

COMMUNITY OF INTERBEING UK – CHILD PROTECTION POLICY 2023-24

Responsible People and Contact Details

Name of Organisation - The 'Community of Interbeing UK' (COI) which also uses the working name, 'Plum Village UK'.

Chair of Trustees

Name: Jonathan Edwards

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Safeguarding Trustee and Charity Safeguarding Officer

Name: Kevin Place

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DBS Administration

Name: Isabelle Wen

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Charity Number: 1096680

Company Number: 4623280

Insurance Company: Ecclesiastical

Specialist support to COI:

'Thirty-one: eight', An independent Christian charity which helps individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from abuse. Contact Telephone: 0303 003 1111

Section 1 - Introduction

The Community of Interbeing UK (the "COI"), also referred to as 'Plum Village UK', seeks to:

- Advance, support and encourage the study and practice of Buddhism and mindful living in accordance with the teachings of meditation master Thich Nhat Hanh, in the United Kingdom and overseas, in keeping with the five Buddhist Mindfulness Trainings and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing (Tiep Hien).
- Assist and encourage the formation and activities of regional and local groups having this common purpose.

The COI's activities include but are not limited to supporting a growing network of practice groups, organising retreats, running courses, and facilitating outreach work to offer the Plum Village practices in appropriate forms to groups in need.

The community is committed to observing the Five Mindfulness Trainings¹, which represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. These trainings and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings² of the Order of Interbeing, guide our actions and inform our approach to safeguarding and child protection. We strive to cultivate a safe and supportive environment that reflects the principles of the Mindfulness Trainings in all aspects of our community's activities.

The COI is committed in its activities to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society, in alignment with the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We will do everything in our power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

This policy is based on law and good practice in England and Wales.

As trustees we recognise our responsibility to safeguard those aged under 18 visiting or involved in our organisation's activities, as set out by the Charity Commission in its latest guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-duties-for-charity-trustees>

¹ <https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/>

² <https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness/the-14-mindfulness-trainings/>

Section 2 – Purpose and Scope

This document is for all involved in our charity's activities (and those of local groups formally associated with our charity) as trustees, facilitators, retreat organisers, Dharma Teachers, Order members, volunteers, mentors and aspirants, and individual sangha members in the UK.

It aims to provide:

- protection for children (anyone under 18) who visit us or take part in our activities, including children of Buddhists and other users of our premises and
- protection for all who may have contact with children in the course of our activities.

It sets out:

- practices and procedures contributing to the prevention of abuse of children.
- what to do if abuse is suspected.

As a community we wish all children who encounter our charity in any way to flourish through their engagement with the Community of Interbeing UK.

Our activities include children in the following ways, regularly or from time to time: eg Family Sangha meetings and family retreats.

We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount.
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from harm.
- partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

This policy applies to all trustees, paid staff, volunteers, parents and anyone else working on behalf of this organisation, whether teaching, leading or supporting.

We will seek to safeguard children and young people by:

- valuing them, listening to and respecting them.
- adopting and implementing child protection guidelines and a code of conduct for staff and volunteers.
- recruiting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring checks are made where necessary.
- sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents, staff and volunteers.
- sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately.
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training.
- integrating the principles of the Five Mindfulness Trainings into our safeguarding practices, promoting a culture of compassion, responsibility, and non-harm.
- fostering open and compassionate communication through loving speech and deep listening, enabling children and their families to feel heard and respected in all interactions.

Key information

Safeguarding Trustee: This is a named trustee who will be legally responsible for dealing with any safeguarding matters. They may delegate the work to a Charity Safeguarding Officer and Named Safeguarding Coordinators for retreats/local sangha activities but will retain overall legal responsibility for the COI charity.

Charity Safeguarding Officer: This is a named person who has been nominated by the Safeguarding Trustee to carry out work relating to this policy. Their work can include ensuring that: DBS checks are administered; COI events have a Named Safeguarding Coordinator; investigating any concerns raised.

DBS Administrator: This is a named person whose work can include ensuring that: DBS checks are completed and recorded; COI events have a Named Safeguarding Coordinator; supporting investigation of any concerns raised.

Named Safeguarding Coordinator: For each event organised in the name of the COI, an organiser must be named as responsible and accountable for Safeguarding and must make themselves known to the Charity Safeguarding Officer.

Who is a “child”?

For the purposes of this policy a child is a person who is not yet 18, regardless of the age of majority in any jurisdiction.

What is child abuse?

Please see appendix A.

Recognising signs of abuse

Please see appendix B.

