

Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group Child Protection Policy 2019

Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group
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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 avoid harming living beings. It refers to law and good practice mainly in England and Wales. Triratna bodies in other countries are requested to draw up similar documents in line with local requirements.

The purpose of this policy

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group 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 Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group 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

Although we do not run activities specifically for children, we recognise that they may happen to visit from time to time/ a teenager under 18 may wish to attend our activities...

The Organisers of the Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group recognise their responsibility to ensure the welfare of all those aged under 18 visiting our Buddhist centre or involved in Buddhist centre activities.

The Organisers are our Safeguarding Team. They are responsible for co-ordinating the protection of children and adults who may be at risk at Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group. (See also our Safeguarding Adults policy.)

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 members of the sangha, volunteers and friends, parents and anyone else working on behalf of Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group, 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 the United Kingdom 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 sexual activities. [‘inappropriate’ has been deleted]
- **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 under 18 individually *anywhere* without attendance from their parent or guardian.

We will not give lifts to those under 18 on their own.

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

Engaging safely with children online and on social media

We are aware that individual contact with under 18s 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.

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', currently being drafted.

DBS checks

The Charity Commission expects that anyone working for a charity, paid or volunteering, including trustees, will be DBS checked wherever they are eligible. Since the rules on eligibility are complicated and change from time to time, our Organiser/Safeguarding team will check at least annually with external Safeguarding experts such as Thirtyone:eight (www.thirtyoneeight.org) and ensure everyone eligible for a DBS check has been checked within the previous five years.

At present, we understand that as Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group does not run activities or events specifically intended for those under 18, DBS checks are not necessary. Under 18s may only attend with a parent or guardian present 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), 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.

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

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 team to negotiate a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation in Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group activities within agreed boundaries. (See the document 'Managing those who pose a risk'.)

Such a person cannot be asked to sign the Child Protection Code of Conduct as it would conflict with the terms of their contract and in any case it would be very unwise to permit such a person to have any contact with those under 18 in the course of Triratna activities.

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.

See also the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group rents/uses premises belonging to HCC and Verrecchia. We have shown them our 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 Organisers/Safeguarding team the first thing you should do is to tell the Organisers/Safeguarding team. However, if this is not possible and you think the child is in immediate danger phone social services or police straight away. A telephone referral should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.
- 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.
- If you are not the Organisers/Safeguarding team, tell the Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group's Organisers/Safeguarding team *only*. They will co-ordinate the handling of the matter on behalf of the charity's trustees.

If necessary The Organisers/Safeguarding team should contact the Triratna Safeguarding team for advice as to what to do next: safeguarding@triratna.community

- Meanwhile, make detailed factual notes about the conversation/concern/incident as soon as possible, including time, date and location. Give them to the Organisers/Safeguarding team. (See 'Secure, confidential record-keeping' below.)
- 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.

Finally, if the allegation may be criminal, without giving personal details of those involved you should email the Charity Commission that there has been a serious Safeguarding incident, that your charity has addressed it according to your Safeguarding policies and that the police have been informed. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity>

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. For example, where there is a criminal allegation against a mitra it would be justifiable for the Safeguarding Lead Chair and mitra convenor at the local centre and Triratna Safeguarding Lead, to know about it. Normally it is illegal to share personal information about a person without that person's permission in writing; however, where there are Safeguarding concerns it may be necessary, and therefore legally justifiable, to report without consent, for the prevention of harm.

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.

Secure, confidential record-keeping

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Organisers/Safeguarding team will keep a detailed log of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations, actions and the reasoning behind them. These will be stored on the charity's computer, in a password protected section accessible only to the Organisers/Safeguarding team and one or two others approved by our trustees. **If this is not practicable, they will be written on a computer, printed out and the paper copies stored in a locked cabinet, box or drawer accessible only to the Organisers/Safeguarding team and one or two others approved by our trustees.** In this case the computer files must be deleted promptly. We understand that such records must not be stored on individuals' own private computers.

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

Keeping confidential records

We understand that because many abuse cases come to light 30 or more years later our insurers may require us to keep our logs for up to 50 years. (This is a requirement of the UK's Buddhist Insurance Scheme.)

If our charity closes down, we will give our records to another Triratna Buddhist centre/charity to keep with their own confidential Safeguarding logs.

Reviewing our policies annually

All our Safeguarding policies will be reviewed by the trustees and Organisers/Safeguarding team annually and the review recorded in the minutes of their meetings.

Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group

Organisers/Safeguarding team's name and email address

Organisers/Safeguarding team's signature

Date

This document is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying Hertford Triratna Buddhist Group Child protection code of conduct and the guidance document 'Caring for teenagers in Triratna', currently being drafted.

This model document published June 2019 by the Triratna Safeguarding team, part of the Triratna Ethics Kula. safeguarding@triratna.community