



**Triratna Buddhist Community (Sydney) Incorporated**  
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# Child Protection Policy

February 2021

## 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 “She 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 is inline with NSW child protection policy and legislation.

## The purpose of this policy

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in Sydney 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) attending Sydney Buddhist Centre activities, 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

- information and practices 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 visits, festival days and family retreats. In addition, under 18's may happen to visit from time to time to attend our classes or other activities.

The Management Committee of Sydney Buddhist Centre recognise their responsibility to Safeguard those under 18 visiting our Buddhist Centre or Vijayaloka Retreat Centre activities, as set out by the Office of the Children's Guardian.

**Buddhankapali is our Safeguarding officer.** She is responsible for co-ordinating the protection of children and adults who may be at risk at Sydney Buddhist Centre or Vijayaloka Retreat Centre She is also responsible for making sure Safeguarding is taken seriously by the Management Committee and appears regularly on their agendas, ensuring the Management Committee members comply with their Safeguarding obligations as required by the Office of the Children's Guardian. Buddhankapali can be contacted at: [buddhankapali@sydneybuddhistcentre.org.au](mailto:buddhankapali@sydneybuddhistcentre.org.au)

We recognize that:

- the welfare of children 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 Centre team and members of the Management Committee, paid staff, volunteers, parents and anyone else working on behalf of Sydney 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 Australia, a 'child' is a person who has not yet passed their 18<sup>th</sup> 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 abused may experience more than one type of cruelty. Discrimination, harrassment, 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 try to avoid giving lifts to those under 16 on their own. If this is unavoidable, we will ask the child to sit in the back seat.

## **Engaging safely with children online and on social media**

We are aware that individual contact with under 18's 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 further personal correspondence.

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

## **Working with children checks**

The Office of the Children's Guardian requires that anyone working with children, either paid or as a volunteer, will have a current Working With Children check. These are required to be renewed every five years.

We understand that where Sydney Buddhist Centre runs activities or events (residential or non-residential) specifically intended for those under 18, or anyone under 18 attends activities not specifically targeted at those under 18:

a) the core team (Parents, Mitras or Order members, paid or voluntary) *must* have a valid Working With Children check.

b) members of the Management Committee must also have a current Working With Children check, even if they have no direct involvement in the activity.

c) Anyone helping with such activities (paid or voluntary) who does not have a current Working With Children check will be supervised at all times by someone who does have a current Working With Children check.

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.

## **Where parents are not present**

We understand that where under 18s attend a Sydney Buddhist Centre or Vijayloka retreat 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.

## **School visits**

Working With Children checks are not needed in relation to school group visits to Sydney Buddhist Centre, which are under the legal supervision of their own teachers. However the Buddhist teacher/leader must ensure that staff, Mitras or Order Members 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'.*

## **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 Sydney Buddhist Centre activities within agreed boundaries. (See the document 'Managing those who pose a risk'.)

Where it is felt that Sydney 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.

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

## Hireouts

Sydney Buddhist Centre rents or lends premises for the following activities which are not activities of our organisation, even if they are led/run by a member of our sangha: [eg yoga classes, massage, 11<sup>th</sup> step groups, retreat centre hire-outs]

We understand that there is joint responsibility on our organisation and those renting/using our premises for the Safeguarding of children and adults taking part in such activities, but that our Management Committee 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 an 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 Triratna or your centre.
- If you are not the Safeguarding officer, tell the Safeguarding officer *only*. They will co-ordinate the handling of the matter on behalf of the Management Committee. However, if this is not possible and you think the child is in immediate danger phone Family and Community Services or police straight away. A telephone referral should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.  
If necessary, the Safeguarding officer should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team for advice as to what to do next: [safeguarding@triratna.community](mailto:safeguarding@triratna.community)
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## 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.

This is not a matter of concealment but is intended to protect all concerned from further harm. 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.

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.

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 it is their legal right. This means that notes should be factual and respectful, free from interpretations and value-judgements.

## Reviewing our policies annually

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

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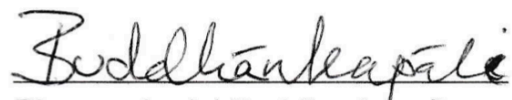
This document will be reviewed annually by the Safeguarding officer and Management Committee of Sydney Buddhist Centre.

Published by the Management Committee Members of Triratna Buddhist Community (Sydney) Incorporated and signed on their behalf by:



Dharmachari Dhammakumāra  
Chairman  
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Date: 19 February 2021



Dharmacharini Buddhankapali  
Safeguarding Officer & Public Officer  
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Date: 21 February 2021