

Gaia House

Code of Conduct



1. Introduction

This code of conduct serves as an overall framework document for ethical decision making and good behavioural practice within our organisation. It is a document that informs internal and external stakeholders about what is valued by our organisation, and all those who live, work and practice at Gaia House. It is intended to be implemented in a spirit of compassion and loving kindness for all.

This code was adopted by the Board of Trustees on 23rd September 2012 after a development and consultation process involving staff, Teachers, retreatants and Trustees. The Trust have also adopted the core principles as described in the NCVO “Good Governance Guide” and refer to it in the drawing up of this code. In particular Principle 5.1 “Ensuring that the organisation’s values and ethos are enshrined in its policies and practices”.

This code should complement any contract in place specific to your relationship with Gaia House and is supported by the Gaia House Guidelines, the grievance and disciplinary procedures and other policies as indicated at the end of this code.

Vision

The Purpose of Gaia House is to enable people to awaken to the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. Gaia House aims to provide a facility for the teaching and practice of the Dharma. Gaia House is committed to supporting the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being of all who reside and work there.

[For the full version of the Gaia House Vision please refer to supporting document or website. www.gaiahouse.co.uk]

Ethical Foundation

- All people who live, work and practice at Gaia House are expected to observe the 5 ethical precepts for training heart and mind, while within the house and grounds, so as to create a retreat environment of safety, peace, sensitivity and respect.
- Everyone who teaches at Gaia House is required to adhere to the Teacher Code of Ethics

The 5 precepts are

1. Refrain from taking life and harming living creatures
2. Refrain from taking that which is not offered
3. Refrain from harmful expressions of sexuality; for retreatants this precept includes a commitment to celibacy whilst on retreat
4. Refrain from harmful speech, for retreatants this includes a commitment to observing and holding noble silence
5. Refrain from the use of alcohol, intoxicants and drugs (unless for medical reasons)

2. Roles & Responsibilities

This Code is intended to apply to all who come to Gaia House: Staff (Director, Managers and Coordinators), Trustees, Teachers, Volunteers, Retreatants and Contractors.

The day to day management of Gaia House rests with the Director, Managers and Coordinators (collectively known as staff) employed by Gaia House Trust. It is not the role of the Trustees or any other group to act as Director or Manager of the staff team or to give direct instructions to members of the staff team. Reasonable day to day contact between staff and Trustees and other groups during working hours, is encouraged as it is recognised that good quality trusting relationships between staff and the Trust are essential to the effective running of Gaia House. It is therefore expected that:

- Trustees, Teachers and Staff would treat each other with courtesy and respect at all times in both formal and informal situations. This includes communication between Teachers and staff concerning the running of retreats and maintaining a suitable retreat environment.
- Staff will endeavour to give appropriate advice to all Trustees as requested.
- Staff, Trustees or Teachers will not seek to use their positions to exercise inappropriate influence for personal gain.
- Staff, Trustees or Teachers will pay due respect to the private lives of all individuals involved in the running of Gaia House including treating personal information as confidential.

Contractual obligations - this code of conduct stands alongside any contract in place in connection with Gaia House Trust.

Conflict of Interest - any individual with a potential conflict of interest should declare this as soon as possible and exclude themselves from the relevant decision-making process if appropriate. For example, divided loyalties or potentially benefitting financially from a decision making process in which they are involved.

Employment of family members - if a family member or partner applies for a position at Gaia House, this connection should be declared at the outset so that all applicants can be fairly assessed.

3. Equality and Diversity Statement

Gaia House Trust (a charity and limited company) is an equal opportunities employer and will apply objective criteria to assess potential suitability for positions.

We aim to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the ground of race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. Selection criteria and procedures are reviewed to ensure that individuals are selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities.

We endeavour to attract applicants who support the aims and objectives of Gaia House Trust. These are:

- a. To preserve, protect and enhance physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health by the provision of a centre for the instruction and practice of meditation.
- b. To provide education and instruction in meditation.

Gaia House Trust is non-party in politics and non-sectarian in religion.

