

Safeguarding Policy for Children

Oxford Buddha Vihara

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MANAGE THE RISKS

Protecting people and safeguarding responsibilities should be a governance priority for all charities. It is a fundamental part of operating as a charity for the public benefit. As part of fulfilling your trustee duties, you must take reasonable steps to protect from harm people who come into contact with your charity.

This includes:

- people who benefit from our charity's work
- volunteers
- other people who come into contact with our charity through its work

The Charity Commission will hold trustees to account if things go wrong and will check that trustees followed this guidance and the law. Trustees are expected to take responsibility for putting things right.

Trustees should promote a fair, open and positive culture and ensure all involved feel able to report concerns, confident that they will be heard and responded to.

We expect all trustees to make sure our charity:

- has appropriate policies and procedures in place, which are followed by all trustees and volunteers
- checks that people are suitable to act in their roles
- knows how to spot and handle concerns in a full and open manner
- has a clear system of referring or reporting to relevant organisations as soon as concerns are suspected or identified?
- sets out risks and how we will be managed in a risk register which is regularly reviewed
- follows statutory guidance, good practice guidance and legislation relevant to our charity: this guidance links to the main sources of information
- is quick to respond to concerns and carry out appropriate investigations
- does not ignore harm or downplay failures
- has a balanced trustee board and does not let one trustee dominate its work – trustees should work together
- makes sure protecting people from harm is central to its culture
- has enough resources, including trained staff/volunteers/trustees for safeguarding and protecting people
- conducts periodic reviews of safeguarding policies, procedures and practice

According to the Government's guidance, our charity's policies and procedures for protecting people and where appropriate, safeguarding should be:

- put into practice
- responsive to change
- reviewed as necessary, always following a serious incident and at least once a year
- available to the public

We have to make all trustees, and volunteers aware of our policies. They all need to know how to apply them when required.

In the policies, we make clear how we will:

- protect people from harm
- make sure people can raise safeguarding concerns
- handle allegations or incidents
- respond, including reporting to the relevant authorities

PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this policies

This policy sets out the approach to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children when they are in contact with the Oxford Buddha Vihara (OBV). It applies to all aspects of our work and to everyone involved in the activities of the OBV.

This policy outlines the procedure to follow if you have a safeguarding concern and how decisions are made.

Definitions

Children refers to those under 18 years of age.

Our values

The OBV is a Buddhist charity run by members of the Theravada Buddhism and Community. Some of its activities involve children and young people, either by arrangement, for example school visits or family activities, or in the form of casual visitors.

The trustees of the OBV recognize their responsibility to Safeguard those aged under 18 visiting or involved in the OBV activities, as set out by the Charity Commission in its latest guidance.

Raising awareness of the policy

The OBV must ensure that all Trustees are made aware of this policy and their responsibility ensuring that the OBV keeps children safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

This policy applies to all, including trustees, volunteers, parents and anyone else working on behalf of the OBV, whether as a Friend, Mitra or Order member.

Training is available online upon request from the Trustee Committee on conducting risk assessments in relation to working with children and vulnerable adults.

We recognise that:

The child's welfare is paramount, as is that of the vulnerable adult.

- All members 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 children and vulnerable people's welfare.

All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded swiftly and appropriately.

We will capture to safeguard children by:

- Valuing them, listening to and respecting them
- Adopting child protection guidelines and a code of conduct (Five Precepts) for volunteers in the OBV
- Recruiting volunteers safely, ensuring checks are made where necessary
- Sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents and volunteers
- Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know and involving parents and children appropriately
- Providing effective management for volunteers through supervision, support and training

Dr Ninithet Than Hlaing and Dr Nang Hnin Nu Nu Kyi, our Safeguarding Officers, are responsible for the protection of children who may be at risk at the OBV.

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.”

POLICY GUIDANCE

Engaging safely with children in person

Outside of our own personal and family relationships, we will not arrange to meet any child under 16 individually anywhere without written permission from their parent or guardian. Having gained such permission, we will conduct individual meetings with a child under 16 in public spaces such as our Buddhist Centre reception area or a room with the door open. We do not need parental permission to meet those aged 16-17 but we will take care to meet in public spaces such as our Buddhist Centre reception area or a room with the door open. We will not give lifts to those under 16 on their own.

Engaging safely with children online and on social media

We are aware that individual contact with under 18s online 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 16 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 more personal correspondence.

Welcoming school visits safely

Schools and other youth groups visit the OBV. We will require every group to bring at least two adults capable of supervising the group. We will make clear that we are not to be left alone with their pupils. Schools are responsible to DBS check for those adults supervising the groups.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

We will ensure that the core team (Mitras or Order members, volunteers) running any OBV activities or events specifically intended for those under 18 have been security checked by the DBS. Anyone else who has not been DBS checked must always be supervised by someone who is DBS checked.

