

Sunyata Retreat Centre Ltd

Complaints Procedure

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The foundation of the document are the five precepts of Buddhism and the process of managing complaints will be guided by the five precepts, legislation, and good practice in our role as a public body and a charity.

The policy/procedure document has two overarching components. Complaints of a general nature and those which are of an ethical nature.

Part 1

Raising a concern

If a person associated with Sunyata Retreat Centre has a concern they would like to address with the Board of Trustees, this complaints procedure is here to act as a guide and to assist people in identifying the type of concern.

General complaints:

General complaints should be addressed to the Chairperson at the following address
sunyataeh@gmail.com

Ethical complaints:

The Board of Trustees at Sunyata Buddhist Centre has established the role of Ethical Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson will handle complaints or concerns regarding ethical guidelines, support complainants, and ensure concerns are heard and dealt with appropriately. Our ombudsperson is Sister Jinho.

Complaints of an ethical nature should be addressed to the Chairperson at sunyataeh@gmail.com. When the nature and seriousness of the complaint has been established, the Chairperson will engage the Ombudsperson with responsibility for overseeing the process of an ethical concern. E.g., misconduct of a teacher according to the Teacher's Code of Ethics. Misconduct of manager/guest/trustee according to the precepts. Everyone who lives, visits or practices at Sunyata Retreat Centre is expected to follow the 5 ethical precepts while they are visiting/residing/on retreat.

All teachers at Sunyata Buddhist Centre (both lay and monastic teachers) are required to adhere to the Teacher's Code of Ethics (<https://www.sunyatacentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sunyata-Code-of-Ethics-for-Lay-Teachers.pdf>) While ethical breaches in our community are fortunately rare, we recognise that they can occur.

Ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson is a trusted and experienced Sangha member selected by the Board of Trustees. While they are independent from the Board of Trustees, they are nonetheless responsible to it. When they are approached with a grievance, they will determine how to bring the concern to a resolution by following the guidelines below:

- Ascertain the nature of the concern and if it is directly related to the community at Sunyata Buddhist Centre
- Establish who needs to be involved in handling the concern and ascertain if state authorities should be notified.
- Identify what procedures and steps are needed to resolve the concern.
- Where appropriate; we will encourage deeper personal reflection for all parties concerned, to facilitate deepening of our practice unless the grievance is of a legal or serious nature.
- Facilitate where appropriate, discussions between the parties if necessary.

Part 2

On the rare occasion that the above process fails, and a more formal complaints process is necessary, the Ethics and Reconciliation Council (EAR) will convene. Conflict may arise in any community and the health of our sangha is not measured by the absence of conflict, rather by our willingness to address it openly and to grow through its resolution. Our commitment to learn from this process is an application of the Buddha's teachings in our daily lives and can assist in deepening our practice.

The process of a formal complaint:

1) A formal letter describing the concern should be sent to the EAR council. This must include:

- 1a) A statement that a formal grievance procedure is requested.
- 1b) The name of the person(s) or party whose behavior or policy the complaint involves.
- 1c) A detailed written description of the alleged behavior.
- 1d) History of attempt(s), if any, to resolve the complaint through other means, including the primary reconciliation procedures listed above.
- 1e) A general statement about the resolution desired.

2) Accepting the Concern

Once it has been determined that the concerns expressed fall within the scope of the EAR Council's responsibilities, the EAR council will decide and inform the parties involved of the process agreed on, as promptly as possible. As part of this notification, the Council will state its understanding of the issue under inquiry in writing and will forward a synopsis/overview of complaint to the party named in the complaint. If the Council does not accept a request for investigation, it will communicate its reasons for not doing so in writing to the initiating party and may recommend further mediation or another course of action. In some cases, outside mediation may be recommended.

3) Forming a Grievance Committee

When a complaint is accepted, the EAR Council will convene to investigate, issue findings, and render a decision on the complaint.

The EAR council consists of two Trustee members, a member of the monastic community and a Sangha member.

EAR Council

Breda Larkin – Independent Practitioner/Psychotherapist

Elaine D’Alton/Heike Griffin – Trustee Members

Sr Jinho – Zen Monastic – Ombudsperson

4) Investigating the Concern

The Ombudsperson will schedule a closed meeting where all parties are given a chance to present their understanding of the issue under investigation. The EAR council may question parties, gather additional information, or schedule additional meetings. If desired, the parties may each bring a supporting companion to such a meeting.

All parties will have an opportunity to respond to all information – oral, written, or other – gathered by the council.

The proceedings and all pertinent documents, including any notes taken by EAR council members, will be held confidentially, unless a court requires disclosure.

5) Committee Findings and Recommended Actions

When the EAR council members are satisfied that they are adequately informed, they will review and discuss the grievance. At its discretion, the council may seek non-binding advice from any other source who agrees to hold the matters discussed in confidence. The council will endeavour to reach its decision by consensus and present a unanimous finding. If consensus cannot be reached, committee members will vote. Within two weeks of a decision(s), the Council will email all parties with the result of its deliberations. For matters involving grievances and conflict that could impact Sunyata Buddhist Centre and its community in significant ways (such as issues that could lead to the suspension or other sanction of a person or that could involve legal proceedings) the EAR Council will provide its written findings and recommendations to the Sunyata Buddhist Centre Board of Trustees to determine the best next steps.

Sunyata Retreat Centre Limited is a registered charity in Ireland (No: 20205822)
Trustees: Heike Griffin - Eileen O’ Connor - Michael O’Brien - Colm Kavanagh - Donal Quirke - Elaine D’Alton