



Ċentru Buddista Malta Malta Buddhist Centre

*Buddhism
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Community*

www.maltabuddhistcentre.com

Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre Child Protection Policy

Address: Triq il-Legenda, Mosta

Email: maltabuddhistcentre@gmail.com

Web address: www.maltabuddhistcentre.com

Registered charity: VO/2407

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.”

Here at the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre, we have a ‘No Tolerance’ approach to any form of abuse. This policy is an expression of the first ethical precept taught by the Buddha: to avoid harming living beings.

The purpose of this policy

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta 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) who visit or receive the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre 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: through school group visits, and as part of our courses, classes, and events.

The Council of the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre recognise their responsibility to ensure the welfare of all those aged under 18 visiting or involved in Buddhist Centre activities. The Council also raises awareness of issues related to child protection by ensuring that staff members, members of the Council and volunteers are familiar with this document outlining the organisation's principles and practices.

In addition, staff members and volunteers can seek further advice from the organisation's Safeguarding Officer.

The Safeguarding Officer is responsible for the protection of children and adults in all the activities at the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre (See also our Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and Guidelines).

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 Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta 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 (see [Appendix 1: Child protection 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”?

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 inappropriate 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 individually *anywhere* without written permission from their parent or guardian.

Having gained such permission, we will conduct individual meetings in public spaces such as our Buddhist Centre reception area or a room with the door open.

We will not give lifts to children on their own, except in exceptional circumstances. In this instance we will ask the child to sit in the back of the car. The Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre will ensure that wherever possible, there will be two supervising adults present at all times during work with children or at least within sight or hearing of others.

Engaging safely with children online and on social media

We are aware that individual contact with children online or using social media carries the risk of accusations of “grooming”; relationships established with a view to sexual contact.

We will not engage with any child personally using email, text or social media, for example by friending them on Facebook or including them in WhatsApp groups or similar.

As a Buddhist Centre, we may receive emails from school pupils wanting information about Buddhism. There will be an individual appointed to reply to these emails.

Having answered their questions, we will not engage in more personal correspondence.

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 the group who must be in attendance at all times.

This is because we understand that children are most at risk in classes and other events specifically provided for them (especially regular, repeated events) because those who wish to gain access to children look for opportunities to become a familiar and trusted figure to children, for instance seeking to join the team running children’s activities.

Children’s events where parents are not present

Currently the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre does not run events specifically for children, except school visits, but we understand that if this were to happen, and where the event does not involve some or all of the children’s parents, we must have written permission from the parent/guardian of each child.

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 children (i.e. a known sex offender 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 the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre activities within agreed boundaries.

Lettings/hire outs/room use

We understand that there is joint responsibility on our charity and those using our premises for the safeguarding of children and adults taking part in such activities, but that our Council bears ultimate responsibility for the safeguarding in all activities which take place on our premises. This includes self-organised meetings of sangha members even where these are not seen as activities run by the charity; e.g. Chapter meetings and GFR meetings.

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.
- Let them tell you as much as they are ready to tell you. Never push for information or question the child.
- 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.

Do your best to avoid:

- Appearing shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry.
- Pressing the child for details.
- Making comments or judgements other than to show concern. Our responsibility is to take them seriously, not to decide whether what they are saying is true.
- Promising to keep secrets.
- Confronting any alleged perpetrator.

- Risking contaminating the evidence by investigating matters ourselves.

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 think the child is in *immediate* danger phone local social services or Social Services straight away. A telephone referral should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.
- If the person is not in immediate danger and if you are not the Safeguarding Officer, tell the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding Officer only. They bear overall responsible for the future handling of the matter on behalf of the charity.
- Where allegations in any way concern the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding Officer tell the Deputy Safeguarding Officer, who will step in to ensure Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre's responsibilities are discharged fully.
- Confidentiality, sharing information **only on a need-to-know basis**, is very important. Nobody else has a right to know about the matter. This is not a matter of concealment but is intended to protect all concerned. 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.
- The Safeguarding Officer should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team for advice as to what to do next: safeguarding@triratnadevelopment.org
- Every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights; therefore, if possible you need to get the child's consent to share the information they have given you, within the limits described here.
- However, if necessary, it is legal to report without their consent, if you believe they may be at risk of significant harm.
- The Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interest of the child is at risk. This will include giving information to the Social Services.
- Meanwhile, make detailed factual notes about the discussion as soon as possible, including time, date and location. Give them to the Safeguarding Officer. If you are the Safeguarding Officer, keep notes yourself and keep them either locked away or password protected.
- In the event that a child protection concern is not reported to a child protection agency, the person who raised the concern will be given a clear written statement outlining the reason why the organization did not take action. They will also be advised that if they remain concerned, they can consult with or report to the Social Services.