Exception: This does not apply to general activities at which someone under 18 may happen to attend from time to time. This is because we understand that children are most at risk in classes and other events specifically provided for them (especially regular, repeated events) because those who wish to gain access to children look for opportunities to become a familiar and trusted figure to children, for instance seeking to join the team running children's activities.

Safeguarding training

The OBV is committed to ensuring that everyone who works as a volunteer teacher understands their safeguarding responsibilities and keeps their knowledge up to date. They must complete an online safeguarding training package within 3 months of taking up the volunteer post, and after that at 3-yearly intervals. There will also be regular refresher training on safeguarding children, including on specific areas of risk and safeguarding practice.

Children's events where parents are not present

We understand that where an OBV event for under 18s does not involve some or all of the children's parents, we must have written permission from the parent/guardian of each child and both the core team running the event and the OBV trustees must be DBS checked. This is because in the absence of parents, the trustees assume legal guardianship for the children for the duration of the event, even if the trustees are not present.

Exception: This does not apply to school group visits to the OBV, which are under the legal supervision of their own teachers.

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 children (i.e. a known sex offender or someone who has disclosed a sexual interest in children). Such a person will be asked by the Safeguarding officer to negotiate a behaviour contract setting out the terms of their continued participation at the OBV.

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.

PROCEDURES

Guarding against abuse

All leaders of OBV activities where a child is likely to attend will be given the OBV's Child Protection Policy to read and the OBV's Child Protection Code of Conduct Policy to read and sign.

- All leaders of the following OBV activities will be required to have DBS checks.
- All team members, volunteers for Sunday School, Summer Ordination and Family Retreats, will be required to read and sign the OBV's Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Code of Conduct document.

Exception - Occasional volunteers, assistants, guests to OBV activities where children may attend will not need to have to read the Child Protection Policy or Code of Conduct document. They will not be left alone with the child/children at any time.

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 involve them in 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 bringing the allegation. Do not be distracted from this by loyalty to the person who has been accused or your desire to maintain the good name of the OBV.
- If 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; therefore, if possible, you need to get the child's consent to share the information

they have given you, within the limits described here. However, if necessary, it is legal to pass on information without their consent if you believe they are at risk of significant harm.

- Tell the OBV's Safeguarding officers only. They bear overall responsibility for the future handling of the matter on behalf of the charity. The Safeguarding officers should contact the OBV Safeguarding team.
- Make detailed factual notes about the discussion as soon as possible, including time, date and location. Give them to the Safeguarding officers. The Safeguarding officers only will keep them either locked away or password protected. Do not tell anyone else as confidentiality is very important. This is not a matter of concealment but is intended to protect all concerned. It will also protect your sangha from fear, rumour and disharmony which will make it harder to deal with the matter effectively without causing further harm.
- Do not 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.

OBV Procedures

- ***Criminal Allegations***

The Safeguarding Officers will report criminal allegations to the police.

The Safeguarding Officer will report the allegation also to the Charity Commission. They will report that there has been a Safeguarding incident, that the OBV has addressed it according to its Safeguarding policies and the police have been informed.

- ***Secure, confidential record-keeping***

The OBV understands its responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. The Safeguarding officer will keep a detailed log of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations and actions related to them. These are kept either in a locked cabinet or safe or in a password-protected electronic file on our computer system. Access to these records is only for the Safeguarding officers and one or two others approved by the OBV's Trustees.

- ***Keeping confidential records for at least 50 years***

The OBV understands that many abuse cases come to light 30 or more years later, so the Centre is required to keep its Safeguarding records safe for at least 50 years. This will include relevant documents and related correspondence. All such documents will be securely retained.

If the OBV closes down, it will give its Safeguarding records to another Oxford Buddha Vihara to keep with their own past confidential records.

Reviewing our policies annually

This document will be reviewed annually by the Safeguarding officers and the review will be recorded in the minutes of trustees meeting. This document is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying OBV's safeguarding vulnerable adult's protection code of conduct.

Oxford Buddha Vihara

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APPENDIX

Types of abuse

Physical abuse: including hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning, or smothering.

1. Sexual abuse: including direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in inappropriate sexual activities.
2. Emotional abuse: repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.
3. Neglect: the persistent lack of appropriate care of children. Appropriate care includes 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 be alert to:

- Any injuries that cannot be explained
- Injuries not consistent with falls or rough games
- Undernourishment
- Any allegations made by children concerning abuse
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders

REFERENCE

https://www.childhope.org.uk/assets/uploads/28.07.16_CH_Child_Safeguarding_Policy_-_FINAL.pdf

(access on 25 January 2021)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/595194/SD8-Office_of-the-Public-Guardian-safeguarding-policy.pdf (access on 25 January 2021)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf (access on 25 January 2021)