

OXFORD ZEN GROUP: SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Signed off by the Executive Committee on 2nd October 2023

Updated with new Safeguarding Officer contact details 19th October 2025

Safeguarding: Introduction

The Oxford Zen Centre is part of Sanbo Zen International, a lay group of Zen practitioners founded in Japan in 1954 by Yasutani Haku'un Roshi. It follows in the footsteps of Shakyamuni Buddha in seeking to realise our true nature, and is open to all people who wish to practise Zen, regardless of their nationality or faith. The members are bound together by a common commitment to practise zazen with the aim of realising wisdom and compassion in their own lives and the world.

The practice of Zen fosters and depends upon healthy communication, which requires a good attitude and thoughtful practice from both speaker and listener. It is the basis of the safe and welcoming environment which the Centre seeks to provide for all who come and practise with us.

Zen is a physical as well as a spiritual path. Correct posture is important, and a teacher or practice assistant (*jikijitsu*) may wish to touch a student in order to correct a posture or demonstrate a point. In practice retreats, a wooden stick called a *kyosaku* is sometimes employed, tapped on students' acupressure points on the shoulders to relieve discomfort and stimulate energy. However, students are entitled to decline to be touched, either by hand or with the *kyosaku*. Neither student nor teacher should ever initiate contact of a sexual nature.

Very occasionally things could go wrong. If they do, these are the procedures to be followed:

In the unlikely event that you experience or witness abuse, bullying, harassment or any other form of unpleasant behaviour, in the first instance raise it orally with a teacher, jikijitsu or trustee. If after that you feel the need to take it further, report it by phone, email or in person to the safeguarding trustee, who has the duty of ensuring that any such problem is dealt with promptly, correctly and sensitively. Reporting should be purely factual, without personal interpretation. The trustee's contact details are at the foot of this policy.

The trustee will make a confidential written record of the complaint and pass it on to her/his fellow trustees and/or the teacher, as appropriate, with whom appropriate remedial action will be discussed.

Oxford Zen Centre Safeguarding Policy

The Centre recognises its duty to safeguard all who participate in its activities, in line with the Charity Commission's guidance.

Through its teachers and practice leaders, the Centre intends to ensure that everyone taking part in its activities, in Oxford, London and elsewhere (during sesshin, for example), is treated with respect and is safe and free from harm.

Safeguarding means creating a safe and welcoming environment run in a way that actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect. It also means being prepared to respond safely and well if a problem arises.

Abuse and neglect include the following:

- Physical and sexual abuse.
- Emotional and/or psychological abuse, including harassing, ignoring and coercing.

The Centre has the responsibility to ensure, as far as we can, that:

- Teachers, trustees and volunteers are reliable and trustworthy, with dependable avenues for feedback from users of the Centre.
- Teachers, trustees and volunteers read the safeguarding policy, understand about safeguarding and the need to be aware that abuse can and does happen, and to report any concerns.
- A trustee who is also a regular participant in the Centre's activities in Oxford, London or both is the safeguarding trustee, with the appointment rotated as and when necessary or desirable.
- The trustees review safeguarding documents annually and revise them if necessary.

The safeguarding trustee will

- Be a source of support and advice on safeguarding questions;
- Share allegations on a confidential basis with other trustees and/or teachers, as appropriate;
- Update safeguarding policies when necessary;
- Keep confidential records of concerns, conversations or allegations relevant to safeguarding.

Reporting of concerns:

Verbal reports to the safeguarding trustee should be followed promptly with a written record which should include the following information:

- Name and contact details of the person reporting.
- Date, time and activity where the matter of concern occurred.
- The nature of the concern, the people involved, and details of any witnesses.
- Whether the person reporting is expressing their own concern or those of someone else.

On receiving this written report, the safeguarding trustee will:

- Make contact with the person expressing the concern and listen carefully to it; and
- Make a written record of it, to accompany the original written report.

The written record will answer the following questions:

- Date and time of this record;
- Name of person reporting;
- Subject of concern;
- Who is allegedly abusing or mistreating, and how?
- What has made the person share their concern?
- Is it an isolated incident or an on-going problem?
- How serious is it, in your view?
- Anything further to add?

The person reporting is assured of anonymity unless the matter has to be reported to outside authority. The safeguarding trustee will check if concerns have been raised about the person reported about previously.

General ethical guidelines of Sanbo Zen International

As a lay community of Zen practitioners, we the members and teachers of Sanbo Zen International resolve to conduct our lives and our relationships with the Three Pure Precepts as our guiding principle. These are:

- 1: to avoid all that is harmful.
- 2: to foster and promote all that is good.
- 3: to purify our minds and seek the liberation of all sentient beings in all our thoughts, words and actions.

We are bound by the Ten Grave Precepts, which are:

- 1: honour all life, do not kill.
- 2: respect others' property, do not steal.
- 3: Speak truthfully, do not lie.
- 4: Respect your own and others' bodies and commitments, do not misuse sex.
- 5: Keep a clear mind, do not abuse drugs and intoxicants.
- 6: Uphold the good name of others, do not engage in harmful speech.
- 7: Live in truthful humility, do not praise self or put down others.
- 8: Be generous, do not be stingy with material or spiritual goods.
- 9: Cultivate a peaceful heart, do not indulge in anger; and
- 10: Uphold the Buddha Dharma, do not defame the Three Treasures, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Safeguarding trustee: Reg Troka

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