



**Ċentru Buddista Malta
Malta Buddhist Centre**

*Buddhism
Meditation
Community*

www.maltabuddhistcentre.com

Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and Guidelines

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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 all adults attending the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre activities including those who may be at risk of harm or have care and support needs, and
- Protection for Friends, Mitras and Order members working with them.

It sets out

- information and practices contributing to the prevention of harm of ‘vulnerable adults’
- a course of action to be followed if harm is suspected

Our values

Although we do not run activities specifically for those with mental illness or addiction, we recognise that people who may be vulnerable in these ways do attend our events and take part in the life of our sangha.

The Council of Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre recognise their responsibility to safeguard adults who may be deemed to be at risk when visiting or involved in Buddhist Centre activities and raise awareness of issues related to vulnerable persons 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 who may be at risk at the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre (See also our Child Protection Policy).

Who is an "adult"?

An "adult" is a person who has passed their 18th birthday.

Who is a "Vulnerable Adult"?

For the purposes of this document a vulnerable person is a person, other than a child, who:

- is suffering from a disorder of the mind, whether as a result of mental illness or dementia,
- has an intellectual disability,
- Is suffering from a physical impairment, whether as a result of injury, illness or age or has a physical disability
- For any reason may be considered not to have 'mental capacity' (see below).

Which is of such a nature or degree:

- As to restrict the capacity of the person to guard himself or herself against harm by another person, or
- That results in the person requiring assistance with the activities of daily living including dressing, eating, walking, washing and bathing.

Whether or not a person is "vulnerable" in these cases will vary according to circumstances, and it should be noted that a person with a physical disability is not necessarily vulnerable or at risk, though they could be. Each case must be judged on its own merits.

What is “mental capacity”?

Whether a person has mental capacity is a matter of specialist assessment and not for us to make. However, it may be useful to know something about it.

Mental capacity is the ability to make a particular decision. An adult *may* be at risk if they are unable to make a decision due to illness, disability, poor mental health, dementia, a learning disability or something else that may impair their judgment.

A person may be deemed to be ‘without capacity’ if they cannot:

- understand the decision
- retain the information
- weigh up the information
- communicate their decision

About matters such as

- finance
- social care
- medical treatment

Vulnerability can be variable

As is made clear we recognise that many people who are generally emotionally and psychologically stable in most aspects of their lives may on occasion find themselves vulnerable. This may be because of illness, relationship breakdown or bereavement, or because their practice of meditation or Buddhism has made them more sensitive and self-aware, particularly if they are new to Buddhism.

We will take great care to help each other avoid exploiting such vulnerability, consciously or unconsciously. 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 the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre, or entering into intimate relationships, whether friendship or relationship which are more romantic or sexual in nature.

Protecting ourselves and others in relationships

More or less conscious harm can occur in our dealings with others in classes and other formal face-to-face activities; it can also occur in personal friendships, especially between those of greater and lesser experience of Buddhism, where one may be seen by the other to be in a position of trust and authority.

We recognise that this may happen even where the more experienced person does not see her/himself as in a position of power or authority.

Though it is natural that some of our relationships will be sexual, we will take great care in starting sexual relationships where there is a considerable difference in level of Buddhist experience between the partners, particularly between Order members and those not ordained.

See the Triratna Ethical Guidelines 2018, and the College ‘Statement on relationships

between preceptors and those they ordain 2017'

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/preceptors/statement-about-sex-between-preceptors-and-those-they-ordain-preceptors-college>

Protecting those with psychological disorders

We are aware that those attending our centre and 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. Where such cases become apparent, 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 dangerous. We may need to encourage them in traditional Buddhist practices involving the calming of body and mind, or to avoid meditation - altogether, or during periods of relapse.

Where we believe a person to be at risk of suicide or self-harm or suicide, we will encourage them to contact their GP, Mental Health Team or to go to the local accident and emergency department of the local hospital. If necessary, make contact on their behalf, with their permission. The Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre Safeguarding Officer should be informed, and they will consult with the Triratna ECA Safeguarding Team (safeguarding@triratna.community) if necessary.

Where it is considered that the person is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, we will contact the emergency services (112), without their permission if necessary.

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; 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 locally to support them *in person* and gaining permission to contact those Order members if we believe they are at risk. (This does not apply where the participant is an Order member and therefore well known to us.)

Responding to children online

See the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre Child Protection Policy 2024.

Managing those who pose a risk to others

There may be cases where it is known that a person attending activities at the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre 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, who is on the Sex Offender Register, or someone who is under investigation for possible sexual or other violent offences).

Such a person will be asked by the Safeguarding Officer to agree a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation in the Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre activities within agreed boundaries and based on a risk assessment carried out by an Order Member with professional experience of risk assessment. If there is no-one locally who is qualified to do this assistance can be requested from the ECA Safeguarding Team.

