CRESTONE MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER – DHARMA SANGHA

When Conflict Arises

A Process for Addressing Difficulty in Community Life

Conflict is not the opposite of harmony. It is one of the ways harmony is found – when it is met honestly, with care, and with the right kind of support. This document describes how Crestone Mountain Zen Center approaches situations of interpersonal difficulty, formal concern, and – when necessary – complaints involving people in positions of institutional authority.

This process is available to everyone at CMZC. We ask everyone who comes here to read this document on arrival and to return to it when something difficult arises. The resources described here are not a last resort. They are part of the practice.

I. The Spirit of This Process

When conflict arises, our first question is always: what does this situation call from me? Most difficulties that arise at CMZC should be met in direct conversation – in the ordinary courage of saying something true to someone's face, in the willingness to hear feedback without collapsing or defending. For residents, this is the living spirit of the Approachability Agreement.

This document describes what is available when direct conversation is not enough – when the difficulty is too entrenched, or involves a dynamic of power or institutional position that makes ordinary resolution difficult. The tracks described here are the institutional complement to that spirit. Reaching for this process is not a failure of practice. It is practice continuing by other means.

This 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, Amy Robertson is a good first conversation.

This process is built on several commitments:

- That every person at CMZC, regardless of role or seniority, has the right to be heard when something is wrong.
- That not every difficulty is the same kind of thing, and different situations call for different responses.
- That the appropriate path depends partly on the nature of the concern and partly on the power relationship between the people involved.
- That no one should be asked to file a concern with the person their concern is about.
- That resolution is the aim – not record-keeping, not punishment, and not the protection of any individual or role.

II. The People You Can Turn To

CMZC has identified specific people for specific functions in the conflict process. Knowing who they are before something difficult happens is part of the preparation.

Amy Robertson – Community Resource Person

Amy Robertson is a senior sangha member, trained psychologist, and supervisor who does not live at the center and holds no operational role within it. She is perceived as fair by residents, staff, and teachers alike. Amy lives approximately three hours from CMZC and is willing to come on-site when in-person support or mediation is needed.

Amy is the primary internal resource for facilitated conversations, informal mediation, and support when a resident does not feel ready or able to address something directly. She can be contacted by any resident, staff member, or teacher. Contacting Amy does not automatically trigger a formal process – she may simply listen, help clarify what is happening, and support the person in deciding how to proceed.

Amy is also available well before things become difficult. If you are trying to live the Approachability Agreement and are not sure how – if you want to give someone feedback but don't know how to begin, or if you have received feedback that is hard to hold – Amy can help you think it through. This is as much within her remit as anything described in the tracks below.

Contact: amy.robertson@comcast.net

Ravi Welch – Sangha Psychologist

Ravi Welch is the sangha's designated psychologist, available to offer emotional support and psychological containment to residents and staff when conflict, difficulty, or distress arises. Ravi's role is not to adjudicate or mediate, but to support the person – to help them find steadiness, process what they are experiencing, and decide how they want to proceed.

Contacting Ravi is always confidential and does not initiate any institutional process. Any resident or staff member may reach out at any time.

Contact: raviwelch@web.de

External Resource Person – Furyu Nancy Schroeder

Furyu Nancy Schroeder is a senior Dharma teacher and former Abbot of Green Gulch Farm - unaffiliated with the Dharma Sangha. Fu holds no role within CMZC and stands in no relationship of loyalty or lineage to the abbot. This structural independence is essential: Fu is a trustworthy as a resource when concerns cannot safely travel through internal channels.

The External Resource Person may be contacted directly and confidentially by any member of the community – without that contact being reported internally unless the person consents. They are particularly appropriate as a first contact when the concern involves a person in a position of institutional authority, or when the person simply needs to speak with someone outside the Dharma Sangha before deciding how to proceed. The External Resource Person can help think through options and – with the person's consent – may communicate concerns to CMZC leadership, facilitate next steps, or support a referral to the SZBA.

This role is especially important for concerns involving the abbot. Because the abbot's lineage relationships – with her teacher, with senior sangha members – create unavoidable proximity to anyone deeply embedded in the Dharma Sangha world, the External Resource Person must be someone genuinely outside that world. Amy Robertson, though trusted and fair, is a Dharma Sangha member and therefore not the primary contact for concerns about the abbot.

Contact: furyu.schroeder@sfzc.org

Tatsudo Nicole Baden Roshi – Abbot

The abbot holds ultimate responsibility for the health of community life at CMZC. Residents and staff may always bring concerns directly to the abbot, and are encouraged to do so when a concern involves a senior staff member, a resident teacher, or any situation that feels too significant for the tracks below.

