

Ethics and Grievance Policy

Facing the Mountain Zen Group | v2026-02-24

(Adapted from our prior sangha policy, with gratitude and structural influence from Berkeley Zen Center's Ethics Guidelines.)

1. Ethical Ground and Intention

“To avoid all harm, to cultivate good, and to purify the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddhas.” — *The Dhammapada*

The practice of Zen is as much about our relationships as about deep inward reflection—simple human meeting simple human. The Bodhisattva Precepts guide us along the path of whole speech, kind conduct, and meaningful relationships. Practice is the basis for cultivating trust, safety, mutual respect, and true communication; the sangha jewel is formed of such relationships. We seek to nurture an atmosphere where people can practice without fear or distraction.

We acknowledge that difficulties may arise among members related to power differentials. Differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality/sexual orientation, and physical disability require particular awareness and sensitivity. As a sangha, we strive to embody the precepts in coping with conflicts and ethical issues.

We also recognize an interfaith convergence of ethical practice:

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (The Bible)
- “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.” (560 BCE, From the Udanavarga 5:18)
- Love your neighbor as yourself. (1300 BCE, Leviticus 19:18)
- Whatever is disagreeable to yourself, do not do unto others. (600 BCE, Shast-na-shayast 13:29)

2. Scope

This policy applies to directors, officers, teachers, practice leaders, officers of the board, event directors, volunteers, and community members while participating in Corporation activities, communications, and spaces.

3. Harmony, Ethics, and Reconciliation Support

Because a small sangha benefits from timely consultation, the Board may establish a **Harmony, Ethics, and Reconciliation support function** (the “HEAR function”). In our early stage, this may be:

- the **Vice Chair + one additional board-appointed person**, or
- a small **committee of 2-3** appointed annually.

Purpose: to assist sangha members when the ethical course is unclear; earlier consultation is generally better, but consultation may be sought at any time.

Examples of matters appropriate to bring for consultation/support: harassment, abusive conduct, boundary confusion, misuse of position, or patterns of behavior threatening the sangha’s safety and harmony.

Situations where it may be unethical to do nothing: suspected abuse of a child/elder/partner where reporting laws could apply; misappropriation of funds; or gross harmful incompetence in a formal sangha position.

4. Teacher/Practice-Leader Boundaries and Power Differentials

We affirm that teacher/student and leader/student relationships involve power differentials and therefore require special care. Teachers and practice leaders are expected to maintain clear boundaries, protect autonomy, avoid exploitation, and act in accord with the precepts.

Sexual relationships and leadership roles: The Corporation expects teachers and designated practice leaders to refrain from sexual relationships with students, and to seek counsel/consultation if boundary questions arise. If a teacher/practice leader nevertheless seeks an intimate relationship within the sangha, the Board (or HEAR function) will determine what role changes are necessary to protect practitioners and the community.

New practitioners: We aim to provide an environment where new practitioners can establish practice without social pressure or distraction. Those in roles that could reasonably be perceived as leadership are expected to be especially mindful and avoid initiating romantic/sexual relationships with new students during their first year of practice.

5. Confidentiality

Practice discussion, way-seeking mind talks, questions in shosan/ceremonies, and dharma group discussions may include highly sensitive personal information. Honoring teacher-student dialogue is essential.

- **Teachers / practice leaders** are expected to maintain confidentiality about matters raised in practice discussion.
- **Students** are expected to refrain from idle talk about matters brought up in practice discussion and to respect confidences shared by other students.

Limits and consultation: Confidentiality is the basis of trust, yet for the well-being of individuals or the sangha there may be times when teachers/practice leaders consult with another teacher* or the HEAR function. Such consultation is never done lightly; only the minimum information needed is shared; and the consultation itself is confidential. Such consultations are required where a serious ethical breach has occurred or where reporting laws apply.

**A teacher is defined here as a Dharma transmitted priest in the Suzuki Lineage of Soto Zen.*

Safety exception: If there is potential for someone causing harm to themselves or others, the teacher/practice leader must take appropriate action, including contacting appropriate authorities when necessary.

6. Mindful Speech and Avoiding Abusive Speech

In a small community, great harm can come from speech inconsistent with the Buddhist precepts. Mutual respect and trust are built when we speak truthfully and compassionately with the intent to be helpful, and refrain from lies, gossip/self-serving talk, slander, and blame.

When conflict arises: It is usually best to address it directly with the other person. Sometimes it may be wise to consult a teacher/practice leader to develop a more skillful approach, or to include a neutral third person if a one-to-one attempt has failed.