In keeping with the First Mindfulness Training, Reverence for Life, it is crucial for all members of the community to be vigilant in recognising signs of abuse. We must approach this responsibility with sensitivity, understanding, and a genuine concern for the well-being of all individuals involved.

Engaging safely with children in person

In all interactions with children, we must uphold the principles of the Third Mindfulness Training, True Love. This includes maintaining appropriate boundaries, ensuring the safety and integrity of individuals, and fostering a nurturing environment that supports the well-being of all participants.

Outside our own personal and family relationships, in connection with this charity’s activities we will not arrange to meet any child under 15 individually anywhere if unaccompanied by a parent/guardian.

We understand that before meeting those aged 15-17 it is good Safeguarding practice to make contact with their parent/guardian. We will take care to meet in public spaces where others are present, such as our reception area or a room with the door open.

Where it is agreed that (in connection with any of our charity's activities) one of our employees or volunteers may give a lift to a person under 18 (with or without anyone else in the car)

- The Named Safeguarding Coordinator must ensure that the driver is well known to us, has read our Child Protection Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy and signed to confirm they will abide by them.
- The Named Safeguarding Coordinator must have the written agreement of the child's parent/carer for the child to travel in the car of this named driver.
- The driver must be over 18, have a full driving licence, adequate insurance and a vehicle which is roadworthy.
- The child must sit in the back seat.

If we do not feel able to implement these criteria, we will require that no employee or volunteer offers lifts to those under 18 in connection with our charity's activities.

Engaging with under-18s using email and social media

We are aware that individual contact with people of any age using email or social media carries the risk of accusations of "grooming"; relationships established with a view to sexual contact.

Communicating with under-18s via email and social media should be guided by the principles of the Fourth Mindfulness Training. This includes practicing loving speech, compassionate listening, and refraining from any language or behaviour that could cause harm or misunderstanding.

We will not engage by email, text or social media with anyone under 15, except where they are seeking information about Buddhism as part of schoolwork or personal study, when we may engage, by email only, from the charity's email account only. Having answered their questions, we will not engage in further personal correspondence.

We will engage with those 15-17 only with the written permission of a parent/guardian, by email or letter, which will be stored by the Named Safeguarding Coordinator.

DBS checks /security checks

Those engaged in community activities should be trained, supported, and supervised in accordance with good practice. If in any doubt about the requirements for DBS checks our Safeguarding Officer and DBS Administrator will check with external Safeguarding experts such as Thirtyone:eight (www.thirtyoneeight.org) to ensure that anyone required to have a DBS check has been checked, and to the correct level. Thirtyone:eight provide an advice line and online DBS service.

We understand that DBS certificates apply to roles rather than persons and are not transferable from another role elsewhere; also that any DBS certificate should be less than **three** years old.

Safer recruitment more generally

DBS checks are only one aspect of safer recruitment.

- We will seek references for anyone, volunteer or employee, seeking to work with those under 18 in the course of our activities, including short-term volunteers, even if they have been DBS checked or will be supervised by people who have been DBS checked.
- Any volunteer or employee, seeking to work with those under 18 during our activities must read our Child Protection Policy and sign our Code of conduct, even if only helping on a one-off occasion.

Safer recruitment practices must reflect the principles of the Second Mindfulness Training, True Happiness, which emphasises generosity in thinking, speaking, and acting. We must approach the recruitment process with fairness, transparency, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of all members of our community.

Where parents are not present

We understand that where under 18s attend an event, if parents are not present at all, or are elsewhere on the premises, the Named Safeguarding Coordinator must contact their parent/guardian to ensure they know this is happening, and to record in writing that contact has been made, along with contact details and any medical conditions we need to know about.

Managing those who pose a risk to children

During our charity's own activities, we will not allow someone who is likely to pose a risk to children to have contact with anyone under 18 (for example, a person who is known to have a previous criminal conviction for sexual or other violent offences, someone who is under investigation for possible sexual or other violent offences or someone who has disclosed a sexual interest in children).

Such a person will be asked by the Charity Safeguarding Officer to sign a Safeguarding agreement setting out the terms of their continued participation in our activities within agreed boundaries, which should explicitly include not having contact with children. This should be based on a risk assessment from a probation officer, police officer, or other professional supervising this person. In addition to the restrictions, the agreement may provide support and guidance for the person who poses a risk, such as offering spiritual support or mentorship, in line with the principles of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

Such a person cannot be asked to sign our Child Protection Code of Conduct as it would conflict with the terms of their Safeguarding agreement and in any case, it would be very unwise to permit such a person to have any contact with those under 18 during our activities.

