

Tiratna Buddhist Order and Community

Covid-19: Safeguarding adults and children

Updated advice 21st April 2020

Formal Safeguarding requirements

1. Safeguarding in online teaching with adults

Where most of the participants are unknown to each other and the team

- **Avoid pairs**

In classes and activities where most of the participants are unknown to each other and the team, avoid dividing people up into pairs. Put people in groups of at least three instead. If a teenager happens to take part in a class intended for adults put them in a group of at least three including a team member.

Why? Classes can include troubled people with behaviours others can find difficult or threatening. Pairs in a real room together are protected by each other and the watchful eye of the team; pairing up in a virtual breakout group with a stranger means more potential for chatting up, inappropriate disclosures, attention-seeking behaviours, pressure to swap phone numbers etc. It could be difficult or even frightening to find yourself alone with someone online whom you find difficult.

If you really do want pairs, on Zoom it is possible to leave a breakout room, and the host could explain how to do this at the start. It's also possible to 'ask for help'. This means the host will join their breakout room. See the video here: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313-Managing-Breakout-Rooms>

Avoid buddying

Again, people in a room together can get a sense of who they'd be comfortable to buddy up with and be left to make private arrangements with people they feel comfortable with, if they wish. How will they do this online?

You'll have to arrange it for them which means they will have to send you their phone number and ask to be buddied, and then you allocate them randomly, women with women and men with men. If there is anyone who has said they are non-binary pair them with another non-binary person or ask them whether they would prefer to be paired with a woman or man.

Our external Safeguarding advisers Thirtyone:eight said they had no experience of how to do online buddying safely and could therefore not advise it.

If you **have** found an easier and safe way to arrange buddying online in a class where people don't already know each other, do let me know! safeguarding@tiratna.community

2. Safeguarding in online teaching with children and young people (under-18s)

15 is the recommended lower age limit for teenagers taking part in Tiratna group activities unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, in person or online. If a teenager 15+ happens to take part in a class intended for adults, if you are having breakout groups put them in a group of at least three including a team member. If you have more than one teenager put them in the same group, with a team member - or another participant close in age.

If you are running online activities *specifically intended and advertised for those under 18* the team will need to be DBS checked, as with any other such activities. (This applies in the UK.)

See the guidance document '*Caring for Teenagers in Triratna 2020*'.

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/eca/eca-chairs-group/triratna-model-safeguarding-policies-and-ethical-guidelines-2020>

Now that many schools are closed worldwide and children are being homeschooled it's very possible you may be contacted by children asking about Buddhism or that they will just turn up in online events aimed at a general audience - as happened last week in one of our European centres.

This is wonderful! We just need to know how to welcome them safely.

Be aware of the risk of allegations of online grooming or sexual activity against which you would be powerless to defend yourself. *Being alone with a child on Zoom etc carries risk equal to being physically alone in a room with a child.*

Talking to a group of children/young people is safer than engaging with a single child/young person. Where contacted by a child you may wish to ask them to ask their teacher to arrange an online meeting for their class.

Where you do engage with a single child/young person online

- a) Using email will mean you have a record, in case of allegations.
- b) Where you prefer to talk on phone, Zoom or WhatsApp etc, ensure that at least one other adult is physically in the room where you are sitting, or that you can see that the child has an adult in the room with them.

Anyone engaging with children in these ways should tell their Centre or Group's Safeguarding officer so they can keep a secure record.

Further advice can be found here, from our external Safeguarding advisers Thirtyone:eight:

https://www.thirtyoneeight.org/media/2588/guidanc-for-online-youth-work_v3.pdf.

See the *Triratna Model Child protection policy 2020*, the *Model Child Protection Code of Conduct 2020* and the guidance document '*Caring for Teenagers in Triratna 2020*'

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/eca/eca-chairs-group/triratna-model-safeguarding-policies-and-ethical-guidelines-2020>

Informal Safeguarding advice

3. **Elderly, ill and/or disabled sangha members will be more vulnerable than usual:** not only isolated in lockdown but also vulnerable to exploitation, theft and fraud by those helping them, especially volunteers unknown to them. There is evidence of a huge increase in fraud since the arrival of Covid-19. You may wish to allocate specific sangha members to stay in touch with vulnerable members of your sangha very regularly.

Triratna's Abhayaratna Trust supports Order members in need, through grants and their Local Care Network. <https://abhayaratnatrust.org/local-care-network-details>

They are making grants of up to £500 to Order members in financial hardship as a result of Coronavirus <https://abhayaratnatrust.org/helpful-links-and-information>

4. **Adults and children suffering violence, psychological abuse or sexual abuse at home are at extra risk during lockdown**, especially as contact with others who may notice signs of harm and abuse is reduced (for example at school). There are worldwide reports of an enormous increase in calls to helplines relating to domestic violence and sexual abuse where Covid-19 has led to lockdown.

You may wish to allocate specific sangha members to stay in touch with sangha members you know to be at risk, to reassure them that they are not alone and also so that those who may pose a threat know that you are keeping an eye on them.

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