



# THE SANGHA SUTRA: SWZC ETHICS, PRACTICES & VALUES



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>THE SANGHA SUTRA</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Preface.....	5
What Is the Sangha Sutra? .....	5
A Brief Ethical History .....	6
Ethical Development of Our Lineage .....	8
What Are the Main Issues of Ethical Conduct? .....	9
Zen Training at SWZC .....	11
What Is Zen Ethical Training? .....	11
SWZC’s Overall Framework.....	12
Sweetwater Zen Center Shared Stewardship and Circle Organization .....	13
What Does SWZC Ask of You?.....	16
Alignment with SWZC Core Values .....	16
The Three Tenets of the Sangha Sutra .....	18
Moving Forward.....	19
<b>STATEMENT OF RIGHT CONDUCT</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Intention.....	19
The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts.....	19
Harmful Conduct.....	21
Discrimination & Harassment .....	22
Sexual Conduct .....	23
Addressing Harmful Conduct .....	23
Atonement.....	24
Summation .....	24
Endorsement.....	24
<b>THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Purpose of the Hearing, Ethics, and .....	25
Reconciliation Circle (HEAR) .....	25
Who Can Use This Process .....	25
Conflict Resolution Procedures .....	25
2-Step Conflict Resolution .....	26
Grievance Procedure.....	26
Statement of Confidentiality.....	26
How to File a Complaint or Grievance .....	26
Categories of Harmful Conduct .....	27

Procedure for Addressing Misconduct.....	27
Disciplinary Actions for Substantiated Grievances .....	29
Procedure for Appealing HEAR Circle Decisions .....	30
Procedure for Addressing Criminal Conduct.....	30
Bringing Attention to Unaddressed Conflicts.....	31
Conflicts with Members of Other Sanghas .....	31
Endorsement .....	31
<b>STATEMENT OF ETHICS FOR SWZC TEACHERS .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Preface.....	32
Teacher Commitments .....	32
Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships.....	35
Summation .....	35
Endorsement .....	35
<b>SWZC CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY .....</b>	<b>36</b>
COI DISCLOSURE FORM.....	40
<b>Appendix A: Key Concepts in Human Interaction.....</b>	<b>42</b>
Triangulation.....	42
Projection.....	43
Transference.....	45
Power Differentials .....	46
Confidentiality .....	47
Shadow Energies .....	48
Defensiveness.....	50
Compartmentalization .....	51
Spiritual Bypassing.....	52
TRAUMA .....	53
<b>Appendix B. Guidelines For Speaking With Others.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Speaking Through Conflict .....	55
Guidelines for Dialogue.....	55
Suggestions for How to Begin .....	56
<b>Appendix C. Procedure Flowcharts .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Procedure for Addressing Conflict.....	57
Procedure for Addressing Misconduct.....	58
Procedure for Addressing Grievances .....	59
<b>Appendix D. Resources For Communication And Grievance Procedure .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix E: Changing Teachers within the White Plum Asanga .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix F: Guidelines For Member-Senior Romantic Relationships.....</b>	<b>62</b>

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# OVERVIEW

The following Sangha Sutra for SWZC includes the following documents:

1. The Sangha Sutra— sets forth the background and context for ethical behavior.
2. Statement of Right Conduct— sets forth an overview of Right Conduct for our members, organization, and Sangha.
3. The Conflict Resolution and Grievance Procedures— sets forth the duties of the Hearing, Ethics, and Reconciliation Circle (HEAR), and the procedures for resolving conflicts and addressing grievances.
4. Statement of Ethics for SWZC Teachers— sets forth ethical guidelines for teachers at SWZC, including visiting teachers.
5. Conflict of Interest Statement— it is considered to be a best practice for any nonprofit to have an adopted conflict of interest policy in order to ensure integrity on the part of the directors and officers of the organization.

# THE SANGHA SUTRA

## Preface

A hidden oasis in the border town of National City, CA, Sweetwater Zen Center carries the mission of offering a Zen path to awakening and being of service. It was founded in 2000 by Roshi Anne Shungaku Seisen Saunders, a Soto Zen priest and Dharma successor of Roshi Bernie Tetsugen Glassman. The century-old property and its buildings have undergone decades of transformation, along with its constantly evolving group of residents and guests. We bow in respectful acknowledgement to all who have participated in making SWZC the place it has become, built on the unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation.

We also offer deep gratitude to the greater National City community, which has helped nurture our establishment and development. With its proximity to the US-Mexico border, this location has always embodied the benefits of crossing over, inclusion and liberation. Accordingly, SWZC does not exclude anyone on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, class, or political point of view. At the same time, members and practitioners are encouraged to explore practice at SWZC as both a spiritual home and possibly a temporary step on a greater spiritual journey, according to one's own path.

## What Is the Sangha Sutra?

A Sangha is formed when three or more people practice the Awakened Way together and embrace the spirit of The Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Buddha is awakened realization; the Dharma, the teachings of awakening; and the Sangha, the community of practitioners. (Alternatively, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha treasures can be interpreted as the realities of Oneness and Diversity, and the continuous interplay of those realities). SWZC's mission and vision strive to embody collective awakening. This means that practice at SWZC is designed as a skillful means for awakening together as a Sangha.

As Roshi Egyoku expresses, the word “sutra” (Sanskrit: sutta) translates as “thread,” and each individual is a thread of the Sangha fabric. Fabric is typically made of the *warp*— the threads that run lengthwise— and the *woof*— the threads that weave around the warp running crosswise. For the Sangha fabric, the warp is made of practice and The Three Treasures, and

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

the woof is how each member engages with them. What kind of fabric are we weaving together? What patterns are being revealed?

Together we weave the fabric of the Sangha treasure by illuminating the Dharma of emptiness, interconnection, and impermanence. Aligning ourselves with these pillars of reality fosters living in harmony, as we are called forth to see others as ourselves and ourselves as others. With this fundamental view, we honor diversity and become skilled in addressing conflicts as a path to deeper interconnectedness. All fabric inevitably wears out, holes and tears appear, and seams rip apart. But fabric is strengthened in its mending. And so we approach conflict within the Sangha as an opportunity for growth.

The Sangha Sutra is not a rigid set of rules. Rather, it provides guidance on how to live harmoniously together in accord with the ever-changing circumstances of life. Life is nuanced, complex, and full of paradoxes. Although there are no fixed answers, there are practices that can help us become flexible and responsive with wisdom and compassion. Rooted in the fundamental principle of *doing no harm*, this Sangha Sutra challenges us to go beyond our self-centered views; to develop a broader, more selfless perspective on what is needed in any given situation.

## A Brief Ethical History

This Sangha Sutra is partially inspired by mistakes made by our past teachers and ancestors, and the need for healing after the damage left in their wake. Founded in 1967 by the venerable Taizan Maezumi Roshi, Zen Center of Los Angeles is the mother temple for all White Plum communities. In addition to the model for practice it established in the West, its history also provides clear examples of how ethical misconduct can threaten the Sangha and compromise the Dharma.

- In the early 1980s, Maezumi Roshi had a secret sexual relationship with a female disciple while they were both married with families. The repercussions due to these abuses of power and sex have continued almost to this day. Online posts can be found on the White Plum Asanga website ([www.whiteplum.org/news](http://www.whiteplum.org/news)).
- Maezumi Roshi was an alcoholic. His drinking caused disruption and consternation among members of the community. In the 1980's, he entered rehab at the Betty Ford Clinic. The Sangha underwent counseling as well. A film of this time, "Zen Center: A Documentary

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Film about the Zen Center of Los Angeles” by Anne Cushman, can be found in the ZCLA library.

The 1983 ZCLA scandal resulted in most of the Sangha leaving Maezumi Roshi and the Zen Center. This was followed by years of coping with the fallout from the sudden departure, and Maezumi Roshi’s coming to terms with his own misconduct. Questions about the nature of enlightenment, the human flaws of Zen teachers, and the psychological foundation for practice were yet to be addressed. At that time, American Zen Centers lacked a structure for dealing with ethical misconduct and accountability. And the intersection of Asian and American culture led to further misunderstandings about Zen, culture and ethics.

It was still unacknowledged that spiritual wisdom does not necessarily include psychological/emotional maturity; nor that our own ideas of power, sex and race etc. are not exempt from scrutiny. This led to dysfunctional Sangha cultures that practitioners *spiritually bypassed*<sup>1</sup>, leaving little room for insight and accountability. With a concentrated emphasis on zazen alone, the effects of conditioning and cause-and-effect were poorly investigated in these early days of Zen in America.

Times of crisis can be followed by years of sincere self-reflection and discernment. This practice can inform us when we are not in alignment, not in harmony. In the very act of living, our wheels naturally go out of alignment, our fabric frays. Regardless of the “reasons,” we admit our errors, atone, and commit to doing better. Just as we say about precepts: We drink from the glass, so the glass gets dirty; we clean the glass, and then drink from it again and it gets dirty again. Realignment is not a one-time action; it is continual. This Sangha Sutra is about caring for the fabric we are weaving together and mending its tears again and again.

At the time of ZCLA’s implosion in 1983, the San Francisco Zen Center had already ousted their Abbot and other Buddhist groups were imploding. Some of this is documented in Rick Fields’ book *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (updated edition by Ben Bogin, Shambhala, 1992). It was a time when the idealism of the early American Buddhist practitioners met the reality of human nature. It became clear that the effects of abuse in spiritual communities lead to devastating feelings of betrayal and a profound distrust of spiritual groups and teachers. Many sincere spiritual practitioners never returned to practice.

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<sup>1</sup> You can learn more about *spiritual bypassing* in appendix A. Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Sadly, few religions are untouched by scandals involving abuses of power, sex, financial misconduct, and discrimination. So, SWZC is committed to addressing these threats on an ongoing basis; bypassing is not an option. This is the noble practice of revolving the Sangha Sutra.

## Ethical Development of Our Lineage

Following the passing of Maezumi Roshi, the White Plum Asanga (WPA) addressed the conduct of its teachers and began to mature as an organization. The process has been aided by a change in U.S. cultural mores, and the development of formal training by professional organizations regarding healthy boundaries for both individuals and organizations.

Research in this area has resulted in a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power. The suffering caused by abuse of power, sexual abuse, and addiction have engendered the development of best practices and the skill sets to prevent such abuses. All White Plum Asanga teachers today agree to follow its Code of Ethical Conduct and a Grievance and Reconciliation Procedure (<https://whiteplum.org/wpa-ethics-policy/>).

It was not until 1997 that communities in the WPA began to actively and consistently address misconduct around power, sex, and addiction both in terms of its past and in laying the ethical foundations for its future. Healing circles were created and shadow exploration classes offered. Individuals who had experienced abuse during Maezumi Roshi's tenure were invited to come forward and a healing ritual was created. The practice of Council was introduced and Sanghas began to train in listening and speaking from the heart, respecting differences, and creating a more transparent culture. Attention was paid to skillfully developing a power-sharing culture in order to bring balance to Zen's strict traditional hierarchy. And the study and practice of the Bodhisattva precepts were moved front and center to anchor daily practice.

After roughly twelve years of dedicated work attending to the many grievances and shadows caused by the early breaches of ethical conduct by past teachers, a grievance procedure was created and the ethics documents were developed. In 2015, WPA's mother temple, ZCLA, established the first Hearing, Ethics, and Reconciliation Circle (HEAR), which further developed the documents that inspired this Sangha Sutra. These core documents are the **Statement of Right Conduct, Conflict Resolution, Grievance Procedures, and the Teachers Ethics Statement**. In addition, there are documents on toxic patterns of interpersonal dynamics such as triangulation,

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

projection, and transference-countertransference. In 2021, SWZC will establish its own HEAR to serve as its Grievance Council.

Every teacher, priest, and senior student at SWZC must undergo training on healthy boundaries, sexual abuse, and power abuse. We want everyone who practices at SWZC to pursue training on these issues, study the Sixteen Zen Bodhisattva precepts, and reflect deeply on their own conduct.

Gathering to investigate the truth of our lives, we practitioners will encounter our own limitations, conditioning and trauma. We reveal our own emotional reactivity, defensiveness and arguing; a lack of patience with ourselves and others. Through working with our mental rigidity, self-centered storytelling and an inability to listen sincerely, we reveal our true self. We become sensitive to power and sexual abuse, and how we participate in a culture that enables misconduct to continue.

As we mature into these practices, a culture of healing and deep listening can emerge. We can see more deeply that we are all working through our karma and deserve the patience and compassion that allows space for transformation and growth.

The ways human beings create suffering through ignorance and delusion are endless. We are committed to addressing them. Experience has shown us that the tears and holes in the fabric of community do not simply disappear with time. The long reach of cause and effect has taught us that making careful repairs matters.

