

Croydon Buddhist Centre Child protection policy 2023-2024

How to report a concern

See the document “I have a concern” which can be found [here](#).

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.”

This policy is an expression of the first ethical precept taught by the Buddha: to protect living beings from harm. It is based on law and good practice in England and Wales.

The purpose of this policy

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in Croydon 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 Croydon Buddhist Centre services including children of Buddhists and other users of this Buddhist centre and
- guidance 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 work with children - the context

We provide only a few activities which include children, and for each of these we ensure that children are properly safeguarded and protected. We hold school visits, on which children are at all times accompanied by their own members of staff. We rent space to an organisation which provides activities for young people. It is only occasionally that children might attend wider sangha events such as festivals, and are always accompanied by their parents. Below we set out

our guidelines for these circumstances. Teaching teams are advised if a young person is part of their event.

The trustees of the Croydon Buddhist Centre recognise their responsibility to ensure the welfare of all those aged under 18 visiting our Buddhist centre or involved in Buddhist centre activities.

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 Croydon Buddhist Centre, whether as a Friend, Mitra or Order member, teaching, leading or supporting.

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”?

For the purposes of this policy a child is a person who is not yet 18, regardless of the age of majority in any particular jurisdiction.

What is “child abuse”?

Please see **Appendix I** [“Types of child abuse”](#)

Recognising signs of abuse

Please see **Appendix 2** [“Signs of abuse in children”](#)

Engaging safely with children in person

We understand that before meeting those aged 15-17 it is good Safeguarding practice to make contact with their parent/guardian.

We will take care to meet in public spaces where others are present, such as our Buddhist centre reception area or a room with the door open.

Engaging safely with under-18's using email and social media

We are aware that individual contact with people of any age 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 by email, text or social media with anyone under 15, except where they are seeking information about Buddhism as part of school work or personal study, when we may engage, by email only, from the charity’s email account only. Having answered their questions, we will not engage in further personal correspondence. For younger children we ask parents or guardians to remain with the child at all times. Adults within the centre are required not to be alone with someone else’s children.

We will engage with those 15-17 only with the written permission of a parent/guardian, by email or letter, which will be stored by Prajnanandi, our Safeguarding officer.

Welcoming school visits safely

School groups and other youth groups visit our Buddhist centre. We will require every group to bring at least two adults capable of supervising all members of the group at all times. We will make clear that none of our staff or volunteers is to be left alone with their pupils.

We have a policy in place to ensure that members of the Buddhist Centre are never alone with a child on school visits. Members of our Sangha who teach or instruct school group visits to our Buddhist Centre must have a basic DBS check. All our school visit leaders have this.

Managing those who pose a risk to children

When someone attending the Croydon Buddhist Centre is known to have abused children, is under investigation, or is known to be a risk to adults with care and support needs; the safeguarding team will supervise the individual concerned and offer support but in its safeguarding commitment to the protection of children and adults with care and support needs, set boundaries for that person, which they will be expected to keep. These boundaries will be based on a risk assessment and through consultation with appropriate parties.

In the course of our charity's own activities 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 agree a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation in Croydon Buddhist Centre activities within agreed boundaries, and based on a risk assessment carried out by an Order member with professional experience in risk assessment. If our Safeguarding officer is not qualified to do this we will ask for help from the ECA Safeguarding team or another professionally qualified Order member. Where it is felt that the charity does not have the resources to manage this relationship safely, we reserve the right to ask the person not to attend our activities.

Lettings/room use:

Our charity rents or lends premises for the following activities which are not activities of our charity, even if they are led/run by a member of our sangha or members of our sangha take part: yoga classes, therapists, Play for Progress, other activities such as general room hire.

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; eg chapter meetings and GFR meetings.

Where any organisation or individual rents space in our premises we will ask them to sign a lettings agreement which says they have read our Safeguarding policies and agree to abide by them, or that they have shown us their own Safeguarding policy, in which case their policy should be compatible with our own policy and should be written to an equal or higher standard.

Reporting concerns or allegations

All reports or suspicions of abuse must be treated seriously. They may include

- something we have seen

- something we have been told by someone else
- rumours about a person's previous behaviour
- behaviour we have observed in a child and
- disclosure from a child directly.

If a person under 18 alleges abuse

- We need to be aware the child may have been threatened and may be very afraid.
- We need to look directly at the child.
- We need to 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.
- We need to accept what the child says without judgement, never suggesting that they may be wrong or mistaken. Our responsibility is to take them seriously, and take action, not to decide whether what they are saying is true.
- We need to avoid pushing for information or questioning the child, but let them tell you as much as they are ready to say.
- We need to make it clear we cannot promise total confidentiality, and that we will need to tell another trusted adult if we believe the child is at immediate risk of harm.
- We need to tell them we need to get help for them, but that we will try to agree with them what will happen next. This means we will need to share what they say with others - on a need-to-know basis only.

We will do our best to avoid

- appearing shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry.
- pressing the child for details.
- making comments or judgments 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 we will do next

We understand that our first concern must be the safety and wellbeing of the child and that we must not be distracted from this by loyalty to the person accused or a desire to maintain the good name of Triratna or our charity.

How to report a concern

See the document “I have a concern” which can be found [here](#).

If the child may be in immediate danger the Safeguarding officer, Chair, Safeguarding trustee or person receiving the disclosure will phone the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at our local social services straight away. A telephone referral will be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

If necessary, our Safeguarding officer will contact Triratna’s European Chairs Assembly Safeguarding team for advice.

- We understand that every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights and data protection legislation; therefore, having taken any urgent actions necessary, if possible Prajnanandi, the safeguarding officer, should get the consent of the child’s parent or guardian to share the information they have disclosed.
- However, it may be necessary, and therefore legally “reasonable” to report without parental consent, if we 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, the person receiving the disclosure will make detailed factual notes about the conversation/concern/incident as soon as possible, including time, date and location, and pass them to the charity’s Safeguarding officer, Prajnanandi. (See ‘[Secure, confidential record-keeping](#)’.) As far as possible what a child has said should be recorded in their own words, as these could be used in court.
- Finally, in England and Wales we understand that we may need to make a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-seriousincident-in-yourcharity>. If necessary the Croydon safeguarding team will consult the European Chairs Assembly Safeguarding team for guidance on this.

Who else needs to know?

We understand that 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 our Chair, Vajragupta, 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, Safeguarding Trustee, 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 our 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 our Safeguarding policy and procedures will ensure that our 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.

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

We understand that the law does not protect confidentiality where criminal acts are confessed. If a Friend, Mitra or Order member discloses to any other sangha member (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 our Safeguarding officer immediately, who must report to our local police immediately. This applies whether the behaviour disclosed is recent or historic.

If a child may be in immediate danger the Safeguarding officer, Chair, Safeguarding trustee or person receiving the disclosure will phone the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at our local social services straight away. A telephone referral will be confirmed in writing within 24 hours. If necessary, Prajnanandi, our Safeguarding officer will contact Triratna's ECA Safeguarding team for advice: safeguarding@triratna.community

Reviewing our policies annually

This document will be reviewed annually by the Safeguarding officer and trustees of Croydon Buddhist Centre, and the review recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

This Croydon Buddhist Centre Child protection policy 2023-2024 is to be read in conjunction with

- Croydon Buddhist Centre Child protection code of conduct 2023-2024
- Croydon Buddhist Centre Vulnerable Adults policy 2023-24

