



Vulnerable Adult Guidelines

“No matter what happens in society at large, we as Buddhists have to act in accordance with Buddhist principles and be open to people of all kinds, and their needs.
“They are our members, not some people out there, but our members.”
— Sangharakshita

Overview

It is understood that vulnerable adults will make contact with the Melbourne Buddhist Centre (MBC) and participants in its events, on site at the premises and / or through off-site activities such as retreats. This contact may also be online: through email or the website. Vulnerable adults may disclose personal details of their lives with people they’ve met through the MBC.

This document is developed to provide guidelines for:

- adults attending MBC activities, including those who may be vulnerable or “at risk”
- the people they come into contact with through the MBC

We are aware that those attending the MBC and its activities include adults experiencing psychological disorders ranging from mild to severe. We recognise that, as Buddhists, we do not have the professional skills to diagnose or help people with psychological disorders, nor will they necessarily be helped solely by Buddhist practices. In such cases, it may be appropriate for us to encourage them to seek professional help.



Responding to Allegations of Abuse

All allegations or suspicions should be taken seriously and reported to the MBC Chairperson or Safeguarding Officer, whose contact details are available on the MBC website:
<https://melbournebuddhistcentre.org.au/safeguarding-at-the-mbc/>

Advice may also be sought from the Triratna Safeguarding Team:
safeguarding@triratna.community

The MBC Chairperson and Safeguarding Officer undertake to support vulnerable adults by:

- publicising the MBC's safeguarding guidelines
- listening respectfully and seeking to understand people's experience
- assuring people that they have been heard
- assuring people that they have done the right thing by disclosing or reporting
- advising people what action could be taken
- talking with the vulnerable adult about a response
- respecting the vulnerable person's agency and decisions



Appendix: Definitions

Vulnerable Adults

Vulnerable adults are people susceptible to abuse or exploitation, either temporarily or permanently.

Their vulnerability may be based on factors which include:

- physical health
- mental health
- grief
- age
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- race and ethnicity
- cultural background
- lack of skills
- disability
- developmental ability
- social isolation
- class
- immigration status
- occupation
- socio-economic status



Types of Abuse

Abuse and neglect can take many forms, including:

1. Physical Abuse

The non-accidental use of force that may result in discomfort, pain, bodily injury or impairment.

2. Psychological / Emotional Abuse

Any act that provokes fear, diminishes the individual's dignity or self-worth, or intentionally inflicts psychological trauma and mental distress.

Examples include threats, yelling, silence, intimidating actions, playing on emotions, degradation, belittling, minimising, denying, blaming or withholding support.

3. Sexual Abuse

Any coercive, unwelcome or forced sexual actions perpetrated by a person in a position of trust, power or authority.

Examples include hugging, kissing, touching, invading someone's personal or online space, or unwanted sexual contact of any kind. This includes forcing or coercing someone to have sex or to have sex with others, or uttering threats to obtain sex.

4. Verbal Abuse

The use of negative comments that are unwelcome, embarrassing, offensive, threatening or degrading to a person.

Examples include name-calling, put-downs, false accusations, lying or saying one thing and meaning another.

5. Stalking

Any behaviour whereby one person repeatedly contacts, follows, harasses or spies on another person and, in so doing, leads that person to feel intimidated, fearful or unsafe.

6. Social Abuse

Any behaviour resulting in the isolation and alienation of a person from friends or family.

Some examples are exclusion or discouraging someone from having contact with family and friends.



7. Spiritual Abuse

Any tactics that exert power and control over a person's beliefs, spirituality and religious orientation.

Examples include imposing one's own views in order to belittle the values and beliefs of someone else, or using one's spiritual authority for coercive purposes.

8. Financial Abuse

Any behaviour that coerces a vulnerable person into providing money, or results in the acquisition of money without a person's permission.

Examples include taking money, forging a person's signature, using a person's credit card without permission, pressuring a person to provide money or denying someone's participation in financial decision-making.

9. Elder Abuse

The Victoria Government Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy, Resource Toolkit (2015) states:

"Elder abuse is mistreatment of an older person that is committed by someone with whom the older person has a relationship of trust, such as a partner, family member, friend or carer.

"Elder abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect. Sometimes family, friends and carers may not know that their actions amount to elder abuse.

"Elder abuse violates an older person's basic right to feel safe. It is a controlling behaviour or action which frightens or intimidates and can be illegal. It can occur at any time and be subtle to extreme."

We endeavour to understand what it is like for older people in our community who may experience isolation, reduced access to services, diminished respect and diminished consideration.

We also endeavour to understand that declining physical and mental capacity can contribute to the lessening of their social identity, function, voice and presence.

We undertake to be mindful of the experience of our elders, to acknowledge the rich lives they have led and the lifelong contribution they have made to society.

We undertake also to encourage their participation in and contribution to the life of our community.