## What Are the Main Issues of Ethical Conduct?

The main issues relating to ethical conduct that our Sangha needs to identify and understand include the following:

- **Power**— What constitutes an abuse of power? What is the embedded inequity of power positions such as in the relationships of teacher to student and senior to junior practitioners? How does power manifest in matters of gender, race and sexuality? What is *power over* versus *power with*? How does the structure of a Zen community contribute to power abuse? What is the right use of power?
- **Sex**— What constitutes sexual misconduct and abuse? How can it be prevented?

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

- **Money**— What constitutes financial misconduct? Are safeguards in place? How transparent are our financial practices?
- **Addiction**— What constitutes an addiction? How is it treated? What are the Sangha's expectations regarding sobriety and practice?

In addition, there are fundamental dynamics that everyone needs to understand in order to help prevent abuse and misconduct. These dynamics— some of which are also discussed in the ethics documents— include:

- Interpersonal dynamics, such as triangulation, projection, transference and countertransference.
- Spiritual bypassing.
- Being a bystander to misconduct or improper behavior in the Sangha.
- Unexamined expectations of Zen practice and teachers.
- Lack of psychological/emotional work and its place in relation to practice.
- Trauma. What do we need to know about trauma and how it manifests? How do we help heal traumatic wounds?
- Deeper understanding of the precepts and the more subtle nuances of precept practice.
- The shadow aspects of spiritual practice. How are these identified and practiced with?
- Knowing the difference between wise discernment and a self-serving agenda.
- Learning new skills, such as how to have difficult conversations and how to resolve conflicts.

## Zen Training at SWZC

Zen training is nothing outside of your life, which includes everything; your practice includes everything. Our venerable ancestor Dogen Zenji wrote: “What is practice? Everywhere— nothing is hidden.” However, because we naturally believe awakening *is* some hidden treasure, embodying true self can be a mysterious and messy journey. Zen practice inquires into the apparent gap between one’s self and Buddha. It exposes all the deeply ingrained patterns of behavior, insecurities, flaws and secrets, forcing us to face some of the most painful aspects of our lives. Why? Because what is revealed is that everything is included in who we really are— unadulterated Buddha Nature.

Our ideas of what practice is, of who we are and what makes a Buddha are strongly held. This can lead to *spiritual bypassing*, which excuses us from facing the more painful qualities of our lives by deeming them unacceptable and ignoring them. We then project these qualities onto others, living in the shadow of our own being. Hence, these are called *shadow aspects*. But since “[Practice is] everywhere—nothing is hidden,” to see what the Buddha saw, we must invite our shadow aspects as practice points and opportunities for awakening. To see SWZC Core Practices, you can [click here](#).

## What Is Zen Ethical Training?

Zen training in our community offers a path to knowing oneself on a very deep level. It also includes a commitment to learning the basics of interpersonal and organizational dynamics and how to effectively address conflicts. Practicing an awakened life in community includes an embodiment of the Bodhisattva Precepts and making atonement. It’s having difficult conversations by listening deeply. We do this not necessarily to seek agreement, but rather to foster deep respect for the diversity of views that constitutes the wisdom of our community. Thus, we commit to expanding beyond our own biases and needs.

Furthermore, we study the basics of organizational dynamics and the kind of culture our behaviors create. SWZC wants its organizational culture to be ethics-based and continuously evolving. Prevention and intervention are key components of this effort— facing problematic behaviors and taking action to rectify them. It does not mean policing others’ behaviors, but being aware when power is being abused. And we aim to create a culture that encourages speaking up without fear of repercussion or intimidation.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

What is required of each of us? A capacity for self reflection, honesty, humility, and a willingness to admit when we need to change our behavior; that we ask for help; that we are willing to have tough conversations. Our practice together requires an attitude of openness to and fundamental respect for oneself and for each other. We should all bear witness to how the deep inner work of *zazen* practice allows us to more earnestly work together in the external world.

Conversely, we witness how the group-work of improving our external circumstances benefits the inner practice of *zazen*. We should make efforts to activate the innate capacity for self-reflection and invite new narratives and possibilities. We must learn to ask questions, to hold complexity and nuance. Otherwise, we fall into black and white patterns of thinking. How do we awaken and shift our deeply-rooted beliefs and paradigms? Such are the challenges we must face as we weave the Sutra of the Sangha.

## SWZC's Overall Framework

Our intention is that ethical conduct is woven into the fabric of SWZC's organizational structure. How do we lay the groundwork, the structural foundation, to frame an ethical culture of awakening? An overview of the Zen Center's organization invites both individual and collective wisdom to arise. Our transformation is amplified when engaging not only the dimension of the individual self, but also the Zen Center organization and the collective Sangha.

At SWZC, we intend to invite collective wisdom. Part of that is encouraging an orientation to the whole, an alignment of intention. Our goal is to encourage everyone who practices at SWZC to be empowered as an integral part of the center's functioning. To that end, we aim to center SWZC's mission and vision for everyone in the community.

SWZC has embraced incorporating a shared model of cooperative power, alongside the Abbot-down vertical power structures found in traditional Zen practice. The manifestation of this new model is always evolving, but the basic principles of cooperation and inclusion imbue our intention.

# Sweetwater Zen Center Shared Stewardship and Circle Organization

Sweetwater Zen Center is organized on a principle of shared stewardship. Shared stewardship is defined by two qualities: cooperative decision-making and collaborative work. The governance and day-to-day administration at SWZC is organized through member collaboration in 'circles.' These circles are organized into the broad context of the Three Treasures: The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

The Buddha treasure refers to the reality of oneness and awakening to True Self. The circles that make up the broader Buddha Circle represent the practice and training aspects of the center. The Dharma treasure refers to the reality of phenomena and awakening to things as they are. The circles that make up the broader Dharma Circle represent the administrative and operational aspects of the center. The Sangha Treasure refers to the reality of how the Buddha and Dharma Treasures harmonize as one, manifesting in the community that gives them life. Therefore, the broader Sangha Circle is embodied by the SWZC community that animates this fusion of the Buddha and Dharma Circles. Each circle contains elements of all Three Treasures, just as each of the Three Treasures manifests with elements of the other two. Notwithstanding, it is helpful to categorize each circle in this way.

While committed to shared leadership and group decision making, SWZC also recognizes the importance of vertical structure and its ability to support a shared leadership model. The following stewardship and leadership roles do just that:

THE ABBOT— is installed by the previous Abbot or, if the previous Abbot is not able to make the installation, the Board— working with the Elder's Circle— appoints the next Abbot.

The Abbot guides SWZC to realize the vision and mission of the Center, guiding the functioning of the Center to align with them. The Abbot vows to continue the Buddhadharma through the lineages of Maezumi Roshi and Bernie Glassman, the WPA and ZPO lineages.

CIRCLE ORGANIZER— either the Abbot or a teacher/senior practitioner appointed by the Abbot. They oversee the Circle mandala and ensure the proper functioning of all circles. The Circle Organizer can also be instrumental in helping members and practitioners find circles that are appropriate for their skill set and practice commitments.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

STEWARDS— stewardship within the SWZC circle structure consists in facilitating the processes of each circle. The steward of each circle acts as an empowering agent, to encourage all its members to participate in fulfilling the circle’s charge. To that end, another important element of circle stewardship is training the next steward.

While each circle has its own steward, the Abbot acts as the steward of the broader Buddha Circle, and the Board of Directors acts as the steward of the broader Dharma Circle. Because of this dynamic, the Abbot attends Board meetings as an advisor/consultant, and the President and Treasurer attend Leadership Circle meetings as advisors/consultants.

## THE CIRCLES

(Circles may be formed and dissolved as needed)  
*for a full circle organization chart, [click here](#)*

### I. **Buddha Circle: training and practice related issues at SWZC.**

- **Leadership Circle:** Is stewarded by the Abbot and supports the Abbot. It stewards the training, staffing and vision of SWZC. The President of the Board and Treasurer serve on the circle as advisors/Board Reps.
- **Events Circle:** Manages SWZC events calendar; prepares and promotes events; stewards online outreach and marketing.
- **Media Circle:** Manages social media and other promotional content and strategies.
- **Tea and Cookies Circle:** Manages refreshments for Sunday Program and other ad hoc SWZC events.
- **Teachers Circle:** Those authorized as Zen teachers at SWZC.
- **Council Facilitators Circle:** Plans and executes Council practice. Trains Facilitators and offers themes for council.
- **Ino and Ceremony Circle:** Stewards ceremony and ritual at SWZC.
- **Jikido Circle:** Supports the weekly zazen schedule and stewards meditation spaces.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

- **Chiden Circle:** Stewards the care of the altars at SWZC and altar prep for ceremony.
- **Zen Meditation Instruction (ZMI) Circle:** organizes Zen meditation instruction and the training of instructors.
- **Priest Circle:** Supports Priest training at SWZC.

## II. **Dharma Circle: temple administration, including financial and legal matters, and the day-to-day operations.**

- **Board Circle:** Manages financial and legal health of SWZC. The Abbot serves on the circle as an advisor.
- **Finance Circle:** Is responsible for monitoring, managing and decision making around SWZC's finances.
- **Community Gateway Circle (CGC):** Manages coming and going of residents. Stewards processes related to the resident agreement.
- **Buildings and Grounds Circle:** Stewards the maintenance of SWZC buildings, grounds and gardens, and the general care of SWZC's spaces.
- **Fundraising Circle:** Stewards the Fundraising at SWZC.
- **Membership Circle:** Provides overall support for SWZC membership. Stewards addition of new members, cultivates outreach to new members and potential members.

## III. **Circles that are only activated as needed**

- **Elders Circle:** appointed by the Abbot and approved by the Board. Consists of Zen Teachers within the White Plum Asanga who serve two primary purposes:
  - 1) To step in to mediate when asked by either the Board of Directors or Abbot in the event that these two parties are at an impasse regarding a particular matter.
  - 2) To be involved in the appointment of a new Abbot, if and only if the current Abbot is unable to affect an appointment themself.

- **H.E.A.R. Circle:** *(see conflict resolution and grievance procedure below)*
- **Resident Support Circle:** Offers support for residents who are struggling with issues that may affect their residency status.

## What Does SWZC Ask of You?

Everyone is called upon to inform themselves of the underlying principles of this Sangha Sutra, which will help weave the best possible conditions for collective awakening at SWZC. Ethical actions, including mending the tears in the fabric of the Sangha, will ideally become habitual. The basis of ethical conduct is found in the manner of our relationship to ourselves and to each other :

- Are we tending to the inherent perfection of being?
- Are we tending to our own emotional maturity?
- Do we recognize unhealthy behavioral patterns and work with them?
- Do we bring acute awareness to our everyday behavior?

These inquiries are a necessary part of practice at SWZC. We are all capable of transformation. Liberation is, after all, your birthright as a Buddha. But Buddhism acknowledges that this birthright is easily obscured, and requires ceaseless action to be illuminated.

Often, it's easier to rationalize and ignore behaviors that are causing harm. But what kind of fabric does that weave? In order to maintain an ethical path to awakening for the SWZC Sangha, we ask members and practitioners to consider the documents in this Sangha Sutra, and to ask the hard questions that lead to the tough conversations that are needed to keep our Sangha fabric healthy and resilient.

## Alignment with SWZC Core Values

Our conduct as practitioners and as teachers is guided by the Sixteen Zen Bodhisattva Precepts. In particular, we align ourselves with the SWZC Core Values, which are as follows:

1. **Affirming the essential awakened nature of all beings**— we want to cultivate this realization with appreciation and compassion for all we encounter. We understand that **no-self and emptiness are basic marks of reality.**

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

2. The practice of **skillful and respectful communication**
3. Fully **engaging** in one's life.
4. A **consciousness of the environment** and our impact on it.
5. **Taking responsibility** for our lives.
6. **Inclusion**— all ages, abilities, ethnicities, genders, races, religions, sexual orientations and cultures etc.
7. **Being of service** to oneself and others.
8. **Honesty**—we expect **transparency** from the Board of Directors, teachers, students and the Sangha at large.
9. **Sobriety/integrity: not deluding oneself**— valuing sobriety both in terms of avoiding intoxication and as a clear-minded emotional engagement with life.
10. **Collective Awakening**— seeking support from teachers and the Sangha, we may awaken together.
11. **Offering and asking for help.**
  
12. **Honoring our lineage** and the gift of our heritage— we want to appreciate our ancestors who dedicated their lifetimes to passing the Dharma on to us.
13. **Self-reflection/self-study**: taking responsibility for ourselves, being open to learning from our mistakes *and* successes.
14. **Justice, protection of the vulnerable**— treating all beings with respect, dignity and compassion. Acknowledging our role in addressing the inequities of our world.
15. **Confidentiality**— making a safe container for practice.
16. **Shared leadership**— mutual support for shared stewardship, Circle governance and collective decision-making. We respect the Sangha's diversity of talents, expertise, and leadership, encouraging everybody's participation.
17. **Financial Health/Integrity**— maintaining a stable and transparent organization; promoting ethical organizational and financial conduct; open access to policies and financial/governance documents; employing sound and transparent management practices in our day-to-day operations.