Where it is felt that the charity does not have the resources to manage this relationship safely, we reserve the right to ask the person not to attend our activities.

Reporting concerns or allegations

All reports or suspicions of abuse must be treated seriously. They may include:

- something we have seen
- something we have been told by someone else
- rumours about a person's previous behaviour
- behaviour we have observed in a child and
- disclosure from a child directly.

If a person under 18 alleges abuse

- We need to be aware the child may have been threatened and may be very afraid.
- We need to look directly at the child.
- We need to keep calm and reassure the child that they are doing the right thing and are not to blame, even if they have broken some rules.
- We need to accept what the child says without judgment, never suggesting that they may be wrong or mistaken. Our responsibility is to take them seriously and take action, not to decide whether what they are saying is true.
- We need to avoid pushing for information or question the child but let them say as much as they are ready to say.
- We need to make it clear we cannot promise total confidentiality, and that we will need to tell another trusted adult if we believe the child is at immediate risk of harm.
- We need to tell them we need to get help for them but that we will try to agree with them what will happen next. This means we will need to share what they say with others - on a need-to-know basis only.

We will do our best to avoid:

- appearing shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry.
- pressing the child for details.
- making comments or judgments other than to show concern. Our responsibility is to take them seriously, not to decide whether what they are saying is true.
- promising to keep secrets.
- confronting any alleged perpetrator.
- risking contaminating the evidence by investigating matters ourselves.

What we will do next

- We understand that our first concern must be the safety and wellbeing of the child and that we must not be distracted from this by loyalty to the person accused or a desire to maintain the good name of our charity or Buddhist tradition.

- If the person receiving the disclosure is not our Charity Safeguarding Officer, they must tell the Safeguarding Officer only, who will co-ordinate the handling of the matter on behalf of the charity's trustees. However, if the Safeguarding Officer is not immediately available the matter should be communicated to the Chair of Trustees, or the Safeguarding Trustee. If the child may be in immediate danger the Safeguarding Officer, Chair, Safeguarding Trustee or person receiving the disclosure will phone the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at social services local to the child straight away. A telephone referral will be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

If necessary, our Charity Safeguarding Officer will consult external experts in Safeguarding, such as Thirtyone:eight

- We understand that every person has a legal right to privacy under the International Convention on Human Rights and data protection legislation; therefore, having taken any urgent actions necessary, if possible, we should get the consent of the child's parent or guardian to share the information they have disclosed.
- However, it may be necessary, and therefore legally 'reasonable', to report without parental consent, if we believe that the child is suffering, or at risk of, significant harm and that informing parents/guardians would not be in the child's interest.
- Meanwhile, the person receiving the disclosure will make detailed factual notes about the conversation/concern/incident as soon as possible, including time, date, and location, and pass them to the charity's Safeguarding Officer. (See 'Secure, confidential record-keeping' below.) As far as possible what a child has said should be recorded in their own words, as these could be used in court.
- Where the Safeguarding Officer and trustee consider that the incident is such that it could lead to a claim on our insurance at some point in the future we will inform our insurers, without naming those involved.
- Finally, in England and Wales we understand that we may need to make a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission, without naming those involved: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity>.
- If necessary, our Charity Safeguarding Officer will consult external experts in Safeguarding, such as Thirtyone:eight

Who else needs to know?

We understand that confidentiality, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis, is very important. Under data protection legislation nobody has a right to know about the matter – except, for Safeguarding purposes, those few in a position to prevent further harm, and those who have a ‘reasonable need to know’ to carry out their duties.

This is not a matter of concealment but is intended to protect all concerned from further harm. It will also protect our community/tradition from fear, rumour and disharmony which will make it much harder to deal with the matter effectively without causing further harm.

In our communication regarding safeguarding issues, we commit to practicing loving speech and deep listening to foster a compassionate and understanding environment. We will avoid spreading rumours while addressing safeguarding concerns.

Where a person is believed/has been found to pose a risk to children it is often thought that parents have a right to know. However, this is not the case. Proper implementation of our Safeguarding policy and procedures will ensure that our community’s children are as safe from such a person as they are from any others who pose a risk but have not been identified as such.

What to do if a person discloses a criminal act against a child

We understand that the law does not protect confidentiality where criminal acts are disclosed in the context of Buddhist confession, including Dharma Sharing. If during our charity’s activities, a person discloses (whether or not in a formal way) that they have physically or sexually abused a child, or have viewed indecent images of children online, the person receiving this disclosure or confession must inform our Charity Safeguarding Officer immediately, who must report to our local police immediately. This applies whether the behaviour disclosed is recent or historic.