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 trustees bear 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.

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 Ćentru Buddista Malta - Malta 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

Below are the main categories of abuse relevant to vulnerable adults:

1. Physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse

3. Abuse through Neglect
4. Institutional abuse
5. Self-neglect
6. Modern slavery
7. Domestic abuse
8. Discriminatory abuse
9. Psychological/emotional abuse
10. Financial or material abuse

Types of abuse, in more detail

Physical abuse

- Bodily assaults resulting in injuries e.g. hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate sanctions.
- Bodily impairment e.g. malnutrition, dehydration, failure to thrive
- Medical/healthcare maltreatment

Sexual abuse

- Rape, incest, acts of indecency, sexual assault
- Sexual harassment or sexual acts to which the person has not consented, or could not consent or to which they were pressured into consenting.
- Sexual abuse might also include exposure to pornographic materials, being made to witness sexual acts; also sexual harassment, with or without physical contact.
- Sexual contact of any kind with anyone under 16 is a crime. In the case of Order members "position of trust" law means sexual contact of any kind with anyone under 18 could be considered a crime.

Abuse through neglect

- Ignoring medical or physical care needs
- Failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational service
- The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating

Institutional abuse

- Neglect or abuse within an institution (e.g. hospital/care home) or care provided in own home.
- One-off incident or continuing ill-treatment
- Poor professional practice, policies or structure of an organization

Self-neglect

- Alcohol abuse
- Hoarding

- Drug abuse

Modern slavery

Examples: working as housemaids, in brothels, cannabis farms, nail bars and agriculture against their will, unpaid

Some possible signs

- Physical appearance, inappropriate clothing.
- Isolation, not being allowed to travel alone; restricted freedom of movement.
- Poor living conditions, few possessions, no ID documents
- Unusual travel times - being dropped off early morning or late at night

Domestic abuse

- Physical, psychological, sexual and financial abuse.
- ‘Honour’-based violence or forced marriage
- Involving intimate partner or family member
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- 16 year-olds can be defined as suffering domestic abuse.

Some signs and symptoms of domestic abuse

- Visible injuries or unexplained marks, scars or injuries
- Making ‘excuses’ for injuries
- Controlling and/or threatening relationships

Discriminatory abuse

- Discrimination including gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, age, skin colour, language, culture, religion or belief, or politics
- Harassment
- Loss of self-esteem
- Not being able to access services or being excluded

Psychological/emotional abuse

- Threats of harm, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, enforced isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.
- Humiliation
- Bullying, shouting or swearing (*See the forthcoming Triratna Model policy on bullying and harassment, “Living with dignity”.*)

Financial or material abuse

- Misuse or theft of money

- Exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance
- Unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money
- Personal possessions going missing from home
- Extraordinary interest and involvement by the family/carer or friend in an individual's assets

Signs of abuse

Physical

NB Ageing processes can cause changes which are hard to distinguish from some aspects of physical assault e.g. skin bruising can occur due to blood vessels becoming fragile.

- A history of unexplained falls or minor injuries
- Bruising in well-protected areas, or clustered from repeated striking
- Finger marks
- Burns of unusual location or type
- Injuries found at different states of healing
- Injury shape similar to an object
- Injuries to head/face/scalp
- History of moving from doctor to doctor, or between social care agencies; reluctance to seek help
- Accounts which vary with time or are inconsistent with physical evidence
- Weight loss due to malnutrition; or rapid weight gain
- Ulcers, bed sores and being left in wet clothing
- Drowsiness due to too much medication; or lack of medication causing recurring crises/hospital admissions

Sexual

- Disclosure or partial disclosure (use of phrases such as 'It's a secret')
- Medical problems, e.g. genital infections, pregnancy, difficulty walking or sitting
- Disturbed behaviour e.g. depression, sudden withdrawal from activities, loss of previous skills, sleeplessness or nightmares, self-injury, showing fear or aggression to one particular person, inappropriately seductive behaviour, loss of appetite or difficulty in keeping food down.
- Unusual circumstances, such as, for example, two people found in a toilet/bathroom area, one of them distressed

Signs of psychological or emotional vulnerability

- Isolation
- Unkempt, unwashed appearance; smell
- Over meticulousness
- Inappropriate dress
- Withdrawnness, agitation, anxiety; not wanting to be touched
- Change in appetite
- Insomnia or need for excessive sleep
- Tearfulness
- Unexplained paranoia; excessive fears
- Low self-esteem
- Confusion

Signs of neglect

- Poor physical condition
- Clothing in poor condition
- Inadequate diet
- Untreated injuries or medical problems
- Failure to be given prescribed medication
- Poor personal hygiene

Signs of financial or material vulnerability

- Unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills
- Unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from accounts
- Disparity between assets and satisfactory living conditions
- Unusual level of interest by family members and other people in the vulnerable person's financial assets

Signs of discrimination

- Lack of respect shown to an individual
- Substandard service offered to an individual
- Exclusion from rights afforded to others, such as health, education, criminal justice

Other signs of abuse

- Controlling relationships
- Inappropriate use of restraint
- Sensory deprivation e.g. spectacles or hearing aid

- Denial of visitors or phone calls
- Failure to ensure privacy or personal dignity
- Lack of personal clothing or possessions

People who might abuse

Abuse may happen anywhere and may be carried out by anyone, e.g.