## Core Practices

Zazen  
Council

Dokusan/Daisan/working with a teacher

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Retreat: sesshin and intensives  
Precept study/Atonement  
Communication skills  
Dharma Talks  
Shared leadership and Circle service  
Social Action  
Sangha Gathering

**Intensive Zen practice will expose deep patterns of conditioning and trauma. SWZC encourages engaging in other programs, processes and techniques that help promote an individual's physical, emotional and spiritual healing including therapy, the 12-Step program, yoga, tai chi etc.**

## The Three Tenets of the Sangha Sutra

Roshi Bernie Glassman offered us the practice of The Three Tenets, which are foundational to SWZC's mission and practice. As a practice for ethical living, these tenets guide us as follows:

- **Not-Knowing**— This is Original Nature— before Buddha, before ideas of right and wrong, life or death. It is our True Nature before any sense of separation. It is before opinions, points of view, and personal narratives. It is being open, without knowing. The life loom is originally bare.
- **Bearing Witness**— From a place of not-knowing, we embrace all that appears, simply as is; flowing with the interconnections of life. In this way, we naturally align with the fabric of the universe by being the fabric itself. This is weaving our fabric with the threads of our eyes, ears, smell, taste, body, and consciousness.
- **Loving Action**— This is the action that arises naturally out of bearing witness from a place of not-knowing. It is not calculated or figured. It manifests of its own from the selfless embodiment of the situation itself. This is discernment—the intimate sense of what is needed to promote harmony. In ethical matters, this includes the practices of mending and healing. How do we address our fabric's holes and tears?

## Moving Forward

Living creates misalignment. As practitioners, we carry the charge to realign ourselves with the fact of oneness and the practice of kindness. Each of us is a Buddha to be manifested; every Sangha, a treasure trove of wisdom and compassion. This Sangha Sutra calls forth the imagination as friend to possibility— for new practices in harmony, for shared pathways to awakening. We must tap into every individual’s gifts, as they are all valuable assets to the Sangha.

*The original nature is pure and undefiled.  
The thread of emptiness leaves nothing unstrung.  
The needle of practice pierces through every fabric.  
The patterns emerging are many and varied—  
Everything appears just as is.  
Stitch by stitch, breath by breath, I take up the  
practice of sewing the Sangha Sutra. When seams rip  
apart and tears appear, I take up the practice of  
mending.  
The vow to live an ethical life calls me forth:  
I revolve the Sangha Sutra—  
May it benefit all beings everywhere.*

May it be so.

## STATEMENT OF RIGHT CONDUCT

### Intention

It is important that the proper environment for practicing at SWZC be actively maintained by any teacher, practitioner, or student. The following guidelines are intended to encourage maturity and a healthy Zen practice environment. We urge all who come to SWZC to assume responsibility for themselves, the Zen Center organization, and the well being of the Sangha. Zen practice includes the practice of right conduct— honoring boundaries and addressing harmful behavior. To this end, SWZC endorses this document and asks its members to abide by its Ethics Policies.

### The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts

The foundation for right conduct at SWZC is comprised of the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts:

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

### The Three Treasures

1. Taking refuge in the *Buddha*. I vow to embody Oneness, the awakened nature of all beings.
2. Taking refuge in the *Dharma*. I vow to embody Diversity, the ocean of wisdom and compassion.
3. Taking refuge in the *Sangha*. I vow to embody Harmony, the interdependence of all creations.

### The Three Tenets

1. *Not-Knowing*— the source of all manifestations, and seeing all manifestations as the teachings of Not-knowing.
2. *Bearing Witness*— encountering all creations with respect and dignity and allowing myself to be touched by the joys and pain of the universe.
3. *Loving Action*— inviting all hungry spirits into the mandala of practice and offering love for healing myself, the earth, and all creations.

### The Ten Grave Precepts

1. Non-killing, not leading a harmful life nor encouraging others to do so. I will recognize that I am not separate from all that is. I will live in harmony with all life and the environment which sustains it.
2. Non-stealing. I will be satisfied with what I have. I will freely give, ask for, and accept what is needed.
3. Chaste conduct. I will encounter all creations with respect and dignity. I will give and accept love and friendship without clinging.
4. Non-lying. I will speak the truth and deceive no one, I will speak from the heart. I will see and act in accordance with what is.
5. Not being deluded, nor encouraging others to do so. I will cultivate a mind that sees clearly. I will embrace all experience directly.
6. Not talking about others errors and faults. I will unconditionally accept what each moment has to offer. I will acknowledge responsibility for everything in my life.

7. Not elevating myself and blaming others. I will speak what I perceive to be the truth without guilt or blame. I will give my best effort and accept the results.
8. Not being stingy. I will use all of the ingredients of my life. I will not foster a mind of poverty in myself or others.
9. Not harboring anger. I will not hold onto resentment, rage, or revenge. I will transform suffering into wisdom. I will roll all negative experience into my practice.
10. Not thinking ill of the three treasures. I will honor my life as an instrument of peacemaking. I will recognize myself and others as manifestations of Oneness, Diversity, and Harmony.

SWZC recognizes that the study and practice of the precepts is a life-long effort and is the responsibility of each person who endeavors to live the Buddha Way.

## Harmful Conduct

SWZC is committed to the practice of *do no harm*. Two categories of harmful conduct are referred to in SWZC Grievance Procedure:

- **Misconduct** refers to untreated addiction, abuse of power, financial manipulation, malicious gossip, inappropriate sexual relationships, sexual harassment, bullying, and written, verbal or cyber abuse.
- **Criminal Conduct** refers to any violation of the law.

People who encounter harmful conduct from *any* member of the Sangha—including its Abbot, teachers, priests, and seniors— should be aware that these actions violate the practice of right conduct and seriously undermine the well being of the Sangha. The following are particularly harmful forms of misconduct that the Zen Center wishes to highlight. We expect all SWZC practitioners to actively be aware of them.

- Abuse of Power—Although the Zen Center is developing a more egalitarian structure, power differentials still exist within the context of Zen training. SWZC places trust in its members who are in positions of authority, and regards any violation of this trust as particularly harmful. We recognize that the roles of Abbot, teacher, senior student, staff member and circle steward naturally create power inequality. Exploiting relationships, harming others, or abusing influence breaches this trust, especially when such misconduct occurs under the

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

pretense of teaching methods or Zen practice. Examples of power abuse may include crossing sexual boundaries, emotional and psychological manipulation, and misuse of the Zen Center's funds. Misconduct by those in positions of trust can destroy the community, and must be addressed immediately.

- Addiction— Substance and sexual addictions are harmful to both the addict and to others in the Sangha. Any Sangha member who demonstrates such addictive behaviors will be directed to seek help as a condition for participation in the Zen Center's activities. Illegal substances and intoxication on SWZC property is prohibited. Recreational drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, are not allowed in our public spaces. Legal substances are only allowed in the Zen Center's private residences.
- Sexual Harassment— Sexual harassment is especially disruptive and damaging to individuals and the wellbeing of the Sangha. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwelcome sexual advance or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted. Sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated at the Zen Center and anyone experiencing or witnessing it should report it.
- Sexual Abuse of Children— This form of child abuse includes any type of sexual activity with a minor, including but not limited to physical contact. This is **criminal misconduct**, and situations interpretable as abuse will be referred to authorities. At SWZC, we are zealous in our commitment to the safety of children.

## Discrimination & Harassment

SWZC supports an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Discrimination or harassment based on race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin or ancestry, physical or mental disability, or any other basis protected by federal or state law, or local ordinances applicable to nonprofit religious corporations is strictly prohibited. The anti-harassment policy applies to all persons involved in the operation of the Zen Center and prohibits harassment by any teacher, practitioner, student, or vendor.

# Sexual Conduct

*(see page 32 for further details)*

Sexuality is a sensitive part of the human experience and carries serious potential for abuse, which can cause great harm to individuals and institutions alike. Aside from following the guidelines for relationship found in this document, SWZC encourages all practitioners to welcome their romantic and sexual feelings as practice points. Sitting with these feelings and talking about them with a mentor or teacher can help direct them down positive, compassionate avenues.

SWZC has a strict **zero-tolerance** policy for sexual involvement in a “Dedicated Teacher-Student” relationship, and is addressed further in the Teachers Ethics Statement (p. 32). Sexual involvement between SWZC senior students or staff and other members requires caution. In general, pursuing a dating or sexual relationship within the membership is prohibited for 3 months and actively discouraged for 6 months after introduction to the Sangha. The expression of sexual or romantic interest in visitors and new practitioners can compromise a supportive and welcoming environment. It is also recommended to consider how a sexual/romantic relationship will impact the participants’ relationship with the center and their practice. **Above all, the biggest threat to healthy relationships in community is secrecy. All sexual/romantic relationships within the sangha should enjoy the ease of public acknowledgment and acceptance.**

It is SWZC’s goal to ensure the safety of everyone in the community. Sexual harassment, inappropriate behavior of any kind towards children and any other unlawful sexual practices are strictly prohibited and will be addressed and reported to the proper authorities.

## Addressing Harmful Conduct

Part of repairing the Sangha fabric is to work through conflicts and difficulties that arise from violations of right conduct. Sangha members who bring conflicts to be addressed through the Zen Center grievance process will not be subject to reprisal of any form, and will be expected to participate in the resolution process. Precept #6, “Not Talking about Others’ Errors and Faults,” should not be invoked to evade the responsibility of reporting misconduct. **This responsibility must be taken with extreme**

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

**earnestness.** Notwithstanding, gossiping always makes conflict resolution more difficult.

With regard for confidentiality, discussion of misconduct shall be limited to those with a bona fide “need to know.” Any member of HEAR can guide anyone bringing a complaint on how to effectively handle the situation as addressed in SWZC’s Grievance Procedure, which details the process for addressing Misconduct and Criminal Conduct.

## Atonement

Anyone who violates right conduct is expected to admit their error and make every effort to realign their conduct with the precepts and heal their relationships within the Sangha. Such atonement is an integral part of right conduct. Atonement can include but is not limited to: a) person-to-person apologies, b) public acknowledgement, c) letters of amends, d) financial restitution and e) acts of service as amends. The formal practice of atonement is held regularly at the Zen Center, and members are strongly encouraged to make this an ongoing practice.

## Summation

It is SWZC’s sincere intention to continually realign our lives in accord with the precepts and to provide an open, supportive, and nurturing environment for the practice of the Buddha Way. We uphold core values and core practices to support us in facing and shifting our individual and collective conduct for the mutual awakening and benefit of all. We are committed to maturing fully, both individually and collectively. We recognize that this Statement of Right Conduct is a living document and will evolve according to the needs of the organization and the Sangha.

## Endorsement

This Statement of Right Conduct has been revised and adopted by the Leadership Circle and Board of Directors on 10.29.23

*See Appendix A for information on Key Concepts in Human Interaction.*

# THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

## Purpose of the Hearing, Ethics, and Reconciliation Circle (HEAR)

The purpose of HEAR is to facilitate the resolution or dissolution of disagreements, complaints of misconduct and grievances. Sangha members are encouraged to bring concerns to any member of HEAR for listening, reflection and guidance. It is the purpose of HEAR to empower voices, to ensure that people have their issues heard to their satisfaction. HEAR members will consider issues that require action and proceed in accord with the Zen Center's Grievance Procedure. It is the responsibility of all Sangha members to be familiar with these documents.

HEAR will be comprised of three or more members appointed by the Leadership Circle and Board of Directors. They will serve two-year terms, and be identified on the SWZC website. The Abbot may not be on HEAR. HEAR members may be added or recuse themselves to suit the needs of a specific grievance.

## Who Can Use This Process

In general, this process is for SWZC membership. However, a non-member who is an active participant in SWZC activities may also use this process. Examples include a participant in an introductory class, a guest practitioner, etc. HEAR will determine whether a complaint by a non-member who is not involved directly in the life of the Sangha should be addressed.

## Conflict Resolution Procedures

Conflict is an unavoidable part of human interaction. From the perspective of Zen practice, conflict presents an opportunity for personal growth and can function as an impetus for awakening and transformation. SWZC defines conflict as ongoing interpersonal disagreements, slights, and situations where harmony is threatened. In a community, the dynamics of triangulation are especially harmful. (See above, Appendix: Triangulation.) All parties to a conflict are asked to engage in deep self-inquiry and to take the steps

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

presented in the following procedures to address the situation before it spirals out of control.

