



Ethical Guidelines

The Ethical Guidelines are intended to help guide the sangha in harmonious practice. They offer a formal grievance process in the event of an ethical transgression within the sangha, regardless of the parties involved. We encourage all those who practice at Open Awareness Buddhist Center to review these guidelines—for them to be effective, the entire sangha needs to be aware of them.

Religious training within a sangha relies upon a profound commitment on the part of both teachers and students to deeply study, realize and actualize the teachings of the Buddha. This requires that each person commit to ethical conduct and practice in a way that is mutually supportive, trusting and peaceful.

These ethical guidelines have been established with the understanding that even in the context of spiritual training, issues or conflicts based in wealth, sexuality and power can arise. While each sangha member is expected to dedicate him or herself to training, mistakes, transgressions and harmful actions may sometimes occur on the part of any sangha member, from the newest student to our Resident Teacher.

These issues can be destructive forces within a sangha, and thus must be acknowledged and worked with skillfully through the wisdom of Buddhist teachings and practice.

When conflicts or breaches of trust arise, it is essential that there be a pathway through which the involved parties can effectively and safely address the conflict and work towards its best resolution. The purpose of this Code of Ethics is to provide that pathway. Guests, students, and teachers each have varying levels of responsibility to the sangha and the Dharma, as well as administrative and/or spiritual authority within the sangha.

As a general principle, whenever there is a conflict between two or more persons, they are first encouraged to work together in a mature and responsible manner to find a satisfactory resolution. If this is not successful, or if the nature of the issue does not permit an opportunity for open and trusting resolution between the parties, the following steps should be taken depending on the role of the involved parties within the sangha.

While the purpose of these guidelines is to provide practical guidance towards maintaining harmony within the sangha, they cannot anticipate all possible situations that might arise. In the event of a situation that is not specifically addressed in these guidelines, the teachers and sangha will need to rely upon their maturity, intelligence and correct practice of the Dharma to respond appropriately in a manner that is neither ignores the principles and spirit of these guidelines, nor is too rule-bound or inflexible.

I. Foundational Principles / Lay Buddhist Precepts

The Five Lay Precepts form the foundational principles of proper conduct at OABC. Those who have not taken these vows will still be expected to abide by these principles at OABC.

1. **We agree to value and protect life.** We will cultivate an ethics of care and refrain from killing and violence towards humans, animals and the natural world. We agree to refine our understanding of not killing and non-harming in all our actions. While some of us recommend vegetarianism, and others do not, we all commit ourselves to fulfilling this Precept in the spirit of reverence for life.
2. **We agree to refrain from stealing.** We will not take what is not freely given, and will respect the property of others and the resources of the natural world. We agree not to misuse the financial offerings given to us or misappropriate funds intended for the Sangha.
3. **We agree to be honest and transparent.** We recognize that secrecy and hiding are toxic behaviors in a community. We will refrain from gossip, and cultivate the quality of straightforwardness and loving-kindness as the basis of our speech. We agree to hold in confidence what is told to us in confidence in Dharma interviews and other teacher-student communications except where we believe imminent harm may be possible.
4. **We agree to avoid creating harm through sexuality and to refrain from using our teaching role to exploit our authority and position.** We will honor the vows we have made to celibacy or to our partner or spouse.
5. **We agree to use restraint and moderation with regard to intoxicants.**

II. Students & Guests

All students and guests are expected to practice in accord with the Lay Buddhist Precepts. A student or guest who creates disharmony within the sangha, or violates the bond of trust between sangha members, and is unable or unwilling to take responsibility for and correct their actions, may be asked to leave the OABC properties immediately. The Resident Teacher and Board of Directors reserve the right to exclude a person from the sangha, and prohibit him or her from attending some or all activities for an indefinite period of time,

In the event of a conflict between students, the involved parties should:

- A. Seek to resolve the conflict through honest, skillful communication in which each person takes full responsibility for their role.
- B. If this does not lead to resolution—or if the involved parties do not feel able to work directly with each other—either person should speak directly with the Resident Teacher or Member of the Board of Directors.
- C. If the situation is judged to be sufficiently serious, the matter may be directed, at the discretion of the Resident Teacher, to the OABC Board of Directors for investigation. The actions of the Board are conclusive and binding.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors and Resident Teacher to ensure that the matter is addressed appropriately and in a timely manner by following through on the matter to its conclusion.

III. Teachers

The Resident Teacher and Guest Teachers have the greatest responsibility to uphold and embody the spiritual and ethical virtues of the Buddha's teachings. When a Teacher violates the bond of trust with a student, the damage can be severe and long-lasting both to the individual involved and the wider sangha. Therefore, it is wholly appropriate for the sangha to expect the Teacher to act fully in accord with all training Rules and Precepts.

Teachers should adhere to the Rules of Service and Selflessness. This means to live in service to the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—and to live selflessly with regards to authority and power. While Teachers are empowered to teach the Dharma—and so carry spiritual authority within the sangha—this should never be used in ways that bring harm to the sangha; this includes individual persons and the entire OABC community.

Any student who feels a Teacher is misusing their power should follow the Grievance Procedure outlined below. Naturally, it is important that any person presenting a request for formal grievance be clear in their intentions and actions, so as to avoid any frivolous accusations.

In general, any sangha member who becomes aware of an action by another sangha member or Teacher that transgresses these Ethical Guidelines should bring this action to the attention of someone capable of examining and acting upon the issue.

IV. Grievance Procedure

A formal grievance procedure is available to any member of the sangha to address conflicts or perceived inappropriate behavior when informal attempts have been exhausted or are deemed inadequate or inappropriate given the nature of the alleged infraction.

Filing a Grievance with the Board of Directors:

A sangha member may submit a formal, written request to any member of the Board of Directors to file a formal grievance. This request should then be sent (via email or mail) to all active Board members who should acknowledge receipt of the request. The request for acceptance should include:

1. A clear statement that a formal grievance is being filed
2. The name of the person(s) whose behavior the grievance concerns
3. A detailed description of the alleged behavior
4. A history of the attempts to resolve the grievance

Until a grievance is accepted by the Board, all information related to the grievance will remain confidential within the Board except for any disclosure mandated by law. Any member(s) of the Board with actual or apparent (perceived) bias or conflict of interest must recuse themselves from the meetings.

Examples of conflicts of interest include people in intimate relationships with either party involved in the grievance, or anyone who is deemed to be involved in the conflict or its parties in such a manner as to make it unreasonable for them to be unbiased. The Board may, by two-thirds majority, vote to recuse a Board member in the event that he/she does not initiate this on their own.

The request—and all further deliberations by the Board for this request—should be considered with at least two-thirds of the full Board membership present. Once a decision has been reached, a majority of the members of the shall reconvene and hand out copies of its written findings and read them aloud.

Proposed revisions to these Ethical Guidelines should be reviewed and formally approved by the Resident Teacher and Board of Directors



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