If a child may be in immediate danger the Charity Safeguarding Officer, Chair of Trustees, Safeguarding trustee, or person receiving the disclosure will phone the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) at local social services straight away. A telephone referral will be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

In dealing with disclosures of criminal acts against children, we will prioritise the protection of the safety and integrity of the affected children and families. We commit to cultivating the four basic elements of true love – loving kindness, compassion, joy, and inclusiveness – to provide support and promote healing for all involved parties.

If necessary, our Charity Safeguarding Officer will consult external experts in Safeguarding, such as Thirtyone:eight

Secure, confidential record-keeping

We understand our responsibility for secure and careful record-keeping. Our Charity Safeguarding Officer will keep a detailed log of all Safeguarding-related incidents as well as conversations, actions and the reasoning behind them. These should not be stored on any computer, but on an external hard drive or memory stick. To guard against loss in case the files, hard drive or memory stick become corrupted these will be backed up to another hard drive or memory stick and/or printed off. Any memory sticks, hard drives and paper copies will be stored in a locked cabinet, box or drawer accessible only to the Charity Safeguarding Officer and one or two others approved by our trustees, eg the Chair of Trustees.

We also understand that under data protection law we need to word our records in a form we would be happy for the subjects to read if they ask to, as is their legal right. This means notes should be factual and respectful, free of interpretations and value-judgements.

We recognise that mindful consumption of information is essential for the well-being of our community. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that our record-keeping practices promote the nourishment and healing of our community by carefully managing access to sensitive information and safeguarding the privacy of those involved in safeguarding incidents.

Keeping confidential records

We understand that because many abuse cases come to light many years later our insurers require us to keep our records for up to 50 years, such that it is possible to address historical cases effectively.

If our charity closes, we will give our records to another Buddhist charity to keep with their own confidential Safeguarding logs.

Reviewing our policies annually

This document was adopted by the trustees of the Community of Interbeing UK on 10 May 2023 and will be reviewed and updated by our Charity Safeguarding Officer and trustees, on or before 10 May 2024.

As part of our annual review, we will reassess the ways in which our safeguarding policy reflects the Five Mindfulness Trainings and consider any necessary adjustments to embody these principles in our approach to safeguarding and child protection.

Adoption of the policy

This policy has been agreed by trustees and will be reviewed annually.

Signed by: 	Position: Chair of Trustees
Signed by: 	Position: Safeguarding Officer

Date: 10 May 2023

A copy of this policy is also available on our website, plumvillage.uk
This Child protection policy [year] is to be read in conjunction with our

- Child Protection Code of Conduct 2023
- Adult Safeguarding policy 2023

Appendix A – What is Child Abuse

The World Health Organisation defines “child abuse” as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Defining Child Abuse

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. A person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults or another child or children.

Child protection legislation throughout the UK is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each nation within the UK has incorporated the convention within its legislation and guidance.

The four definitions (and a few additional categories) of abuse below operate in England, based on the government guidance ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)’.

Definitions of abuse and neglect

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult men. Women and people of other genders can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can children.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of parent's substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;

- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Extremism goes beyond terrorism and includes people who target the vulnerable – including the young – by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination; justify discrimination towards all women and girls, including transwomen; persuade others that minorities are inferior; or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society.

Appendix B - Signs of abuse in children

The following signs could be indicators that abuse has taken place but should be considered in the context of the child's whole life.

Physical

- Injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them
- Injuries that occur in places not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc
- Injuries that have not received medical attention
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy pains
- Bruises on babies, bites, burns, fractures etc which do not have an accidental explanation*
- Cuts/scratches/substance abuse*

Sexual

- Any allegations made concerning sexual abuse
- Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour
- Age-inappropriate sexual activity through words, play or drawing
- Behaving in a sexually provocative or seductive manner with adults
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations
- Eating disorders - anorexia, bulimia (These indicate the possibility that a child or young person is self-harming.)

Emotional

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging.
- Depression, aggression, extreme anxiety.
- Nervousness, frozen watchfulness
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Persistent tiredness

- Running away/stealing/lying

Neglect

- Under nourishment, failure to grow, constant hunger, stealing or gorging food, untreated illnesses, inadequate care, etc

*This information used with permission from Thirtyone:eight, external specialists in Safeguarding for UK faith organisations.
www.thirtyoneeight.org*