

## **Caring for teenagers in Triratna 2020**

### **Guidance on the care of those aged 15-17**

*This guidance document is based on law and best practice in the UK. It should be read together with the Triratna Model Child Protection Policy 2020 and the Triratna Model Child Protection Code of Conduct 2020.*

#### **Is a teenager a child?**

In UK law a teenager who has not reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday is still a child. While wishing to respond to the interest of many teenagers in Buddhism, we have an ethical and legal duty to protect them from harm.

#### **How old should a child be to attend Triratna activities unaccompanied by a parent or guardian?**

There is no legal guidance on this in the UK, but our external advisers Thirtyone:eight consider 15 to be a reasonable lower limit. [www.thirtyoneeight.org](http://www.thirtyoneeight.org)

Thus, this document applies to those aged 15-17. For guidance on the care of those under 15 please see the Triratna Model Child Policy and the Triratna Child Protection Code of Conduct.

#### **Written parental consent**

Where a teenager aged 15-17 attends *non-residential* Triratna events *regularly and unaccompanied by their parent/guardian* (ie if it's more than a drop-in or one-off visit and it's clear they are likely to keep coming) it is regarded as good Safeguarding practice for the Safeguarding officer to make contact with their parent/guardian to ensure they know this is happening, and to record in writing that contact has been made, along with contact details and any medical conditions we may need to know about.

#### **Social media and meeting up**

Those leading activities should be alert to attempts by anyone over 18 in the class to befriend a 15-17 year-old outside the class or share contact details or befriend them on social media.

Nobody at a Triratna Centre or Retreat centre should engage with anyone aged 15-17 using email or social media except with written permission from their parent/guardian, specifying the agreed medium and the named Order member/s who will be contacting them on behalf of the Centre and/or Young Buddhist group.

Any personal meetings between Order members, Mitras or Friends and a person 15-17 (whose parents have given permission) should be arranged to take place in public, eg at the Buddhist Centre when others are present or in a café or public library. Those 15-17 should only be invited home where there are group activities or other teenagers present and the parents are aware of the invitation.

#### **Keep age ranges as narrow as possible**

Events aimed specifically at, for example, 15-30 year olds, are not a good idea. Older people might class them all as young Buddhists but a 15-year old will experience a huge difference, and power imbalance, between themselves and even a 20 year-old, which can make the younger person vulnerable to influence.

In pair work it is advisable to pair a person aged 15-17 with someone as near as possible to their own age, or to pair them with someone from the team – or put them in a three with one or two people as near as possible to their own age and/or someone from the team.

#### **Security checks and Safer recruitment**

Any event intended for those under 18 (or at which it is known one or more under 18s are likely to attend) requires 'safer recruitment' - which means

- Enhanced DBS checks with check of barred lists for all the charity's trustees

- Enhanced DBS checks with check of barred lists for those leaders/team members directly involved with running events involving anyone under 18.
- Anyone who is not DBS checked who helps with activities involving an under-18 must be supervised at all times by someone who is DBS checked (ie never left alone with the under-18).
- Taking out sangha references for anyone volunteering short term to work with teenagers on an event, even if they will be supervised by people who have been DBS checked.
- **No DBS checks are necessary** for the team when an under 18 just turns up unexpectedly to an event. But in this case everyone on the team should be reminded to be particularly aware of the centre's Child Protection Policy and Code of conduct for keeping them and everyone safe - nobody over 18 being alone with the under 18 out of sight and hearing of others, for example.
- On a residential event at which anyone under 18 is present all the *retreatants* should also be asked to sign the Child Protection Code of Conduct, to raise awareness and for everyone's protection.

**Venues etc** All events/gatherings/study groups involving anyone 15-17 should take place in public settings (centres, retreat venues etc), not at anyone's private home or Buddhist residential community.

No leader or team member - or anyone else on an event - should allow themselves to be alone in a room with anyone under 18 out of sight or hearing of others; ie if it is absolutely necessary to enter a room where a person under 18 is alone they should leave the door open.

### **Residential events**

In addition to the above, the following applies:

#### **Residential events for those under 18/mixed age groups**

Where *unaccompanied* 15-17 year-olds attend *residential* events intended for those under 18 (or mixed age groups, such as family events) you **must** get written parental permission for them to attend.

#### **Residential events for those over 18**

A 15-17 year-old on a residential event advertised more generally for adults must be accompanied by a parent/guardian and, preferably, share a room with their parent/guardian.

If that is not acceptable to the parent/guardian and teenager, the teenager could be in a single room, if possible adjoining the parent/guardian's room.

If not accompanied by their own parent/guardian, the teenager could be accompanied by an adult friend appointed by the parent/guardian as their carer for the event, in which case the Centre must obtain a written agreement made personally between the parent and the carer referring specifically to the event, and the carer and teenager should share a room, or sleep in adjoining rooms.

(If the *Buddhist centre* arranged for an adult to share with the child, that would constitute 'regulated activity' on the part of the charity, which would mean the adult sharer would have to be DBS checked.)

### **More generally**

Adult leaders should never share a room with anyone under 18. If they have to enter the room to talk to the under-18 they should leave the door open.

15-17s should always sleep in rooms shared with others of the same sex and as close in age as possible, or in a single room if there is nobody of appropriate age and sex to share with.

Those under and over 18 should not share if possible (but close friends and siblings could be an exception).

The more beds in a dorm the better, making it less likely that anyone under 18 could find themselves alone with someone else 18 or over.

Over 18s should not go into the under 18s' rooms. If they really need to enter the room they should leave

the door open.

**Trans/gender diverse teenagers**

It is regarded as good practice for trans or gender-diverse under-18s to share sleeping accommodation with others of the gender they were assigned at birth - if possible - or to have single rooms.

**Safer transport**

It is extremely unwise for an adult to give a lift to anyone under 18, if nobody else is in the vehicle. If it's unavoidable, for the protection of both parties the child/teenager should sit in the back seat.

It should be made very clear between the Buddhist Centre and the parent/guardian of any 15-17 year-old who is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian that the Buddhist Centre is responsible for the 15-17 year-old only while they are at the Centre/event. The parent/guardian is responsible until 15-17 year-old arrives at the Buddhist centre/event and after they leave.

*This guidance published March 2020 by the Triratna Safeguarding team, part of the Triratna Ethics Kula.*  
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