- Order members, Mitras and Friends, whether financially supported or volunteering
- Parents
- People you consider good and trusted friends
- Informal carers, family, friends, neighbours
- Other users or tenants of the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre
- Strangers or visitors to the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre

If you have a concern

All allegations or suspicions should be taken seriously and reported to the Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding Officer.

What to do if a person over 18 alleges abuse

Do

- stay calm.
- listen patiently.
- reassure the person they are doing the right thing by telling you.
- clarify issues of confidentiality early on. Make it clear that you may have to discuss their concerns with others, on a strictly need-to-know basis, if at all possible with their permission. (See below.)
- explain what you are going to do.
- write a factual account of what you have seen and heard, immediately.

Do not

- appear shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry.
- press the individual for details.
- make comments or judgments other than to show concern. Your responsibility is to take them seriously, not to decide whether what they are saying is true.
- promise to keep secrets.
- confront the alleged perpetrator.

- risk contaminating the evidence by investigating matters yourself.

What to do next

- Your first concern is the safety and wellbeing of the person bringing the allegation. 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 person is in immediate danger phone the 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 responsibility 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.
- Every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights; therefore, if possible you need to get the person's consent to share the information they have given you, within the limits described here.

In considering the capacity of the vulnerable person to give consent, the following factors should be taken into account:

- The person has capacity to understand what is being asked of him or her.
- Sufficient information is given, in a way that the person understands, to enable him/her to make an informed decision.
- Consent is not received through any form of coercion.

If the vulnerable person is unable to give informed consent, discussions will take place with their carer/guardian/close family member about reporting concerns/allegations and, where appropriate, discussions should also take place with any medical or social work personnel.

There may need to be a determination as to who can give consent on behalf of the vulnerable person. In some cases there may already be provision in place; consultation may be required with legal advisers and statutory authorities. The Safeguarding Officer will not make determinations around capacity to give consent without consultation with appropriately trained and skilled personnel.

- It may be necessary and therefore legally ‘reasonable’ to pass on information without their consent if you believe they may be at immediate risk of harm and / or a crime has been or is about to be committed; also, if what is disclosed indicates that there is also risk of harm to a child.
- If upon receipt of the concern, where the vulnerable person has the capacity to give consent to reporting but does not give it, and it is not clear that a criminal act has taken place, and where the Safeguarding Officer believes that others may also be at risk of harm, consultation should take place with civil authorities as to the best course of action in the absence of consent.
- The Safeguarding Officer should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team to discuss what to do next: safeguarding@triratna.community.
- 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.
- No sangha member should attempt to investigate a criminal allegation. This is the job of the Social Services and to attempt this could prejudice a court case and put the person in danger.
- In the event that a vulnerable persons protection concern is not reported to an external agency, the person who raised the concern will be given a clear written statement outlining the reason why the organisation did not take action. They will also be advised that if they remain concerned they can consult with or report to the Social Services.

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 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 one or two others approved by our trustees.

Keeping confidential records for at least 50 years

We understand that many abuse cases come to light 30 or more years later, so we are 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

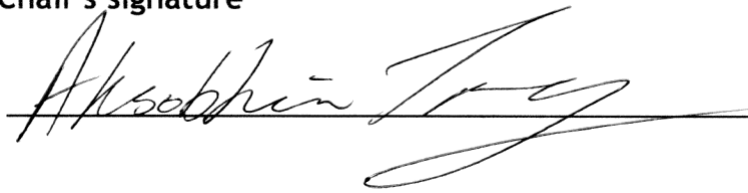
This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Centre Council and Safeguarding Officer annually and the review recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

Ċentru Buddista Malta - Malta Buddhist Centre

Chair's name: Aksobhin Tracy.

Email address: aksobhin@gmail.com

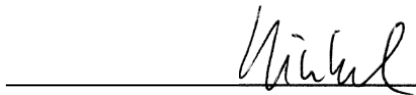
Chair's signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Aksobhin Tracy", written over a horizontal line.

Safeguarding Officer's name: Alexandra Hinkel

Email address: alexaphotography222@gmail.com

Safeguarding Officer's signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Hinkel", written over a horizontal line.