All employees will be given equality of opportunity and, where appropriate and possible, special training to enable them to progress both within and outside the organisation.

Gaia House is committed to a continuing programme of action to make this policy effective and bring it to the attention of all employees.

4. Behaviour and Expectations

The Trust's Responsibility (Principle 4.6 from NCVO Code of Good Governance)

According to this principle the Trust is responsible for allowing the proper exercise of delegated authority by the chief executive and/or other staff and volunteers without inappropriate interference, whilst being sufficiently involved and engaged to properly supervise, hold to account and retain ultimate responsibility for decisions and actions taken, through appropriate systems of monitoring and reporting back.

Confidentiality at Gaia House

There are a number of areas in Gaia House where confidentiality is important. All those involved in Gaia House need to feel confident that information personal to them will be handled sensitively and with respect. These areas are listed in brief below and are covered in more detail in the Gaia House Confidentiality Policy.

1. Retreatants

- a. Database
- b. Interview Forms
- c. Concerns about retreatants

2. Staff - residential Coordinators and the non-residential staff

Confidentiality can be important in different situations for everyone. These are not 'legal' issues but areas where staff need to be able to feel secure to discuss difficult issues in a confidential setting. These are:

- a. Residential Coordinator Sharing Group
- b. One to One support
- c. Supervision Notes
- d. Personal File
- e. CRB Information

3. Teachers

- a. Confidentiality in the Teacher-Retreatant Relationship. Dharma interviews or discussions are confidential. Personal information about Retreatants is not to be communicated to a third party without express Retreatant consent, except in the case of likely harm or in the course of maintaining effective support, and then only in such a way that information cannot be heard or accessed by any further third party.
- b. Exceptions to prevent harm
- c. Exceptions to maintain continuity of support
- d. Financial Information

4. Trustees and Volunteers

- a. Personal Information held on database/file

5. Data Protection Act.

- a. Personal data must be obtained fairly and lawfully
- b. Personal data in both electronic form and manual form
- c. Personal data processing
- d. Personal data must be kept accurate and only for as long as is required.
- e. Appropriate security measures
- f. Transfer of personal information.
- g. Data Subject Rights

Harassment

Gaia House endeavours to cultivate an atmosphere where people can be confident that they will not suffer harassment of any sort (including discrimination covered by the section on Equal Opportunities in this Code).

The five precepts provide an ethical foundation to support everyone in contributing to Gaia House by treating others with kindness, respect, courtesy and consideration at all times. Everyone is also expected to respect and adhere to the decision-making and management processes of Gaia House as a charitable organisation

Harassment is behaviour that creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for another person. It can range from extremes such as verbal abuse or unwanted sexual conduct to less obvious actions such as insensitive teasing or overbearing or persistent behaviour that dismisses someone's feelings, thoughts or experience.

The essence of harassment is that the conduct is unwanted, unreasonable, demeaning or offensive to the recipient. Such conduct becomes harassment if it persists once it has been made clear that it is regarded by the recipient as offensive, although a single incident may constitute harassment if it is sufficiently serious.

Meetings

All meetings should be convened in accordance with good management practice and within the governance structure of Gaia House. All those attending meetings necessary for the management of Gaia House are expected to:

- Act within Gaia House's Governing Document and the law.
- Act in the best interests of Gaia House and declare any conflict of interest.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Attend meetings/appointments or give apologies in advance.
- Prepare fully.
- Engage in discussion and listen with respect to others' contributions.
- Support and abide by decisions once they have been made and be willing to contribute to their implementation.
- To consult with the Director or Trust if they feel unable to comply with decisions that have been made.

5. Complaints Process

Anyone who becomes aware of a breach or a disregard of Gaia House's Code of Conduct has both the right and responsibility to take appropriate action as soon as possible after the event, in accordance with the following guidelines:

Stage 1

Where possible to raise the matter informally with the person or people concerned. It is hoped that such an approach will enable the matter to be resolved satisfactorily.

Stage 2

1. Where an informal approach is not appropriate or proves insufficient to resolve the complainant's concerns then the complainant should raise their concerns with the Director, verbally or in writing. If the complaint concerns the Director then it should be raised with the Chair of the Trustee Board (or a Trustee delegated by the Chair).