What to do if a person discloses historic (retrospective) abuse.

- In the event of an adult disclosing retrospective abuse, you must inform the Safeguarding Officer.
- Inform the person disclosing the abuse sensitively (to avoid further distress or trauma) that you will need to inform the Safeguarding Officer that they have disclosed the retrospective abuse.

What to do if a sangha member discloses a criminal act against a child

We at the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre understand that the law does not protect confidentiality where criminal acts are disclosed in the context of Buddhist confession. If in the course of our charity's activities, or of an activity which takes place on our premises, a Friend, Mitra, or Order member discloses (whether or not in a formal confession) that they have physically or sexually abused a child, or have viewed indecent images of children online, the person receiving this disclosure or confession must inform the Safeguarding Officer immediately, who may inform the Social Services.

This applies whether the behaviour disclosed is recent or historic.

Secure, confidential record-keeping

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Safeguarding Officer will keep a detailed record of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations and actions related to them. These are kept either in a locked cabinet or safe or in a password-protected electronic file on our computer system. Access to these records is only for the Safeguarding Officer and the Deputy Safeguarding Officer / Chairman where necessary.

Keeping confidential records for at least 50 years

We understand that many allegations of abuse come to light 30 or more years later, and that we are therefore required to keep our records safe for at least 50 years.

If our Centre closes down, we will give our records to another Triratna Buddhist Centre to keep with their own past confidential records, i.e. with their solicitor/accountant.

Reviewing this policy annually


This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Council and Safeguarding Officer annually and the review recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre

Chair's name: Aksobhin Tracy.

Email address: aksobhin@gmail.com

Chair's signature



Safeguarding Officer's name: Alexandra Hinkel

Email address: alexaphotography222@gmail.com

Safeguarding Officer's signature



Appendix 1: Child protection code of conduct

Staff and Volunteer Guidelines when working with children will do their best to:

- treat all children and young people with respect and kindness.
- be an example of the good conduct we wish to see in young people and others.
- respect a young person's right to personal privacy.
- encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like.
- remember that someone else might misinterpret our actions, no matter how well-intentioned
- be aware that physical contact with a child or young person may be misinterpreted.
- give guidance and support to less experienced helpers, colleagues and volunteers.
- challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations/suspensions of abuse to Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding Officer.

- **ensure that, whenever possible, there is more than one adult present during activities with children or at least that we are within sight or hearing of others.**

Staff and Volunteer Guidelines when working with children will do their best not to:

- allow someone who is likely to pose a risk to children to have contact with children (i.e. a known sex offender or someone who has disclosed sexual interest in children).
- have inappropriate physical or verbal contact with children or young people.
- be left alone in a room, either in person or online with a person under 18.
- ask a person under 16 for their phone number, or attempt to contact them via email, messaging services or social media without the permission of their parent or guardian.
- be drawn into inappropriate, attention-seeking behaviour.
- make suggestive or derogatory remarks or gestures in front of children or young people.
- take pictures of children unless there is prior school, carer or parental consent to do so.
- perform tasks of a personal nature for children that they can perform for themselves (Staff members and volunteers are not responsible for the personal hygiene needs of children).
- jump to conclusions without checking facts.
- exaggerate or trivialise child-abuse issues.
- show favouritism to any child.
- rely on our good name or that of the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre to protect us.
- believe "Things like that could never happen here" or "They would never do a thing like that".