Abusive speech is not acceptable. Abusive speech includes shouting, threats, humiliation, undermining, manipulation, and personal attacks. Those holding positions of responsibility are expected to understand that abusive speech and anger are not acceptable expressions of leadership; failure to uphold patience and kindness may be grounds for suspension of sangha responsibilities.

7. Professional / Business Relationships Among Members

We encourage members to be mindful about mixing sangha relationships with business/professional relationships. This is not prohibited, but the community should not be used as a business pipeline, and members should exercise care in roles that involve fiduciary, therapeutic, medical, or legal power dynamics.

8. Recourse and Grievance Pathways

Since we are a small group, avenues for resolution are close to home.

Step 1 — Direct clarification (when safe):

Attempt to clarify the issue with the other person involved, unless doing so would cause fresh harm to either party.

Step 2 — Bring concerns to a teacher or designated leader:

If Step 1 is unsuccessful or not appropriate, bring concerns to one of the teachers/practice leaders. If a teacher's action is the source of the problem, the concerned person may bring the concern to another teacher, including teachers in affiliated sanghas when appropriate.

Step 3 — Consult the HEAR function:

If the ethical course is unclear, or if the concern is serious, bring it to the HEAR function for consultation and support.

Informal vs formal:

- **Informal concern:** when you want support, advice, or reconciliation in a confusing situation.
- **Formal complaint:** when there may be a serious breach of these guidelines and investigation/organizational action may be needed.

Possible outcomes: mediation, role changes, suspension from responsibilities, removal from leadership roles, or other steps appropriate to safety and harmony. (Confidentiality is intended but cannot be guaranteed in serious cases.)

9. Confidentiality in the Process

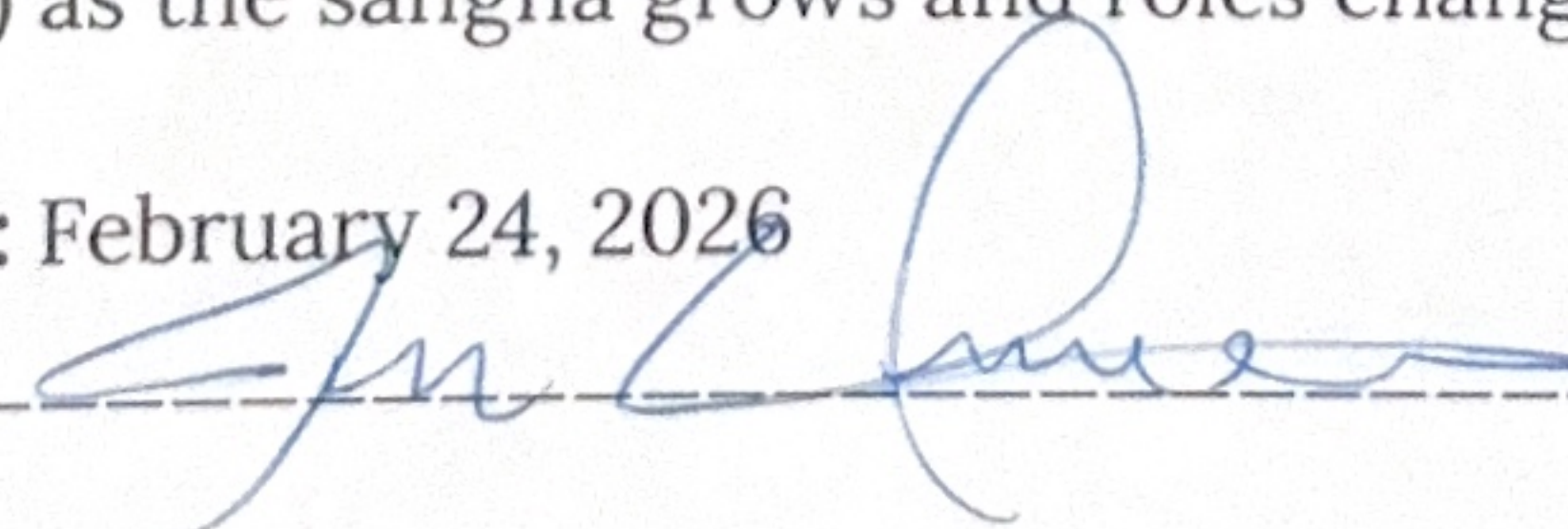
We will share information on a need-to-know basis. In serious cases, we will make efforts to protect privacy, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

10. Adoption and Review

This policy is adopted by the Board and will be reviewed periodically (recommended: annually) as the sangha grows and roles change.

Adopted: February 24, 2026

Signed: _____

 2/24/2026