2. The Director (Chair) should invite all those concerned to a meeting in order to discuss the alleged breach of the Code and agree appropriate action. Minutes should be taken of this meeting and circulated to all participants.

Stage 3 (A)

If no agreement is reached at Stage 2, the Director (Chair) will support the complainant in presenting their concerns to the Trust Executive Committee. The Committee will consider the complaint and respond with their recommendations in writing within 28 days of the complaint first being presented to them.

Stage 3 (B) - Ethical Issues

Where the alleged breach of the Code is deemed to be of a serious ethical nature then the Director (Chair) should bring to the attention of the complainant the existence and role of the Ethical Ombudsperson.

The Ethical Ombudspersons who are independent from, but responsible to Gaia House Trust, are available to receive complaints about behaviour:

- i) By teachers in breach of the Teachers Code of Ethics;
- ii) By Trustees or Teachers in breach of the code of conduct.

NB - where the complaint concerns a member of the paid staff, including Coordinators, in order to comply with Employment Law, the matter will need to be dealt with by the Trust in their role as Employer.

The complainant can approach an ethical ombudsperson directly or request the support of the director or chair of the Trust, or a member of the Teacher Council.

On receiving a complaint within their remit, the Ethical Ombudsperson will:

- Inform Gaia House Trust that they have received a complaint
- Contact the complainant to discuss their concern/experience
- Contact the person(s) whose behaviour is the subject of the complaint to inform them the complaint has been made, and discuss with them their understanding of what occurred
- Seek to facilitate further discussion between the parties with a view to a resolution of the complaint.

If mediation is not able to produce a satisfactory solution and the complainant wishes to continue with their complaint the Ethical Ombudsperson will request the Trust to convene an Ethical Committee, this committee will consist of 2 Gaia House Trustees and 2 members of the Gaia House Community (Sangha) selected by the Trust and approved as suitable by the Ethical Ombudsperson.

The Ethical Committee (EC) will set a time and place for the complaint to be held in confidence. At the hearing the Committee will hear from both parties and make a determination as to whether the complaint is upheld. The Ethical Committee will then make recommendation to the Trust or Teacher Council (whichever is appropriate) concerning possible sanctions or undertakings required of the person against whom the complaint was made.

The EC may decide that in the interests of the wider community, it is appropriate to publish some or all of the following: the nature of the complaint, the name of the person(s) subject of the complaint, whether or not the complaint was upheld, any sanctions imposed or undertakings required. In this case the identity of the complainant and any information, which would lead to their identity being revealed, shall remain confidential unless the complainant consents in writing to such disclosure.

The Ethical Ombudsperson(s) names and contact details are available in the reception department at Gaia House or via our website and are regularly updated by our Admin Manager.

During stage 2.2 or 3(A &B), where a complaint concerns the Precepts or Ethical Guidelines, the Director/Chair may, at their discretion, request advice from a member of the Teacher Council.

Anyone raising a concern about a possible breach of the Code can, at any time, request the support of a third party who is either:-

- Someone whose role/position at Gaia House is equivalent to their own, or
- In the case of Retreatants, a co-ordinator or staff member, or
- In the case of staff and co-ordinators, their line manager, or
- A Trustee, or
- The Resident Teacher or another member of the Gaia House Teacher Council.

Anyone who in good faith raises a concern about a possible breach of the Code will not be victimised or made subject to retaliatory action as a result.

In following these guidelines all parties should bear in mind the need for discretion and confidentiality as outlined in the Confidentiality Policy.

Other Relevant Policies and Documents

These are policies that should be adhered to in conjunction with this Code of Conduct.

Ethical Guidelines and Teachers Code of Ethics

Gaia House Complaints Procedure

Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures for staff [in conjunction with current employment law]

Gaia House Vision

Gaia House Health and Safety Policy

Equality and Diversity Policy

Mental Health Policy

Vulnerable Persons Policy

Gaia House Guidelines

NCVO* Good Governance

*National Council of Voluntary Organisations - GH Trust is a member