

Wellington Buddhist Centre Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Guidelines

This document is for Friends, Mitras and Order members involved in Wellington Buddhist Centre activities as employees, volunteers, leaders, teachers or parents. It sets out practices and procedures contributing to the prevention of abuse of vulnerable adults. It also sets out a course of action to be followed if abuse is suspected.

It is aimed at protecting both vulnerable adults attending Wellington Buddhist Centre activities, and Friends, Mitras and Order members working with them.

1. Who is a 'vulnerable adult'?

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be in need of, community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is, or may be, unable to take care of him/herself, or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or exploitation.

A vulnerable adult may be a person who:

- Has a physical or sensory disability
- Is physically frail or has a chronic illness
- Has a mental illness or dementia
- Has a learning disability
- Is old and frail
- Misuses drugs and/or alcohol
- Has social or emotional problems
- Exhibits challenging behaviour

Whether or not a person is vulnerable in these cases will vary according to circumstances. Each case must be judged on its own merits.

2. What is 'abuse'?

Abuse is the harming of a person usually by someone who is in a position of power, trust or authority over them, or who may be perceived by that person to be in a position of power, trust or authority over them; for example by a Friend, Mitra or Order member who is helping to run Wellington Buddhist Centre activities for those newer to such activities. The harm may be physical, psychological or emotional, or it may exploit the vulnerability of the victim in more subtle ways.

3. Types of abuse

Types of abuse include physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, financial/material and, also, discriminatory language.

4. People who might abuse

Abuse may happen anywhere and may be carried out by anyone, including Order members, Mitras and Friends, whether financially supported or volunteering, other users of the Wellington Buddhist Centre and strangers or visitors to the Wellington Buddhist Centre. In addition, a vulnerable adult might talk to an Order member, Mitra or Friend about abuse they are experiencing at home or in other aspects of their daily life.

5. Reporting abuse

- All allegations or suspicions are to be treated seriously. No abuse is acceptable.
- Some abuse may be a criminal offence and should be reported to the police as soon as possible.
- The employee or volunteer's primary responsibility is to protect the vulnerable adult if they are at risk.
- Each employee or volunteer has a duty to take action.

6. What to do if a vulnerable adult reports abuse to you

Do

- Stay calm
- Listen patiently
- Reassure the person they are doing the right thing by telling you
- Clarify issues of confidentiality early on. Make it clear that you will have to discuss their concerns with others
- Explain what you are going to do
- Write a factual account of what you have seen and heard, immediately

Do not

- Appear shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry
- Press the individual for details
- Make comments or judgments other than to show concern
- Promise to keep secrets
- Confront the abuser
- Risk contaminating the evidence

7. What to do next

When deciding whether to refer the matter to others (e.g. to the Chair and Safeguarding officer of Wellington Buddhist Centre, police or social services) consider the following:

- The wishes of the vulnerable adult and their right to self-determination
- The mental capacity of the vulnerable adult
- Known indicators of abuse
- Definitions of abuse
- Level of risk to the individual
- The seriousness of the abuse
- The effect of the abuse on the individual
- Level of risk to others
- The effect of the abuse on others
- Whether a criminal offence has been committed
- Whether other statutory obligations have been breached
- The need for others to know
- The ability of others (e.g. police, social services) to make a positive contribution to the situation

Where a vulnerable adult expresses a wish for concerns not to be pursued, this should be respected wherever possible. However, decisions about whether to respect their wishes must have regard to the level of risk to the individual and others, and their capacity to understand the decision in question. In some circumstances the vulnerable adult's wishes may be overridden in favour of considerations of safety.

The consent of the vulnerable adult must be obtained except where:

- The vulnerable adult lacks the mental capacity to make a decision, and a risk assessment indicates that referral would be in their best interests
- Others may be at risk
- A crime has been committed