## 2-Step Conflict Resolution

**Step One: Go directly to the person(s) involved.** Keeping The Three Tenets in mind, Sangha members are encouraged to speak directly to each other. We encourage face-to-face interaction, uncomfortable as it may be. When speaking directly poses a physical or psychological threat, or when attempts at speaking directly have been unsuccessful, ask for help from a teacher, a senior student (an active SWZC member who has completed an Ango as head trainee or shuso as appointed by the Abbot), or a HEAR member. (*For suggestions on speaking face-to-face, see Appendix A, “Guidelines for Speaking Directly with a Person with Whom One is in Conflict.”*)

**Step Two: Facilitated meeting.** In a situation where a facilitator is necessary, HEAR members may help the parties involved choose an appropriate facilitator and method of facilitation (e.g., council, conversation, mediation) before proceeding. If the parties cannot come to agreement, HEAR will appoint a facilitator and a method of facilitation. Situations may arise in which a quick solution is not forthcoming. The members of HEAR commit to holding a space for introspection, speaking/listening from the heart, and working toward action(s) that will serve all parties. Effort should be made by all parties to move forward to a satisfactory resolution or dissolution of the problem.

## Grievance Procedure

### Statement of Confidentiality

Anyone bringing forward a grievance is assured that information concerning people and situations is confidential. “Confidential” means that names and specifics will be protected and undisclosed. The privacy of individuals concerned will be respected. Teachers may be consulted for a situation requiring their discernment. (See above, Appendix: “Confidentiality.”)

### How to File a Complaint or Grievance

When conflict cannot be resolved through the above 2-step conflict resolution

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

and involves breaches of SWZC's statement of right conduct, a member may file an official grievance for resolution. To do so, go directly to any member of HEAR. There will be a good faith effort to respond to the complaint within two weeks from the date the complaint was received. Adjustments to the timeline will be made in situations of urgency. The HEAR member who receives the initial complaint will listen, help assess and discern the situation, review the procedures set forth in this document, and act in accordance with them.

In keeping with HEAR's commitment to ensure that a complainant has been heard, if for any reason the process is unsatisfactory to the complainant, they are free to go to another HEAR member or to a teacher at any point in the process.

## Categories of Harmful Conduct

SWZC defines two categories of harmful conduct as the following:

- **Misconduct** refers to untreated addiction, abuse of power, malicious gossip, inappropriate sexual relationships, sexual harassment, bullying, and written, verbal or cyber abuse.
- **Criminal Conduct** refers to any violation of the law.

## Procedure for Addressing Misconduct

If misconduct is observed or experienced and you do not feel that you can address it on your own, report the misconduct to a member of HEAR. The person you contact will guide you through the Written Grievance Procedure and offer a meeting with all of HEAR for support and direction.

A formal grievance must be written, signed, and dated by the person filing the grievance. It must include all the pertinent details of the situation(s), what previous attempts have been made to resolve the issue(s), and why the previous attempts have not been successful, if pertinent. The letter is then submitted to a member of HEAR who will then immediately forward it to the other members of HEAR, and they will convene and follow the procedures for adjudicating a complaint.

**HEAR will make a good faith effort to respond to the written grievance within 14 days from the date it is initially submitted and**

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

**to resolve it within 60 days from the date it is received.**

In addition:

HEAR will make every effort to adjudicate grievances fairly, with wisdom and compassion for all the parties involved. In the event that the misconduct affects the entire Sangha, other steps not outlined in this document may be taken, as deemed necessary or appropriate to the situation by HEAR and/or the Abbot. HEAR will keep confidential written records of all proceedings. Access is limited to HEAR; consultation with the Abbot is at their discretion.

The written grievance is addressed in the following order:

1. Interview the Complainant. The complainant can choose to have a support person. The role of the support person is to be there for the complainant without taking sides in the situation or having any official role in the situation or the grievance process.
2. Interview the subject of the grievance. A written response by him or her will be made. A support person, as defined in (1) above, will be offered.
3. Investigation:
  - Further pertinent information will be gathered.
  - Zen Center leaders who need to know will be notified.
  - A narrative timeline will be developed that documents the incidents and will be verified by all parties involved in the dispute.
  - The subject of the grievance *may* be placed on temporary leave from teaching duties, staff position, or other leadership positions.
  - The subject of the grievance *may* have access to the Sangha and/or SWZC property curtailed while the investigation is ongoing.
  - The issue *may* be referred to an independent party for investigation and recommendation. Independent parties may include The Elders Circle, White Plum Asanga teachers or someone with expertise in the subject area of the grievance. Should HEAR decide that the misconduct requires an outside investigator, HEAR will consult

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

with the Board of Directors regarding legal counsel and the assessment of potential liability to the Zen Center.

4. Determination on the validity of the complaint. In the case of a grievance with transmitted teachers or the Abbot, HEAR's determination will follow consultation with the Teachers Circle, Elders Circle and the Board of Directors.
5. Substantiation. If the misconduct is substantiated, HEAR, in consultation with the Abbot, (or the Board if the Abbot is the substantiated transgressor) will do the following:
  - Stipulate disciplinary action for the subject of the grievance. Disciplinary action may include requirements for treatment, restitution, or suspension/termination of position or membership.
  - Notify the Complainant in writing.
  - Notify and inform the Membership/Sangha as appropriate.
6. Acquittal. If the misconduct is *not* substantiated, HEAR will:
  - Notify the complainant in writing.
  - Address recommendations for the complainant as appropriate.
  - Exonerate the subject of the grievance in all appropriate ways.

## Disciplinary Actions for Substantiated Grievances

If misconduct is ultimately substantiated, the subject of the grievance will be disciplined in one of the follow ways:

- Corrective Actions. The requirements for corrective action will be spelled out in a written document. These may include treatment, financial restitution, apologies to particular parties, and atonement.
- Suspension.

- The requirements for suspension will be spelled out in a written document, including the beginning and ending dates of the suspension period and salary considerations for paid employees.
- There will be a review of standing and provisions as spelled out in the suspension document.
- Termination. The conditions of termination will be spelled out in a written document. These will include the date of termination, salary considerations for paid employees, and appropriate access to the Zen Center.

## Procedure for Appealing HEAR Circle Decisions

If an appeal of HEAR recommendations is desired, the request will be made in writing stating the basis for the appeal and submitted to the Board of Directors. When an appeal is considered, HEAR members should be present for clarity of understanding but will have no vote on the matter. All parties are expected to work from an assumption that HEAR has acted in good faith and with due diligence. The Board should consider overturn of the findings of HEAR to be a drastic measure.

## Procedure for Addressing Criminal Conduct

Victims of a serious criminal offense or any Sangha member who becomes aware of a serious criminal offense should report it to the proper authorities. Nobody in the community is exempt from consequences for their misconduct. A member of HEAR should be notified and immediately do the following:

1. Inform the Membership/Sangha as appropriate.
  2. Address the role of accused in Sangha activities. If there is suspension or termination, HEAR will follow the procedures as outlined above.
- ❖ *SWZC believes that there are consequences for misconduct, but is also deeply aware of the dangers of American policing practices. The National City PD has proven itself to be forward thinking in its policies and actions, but SWZC still encourages everyone to consider the ramifications of involving law enforcement in any situation involving misconduct.*

## Bringing Attention to Unaddressed Conflicts

Ongoing unaddressed conflict can seriously undermine the wellbeing of the Sangha. It is important for all Sangha members to feel empowered to step forward and inform HEAR of any situation ongoing in the community that is not being attended to.

Examples of such conflict include observably disruptive behaviors, addictions, bullying, the spreading of gossip or rumors, triangulating, and behaving in subtle ways that don't align with Zen Center practices or policies. HEAR will determine an appropriate response after a thorough investigation of the situation.

## Conflicts with Members of Other Sanghas

Where a complaint is filed between a SWZC Sangha member and a member of another Sangha, the problem-solving process will follow the policies of the *accused's* Sangha. HEAR and the Abbot will be informed about the situation. The situation will be discussed with the SWZC Sangha only where there is a bona fide need-to-know.

## Endorsement

This Conflict Resolution Procedure and Grievance Procedure has been revised and adopted by the Abbot and Board of Directors on 10.29.23

***Please See Appendix B for Guidelines For Speaking With Others***

***Please see Appendix C for Flowcharts outlining SWZC's grievance procedure***

***Please see Appendix D for further resources on conflict resolution and grievance procedure.***

# STATEMENT OF ETHICS FOR SWZC TEACHERS

## Preface

Teachers of Sweetwater Zen Center vow to uphold and adhere to the SWZC Vision, Core Values, Core Practices, Statement of Right Conduct and The Grievance Procedure. The role of a Zen teacher carries with it additional responsibilities that are expressed herein. While we recognize that we are all students and teachers of each other, this Statement of Ethics applies specifically to those who have received authorization to teach through Dharma Transmission, including visiting Dharma teachers. In addition, Dharma Holders and Students who are appointed to teach and lead Zen Center programs will agree to honor and practice these guidelines.

Teachers must recognize that they carry the Sangha's trust. SWZC acknowledges the inherent power differentials in student-teacher relationships, and that teachers' actions and words carry greater weight than they might outside the Zen Center. As such, teachers commit to following a code of conduct that supports the development and wellbeing of students, the organization, and the Sangha. Teachers acknowledge that their position is a deepening of their own personal practice and service to the Dharma. Teachers will honor the trust of the Sangha, the essential nature of the Student-Teacher relationship, and the importance of that relationship in the transmission of the Dharma. All teachers at SWZC are required to take formal Healthy Boundary Training.

## Teacher Commitments

Our conduct as practitioners and as Teachers is also guided by the following specific commitments. It is important to acknowledge that there are different kinds of relationships in a Sangha, and that each one carries different power dynamics and must be treated appropriately, respecting specific boundaries that support the health of each relationship.

**Dedicated Student-Teacher Relationship**— A “dedicated student” is anyone who meets regularly one on one with a teacher, as a guide on their spiritual path. A “teacher” is anyone authorized to teach at SWZC through Dharma Transmission, a Dharma Holder or a Senior Student in teacher training, who takes on the role of spiritual guide for the dedicated student.

We recognize that deep personal and spiritual sharing happens within the Dedicated Student-Teacher relationship. We vow to be honest and to maintain clear boundaries. We define teacher misconduct as conduct that is harmful to the wellbeing of the teacher, Zen Center, Sangha, or an individual Student. We vow not to abuse our role as teachers by exploiting the trust of

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

students through verbal abuse, sexual misconduct, misuse of the Zen Center's funds, or through psychological manipulation of the power dynamic inherent in the student-teacher relationship.

**Member-Senior Relationship**— A “member” is any participant in SWZC programs and practices. Though they may not work with a teacher one-on-one, they are students of The Way nonetheless, and should be treated with attention and care. A “senior” is any senior student or Zen Teacher that carries the responsibility of caring for sangha members and their paths. While this relationship doesn't carry the weight and vulnerability we find in a Dedicated Student-Teacher relationship, there is still a clear power imbalance. And so, these relationships require strong, healthy and transparent boundaries as well.

**Member-Member Relationship**— This relationship exists between SWZC members or participants and has little to no power dynamics at play. This is a relationship of peers and carries little threat of power abuse or misconduct.

**Sex And Romance**— We recognize that sexual relationships with power imbalance are often harmful. We also recognize that attraction between people may arise. We are mindful of the harm that can be done even under the most sincere and consensual circumstances. We acknowledge that shifts in romantic and sexual dynamics can occur gradually or suddenly and require both vigilance and integrity. If this occurs, we vow to be open and transparent to ourselves and to the other SWZC teachers.

- Intimate relationships are strictly prohibited in a Dedicated Student-Teacher relationship. If feelings arise and both parties want to pursue those feelings, the teacher-student relationship must end, and they must inform the Leadership Circle, and if appropriate, the Board, immediately. They will then follow any and all guidelines set forth by the Leadership/Board Circles before engaging in a sexual/romantic relationship.

- In a Member-Senior relationship, intimacy is strongly discouraged and very delicate. It is best for Seniors to treat all Members as students of The Way, not potential lovers/partners. But in extraordinary circumstances, when undeniable mutual feelings arise, the Leadership/Board Circles must be informed of the intention immediately. Then both parties will follow guidelines set out by the Leadership/Board Circles, to ensure the healthiest, safest circumstances for starting an intimate relationship.

