

Rochester Zen Center Sexual Abuse and Molestation Prevention Policy

The Rochester Zen Center does not permit sexual abuse or molestation to occur at the Center or at any activity sponsored by or related to it. In order to make this “zero-tolerance” policy clear to all employees, volunteers, staff members and Sangha members, we have adopted mandatory procedures that employees, volunteers, family members, board members, individuals and victims must follow when they learn of or witness sexual abuse or molestation.

Sexual abuse takes the form of inappropriate sexual contact or interaction for the gratification of the actor who is functioning as a caregiver and is responsible for the care of a child or incapacitated adult. Sexual abuse includes sexual assault, exploitation, molestation or injury. It does not include sexual harassment, which is another form of behavior which is prohibited by the Center.

Reporting Procedure

Any staff member or trainee who learns of sexual abuse being committed must immediately report it to the Head of Zendo, the Abbot, or any member of the Center’s Ethics and Advisory Committee. If the victim is an adult, the abuse will be reported by the Head of Zendo to the local or state Adult Protective Services (APS) Agency. If a child is the victim, the Head of Zendo will report it to the local or state Child Abuse Agency. The Head of Zendo shall immediately notify appropriate family members of the victim in cases of suspected child abuse.

Investigation and Follow Up

We take allegations of sexual abuse seriously. Once the allegation is reported we will promptly, thoroughly and impartially initiate an investigation to determine whether there is a reasonable basis to believe that sexual abuse has been committed. Our investigation may be undertaken by either an internal team or we may hire an independent third party. We will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or regulatory agencies and we may refer the complaint and the result of our investigation to those agencies. We reserve the right to place the subject of the investigation on an involuntary leave of absence or to reassign that person to responsibilities that do not involve personal contact with children or certain individuals. To the fullest extent possible, but consistent with our legal obligation to report suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, we will endeavor to keep the identities of the alleged victims and perpetrator confidential.

If the investigation substantiates the allegation, our policy provides for disciplinary penalties, including but not limited to termination of the actor’s relationship with our organization.

There are a number of “red flags” that suggest someone is being sexually abused. They take the form of physical or behavioral evidence.

Physical evidence of sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Sexually transmitted diseases;
- Difficulty walking normally;
- Stained, bloody or torn undergarments;
- Genital pain or itching; and

- Physical injuries involving the external genitalia.

Behavioral signals suggestive of sexual abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Fear or reluctance about being left in the care of a particular person;
- Recoiling from being touched;
- Bundling oneself in excessive clothing, especially night clothes;
- Discomfort or apprehension when sex is referred to or discussed; and
- Nightmares or fear of night and/or darkness.

Retaliation Prohibited

We prohibit any retaliation against anyone, including an employee, volunteer, board member, Sangha member or individual, who in good faith reports sexual abuse, alleges that it is being committed or participates in the investigation. Intentionally false or malicious accusations of sexual abuse are prohibited.

Anyone who improperly retaliates against someone who has made a good faith allegation of sexual abuse, or intentionally provides false information to that effect, will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment, membership in the Center, or both.

Zen Center Youth and Coming-of-Age Programs

The coordinator of the Center's youth program, the elders and mentors of the coming-of-age program, and Center volunteers, trainees or staff wishing to be assigned to work with children are required to do the following:

- 1) Respond in writing to these questions: "Have you ever been convicted of any crime against children or other persons? If the answer is 'Yes,' please explain where, when, and the disposition."
- 2) Give authorization for the Center to conduct a criminal background check.
- 3) Give authorization for the Center to contact any organization in which the person has indicated prior experience in working with children or youth.

The Head of Zendo is responsible for overseeing the implementation of procedures to ensure that required questionnaires are completed, authorizations obtained, and background checks performed. In addition, the coordinator of the Center's youth program and the Coming-of-Age Committee are responsible for exercising oversight regarding the issue of child abuse.

All those involved in the youth and coming-of-age programs are encouraged to discuss any concerns about inappropriate or abusive behavior with the Youth Group Coordinator, with members of the Coming-of-Age or Ethics and Advisory Committees, and with the Head of Zendo. If the Coordinator or a Committee member has reasonable cause to suspect sexual abuse of a child, that person is to make an immediate report to the Head of Zendo, who shall promptly contact the parents of the child involved and report to the New York State Department of Social Services. In addition, at least annually, the Youth Group Coordinator and the Coming-of-Age Committee are to alert the Center Board of Trustees if either program has changed in ways that would require new policies or if the climate of open and honest discussion has become more guarded.