

Managing a person who may pose a risk at the Wellington Buddhist Centre 2023

Introduction

This document offers advice on how to manage safely the inclusion in Wellington Buddhist Centre activities those who may pose a risk to others in certain circumstances. It relates particularly to the inclusion of those with criminal convictions for seriously harmful offences against adults or children; for example violent and sexual offences (including viewing indecent images of children); domestic violence and stalking. However, the kind of written agreement referred to here can also be used to establish clear, supportive boundaries for those with behavioural or mental health problems where they have proved disruptive or distressing to others in your sangha. You can always email Triratna's ECA Safeguarding team for advice: safeguarding@triratna.community.

The inclusion in sangha of those with criminal convictions for seriously harmful offences against adults or children

From time to time a member of a Triratna sangha, or someone wishing to join a sangha, may disclose that they have a criminal conviction for a seriously harmful offence against adults or children, whether or not they have served a prison sentence. It is also possible that probation services may ask if an ex-offender may attend your activities. It is a mistake to think that once a person's sentence is served they no longer pose a risk or that they can be cured or prevented from reoffending simply through practising the Dharma or the kindness of Buddhists. They, and we, need the protection of clear boundaries to support them and prevent them from reoffending.

Therefore we need to establish what level of risk they continue to pose, what conditions they need to support them and therefore which activities they may attend and under what conditions.

Risk assessment is a professional skill and must be left to those who are professionally responsible for supervising this person, for example their probation officer, police liaison officer, psychiatrist or social worker.

Being realistic

Managing the safe inclusion in a sangha of a person who poses a risk can be rewarding and worthwhile. It's also a considerable responsibility, requiring commitment and time from named Order members, potentially over many years if the person continues in your sangha. It's important to be realistic as to whether you have the resources for this, especially given that your first responsibility is to the welfare of all Sangha members at the Wellington Buddhist Centre.

Our Safeguarding Officer should

- ask the person to put them in touch with those supervising this person (e.g., probation officer, police liaison officer, police monitoring officer, psychiatrist or social worker)

- check with those supervising this person
 - whether, in attending your activities the person is keeping agreements made with them
 - what level of risk to self/others the person is assessed to pose (high, medium or low)
 - given the above, which of your activities would be suitable for them and on what terms
- based on that, agree with the person and their probation officer (or others in a supervisory role, as above) a written agreement setting out the terms on which they may engage in your activities.

If the person does not wish to co-operate with the above, it would be unreasonable for them to attend our activities.

If you become concerned

Should you become concerned about this person, whether because of a risk to themselves or others, do not hesitate to tell those who are supervising them professionally or the police. This may be because they are not keeping to the written agreement, or because their behaviour is disruptive or concerning in other ways, or you believe children or adults are at risk from them elsewhere; e.g., they have a conviction for sexual offences with children and you become aware they are working or volunteering with children or attempting to do so within Triratna or elsewhere.

For the above reasons, or if you realise the Wellington Buddhist Centre lacks the human resources to continue the relationship with them safely, you may well decide that they need to stop attending your activities. Your first duty is always to the protection of your existing sangha.

Confidentiality

Information about this person may be shared very carefully between those who need to know in order to prevent harm, including those with legal or otherwise key responsibility; e.g., our Chair, Mitra Convenors and Safeguarding Officers, and anyone else it has been agreed will particularly support this person or act as their minder on your premises or at your activities. If you do share information, you may only share as much detail as is necessary; for example simply the terms on which they are included; what they are and are not permitted to do, rather than the details of their offences.

Nobody else necessarily has a right to know this person is an ex-offender. To take a particular example, where a person has a conviction for sexual offences with children it is often thought that sangha members with children should be warned. However this is not the case. The ex-offender has a legal right to confidentiality and sharing such information would cause great confusion in your sangha. And, after all, the written agreement and the proper implementation of your Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct will ensure that children are as safe in your sangha from this person as from any others with an *undisclosed* sexual interest in children.

Where criminal behaviour has not been reported to the police

The advice in this document relates only to those whose criminal offences have already been addressed by the criminal justice system.

Where a person discloses or confesses possible criminal behaviour (recent or historic) which has not been addressed by the police they need to be encouraged and supported to report themselves to the police, so that further harm can be prevented and anyone they have harmed can be helped.

Where you do not see proof that they have reported themselves to the police, our Safeguarding Officer should report to local police.

Where a newcomer, Friend, Mitra or Order member discloses or confesses seriously harmful behaviour against adults or children (recent or historic) which has not been addressed by the police, they need to be encouraged and supported to report themselves to the police, so that further harm can be prevented and anyone they have harmed can be helped. By 'seriously harmful behaviour' is meant - for example - violent and sexual offences (including viewing indecent images of children); domestic violence and stalking (not an exhaustive list).

This document is to be read in conjunction with our Child Protection Policy 2023 and Child Protection Code of Conduct 2023.