- For Member-Member relationships, simply following the 3-6 month guideline laid out earlier in this document (page 23), in the Resident Handbook, and in the New Member Packet will ensure that intimate relationships start in a healthy, auspicious way.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

**Privacy**— We respect the intimacy and sensitivity of all Face-to-Face meetings (Dokusan, Daisan, and Private Practice Meetings). We will treat matters discussed there as private matters shared within the context of practice and training in the Dharma: we honor privacy, except in the case of necessary consultation. SWZC teachers may, in confidence, consult with other teachers regarding sensitive matters brought up by students in Face-to-Face meetings. Senior students training to be teachers are also encouraged to discuss Face-to-Face meetings with their teacher for feedback and consultation. **Face-to-Face practice at SWZC is considered private, not necessarily confidential.** **Mandatory Reporting**— SWZC clergy and leadership are mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect as per CANRA: Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act. (Overview: Mandatory reporting laws, <https://www.wklaw.com/what-are-mandatory-reporting-laws> Statute: Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=PEN&division=&title=1&part=4&chapter=2&article=2.5](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=PEN&division=&title=1&part=4&chapter=2&article=2.5))

Mandated reporters of the state of California include clergy along with education and health professionals. Basically, anybody in a professional position of authority over children are mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect. Clergy are also mandated reporters for dependent adult and elder abuse. (Statute: Welfare and Institutions Code, [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=WIC&sectionNum=15630#](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=WIC&sectionNum=15630#))

California law states that clergy are included in the following group: “Any person who has assumed full or intermittent responsibility for care or custody of a dependent adult or elder, whether or not he or she receives compensation.” All SWZC teachers must remain alert to child abuse and neglect and dependent adult and elder abuse and take the appropriate action to address it.

**Dual Relationships**— A dual relationship is created whenever two individuals are relating to each other in two (or more) different capacities. For example, a teacher who is a psychotherapist may be asked by a student to become a client/patient. Or a student who is an attorney may be asked by a teacher to provide legal services. These and other such situations give rise to a dual relationship.

In the case of professional relationships such as with a psychotherapist, attorney, or doctor, teachers must not enter into these dual relationships. We recognize that not all dual relationships are inherently unethical. For Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

example, as senior students move into teaching roles, friendships with Sangha members may continue to exist. We are, however, mindful of the complexities and risks in these circumstances. The responsibility for guarding against the misuse of the power differential rests with the role of the teacher. We will seek the counsel of other teachers as needed.

**Financial Responsibility**— We are mindful that all of the Zen Center’s funds belong to the Zen Center organization and the whole Sangha. We acknowledge our responsibility to be efficient and transparent with the Zen Center’s Funds.

**Gifts**— Students may wish to offer gifts as an expression of gratitude for a teacher’s offering of the Dharma. We wish to avoid any undue influence that a gift might have on the essential Student-Teacher relationship.

**Conflicts or Grievances with Teachers**—It is the teacher’s responsibility to maintain clear and appropriate boundaries within the Student-Teacher relationship, and cause no harm. Any concern or complaint about the conduct of a Teacher should follow the SWZC Grievance Procedure.

## Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships

Teachers will respect, support and, as needed, counsel each other. We will address whatever issues arise between and among Teachers Circle members in a timely way. In the event that teachers are a married couple, they will be asked to be especially scrupulous in their observance of these ethical guidelines. We commit to ongoing Council Practice.

## Summation

We recognize that our practice continues without end. We hold ourselves accountable to the SWZC organization, to the Sangha, to our peers in the Teachers Circle, to our own teacher and to the White Plum Lineage.

## Endorsement

This Teachers Ethics Statement has been revised and adopted by the Abbot and Board of Directors on 10.29.23

*Please see Appendix E for information on changing teachers within the WPA*

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

# SWZC CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

## ARTICLE I Purpose

The purpose of this Conflicts of Interest Policy is to protect the interests of Sweetwater Zen Center, a California non-profit corporation (the “Center”) when the Center is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of an officer, director, or other person in a position of official responsibility with the Center. This policy, adopted by the Board of Directors of the Center, is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable laws or regulations of the State of California governing conflicts of interest applicable to nonprofit and charitable corporations.

## ARTICLE II Definitions

For purposes of this conflicts of interest policy, the following definitions and rules of construction shall apply:

1. “Interested Person” shall mean a director, principal officer, or member of a committee with the authority to act on behalf of the Board of Directors, who has a direct or indirect Financial Interest.
2. A “Financial Interest” exists if an Interested Person has, directly or indirectly, through business, investment or family:
  - a. an ownership or investment interest in any entity with which the Center has a transaction or arrangement;
  - b. a compensation arrangement with the Center or with any entity or individual with which the Center has a transaction or arrangement; or
  - c. a potential ownership or investment interest in, or compensation arrangement with, any entity or individual with which the Center is negotiating, or any entity or individual with respect to which the Board or a committee is considering, a transaction or arrangement.
  - d. A Financial Interest does not necessarily constitute or result in a conflict of interest. For purposes of this Policy, a person shall be considered to have a conflict of interest only if the Board or an appropriate committee determines that a conflict of interest exists pursuant to Article III below.
3. Compensation includes direct and indirect remuneration and gifts or favors which are substantial in nature, but shall not include gifts of less than Fifty Dollars (\$50.00) in value.

4. An Interested Person who has a Financial Interest with respect to one or more parent, sister, or subsidiary business entities of the Center shall be deemed to have a Financial Interest in the Center.

#### ARTICLE III Procedures

1. An Interested Person shall disclose the existence and nature of his or her Financial Interest, and shall be given the opportunity to disclose all material facts with regard to such Financial Interest, to the directors and members of committees with Board-delegated powers considering the proposed transaction or arrangement.
2. If the Interested Person has a Financial Interest, after disclosure of the Financial Interest and all material facts relating to the Financial Interest, and after any discussion between the Board or the committee and the Interested Person to clarify or bring to light additional information with respect to the Financial Interest, the Interested Person shall leave the Board or committee meeting while the remaining Board or committee members deliberate and vote upon whether a conflict of interest exists. Prior to leaving the meeting, the Interested Person may offer a brief statement of his or her position regarding the transaction or arrangement and may answer pertinent questions from other directors or committee members. In the absence of the Interested Person, the remaining Board or committee members shall determine if the Financial Interest constitutes or results in a conflict of interest.
3. In the event the Board or committee determines that a conflict of interest exists:

The Interested Person may make a presentation with regard to the transaction or arrangement at the Board or committee meeting, but after such presentation, the Interested Person shall leave the meeting during the deliberations concerning, and the vote upon, the transaction or arrangement.

  - a. The President of the Board or committee shall, if appropriate, appoint a disinterested person or committee to investigate alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement.
  - b. After exercising due diligence, the Board or committee shall determine whether the Center can, with reasonable efforts, obtain a more advantageous transaction or arrangement

with a person or entity that would not give rise to a conflict of interest.

- c. If a more advantageous transaction or arrangement is not reasonably attainable under circumstances that would not give rise to a conflict of interest, the Board or committee shall determine, by a majority vote of the disinterested directors or committee members present at a meeting, whether the transaction or arrangement is in the Center's best interest and for its own benefit and whether the transaction or arrangement is fair and reasonable to the Center.

#### ARTICLE IV Records of Proceedings

The minutes of meetings of the Board of Directors and all committees acting with the authority of the Board of Directors shall include:

1. The names of all persons who have disclosed or otherwise were found to have Financial Interests, the nature of the Financial Interest, and the Board's determination of whether a conflict of interest existed; and
2. The names of the persons who were present at the meeting for discussions and votes relating to the transaction or arrangement, the content of these discussions (including any alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement), and a record of the vote.

#### ARTICLE V Compensation Matters

A voting member of the Board of Directors who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the Center for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation. A voting member of any committee whose jurisdiction includes compensation matters and who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the Center for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation.

#### ARTICLE VI Annual Statements

Each director, principal officer and member of a committee acting with Board- delegated powers shall, upon commencement of his or her employment or term of office, and annually thereafter, acknowledge and affirm that he or she has:

1. received a copy of the conflicts of interest policy;
2. has read and understands the policy;
3. agrees to comply with the policy; and

4. understands that the Center is a charitable organization and that in order to maintain its tax-exempt status, it must engage primarily in activities which accomplish one or more of its tax-exempt purposes.

#### ARTICLE VII Periodic Reviews

The Center shall conduct periodic reviews of its activities to ensure that it is operating in a manner consistent with its charitable purposes and that it is not engaging in activities that could jeopardize its status as an organization exempt from federal income tax. In conducting such reviews, the Center shall evaluate the following:

1. Whether the Center's compensation arrangements and benefits are reasonable and the result of arm's length negotiations; and
2. Whether contractual arrangements with providers of goods or services conform to written policies, are properly recorded, reflect reasonable payments for goods or services, further charitable purposes, and do not result in private inurement or impermissible private benefit

In conducting its periodic reviews, the Board of Directors may in its discretion engage outside advisors, but the Board of Directors shall at all times retain responsibility for ensuring that periodic reviews are conducted.

ARTICLE VIII Violations of Conflicts of Interest Policy If the Board of Directors or a committee has reasonable cause to believe that a member of the Board of Directors or of the committee has failed to disclose a Financial Interest, it shall inform such member of the basis for such belief and afford the member an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclose. If, after hearing the response of the member and making such further investigation as may be warranted under the circumstances, the Board of Directors or committee determines that the member has in fact failed to disclose a Financial Interest, it shall take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action.

**By accepting a position of responsibility with the Center I affirm that I understand what I have read and that I will honor the terms of this Conflict of Interest Policy.**

This is an Official Policy Document under Bylaws Art. III, Sec. 2., c. Approved by the Sweetwater Zen Center Board of Directors September 18, 2016

# COI DISCLOSURE FORM

*I have read and understand the Conflict of Interest Policy Statement of Sweetwater Zen Center and I have received a copy of said policy. I agree to abide by all of its terms, including the provisions requiring that I avoid all conflicts of interest and the requirement that I immediately disclose potential and/or actual conflicts of interest. I understand that the Center is charitable and in order to maintain its federal tax exemption it must engage primarily in activities which accomplish one or more of its tax-exempt purposes. Pursuant to my obligation to disclose potential conflicts of interest, I truthfully and to the best of my knowledge, respond to the following questions:*

**Question 1:** Do you or, to your knowledge, any member of your immediate family have any financial interest in, or loans from, any supplier to or purchaser of goods or services from the church? (You need not report any financial interest in less than 5% of the outstanding publicly traded shares of a supplier or purchaser of goods or services.)

No  Yes . If Yes, please explain:

**Question 2:** Do you or, to your knowledge, any member of your immediate family hold any position as a director, officer, partner, trustee, employee, agent, or consultant, of or for any supplier to, or purchaser of, goods or services from the Center?

No  Yes . If Yes, please explain:

**Question 3:** Have you or, to your knowledge, any member of your immediate family received or enjoyed, directly or indirectly, any gift, entertainment, compensation, reward, or other benefit of more than nominal value during the past year from any supplier to, or purchaser of, goods or services from the Center?

No  Yes . If Yes, please explain:

**Question 4:** Have you or, to your knowledge, any member of your immediate family engaged in any transaction with the Center during the past year? (You need not report any compensation received as salary, wages or bonuses, any benefit received under the Center's written employee benefit plans or arrangements, any reimbursement of expenses made in conformity with the Center's reimbursement procedures, or any Center services received from the Center on customary terms.) No

Yes . If Yes, please explain:

**Question 5:** Do you hold membership or participate as an officer in any governing board, municipal government, or entity that has any oversight or influence or other relationship with the Center, whether or not such relationship involves the exchange of money or other tangible benefits?

No  Yes . If Yes, please explain:

Sign Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Today's Date —

Print Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address -

City, State, Zip -

Received by: —

Date Received: -

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

# Appendix A: Key Concepts in Human Interaction

Written By: Ellen Reigen Ledley and Penelope Luminous Heart Thompson (ZCLA)

Spiritual Bypassing addition by: Robert Chowa Werner (SWZC)

Trauma Addition by: Ann Koren Bortz (SWZC)

## Triangulation

The term triangulation describes a situation in which two people are in conflict and one or both parties entangle other people in the situation usually to gain favor for their individual positions. In triangulation, contacting a third person is done not to dissolve and/or resolve the conflict, but rather to avoid the conflict or solidify one's position.

Triangulation often results when we have been conditioned to not deal with conflicts directly, when we want to be right, when we want to be liked or approved of, and when we are in denial of the suffering we may cause ourselves or another. It is also likely to happen when people lack the skills to deal with conflict or are fearful of conflict.

For example, Angela and Brody are in conflict with each other. Instead of working directly with each other to resolve the conflict, Angela talks to a third person, Craig, about what is going on and to gain sympathy and support for her view or position. Angela may or may not be aware of her intention in speaking with Craig.

When Craig is unaware, he will become entangled in the conflict by taking sides or, even worse, begin to spread the conflict further by talking to others. Hence, a triangle is formed among Angela, Brody and Craig although person Brody may be unaware of the triangulation. Perhaps Brody is also triangulating someone else regarding this same situation, in which case, multiple triangles are being formed. Triangulation spreads the conflict to others not previously involved and many more patterns of triangulation result as other people are snared into the situation. This dynamic makes resolution more complicated and difficult.

