Managing those who pose a risk in Triratna 2025

Introduction

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.

This document offers advice on how to manage safely the inclusion in a Triratna sangha's activities of those who may pose a risk to others in certain circumstances. Following UK best practice it aims to help UK Triratna charity trustees fulfill their Safeguarding duties in this respect but has been found helpful by Triratna centres and enterprises in other countries too.

It relates particularly to the inclusion of those with criminal convictions for seriously harmful offences against adults or children; for example violent and sexual offences (including viewing indecent images of children); domestic violence and stalking (not an exhaustive list).

However, the kind of written agreement referred to here can also be used to establish clear, supportive boundaries for those with behavioural or mental health problems where they have proved disruptive or distressing to others in your sangha.

You can always email Triratna's ECA Safeguarding Consultant for advice: *safeguarding@triratna.community*.

Including in sanghas those with criminal convictions for seriously harmful offences against adults or children

From time to time a member of a Triratna sangha, or someone wishing to join a sangha, may disclose that they have a criminal conviction for a seriously harmful offence against adults/children, whether or not they received a prison sentence. It is also possible that probation services may ask if an ex-offender may attend your activities.

In the UK such a person may remain on the Sex Offender Register for some years after the end of their sentence, which comes with specific restrictions on what they are permitted to do. This is because it cannot be assumed that once a person's sentence is spent they no longer pose any risk. It would be a mistake to think that they could be prevented from re-offending simply through practising the Dharma or the kindness of Buddhists. They - and we - need the protection of clear boundaries to support to prevent them re-offending.

Therefore we need to establish what level of risk they continue to pose, what conditions they need to support them and therefore which activities they may attend, and under what conditions.

Risk assessment of ex-offenders is a professional skill for those who are professionally responsible for supervising this person, for example their probation officer, police liaison officer, police monitoring officer, psychiatrist or social worker. However, it is good for those involved in Safeguarding in Triratna to develop skills in this area and our external advisers Thirtyone:eight run online training. www.thirtyoneeight.org

Being realistic

Managing the safe inclusion in a sangha of a person who poses a risk can be rewarding and worthwhile. It's also a considerable responsibility, requiring commitment and time from named Order members, potentially over many years if the person continues in your sangha. It's important to be realistic as to whether you have the resources for this, especially given that your first responsibility is to the welfare of your charity's other beneficiaries, ie, the rest of your sangha.

Your Safeguarding Lead should

- ask the person to put them in touch with those supervising this person (eg probation officer, police liaison officer, police monitoring officer, psychiatrist or social worker)
- check with those supervising this person:
    - whether, in attending your activities, the person is keeping agreements made with those supervising them.
    - What level of risk to self/others the person is assessed to pose (high, medium or low)
    - Given the above, which of your activities would be suitable for them and on what terms

• Based on that, agree with the person and those supervising this person a written agreement setting out the terms on which they may engage in your activities.

If the person does not wish to co-operate with the above, it would be unreasonable for them to attend your charity's activities.

Triratna's ECA Safeguarding Consultant has sample agreements drawn up in previous cases. Please email if you would like to have them. *safeguarding@triratna.community*

If you become concerned

Should you become concerned about this person or your ability to support them do not hesitate to tell those who are supervising them professionally, or the police. This may be because the person is not keeping to the written agreement, or because their behaviour is disruptive or concerning in other ways, or you believe children or adults are at risk from them elsewhere; eg they have a conviction for sexual offences with children and you become aware they are working or volunteering with children or attempting to do so – within Triratna or elsewhere.

For the above reasons, or if you realise the charity lacks the resources to continue the relationship with them safely, you may well decide that they need to stop attending your activities. Your first duty is always to the protection of your existing sangha/beneficiaries.

Confidentiality

Under UK data protection law, information about this person may be shared very carefully between those who need to know in order to prevent harm, including those with legal or otherwise key responsibility; eg your Chair, your Safeguarding trustee, mitra convenors and safeguarding Lead, and anyone else it has been agreed will particularly support this person or act as their minder on your premises or at your activities. If you do share information, you may only share as much detail as is necessary; for example simply the terms on which they are included; what they are and are not permitted to do, rather than the details of their offences.

Nobody else necessarily has a right to know this person is an ex-offender. To take a particular example, where a person has a conviction for sexual offences with children it is often thought that sangha members with children should be warned. However, this is not the case. The ex-offender has a legal right to confidentiality and sharing such information would cause great confusion in your sangha. And, after all, the written agreement and the proper implementation of your Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct will ensure that children are as safe in your sangha from this person as from any others with an *undisclosed* sexual interest in children

Ex-offender Mitras

Some ex-offenders become Mitras. Like any other Mitra such a person becomes a friend to our Order and Community worldwide. However, unlike other Mitras they will not be able to turn up at any other centre or retreat centre in the world; they will first need to contact the Safeguarding Lead there, too, so that the appropriate measures can be put in place. Apart from that, if they are on the UK Sex Offender Register they will be limited by the terms of their registration, which may (for example) include not being able to leave the UK or stay away from home without notifying the police. It's often said, as part of the Mitra ceremony, that the new Mitras will now be welcome at any Triatna centre in the world, so before the ex-offender decides to become a Mitra it will be important to clarify with them, in private, that this will not be the case for them until they are free of all restrictions from the criminal justice system.

Where seriously harmful behaviour has not been reported to the police

The advice in this document relates only to those whose seriously harmful offences have already been addressed by the criminal justice system.

Buddhist confession offers no protection from the law, in the UK or many other countries. While UK law does not currently require police reporting, UK charity regulators such as the Charity Commission do expect criminal matters to be disclosed to the police; and in May 2023 the UK Government began consulting on proposed new laws to make it mandatory to report concerns, allegations or disclosures of **child** sexual abuse to the police.

Where a newcomer, Friend, Mitra or Order member discloses or confesses seriously harmful behaviour against adults or children (recent or historic) which has not been addressed by the police, they need to be encouraged and supported to report themselves to the police, so that further harm can be prevented and anyone they have harmed can be helped. By ‘seriously harmful behaviour' is meant - for example - violent and sexual offences (including viewing indecent images of children); domestic violence and stalking (not an exhaustive list).

Where you are not sure that they have reported themselves to the police, you must inform our Safeguarding Lead immediately. The Safeguarding Lead will immediately work out appropriate next steps, which could include meeting with the person who has confessed, consulting with ECA Safeguarding Consultant or ThirtyOne:Eight, or reporting the matter to the local police. This applies whether the behaviour disclosed is recent or historic.

If a child may be in immediate danger the Safeguarding Lead, Chair, Safeguarding trustee or person receiving the disclosure will phone the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at our local social services straight away.

For further advice contact our external Safeguarding advisers Thirtyone:eight. www.thirtyoneeight.org

This document is to 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 Model Ethical Guidelines 2025*
- *Caring for Teenagers in Triratna 2025 Online Safety in Triratna 2025 Safeguarding and Data protection 2025*

https://thebuddhistcentre. com/search/node/safeguarding

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