CRESTONE MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER – DHARMA SANGHA

Ethics Guidelines

These guidelines exist to make explicit what we try to practice every day: that everyone who comes to Crestone Mountain Zen Center – as a guest, a resident, a student, or a practitioner – can trust that they will be treated with dignity, honesty, and care.

I. Our Intention

Crestone Mountain Zen Center is a place of Zen practice in the Shunryu Suzuki–Baker Roshi lineage. Our work is to support genuine transformation – individual and collective – and to preserve and transmit the teachings of wisdom and compassion to future generations. We are open to everyone who comes in a spirit of sincere inquiry, and we welcome people of all backgrounds, ages, identities, and life situations.

Our ethical orientation is inseparable from our practice. These guidelines are not a set of rules imposed from outside – they are an attempt to articulate the values that are already at work in how we try to live and practice together. They are a living document, tested in practice, reflected on in conversation, and revised as our understanding deepens.

II. Our Foundational Principles

Our ethics are grounded in the Buddhist precepts and in the practice of wisdom and compassion. This means:

- A fundamental orientation toward non-harm – toward doing good and living in a way that considers the wellbeing of all beings.
- The commitment not to harm others, not to take what has not been given, not to misuse sexuality, not to deceive or mislead, and not to misuse substances that cloud the mind.
- The understanding that these principles are not abstract ideals but are practiced in the texture of ordinary life – in how we speak, how we listen, how we make decisions, and how we treat one another.

For those living at the center, these principles are given more specific form in our Shingi – the house guidelines that support communal life – and in the other agreements that shape how we live and work together.

III. How We Live Together

Our shared life at CMZC is itself a field of practice. Everyone who comes here – whether for a weekend retreat or a years-long residency – contributes to the quality of that field.

Participation and Schedule

Guests and residents participate in the daily schedule according to their program. We ask everyone to be punctual, to maintain stillness and respect in the zendo (plain clothing, no perfume or strong scent), and to be present to the practice context of each part of the day.

Silence and Speech

We practice silence between the evening meditation and breakfast. During work periods, we reduce conversation to what is necessary. We practice speaking clearly, honestly, and without harm – avoiding gossip, ungrounded accusation, and speech that creates unnecessary confusion or division.

Clarity of Mind

Alcohol, cannabis, and illegal substances are not permitted at the center. Tobacco use is permitted only in designated areas. Prescription medications are of course entirely your own concern – we simply ask that their use not impair participation in shared practice.

Care for the Place

We treat buildings, equipment, and the land with respect – leaving work areas clean, using resources carefully, and attending to the physical environment as part of our practice. Personal vehicles and shared vehicles are used responsibly and with awareness of our remote location.

Clothing and Hygiene

We dress in a way that supports the practice environment – covering shoulders and upper legs – and attend to personal hygiene and the cleanliness of our rooms.

IV. Responsibility, Power, and Relationships

Everyone who lives at or takes responsibility for CMZC represents the Dharma Sangha and shares in creating a safe, supportive practice environment. This is especially important where there are differences of role, seniority, or institutional position.

Using one's position – as teacher, staff member, or senior practitioner – to satisfy personal emotional, sexual, economic, or social interests at another's expense is a clear violation of these guidelines and will be treated as such.

Teacher–Student Relationships

The teacher–student relationship in Zen carries particular intimacy and requires particular responsibility. Teachers at CMZC are committed to holding this relationship in a way that serves the student's practice – not their own needs. Dokusan and practice conversations are held in a spirit of genuine care and confidentiality. No romantic or sexual relationship between a teacher and a student in active training is appropriate.

Relationships Between Residents

We ask residents not to enter into romantic or sexual relationships with guests. Where relationships develop between long-term practitioners or members of the residential community, we expect transparency with the community and the maintenance of each person's independent practice.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

We meet every person who comes here with openness and genuine interest, regardless of age, gender, gender identity, physical or mental constitution, disability, chronic illness, ethnic background, language, culture, social or economic status, educational background, sexual orientation, family situation, or religious and philosophical conviction. We are aware that these differences exist between us and that attending to them is part of our practice.