The preferred approach or action would be for Angela or Brody to initiate direct communication with the other. If that seems too difficult or if

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

resolution does not occur, then a good option could be for either party to talk with someone like Craig, with the straightforward intention of sorting out their confusion about the situation. The aim would be better understanding of his or her role in the conflict and an exploration of ways to move the situation forward.

When Craig is aware, he will listen, ask guiding questions, and redirect that person back to the other, or to an appropriate person who can be involved in resolution. Craig will listen openly and affirmatively and ask questions that can help to clarify the situation. Craig could also suggest that Angela or Brody look at the Statement of Right Conduct for guidance.

Craig must be aware that he is hearing only one side of the story, no matter how compelling or convincing the account may appear or how emotionally upset the person is.

Here are some guiding questions for any stage in the conflict resolution process (e.g. Angela or Brody could address these questions to themselves or Craig could address them to either or both of them.)

- What are the facts of the situation?
- What is your story about these facts?
- What is your role in this conflict?
- What is being triggered for you in this conflict?
- What is your motive in speaking with me about it?

## Projection

Projection describes a two-step process of seeing something in another that you do not see in yourself and then responding to the other as though they embody that quality. It is a process of disowning one's self-perception or quality, which may be a positive or negative aspect. The cause and the effect of projection is that we tend not to see ourselves clearly.

You can begin to observe projection in action when you are using second or third person pronouns instead of the first person pronoun. This projection may take the form of a thought or something that is directly spoken. For example, when you hear yourself thinking or when speaking aloud phrases like "You always", "You never", or "She always", you are probably projecting.

Some examples of projection might sound like this:

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

- You always come late.
- You never call me back.
- He is much more thoughtful than I am.
  
- She is much smarter than I am. ● He is not that smart.

Notice that each of these projections involves comparing oneself with another or others and it involves a judgment as well.

Some ways to notice and to work with one's projections:

1. Begin to pay attention to when you are thinking or speaking in the second or third person and when you are using the words "always" or "never". Experiment with changing your thought/or speech to "I" and then notice the meaning and impact of that change, on your perception of yourself and of the other.
  
2. Ask yourself: "What about the other's behavior triggers me?" Using the example of lateness: "Do I come late or what about the other's lateness bothers me?" If you feel "I am never late", does it feel to you like disrespect when another is late? Or do you feel "I am a good person because I am always on time"? And therefore "a person who comes late is a bad or thoughtless person"?
  
3. As another example, if you perceive another as smarter than you, ask yourself "Where does this judgment come from in me?" Experiment with re-owning the projection by saying to yourself, "I am smart". Even if it feels initially unfamiliar, try it out anyway. See what it is like to stay with that statement. If you are saying about another, "He is not that smart", notice what it feels like to say that in the first person, "I am not that smart." Then see if you can discover what drives that statement. is there some old fear that you are not smart? Did someone important to you tell you that? Again experiment with an affirming self statement, such as "Actually I am smart."

It appears to be human nature to project disowned aspects of ourselves onto others. By bringing our pre-conscious projections to awareness, we are acting on our commitment to know ourselves more clearly and thereby to free ourselves from delusion.

# Transference

Transference involves the unconscious projection or transfer of feelings, attitudes and expectations from previous life experiences and people onto a person or situation in the present. We act and feel as if that person or situation in the present is a person or situation from our past.

It is as if we are reliving past memories without being aware of it, transferring scenes and ways of perceiving from the past onto the present.

Examples of transference:

- You meet someone at the Zen Center who reminds you (unconsciously) of a person from your past that you felt very close to, and you find yourself feeling close to the person at Zen Center.
- A person who always felt that their parent favored their sibling, may feel that the teacher favors others, not them, and may feel angry or hurt.
- A person who experienced disapproval or rejection as a child finds themselves worrying about judgment or criticism from a teacher or other Sangha members, or they may feel like they don't belong or fit in.

Counter-transference is the term that describes the feelings and response evoked by the other person's transference to them. The term counter-transference relates to a Person A's reaction to the way they are being treated by Person B who has the transference to Person A, which then activates a transference reaction in Person A.

For example: somebody behaves towards you in an angry way, and you think it's about you. You might react by getting angry back or feeling victimized and that reaction is your countertransference.

Sometimes it may feel very clear to you that someone's behavior and feelings towards you don't really belong to you. In that situation, it may feel natural to you to come into a place of open heartedness or concern for the other. This is an example of not coming into a countertransference position or relationship.

Bringing these transferences to consciousness can lead to more clarity in the relationship, based on what is actually going on between the two people.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Guiding Questions one might ask oneself:

- Does this person remind me of someone in my past?
- Do my feelings about this person feel familiar?
- What are my feelings and body sensations when with this person?
- Can I begin to access what my part of this difficult connection is?
- Do I act in ways, when with this person, that feel out of my control or are not how I would want to act?

Tracing back the threads of these historical connections can be complex and anybody can benefit from talking them through and exploring it with a friend, sangha member, teacher or even therapist. This is always done with an awareness and intention of better understanding oneself and one's reaction, and not in the service of gossip.

If you feel yourself in recurrent clashes or conflict with someone in the sangha, we encourage you to seek help and support. It is part of your responsibility as a community member.

## Power Differentials

Power differentials exist when there is the reality or the perception that a difference in influence or authority exists.

Some examples of power differential situations at the Zen Center:

- A female member feels that certain men treat her as unimportant/not valuable, and experiences this as possible sexism.
- A member comes to the Abbot with an idea. The Abbot decides it is not a good idea. The member feels that the Abbot is misusing their power or is not open to consideration of this idea because the member is not valued.
- There is a Sangha member who is in a position of authority, who acts in an authoritarian or self righteous manner making unilateral decisions. A Sangha member may experience difficulty in making their point of view known.
- A resident or member perceives that one person is more highly regarded or receives special attention from an authority figure. The privileges or inherent sense of entitlement that comes with being part

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

of the group “in power” are often taken for granted or are enacted without awareness.

The following are questions that might inspire thinking and exploration for each of us:

- Have you had an experience of feeling there was a power differential in the Sangha that has impacted you in a negative way?
- How have you observed power differentials operate at SWZC? Positively, neutrally or negatively?
- What is a positive experience you have had with the power differential at the Zen Center?
- If you allow yourself to bring awareness to any uncomfortable situation you have experienced or are experiencing currently, is there any power differential involved between you and any other Sangha member?
- Have you personally experienced racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, or prejudice based on cultural, religious or ethnic identity at SWZC?

## Confidentiality

Basic definition of confidentiality: a person receives another person’s information and holds it in confidence unless there is a risk of danger to that person or to someone else. There is an inherent trust or articulated understanding that the privacy of the information will be maintained.

We are in many community situations at SWZC where people share vulnerable information (Face-to-Face, council, atonement ceremonies, circles, staff meetings, board meetings and other contexts). Confidentiality in those contexts means treating what is shared with respect and holding the information safe.

Council is by definition a confidential setting. However, there are times when one person could say to another: “I was so moved by what you shared...would it be ok to talk further with you about it?” The other person might respond, “I would be fine with that.” Or they could say, “I don’t want to discuss this further.” There may be occasions in which confidentiality needs to be maintained for a given time before it can be shared. For example, a circle

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

may explore an issue, and while the discussion on it continues, they may choose not to open the topic to the larger community. When the circle's consensus is reached that they are ready to open the discussion, then confidentiality would be lifted. There is a necessary balance of transparency, function, and confidentiality which exists in all circle communications.

In Face-to-Face situations, teachers or senior students in Face-to-Face training may need to confer with other teachers when they become uneasy about something shared in Face-to-Face. In the case of senior students who are being trained in Face-to-Face, teachers may discuss as necessary an issue/person to make sure students are being properly guided and teachers-to-be can be supported in their learning. Zen teachers are not bound by formal confidentiality laws. Therefore, Face-to-Face is considered private but not necessarily confidential.

Guiding Questions:

- How do we hold other people's vulnerable sharing?
- Remember a time when you shared in confidence and that confidence was broken. What was that experience like for you, and what were the consequences?
- Remember a time when someone shared something with you and wanted it kept confidential. Again, what was that experience like for you, and what were the consequences?
- What has been your experience when you have felt able to trust someone with a vulnerable concern, when you felt deeply heard, and felt that the other would maintain confidentiality?
- Are there other examples that come up for you in thinking about confidentiality? It may be useful to explore them for yourself.

## Shadow Energies

Shadow energies are those aspects of ourselves we find unacceptable and therefore disown. These parts of ourselves are not conscious, nor is the process of disowning them, unless and until we start to be aware of them. They usually are marked by "heat" (intense emotional and physical energy).

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

A person may experience him/herself as on the moral high ground, coming from a place of superior righteousness. Another might disown their sexual proclivities such as homophobia. Perhaps another does not own their leadership skills and/or other gifts. Yet another might present him/herself as empathically concerned when they are in fact engaging in gossip or criticism. Some people who disown their anger manifest it passively aggressively. Shadow energies cause suffering to oneself and to others. Examples:

- A sangha member sees another member taking on a leadership role and feels critical of their always “taking over”. The shadow energy here might involve one’s unconscious desire for recognition they did not receive earlier in life; it might also stem from being shamed for being “too verbal” or “too bossy”.
- A resident member notices that another resident member is not sitting regularly in the zendo and says, “I’ll bet (s)he isn’t following the resident requirement.” The shadow energy here might be envy for someone breaking rules and getting away with it, as they historically were not allowed to do.
- In Face-to-Face meeting with a teacher, a person may perceive, accurately or not, that the teacher is being impatient with them. They may feel shamed and judged. Earlier in life, it may have been unacceptable to not know, to not be perfect or to not get it right away.
- A teacher finds him/herself attracted to a student or a self-defined heterosexual person may have sexual feelings for someone of the same gender. The shadow energy here might be the sense of unacceptability of such feelings. Appropriate behavior for a teacher in such a situation would be to acknowledge their feelings to themselves and to seek counsel and support from other teachers. In this way the person could make decisions on how to handle the situation without causing suffering to anyone. A person coming to awareness of sexual responses to another of the same gender might then get support to explore the meaning for them and to make thoughtful decisions on possible actions without harm to self or others.

Some guiding questions for consideration:

- Can you remember the situation(s) where you have felt “the heat”, a reaction to another’s behavior or to a situation at SWZC?

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

- What are the conscious feelings or thoughts that arise in that situation?
- What do you notice your consequent behavior to be?
- If you sit with your awareness of the situation and your reactions, thoughts and feelings, can you begin to touch into what that disowned part of you is?
- Can you allow yourself to be patient and self-accepting in this process ?

This work allows us to come face to face with the shadow and to reclaim it. In effect, it is a willingness to shed light onto dark, hidden aspects of ourselves. The process of discovery involves opening ourselves to vulnerability, deep honesty, self compassion and courage. As Zen students, we take on this work in the spirit of ending suffering for ourselves and all beings.

## Defensiveness

Defensiveness is an excessive response or over reaction to a real or perceived threat. Defensiveness is different than defending oneself or others.

To defend oneself or another may be an appropriate response to a situation. A person may correct misperceptions, clarify a situation or prevent/stop someone from abusive speech or behavior.

A part of our Zen practice is to listen deeply from the heart, to ourselves and to others. With this practice we increasingly may have less need to defend. We learn to acknowledge that which we may have difficulty in accepting about ourselves. In such listening, we also are committed to greater awareness of the suffering of the other.

Let's say for example that a sangha member confronts another member. She might say, "You never rinse your dirty dishes and put them in the dish rack. You always leave them in the sink." That statement might cause the recipient to react in a defensive way, refuting the whole statement. A non-defensive way to respond in that situation might be to say to the speaker, "When you describe my behavior in always and never terms, I find myself feeling defensive and not able to hear you. It would help me if you could just address this particular situation and my behavior as you see it. That said, you are right. I did not rinse my dishes. Thank for reminding me and I will pay attention in the future."

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Using the same example, without the “always and never”, here is a statement with two responses. “Fran, could you please rinse your dishes and put them in the rack?” First response might be “I WAS GOING TO.” Another response might be, “Thanks, I was going to, and thanks for the reminder”(with no denial or emotional charge).

Some guiding questions to ask yourself:

- Can you remember a recent incident where you felt defensive?
- As you remember it, can you access in your body the sensations you had?
- Can you access the stream of thoughts and judgments you had as well?
- Do you have any hunches about what might be being triggered in you?
- If you were to use the sentence, “It makes me feel...” what might you say?
  - “I feel like a child.” “I’m not good enough.” “I’m stupid.”

When one feels defensive, it is an opportunity to explore what the triggers are inside oneself. This may not be accomplished in the moment of the interaction, but may be an invitation to sit with this experience and open to new considerations of response in present time, not based on past events.

## Compartmentalization

We tend to wall off or compartmentalize certain aspects of our lives that feel too shameful or painful to carry in conscious awareness.

