

Ethical Guidelines at Wellington Buddhist Centre for People in Public Roles – March 2019

The guidelines below are based on the five Buddhist precepts which all mitras and Order members in the Wellington Buddhist Centre sangha put into daily practice. They are training principles rather than our personal achievements, and as such need to be actively kept in mind.

In addition, we need to remember that these precepts originated with the Buddha and have been handed down within the Buddhist tradition for over 2,500 years. Our experience is that they remain as spiritually vital and meaningful in the conditions of modern living as when they were first taught. However, we each need to discover this meaningfulness for ourselves in our own lives and we therefore always welcome questions and discussions on how they serve to support our Buddhist practice.

1. Abstention from Harming Living Beings / Practising deeds of Loving-kindness

Wellington Buddhist Centre aims to support the awakening of the individual, in a manner appropriate to each person. We wish to cultivate a vibrant spiritual community, something defined by our founder Sangharakshita as a 'free association of individuals'. It is therefore important that individuals in positions of trust do not misuse their position or authority for their own benefit or to inappropriately influence others. In all our dealings with one another we aspire to behave in a spirit of kindness, which is referred to by the Buddha as kalyana mitrata or spiritual friendship.

The centre is open to everyone interested in the Buddhist path of transformation regardless of sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic background, age etc.

Wishing to minimise the harm we do to any living being and the natural world which sustains us, we affirm that physical violence and strong displays of anger cause harm and have no place among us. We also serve only vegetarian or vegan food at Wellington Buddhist Centre and on our events.

2. Abstention from Taking the Not-Given / Practising Open-handed Generosity

We wish to offer the Buddha's teachings in the spirit of generosity, making them accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstances.

However, the maintenance of the Wellington Buddhist Centre depends on generosity. Retreat fees, donations for courses and regular donations pay our centre's expenses. At this time no one is paid to teach, guide, administer and manage. Many people regularly donate their time and energy to support the Wellington Buddhist Centre and the sangha in many ways, for example, by helping with the running of the Centre, with Dharma teaching, through supporting retreats, and by participating in the life of the sangha and Order.

As a valuable resource for people currently practising the Dharma, people wanting to explore the Dharma, and future generations to come, we take care of our centre and those who work and practise here. We want to leave the centre in a better condition than we find it now. Therefore, we administer and use funds appropriately and responsibly.

Those who handle money or property for the Wellington Buddhist Centre must take care of them and avoid deliberate misuse or misappropriation. The sangha's resources should be used with care, and we pursue wider consultation when appropriate. Where misuse is deemed to have occurred appropriate action will be taken, usually in consultation with the centre council and the local Order.

The Wellington Buddhist Centre is also part of a wider, broader community and dependent on the natural world. We recognise this co-dependence and aspire to express generosity through community involvement and environmental sustainability, both individually and collectively.

3. Abstention from Sexual Misconduct / Practising Stillness, Simplicity and Contentment

The Wellington Buddhist Centre is part of the international Triratna Buddhist community. Both locally and internationally, we are a community of people practising the Buddha's teachings together. The Buddha once said that if there was another force in people's lives as powerful as sexual attractions, there would be no chance of leading the Dharma life. We try to create an atmosphere at the Wellington Buddhist Centre which is about individuals coming together as individuals rather than as couples and potential partners.

Naturally close relationships will develop amongst the sangha and sexual relationships may also develop between members of our sangha. When this happens, we encourage people to conduct these relationships ethically, with awareness and kindness. We also encourage people in positions of responsibility who have just ended a relationship to think carefully before starting a new relationship, particularly if either party is part of the sangha. It is suggested that a new relationship is not started soon after a previous relationship has ended to ensure that undue hurt is not caused.

People in teaching roles or otherwise helping to lead Centre activities have a particular responsibility to support the people they teach to engage with the Dharma, in an atmosphere of stillness, simplicity and contentment. In the spirit of spiritual friendship, these positions of leadership, responsibility and spiritual mentoring are frequently best kept separate from developing sexual relationships. As we start to explore the liberation that Dharma practice can provide, it is easy to confuse our strength of feeling for the Dharma with an attraction to the individual serving as our main point of contact with the Wellington Buddhist Centre and the Buddhist tradition more generally.

It is therefore important that someone in a public role who is a newer person's primary point of contact with the Dharma does not become involved in a sexual relationship with that person. This situation will change as the newer person develops friendships with other members of the sangha.

More generally, we would encourage anyone interested in cultivating and developing their understanding and practice of Buddhism to develop a broad base of platonic friendships before considering a sexual relationship with someone they have met at the centre. Of course, this is only a friendly suggestion based on experience at Buddhist centres over the years.

Order members and mitras considering a sexual relationship with someone they have taught, should consult with their chapter, kalyana mitras and preceptors, as applicable.

4. Abstention from False Speech / Practising Truthful Communication

Members of the Triratna Buddhist Order add an additional three speech precepts (kind, helpful, harmonious) to truthful speech. If you look at the original teachings of the Buddha it quickly becomes evident that he considered communication a particular area of practice and care.

In all our dealings with one another, and with those we teach, we aspire to use truthful, meaningful and harmonious speech which encourages spiritual growth and creates community. Through our communication we aspire to create an atmosphere of friendliness, co-operation, harmony and trust. We hope to enable individuals to confidently share, learn and explore on our mutual path of transformation.

On this journey, much is confided in Order members, those teaching at the centre or helping as kalyana mitras. Friends and mitras should feel they can explore with Order members and each other the Dharma and their personal lives in an atmosphere of trust.

Members of the Order and others in positions of responsibility at the centre should be mindful of sharing other people's information only where they have permission to

do so as spiritual friends. For example, for Order members this may be as part of formal kalyana mitrata and where necessary in the process of ordination training.

5. Abstention from Intoxication / Practising Mindfulness Clear and Radiant

The Triratna Buddhist Community aims to provide support for the development of wisdom and compassion through deepening awareness. This is effectively achieved through well-established meditation techniques and reflection practices.

We engage with our practice and with each other with as much mindfulness as possible and actively support those who are attempting to live without mind-altering substances. To these ends, we will never, for example, serve alcohol or other intoxicants at the Wellington Buddhist Centre or any of our events.