Caring for teenagers in Triratna 2025

Guidance on the care of those aged 15-17

This is a guidance document for you to refer to, not a policy to be adopted. Based on law and best practice in the UK, it should be read together with the documents listed at the end.

Is a teenager a child?

For the purposes of Triratna policy, and in law in many jurisdictions, a 'child' is anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday.

While wishing to respond to the interest of many teenagers in Buddhism, we are aware of our ethical and legal duty to protect them from harm in the course of Triratna activities.

We are also aware that although the age of consent is 16, it is a criminal offence to have sex with a person under 18, where the older person is in a teaching or mentoring role in relation to the younger person. This 'Position of trust' law is likely to apply to Order members and Mitras in teaching, supporting or volunteering roles in Triratna.

How old should a child be to attend Triratna activities unaccompanied by a parent or guardian?

There is no legal guidance on this in the UK, but our external Safeguarding advisers Thirtyone:eight consider 15 to be a reasonable lower limit. www.thirtyoneeight.orgAccordingly, this document applies particularly to children aged 15-17. For further guidance on the care of all those under 18 please see the Triratna Model Child Protection Policy 2025 and the Triratna Child Protection Code of Conduct 2025.

Written parental consent

Where a child aged 15-17 attends *non-residential* Triratna events *regularly and unaccompanied by their parent/guardian* (ie if it's more than a drop-in or one-off visit and it's clear they are likely to keep coming) the Safeguarding Lead must make contact with their parent/guardian to ensure they know this is happening, and to record in writing that contact has been made, along with contact details and any medical conditions we need to know about.

Social media and meeting up

Where any sangha member becomes aware of behaviour which goes against the advice in your charity's Child Protection Code of Conduct 2025 or Child Protection Code of Conduct 2025 (for example befriending a 15-17 year-old outside Triratna activities or sharing/exchanging contact details with them or befriending them on social media) the Safeguarding Lead should be asked to look into the matter.

Nobody at a Triratna centre or retreat centre should engage with anyone aged 15-17 using email or social media except with written permission from their parent/guardian, specifying the agreed medium and the named Order member/s who will be contacting them on behalf of the centre and/or Young Buddhist group.

Any personal meetings between Order members, Mitras or Friends and a person 15-17 (whose parents have given permission by email or letter to the Centre Safeguarding Lead) should be arranged to take place in public; eg at the Buddhist centre when others are present or in a café or public library. Those 15- 17 should only be invited home where there are group activities or other teenagers present and the parents have given permission by email or letter to the charity's Safeguarding Lead.

Keep age ranges as narrow as possible

Events aimed specifically at, for example, 15-30 year olds, are not a good idea. Older people might class them all as 'young Buddhists' but a 15-year old will experience a huge difference, and power imbalance, between themselves and even a 20 year-old, which could make the younger person vulnerable to influence.

In pair work it is advisable to pair a person aged 15-17 with someone as near as possible to their own age, or to pair them with someone from the team – or put them in a three with one or two people as near as possible to their own age and/or someone from the team.

DBS checks/security checks and safer recruitment

Please see the Triratna Model Child Protection Policy 2025.

Meeting in public

All events/gatherings/study groups involving anyone 15-17 should take place in public settings (centres, retreat venues etc), not at anyone's private home or Buddhist residential community.

No leader or team member - or anyone else on an event - should allow themselves to be alone in a room with anyone under 18 out of sight or hearing of others; if it is absolutely necessary to enter a room where a person under 18 is alone the door should be left open and another team member informed.

Residential events, children's, young people's or family events

Where 15-17 year-olds attend *residential* events intended for those under 18 (or mixed age groups, such as family events) unaccompanied by their parent/guardian the Safeguarding Lead **must** get parental permission for them to attend, by email or letter.

15-17 year-olds on general residential events

A 15-17 year-old on a residential event advertised more generally for adults must be accompanied by a parent/guardian and, preferably, share a room with their parent/guardian.

If that is not acceptable to the parent/guardian and teenager, the teenager could be in a single room, if possible adjoining the parent/guardian's room.

If not accompanied by their own parent/guardian, the teenager could be accompanied by an adult friend appointed by the parent/guardian as their carer for the event, in which case the Centre must obtain a written agreement made personally *between the parent/guardian and the carer* referring specifically to the event, and the carer and teenager should share a room, or sleep in adjoining rooms.

It is unlawful in the UK for a *charity* to arrange for any adult to share with a child. The only exceptions are those detailed above where the adult is a relative (and there is written parental consent) or with close friends who are perhaps in the same school year, where one has already turned 18 but the other is still 17.

More generally

Adult leaders should never share a room with anyone under 18. If they have to enter the room to talk to the under-18 they should leave the door open.

15-17s should always sleep in rooms shared with others of the same sex and as close in age as possible, or in a single room if there is nobody of appropriate age and sex to share with.

Those under and over 18 should not share if possible (but close friends and siblings could be an exception.)

If there are several beds in the room it is less likely anyone under 18 could find themselves alone with someone else 18 or over.

Over-18s should not go into under-18s' rooms. If they really need to enter the room they should leave the door open.

LGBTQ+ teenagers

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/lgbtq-children-young-people#skip-to-content

It is important to read and understand the risk posed to LGBTQ+ young people and if this applies to your charity, the advice would be to create a policy that shows how you support LGBTQ+ young people specifically.

Safer transport

As stated in the Triratna Model Child Protection Policy 2025, where it is agreed that (in connection with any Triratna charity's activities) that one of its employees or volunteers may give

a lift to a person under 18 who is not accompanied by a parent or guardian (with or without anyone else in the car)

- The charity's Safeguarding Lead must ensure that the driver is well known to them, has read the charity's Child Protection Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy and signed to confirm they will abide by them.
- The charity's Safeguarding Lead must have the written agreement of the 15-17 year-old's parent/carer for them to travel in the car of this named driver.
- It should be made very clear between the charity and the parent/guardian that the charity is responsible for the 15-17 year-old only while they are at the Centre/event. The parent/guardian is responsible until the 15-17 year-old arrives at the event and as soon as they leave.
- The driver must be over 18, have a full driving licence, adequate insurance and a vehicle which is roadworthy.
- The 15-17 year-old must sit in the back seat.
  If the charity's Safeguarding Lead does not feel able to implement these criteria lifts should not be offered to those under 18 by any employee or volunteer - in connection with their charity's activities.

Get free help from external Safeguarding experts such as Thirtyone:eight:
www.thirtyoneeight.org

This guidance published 2024 by Triratna's ECA Safeguarding Consultant.
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It should be read in conjunction with the

- *Triratna Model Child Protection Code of Conduct 2025*
- *Triratna Model Child Protection Policy 2025*
- *Triratna Model Adult Safeguarding Policy 2025*
- *Triratna guidance document 'Managing those who pose a risk 2025'*
- *Triratna Model Ethical Guidelines 2025*
- *Triratna 'Safeguarding and data protection 2025*