The consequences of compartmentalization over time can lead to various behaviors that increase suffering, such as: all addictions, emotional reactivity, difficulties with relationships and work, and so on.

Examples:

- If you grew up in a family where anger was unacceptable, you might avoid connection or contact with a person toward whom you feel unconsciously angry.
- If there is something in your past you experience as shameful, you might be afraid to share that with your teacher or other Sangha member for fear of displeasing them or alienating them. Many of us grew up in families where we learned to survive by pleasing others.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

## Spiritual Bypassing

Coined by John Welwood in his book *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*, spiritual bypassing refers to the practice of using spiritual ideas and concepts to avoid addressing unresolved emotional, psychological or developmental issues. It allows us to hide triggers and toxic patterns behind a spiritual gloss. And while it may create ostensible peace or harmony in the moment, it often leaves important issues unresolved and leads to further harm in the future.

Spiritual Bypassing alienates us from our feelings and our karma, distancing them from both ourselves and others. Some examples of spiritual bypassing include:

- Avoiding feelings of anger
- Belief in spiritual superiority as a way to hide from insecurities
- Promoting traumatic events as “learning experiences”
- Thinking that spiritual practices are always positive
- Unrealistic idealism
- Feelings of detachment
- Being stuck in spirituality while ignoring the present
- Forcing or manufacturing constant positivity or optimism
- Projecting your own negative feelings onto others
- Promoting the idea that just being positive solves all problems
- Thinking that you must “rise above” your emotions
- Denial and Repression

While spiritual bypassing is essentially a defense mechanism meant to keep us safe when certain issues seem too difficult to deal with, it ultimately allows those issues to grow stronger within us, causing more damage down the road. The phenomenon of awakening, or liberation, encourages us to “rise above” our karma instead of facing or penetrating it.

There are aspects of our culture at large that lend themselves to spiritual bypassing. Individualism and self-reliance are so highly valued in our society, it would make sense that one would believe they should find the fortitude to “get over” their issues and not let them out to burden anyone else. In addition, even many modern spiritual interpretations put heavy emphasis on positivity and “rising above” any negativity. When in fact, it is only by stepping *into* our conflicts, patterns and issues, that we can experience healing and transformation.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

# TRAUMA

SWZC honors Resmaa Menakem’s definition of trauma as “...a response to anything that [the body] experiences as too much, too soon or too fast.” Trauma stays in the body as unmetabolized energy and can have a deep influence on how we respond to and interact with our world. The practice of zazen can be a powerful tool for processing our trauma. And at SWZC we highly value also working with therapy and trauma professionals in the pursuit of healing.

Trauma comes from exposure to life endangering stressors, such as natural disasters, war, sexual assault, physical abuse, domestic violence, serious accidents and pandemics. Exposure to traumatic stress can occur when we: directly experience or witness a traumatic event; learn that the event happened to a close family member or friend; have repeated extreme exposure to details of trauma, such as in the context of work (e.g.: ER doctors, nurses, journalists, therapists, humanitarians). When we are traumatized, we may experience: intrusive thoughts and images about the traumatic event; avoidance of thoughts, feelings, people and places that remind us of the event; alternating states of hyperarousal and hypoarousal, which may present as both emotional reactivity and numbing.

Approximately 90% of the world’s population will be exposed to at least some type of traumatic event in their lifetime. Anywhere from 8%-30% of us will develop debilitating symptoms of traumatic stress in the aftermath of such exposure, depending on our particular physiology and history of life experiences. It is estimated that at any given time an estimated 8% of Americans—24.4 million people (a number that is equal to the total population of Texas)—will meet criteria for the clinical diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It is important to remember that, “Trauma is not just an individual tragedy but deeply interconnected to larger systems of domination that shape the world” (Treleaven, 2018). In other words, individuals are increasingly likely to have a history of trauma if they belong to a group that is systemically targeted for oppression. For example, members of the BIPOC and LGBTQIA communities, as well as women and children, are more likely to be targeted for interpersonal violence and to have histories of traumatic stress.

While mindfulness and meditation can help people heal from trauma these practices can also be potentially re-traumatizing. Whenever we are inviting people to pay close attention to their internal worlds, we are potentially inviting them into contact with traumatic stimuli—thoughts, sensations and

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

feelings--that may relate to a traumatic event. As Pat Ogden, the founder of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy noted, “Unrestricted mindfulness towards any and all elements can cultivate disturbing intrusion and overwhelming arousal for people with PTSD, and thus is often met with dismay, judgment, self-criticism and further dysregulation”.

Our job as students and teachers of Zen is to recognize the four R’s of trauma-informed mindfulness and meditation:

1. Realizing the pervasive impact of trauma
2. Recognizing the signs/symptoms of trauma
3. Responding skillfully to these symptoms
4. Avoiding Retraumatization

It follows that we must continually strive to educate ourselves about trauma-informed mindfulness practices. A good resource for doing this is the book *Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* by David Treleaven. Finally, it is important to highlight that in order to avoid re-traumatization, students must experience a sense of choice and control in their mindfulness/meditation practice. More specifically, students should be educated that if they are feeling triggered during meditation practice (e.g.: overwhelmed by intrusive images; experiencing unbearable states of hyperarousal or hypoarousal), they should feel free to respond to this by discontinuing what they are doing and shifting their focus of attention until they are ready to rejoin the practice. Students should also be encouraged to talk with teachers about how they can learn to recognize and work with states of hyperarousal and hypoarousal on the cushion (e.g.: using unobtrusive breath practices that help rebalance the nervous system). Finally, it should be recognized that meditation alone is rarely a cure on its own for profound traumatization and that students should be encouraged to simultaneously seek trauma-informed psychotherapy elsewhere if needed.

## Appendix B. Guidelines For Speaking With Others

### Speaking Through Conflict

Talking through conflict is primarily an exercise in self-reflection. No matter how well the conversation begins, you must stay in charge of yourself, your purpose, and your emotional energy. The suggested reflections may prove very valuable whether or not the conversation takes place. **Conflict discussion facilitators may want to use these as a guide.**

Reflect on the following:

1. What's the purpose for the conversation?
2. What do you hope to accomplish?
3. What would be a satisfactory outcome?
4. What buttons of yours are being pushed?
5. Is a personal history being triggered?
6. What are your needs and fears?
7. How have you contributed to the problem?
8. What solutions would you offer?
9. Are you avoiding this conversation? Why?
10. If so, do you need support in taking this step?

### Guidelines for Dialogue

1. Consider framing the other as a partner in the process, not an adversary.
2. Resolve that the experience together will be met with openness and compassion.
3. Listen from the heart.
4. Come from a place of not-knowing. Ask questions; be curious. Cultivate a willingness to go beyond what is "known" and encounter with genuine interest what arises in the here and now.
5. Suspend judgment. Notice reactions and judgments of others and ourselves, and attempt to let them go.
6. Avoid gossip and protect the confidentiality of the exchange.

7. Don't assume that the other can see things from your side. Be clear and thorough in explaining your point of view.
8. Notice any feelings of defensiveness that arise. Acknowledge these feelings in the exchange.
9. Speak from experience. Share your confusion and clarity; look to your own experience rather than your opinion. Avoid leaning on the words of experts and authorities.
10. Put trust in the process.
11. Refrain from the urge to "fix" or give advice. See and reflect the perfection of each person's situation and condition just as it is.
12. Remember that all are interconnected. Everything that arises is some aspect of the Truth. Bernie Glassman always used to emphasize that every person carries one piece of the whole Truth.
13. Acknowledgement does not imply agreement. It shows that you are listening to what the other person is saying.

## Suggestions for How to Begin

If you have a conflict to address, approach the person when you are in a responsive (not a reactive) state and when you sense that they might be receptive to the conversation. At this point, set a time to talk. Examples of how you might open dialogue:

- "I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work/live together more harmoniously."
- "I'm uncomfortable with something that just happened. Do you have time to talk?" If they agree to talk, be sure to follow up with them.
- "I need your help with something. Can we talk about it?"
- "I think we have different perceptions about \_\_\_\_\_. I'd like to hear your point of view."

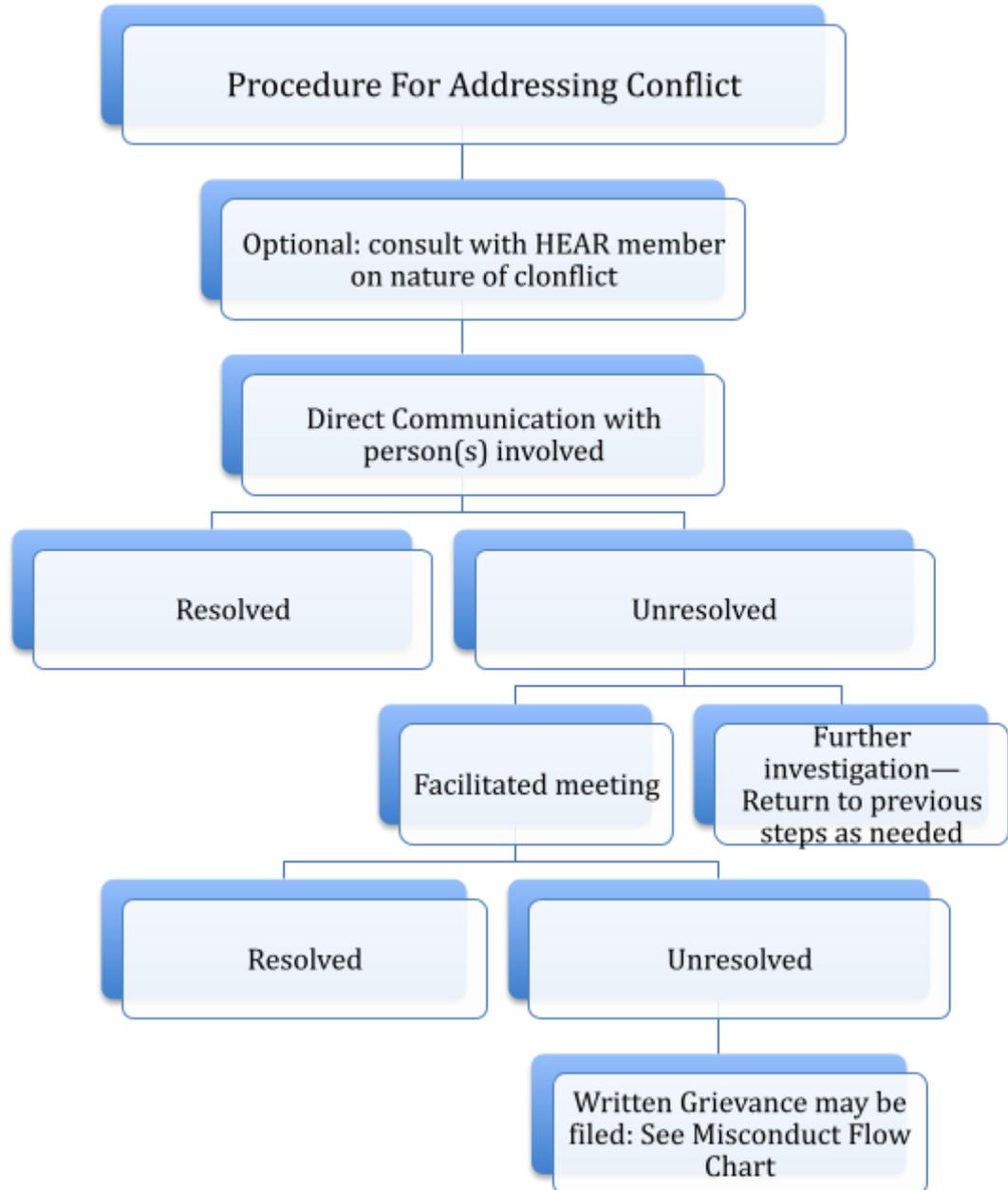
If direct communication around a conflict leads to a satisfactory resolution for both parties, good work! But if agreement cannot be reached, refer to step two

