that employees or volunteers may give a lift to a person under 18 who is not accompanied by a parent or guardian (with or without anyone else in the car):

- One of our Safeguarding Officers must ensure that the driver is well known to them, has read our Child Protection Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy and signed to confirm they will abide by them.
- One of our Safeguarding Officers must have the written agreement of the 15–17-year-old's parent/carer for them to travel in the car of this named driver.
- It should be made very clear between the Buddhist Centre and the parent/guardian that the Buddhist Centre is responsible for the 15–17-year-old only while they are at the Centre/event. The parent/guardian is responsible until the 15–17-year-old arrives at the Buddhist Centre/event and as soon as they leave.
- The driver must be over 18, have a full driving licence, adequate insurance and a vehicle which is roadworthy.
- The 15–17-year-old will sit in the back seat.

If our Safeguarding Officer does not feel able to implement these criteria they will require that lifts are not offered to those under 18 by any employee or volunteer in connection with our activities.