

Advice on Safeguarding children and adults in Triratna groups 2019

What is “Safeguarding”?

“Safeguarding” (or Protection, in Scotland) refers to the duty of legally established bodies in the UK to protect children from harm, and to protect adults who may be deemed to be “at risk”, for example those with addictions or compromised mental health. Safeguarding policies and procedures also protect from harm those running activities, for example allegations of misconduct against those running Buddhist activities.

Unlike Triratna centres, most Triratna groups have no legal status. However, it is clear some groups are encountering the same challenges as centres, yet with far fewer resources to deal with them, which means there is a greater risk of harm - to those attending your activities, and to you and your team.

Although an independent group has no formal obligation to have Safeguarding procedures, obviously we have an ethical obligation to do whatever we can to avoid harm; besides which, anything which goes wrong in any Triratna group could affect Triratna worldwide by association.

What do you need to do?

Every UK Triratna centre should have a Safeguarding officer and policies for the protection of children and adults. Groups run by a centre are governed by that centre’s Safeguarding officer and policies. If your group is an outreach group from a centre, please speak to that centre’s Safeguarding officer.

If your group is independent of any centre you need to appoint a Safeguarding officer and adopt your own Safeguarding procedures.

Everyone (Mitra or Order member, paid or voluntary) who leads or supports your group’s activities, should be asked to sign a list saying that they have read, understood and agree to abide by your group’s (or centre’s) Safeguarding policies.

If they are not willing to sign they should no longer lead or support, as, if your group is run by a centre, this means they are not in agreement with the policy and values of the trustees of the centre who have final legal responsibility.

Even if your group is not run by a centre, the fact that a person refuses to be bound by Safeguarding principles means that they should not be in a position of trust or responsibility which could render others vulnerable to influence and put them at risk themselves.

Why is this necessary?

Informal groups of kind, well-meaning Buddhists, often meeting in private homes and sometimes run by Mitras with minimal Order involvement, are vulnerable to those who seek to gain access to children for criminal purposes; we know from experience that those running groups find it less easy to manage the inclusion of ex-prisoners or people with mental health problems or addictions; they may find it less easy to determine when a person needs to be excluded for the greater good of the group.

Triratna Safeguarding resources

Triratna has a Safeguarding team who can be contacted at safeguarding@triratna.community. They produce model policies and guidance documents upon which centres and groups can base their own policies and procedures. Among other things these cover children, teenagers, adults, and managing “those who pose a risk” (for example, how to write a contract for a prisoner on probation).

You can always find the latest model policies and news on Triratna Safeguarding more generally at <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/search/node/safeguarding>. The latest versions of these policies will also be posted at <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/triratna-project-support/triratna-groups-and-pioneers> when published.

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