When a concern involves the abbot herself, the appropriate first contact is the External Resource Person. The abbot does not adjudicate concerns about her own conduct. See Section V below.

Contact: nicole@nicolebaden.com

III. The Four Tracks

Not every difficulty is the same kind of thing. The track that applies depends on the nature of the situation and the relationship between the people involved. These tracks are not a hierarchy to move through sequentially – you enter at the level appropriate to your situation.

Track 1 – Interpersonal Resolution

Between peers – the institution is not yet a party

Most friction between people living in close community belongs here. Two residents disagree about how something is done. A misunderstanding creates distance. Someone's way of being in the space is difficult for another. These are real – and they are primarily between the people involved, not between those people and the institution.

The right first step is almost always a direct conversation – honest, specific, grounded in the skills of right speech and non-violent communication. This is not a small thing. It takes real courage and real skill. If you are not sure how to begin, speak with Amy Robertson or Ravi Welch first. Either can help you prepare.

What the institution does:

- Holds the space. Does not intervene unless asked.
- Amy Robertson is available as a facilitator if both parties agree they would benefit from support.
- No record is created unless the situation escalates.

This track is not appropriate when:

- There is a significant power difference between the parties.
- The concern involves potential harm or ethical violation.
- Previous direct attempts have failed and the situation has not resolved.

Track 2 – Informal Concern

Something needs to be named – accountability without permanent record

Sometimes a situation has moved beyond what two people can resolve alone, but has not yet reached the point of a formal complaint. A pattern is forming. Something was said or done that crossed a line. A direct conversation was attempted and did not go well. Someone is not sure what category their concern falls into, but knows it needs to be heard by someone with institutional standing.

At this level, the person with the concern speaks with Amy Robertson. Amy hears the concern, documents it minimally (date, parties involved, nature of the concern), and discusses with the person what response – if any – they want. Amy may speak with the other party if appropriate and agreed. Amy informs the director or abbot that a concern has been heard, without necessarily sharing details, unless the person consents.

What happens:

- Concern is heard and acknowledged. The person feels genuinely received.
- Minimal documentation: date, parties, general nature. Not a formal record.
- Amy follows up within two weeks to check whether the situation has changed.
- The person retains agency: they decide whether to escalate, wait, or consider it addressed.

If the concern involves Amy Robertson herself:
Contact the External Resource Person directly, or the abbot.

Track 3 – Formal Complaint

A written record is created and a defined process is triggered

A formal complaint is appropriate when the situation is serious enough to require a documented institutional response: when harm has occurred or is ongoing, when previous tracks have not resolved the situation, when there is a pattern that needs to be

on record, or when the person believes that institutional accountability – not just resolution – is necessary.

How to file:
A formal complaint is submitted in writing to Amy Robertson, who passes it to the director and abbot (or, if the complaint involves either of them, to the External Resource Person). The complaint should describe: what happened, when, who was involved, and what response the person is seeking. Amy can help draft this if needed.

What follows:

- Written acknowledgment within five working days.
- A meeting between the director or abbot and the person who filed, within ten working days.
- The person complained about is informed and given an opportunity to respond in writing.
- A written response stating what action will be taken, within a further ten working days.
- The complaint and response are kept on file, held by the director, with access according to privacy principles.
- The person who filed may request that Amy Robertson be present at any meeting in this process.

Right to respond:
The person who filed may respond in writing to any institutional decision within ten working days of receiving it. That response becomes part of the file.

Track 4 – Power-Asymmetric Concerns

When the concern involves someone with greater institutional authority

This track exists because the standard paths – speak to the director, speak to the abbot – are not always available to the person with a concern. If the difficulty is with the director, bringing it to the director is not possible. If it involves the abbot, normal internal paths may feel closed. This is not a failure of the community. It is a structural reality that every honest institution must name and address explicitly.

Concern involving a senior staff member or resident teacher:
The first line of contact is the abbot, if that feels trustworthy. The abbot has full authority to hear this concern, take action, and follow up. If bringing it to the abbot does not feel possible or safe – for whatever reason – contact Amy Robertson or the External

Resource Person first. Either can support you in deciding how to proceed and, with your consent, can communicate the concern to the abbot.

Concern involving the director:
Contact the abbot directly. If you do not feel comfortable contacting the abbot, contact Amy Robertson or the External Resource Person. Either can receive the concern, support the person in deciding how to proceed, and – with consent – communicate it to the abbot or determine appropriate next steps.