Institutional Accountability

For critical self-reflection among the teachers and the possibility of correction in cases of blind spots, the Dharma Sangha has an Abbot's Council – a group of senior practitioners and teachers who provide an independent perspective on institutional matters and can raise concerns about leadership. This is part of how we try to build accountability into the structure of the organization itself, not merely into individual goodwill.

V. Confidentiality and Privacy

- We treat all personal information – biographical details, the content of individual conversations, practice interviews, supervision, and conflict processes – as confidential. We do not share this information with third parties without your explicit consent, except where we are legally required to do so or where there is an acute risk of serious harm.
- In group settings – sesshin, seminars, the residential community – a shared agreement applies: personal experiences and shared content stay within the context in which they were shared and are not carried outside in identifiable form.
- Access to contact and registration information is limited to those who need it for their specific role. All personal data is handled carefully, purposefully, and in accordance with our separate Privacy Policy.

- When we need to address a situation or work through a conflict, we will be clear about who is involved in the process and what information is being shared.

VI. Information and Transparency

We make every effort to communicate clearly and honestly about what we offer and how we work. This includes:

- The nature and scope of programs and offerings – seminars, guest stays, residential programs – and their possible effects on body, mind, and daily life.
- Financial conditions: costs, payment options, and any available reduced-fee arrangements.
- The limits of what we are able to offer and when we would refer someone to other teachers, colleagues, or external professionals.

VII. When Something Is Wrong

Everyone who comes to CMZC has the right to be taken seriously when something feels wrong, inappropriate, or boundary-crossing. You have the right to ask questions, offer feedback, and raise concerns in a spirit of respect – and to have those concerns received in the same spirit.

This process is available to everyone at CMZC, regardless of role or length of stay. We ask everyone who comes here to read our conflict and concern process and to know that the resources described there are not a last resort. They are part of the practice.

What This Process Is For

Our concern process exists to address specific conduct – actions, communications, or patterns of behavior that affected a person's safety, dignity, or standing in the community. It is not a vehicle for doctrinal disagreement, dissatisfaction with how the center is run, or general unhappiness with decisions made by those in authority. If you are uncertain whether what you are experiencing falls within scope, our Community Resource Person is a good first conversation.

Where to Start

Where it feels right, concerns can first be raised directly with the person involved. Where that is not possible or appropriate, the following people are available:

- Our Community Resource Person – a senior sangha member trained in mediation and facilitation, independent of the center's daily leadership, and available for informal conversation, support, and facilitated dialogue. Reaching out to her does not trigger any formal process.

- The director and abbot are available for concerns about staff members, program conditions, or institutional matters.
- For concerns about the abbot, or in situations where the ordinary chain of address does not feel safe, an External Resource Person – a senior Dharma teacher from entirely outside the Dharma Sangha – is available as a structurally independent contact.

In addition, all practitioners have the option of contacting the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA) – the collegial association of which CMZC is a member – which maintains a process for receiving and referring concerns about member teachers and centers.

Violations of These Guidelines

We take violations of these guidelines seriously. Our first aim is always clarity and learning in the spirit of practice. Where this is not sufficient, or where questions of safety are involved, CMZC will take appropriate measures – up to and including ending a stay or residency, as described in our internal exclusion process.

VIII. Our Understanding of Institutional Responsibility

As the Dharma Sangha, we understand ourselves as an organization that is aware of its responsibility in personal, spiritual, and social terms. These guidelines are not a fixed document – they are tested in practice, reflected on in conversation, and developed further as needed.

We do not claim to have this entirely right. What we can claim is that we are trying – honestly and carefully – to create a place where mindfulness, compassion, and accountability are practiced at every level: personal, communal, and institutional.