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

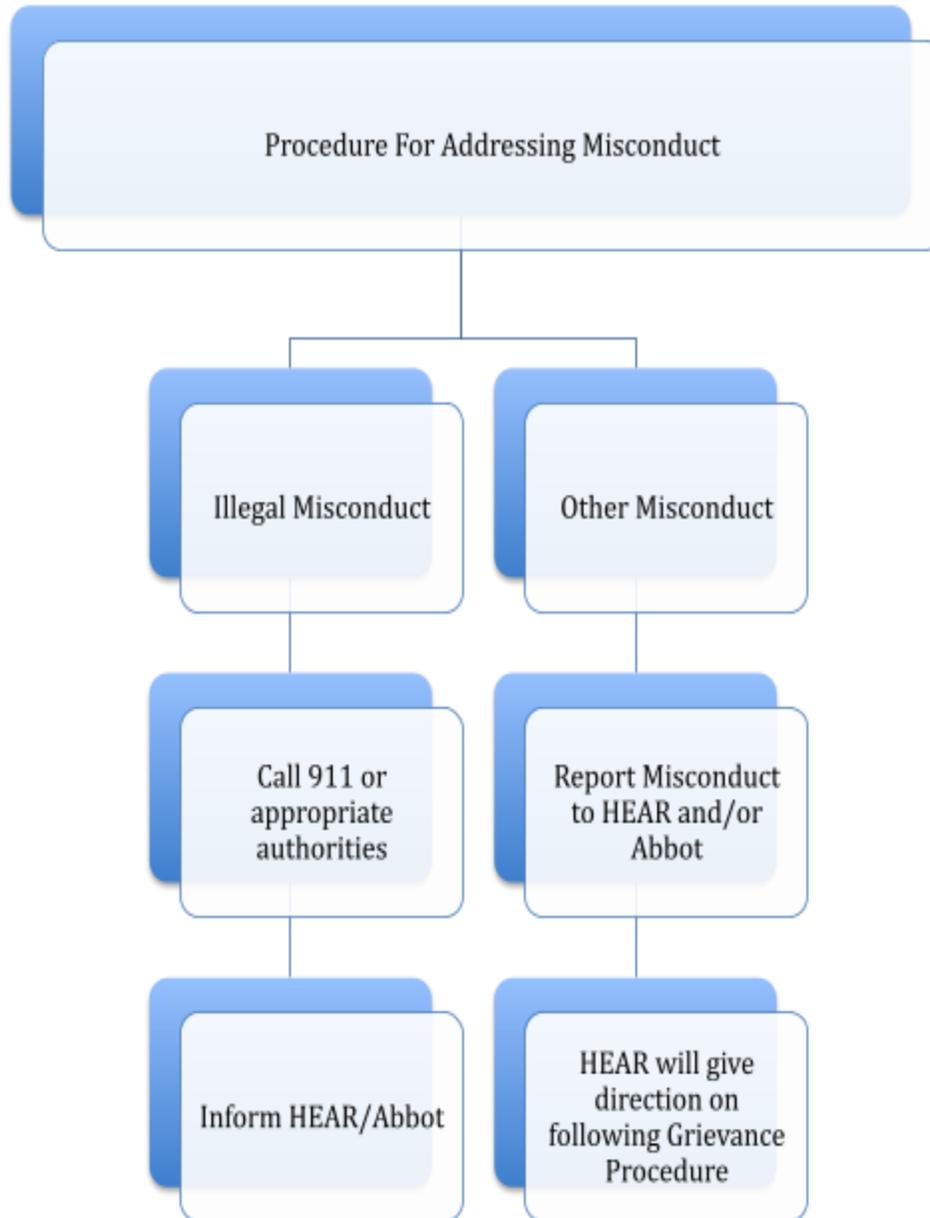
of the *2-Step Conflict Resolution* section above.

## Appendix C. Procedure Flowcharts

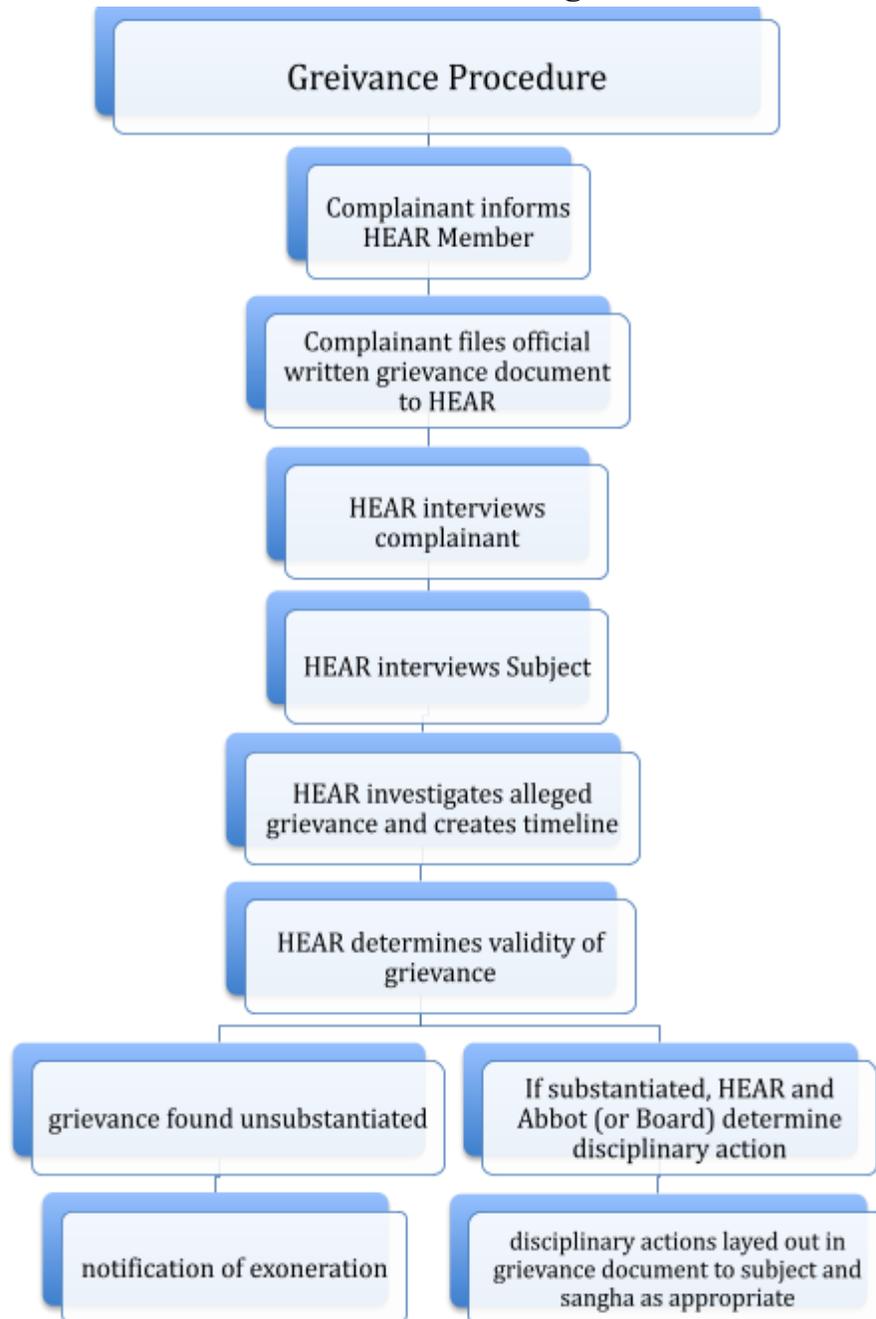
### Procedure for Addressing Conflict



## Procedure for Addressing Misconduct



## Procedure for Addressing Grievances



## Appendix D. Resources For Communication And Grievance Procedure

### **Books**

Barstow, Cedar. 2005. Right Use of Power. Boulder, CO: Many Realms Publications.

Edelstein, Scott. 2011. Sex and the Spiritual Teacher. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Hoertdoefer, P. and F. Muir, eds. The Safe Congregation Handbook: Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in Our Faith Communities. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association.

Patterson, K., et al. 2002. Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Rutter, Peter. 1989. Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power – Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others – Betray Women’s Trust. Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.

Rutter, Peter. 1996. Sex, Power, and Boundaries: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Harassment. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Senauke, Alan, ed. 1998. Safe Harbor: Guidelines, Process and Resources for Ethics and Right Conduct in Buddhist Communities. Berkeley, CA: Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

### **Websites**

Crucial conversations: [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)

Faith Trust Institute: [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

Right Use of Power Institute: [www.rightuseofpower.org](http://www.rightuseofpower.org)

Safe Harbor: [www.clearviewproject.org](http://www.clearviewproject.org)

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

# Appendix E: Changing Teachers within the White Plum Asanga

## Recommended Procedure for Senior Students Changing Teachers Within the White Plum

When a senior student (shuso/head trainee or above), or an ordained priest makes a request to change teachers within the White Plum, the first and simplest procedure is for the teachers involved to speak with each other. Ideally, the first teacher would advise the second on the student's training to that point, state what needs to be done to appropriately end the relationship, (if this is still outstanding), and give their blessing.

Ideally, the departing student would take an honorable leave from the first teacher by requesting such a leave and performing any leave-taking ritual established by the teacher or Center. The new teacher will consider his or her own terms for accepting the new student for a trial period.

It would be helpful for the student to have timelines and guidelines for the transition and for establishing a relationship with the new teacher and Sangha. Some thought should be given as to how the student is integrated or presented to the new Sangha as well as how the student is spoken of by the former teacher to the Sangha they are leaving.

If there is some ill-will or difficulty between the student and the first teacher, efforts should be made to resolve it through the use of a facilitator or some form of forgiveness practice. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to involve their senior students, if any, to help work through the issues. It is recommended that the first teacher be invited to subsequent empowerment services conducted by the second teacher. Both the first and second teacher involved are encouraged to work together for the student's benefit.

NB: This recommendation is intended for senior students, and for permanent changes of status, not for those who travel, explore, and follow the peripatetic life-style of ancient monks or contemporary transients.

Adopted by WPA.

## **Appendix F: GUIDELINES FOR MEMBER-SENIOR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

*“In situations where power dynamics are at play, there’s no such thing as mutual consent.”*

- Joan Hogetsu Hoebrechts, Roshi (Buddhist Healthy Boundaries Institute)

Per the Sangha Sutra, “seniors” should treat all “members” (as defined in SS\*) as practitioners and valuable members of the sangha, and engaging in a sexual or romantic relationship is **strongly discouraged**. The first step when mutual feelings arise is for the senior to remember that this kind of relationship poses many risks to their integrity, the reputation of the organization, and the sense of safety in the sangha for the member. The senior carries the responsibility to assess whether the situation is so remarkable that it warrants taking these risks.

The following is a suggested set of guidelines to be considered by the senior, the member, the Leadership Circle, the Board of Directors, and any other parties who can bear witness and offer support to the process. These suggestions are fluid, and have not necessarily been proven to prevent harm in the case of a member-senior relationship. But in extraordinary circumstances, these guidelines can offer a place to start.

### **PHASE 1**

As soon as sexual or romantic feelings are communicated by or to either party, the senior should alert the Leadership Circle immediately. The circle will then offer encouragement towards working through the feelings before acting on them. At this point, there should be no teacher-student relationship at all between the two parties.

If, after serious consideration and meetings between the senior, member and leadership circle, the parties still want to pursue a romantic relationship, the Board should be notified that the Leadership Circle is beginning a monitored process to help guide the situation. At this point, if the member is a resident, they **may** be asked to find a different sangha with which to continue their spiritual practice.

### **PHASE 2**

Once the Leadership Circle has decided to proceed with nurturing the relationship, and the Board has been notified, the Leadership **may** decide to recommend that the two parties do not spend any time alone together. This

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

will last as long as the circle deems fit. During this time, both parties are required to study materials around power abuse and healthy boundaries:

- Sex In The Forbidden Zone
- Sex and The Spiritual Teacher
- Student And Teacher, A Zen Perspective (by Nicolee Jikyo McMahan Roshi)
- Something's Not Right
- Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics
- A Sacred Trust: Boundary Issues for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers

The parties can spend time together in groups and get to know each other, but may be asked to avoid being alone together. It is important that both parties check in with the Leadership Circle, and any other trusted sources of expertise and guidance, at regular intervals during this phase to share about their experience.

### PHASE 3

At the Leadership Circle's discretion, the parties may begin to spend time alone together, without engaging in romantic or sexual activity. During this time, the parties are encouraged to engage in serious discussions and even in formal council practice, either alone or with others, to open up fully about the feelings and challenges being faced in the process. The parties are also strongly encouraged to go to joint therapy sessions with a trusted therapist, to discuss all the feelings and potential risks and dangers presented by the situation. It is still required to meet regularly with the Leadership Circle and other trusted guides to report on the process and receive feedback.

### PHASE 4

At the Leadership Circle's discretion, after all phases of the process have been practiced, monitored and considered, the parties may be given permission to enter into a romantic/sexual relationship. At this point, the Board should be notified and there should be serious consideration about if and how to notify the residents, members, extended sangha and/or affiliated sanghas and organizations.

To be clear, there is precedent for this process between a member and a senior at SWZC, and it still resulted in harm to the member and a lot of stress for the organization. **The only proven way to avoid this kind of harm to the sangha is to abstain from member-senior romantic relationships.** But, we acknowledge that love and attraction are inexorable forces that arise in community and cannot be completely avoided. May we express love and friendship without clinging, and engage them for the benefit of all beings.

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents

Click [HERE](#) to return to the Table of Contents