Concern involving the abbot:
Contact the External Resource Person as the first step. The essential quality of this role is structural independence: the External Resource Person is not part of the Dharma Sangha, holds no relationship of loyalty or lineage to the abbot, and is not subordinate to her in any way. This independence – not simply goodwill or fairness – is what makes this path credible. The External Resource Person can receive the concern fully, support the person in thinking through options, and – with the person's consent – determine appropriate next steps, which may include a referral to the SZBA.

Amy Robertson may also be approached for emotional support and containment in this scenario, together with Ravi Welch. However, because Amy is a senior sangha member – and therefore not structurally independent of the abbot's lineage relationships – she is not the primary contact for concerns about the abbot herself. The External Resource Person is.

In all cases in this track:

- The person with the concern is not asked to confront the more powerful person directly before they are ready.
- Retaliation of any kind against someone who has raised a concern is a serious violation and will be treated as such.
- The concern may be filed formally (Track 3) at any point.

IV. At a Glance

Track	When to use	First contact	Record created?
1 – Interpersonal	Friction between peers; misunderstandings; ordinary difficulty	The other person directly; Amy if support needed	No
2 – Informal Concern	Pattern forming; direct attempt failed; needs to be named	Amy Robertson	Minimal; not permanent
3 – Formal Complaint	Harm occurred; pattern on record; institutional response needed	Amy Robertson (to director / abbot)	Yes – formal file
4 – Power Asymmetry	Concern involves staff, director, teacher, or abbot	Abbot / Amy Robertson / External Resource Person (see section V)	Depends on chosen track

V. Concerns Involving People in Authority – Full Path

Because this path is the most structurally sensitive, we describe it here in full, across the different scenarios.

Concern about a senior staff member or resident teacher

Bring it to the abbot directly. The abbot has full authority to hear this concern, take action, and follow up. If bringing it to the abbot does not feel possible or safe – for whatever reason – contact Amy Robertson or the External Resource Person first. Either can support you in deciding how to proceed and, with your consent, can communicate the concern to the abbot.

Concern about the director

The director is responsible to the abbot. Contact the abbot directly. If you do not feel comfortable contacting the abbot, contact Amy Robertson or the External Resource Person. Either can hear the concern and, with your consent, determine how to bring it forward.

Concern about the abbot

Contact the External Resource Person as a first step. What matters here is not simply that this person is fair-minded – it is that they are genuinely structurally independent. The abbot's lineage relationships, including those with her teacher and with senior sangha members, mean that anyone embedded in the Dharma Sangha world carries an unavoidable proximity to her. The External Resource Person does not. They can receive the concern fully, support you in thinking through what you need, and – with your consent – determine appropriate next steps. These may include:

- A facilitated conversation between you and the abbot, with the External Resource Person present.
- Referral to the SZBA's ethics and grievance process.
- Support in filing a formal complaint through Track 3, with the External Resource Person as the receiving party rather than Amy.

Amy Robertson and Ravi Welch are available for emotional support and containment in this scenario. The abbot does not adjudicate concerns about her own conduct. If the abbot becomes aware that a concern about her has been brought to the External Resource Person, she will not seek to find out who filed or what was said unless the person has consented to that contact.

VI. What This Document Does Not Cover

This process addresses interpersonal conflict and institutional concerns. It is separate from – and does not replace – the process for exclusion from residency, which is described in the document "When Membership Must End."

Situations involving immediate safety risk, violence, sexual misconduct, or other serious ethical violations may bypass this process entirely and move directly to the director and abbot, or – if those persons are involved – to the External Resource Person and the SZBA. These situations are described in detail in the exclusion document under "Immediate Exclusion."

Quick Reference

Who do I contact?

- **Emotional support and containment:** Ravi Welch (always confidential)
- **Facilitated conversation or informal mediation:** Amy Robertson
- **Informal concern (Track 2):** Amy Robertson
- **Formal complaint (Track 3):** Amy Robertson → director / abbot
- **Concern about senior staff or resident teacher:** Abbot – or Amy Robertson – or External Resource Person
- **Concern about the director:** Abbot – or Amy Robertson – or External Resource Person
- **Concern about the abbot:** External Resource Person (primary) – or Amy Robertson for support
- **Concern you cannot bring within the Dharma Sangha:** External Resource Person

Contact details

Amy Robertson: amy.robertson@comcast.net

Ravi Welch: raviwelch@web.de

External Resource Person: furyu.schroeder@sfzc.org

Abbot: nicole@nicolebaden.com