

Approved by the Board of Directors, 13 March 2021

The Code of Ethical Behavior for Teachers, Board Members, and Practice Leaders at the Vermont Insight Meditation Center

The Vermont Insight Meditation Center (VIMC) is a Buddhist spiritual center dedicated to the study and practice of Vipassana (Insight meditation) and committed to the possibility of liberation for all beings. VIMC welcomes diverse populations. It supports and encourages the development of compassionate action based upon the ideals, teachings, and practices in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism.

This Code of Ethical Behavior applies to members of the Teacher Council as well as any invited teachers who are participating in a teaching capacity at VIMC (hereafter, “Teachers”), which includes giving dharma talks, conducting interviews, and presenting classes. In addition to Teachers, this Code applies to all members of the Board of Directors and all Practice Leaders. The Ethics and Reconciliation Council will help ensure that the Code of Ethical Behavior is upheld by these parties by reviewing any cases that may arise, providing guidance to people involved, and recommending any necessary action.

The Teachers, Practice Leaders, and Board of Directors (hereafter, ‘we’) recognize that the foundation of spiritual life rests upon a mindful and caring relationship to the life around us. In keeping with this understanding and for the long-term benefit of our community, we agree to uphold the five lay training precepts. We have elucidated some possible applications that may be relevant to the VIMC community and cultural setting, and articulate guidelines for certain situations. All cases brought before the Ethics and Reconciliation Council will receive careful, individual attention, and the five core precepts will be held forefront in all considerations. Above all, the Ethics and Reconciliation Council seeks to promote the ethical decision-making of all members of the community, so that situations involving violations of the Code of Ethical Behavior do not arise.

1) We undertake the precept of refraining from killing or causing harm.

We acknowledge the interconnection of all beings and affirm our respect for all life. We encourage a deepening awareness of what it means to refrain from harming and killing, and apply this understanding to protect and promote the safety and well-being of the community.

Furthermore, we understand that harm can happen intentionally or unintentionally and commit to reducing harm in all ways. We maintain an openness to dialogue with others who are expressing the experience of harm.

2) We undertake the precept of refraining from taking that which is not freely given.

We respect the property of others, and we will not take that which does not belong to us. For instance, we bring consciousness to our use of the earth's resources in a wholistic way. We are honest in our financial dealings and will not misappropriate financial resources committed to Dharma projects.

We commit to responsible use of all money donated to the organization and pledge to exercise care in the pursuit of investments on behalf of the organization, recognizing that investment practices could lead to unintentional violations of the first precept.

3) We undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.

The following guidelines pertain equally to Teachers, Board Members, and Practice Leaders

We will avoid creating harm through sexual misconduct and will refrain from all forms of sexual exploitation. Teachers will not use their teaching role to exploit their authority and position to assume a sexual relationship with a Student. Specifically, with respect to relationships between a Teacher (or visiting teacher) and a Student, we will abide by the following guidelines:

a) We respect long-term, committed romantic relationships, and we will avoid any situations of unwanted or inappropriate romantic or sexual advances between Students and Teachers. New romantic or sexual relationships should not begin between a Teacher and a Student.

b) During retreats, formal teaching occasions, or interviews, any speech or actions indicating interest in a Student-Teacher romantic or sexual relationship is inappropriate. This applies to anyone in a less formal teaching role, including practice leaders and senior students.

c) If interest in a genuine and committed relationship develops over time between a Teacher and a Student, the Student-Teacher relationship must clearly and consciously end before a romantic relationship begins. For purposes of clarity, neither person must end their involvement with the sangha, but the Teacher in question must no longer teach classes, present dharma talks, or give retreats with the specific Student in attendance. Students and Teachers will alternate their presence at Vermont Insight in a manner which is equitable to both parties.

d) We understand that there will be grey areas in particular situations that are not covered by this document, and under these circumstances the parties will resolve this with the Ethics and Reconciliation Council.

e) If after a period of twelve months, there is desire to revisit the formal Student-Teacher relationship, then the individuals may request this of the Ethics and Reconciliation Council.

f) This Section 3 applies equally to relationships between Board members and Teachers, and between Practice Leaders and Students.

4) We undertake the precept of refraining from false speech.

We continuously strive to speak what is true, useful, and kind. We hold in confidence what is explicitly told to us in confidence. We cultivate conscious and clear communication, and base our speech in the qualities of loving-kindness and honesty.

5) We undertake the precept of refraining from using intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness.

Intoxicants will not be served at any VIMC teachings, practices, or events. We will neither consume intoxicants at nor be intoxicated at any VIMC teachings, practices, or events. We understand that if any of us develops concerns about our use of substances, the Ethics and Reconciliation Council is available to offer appropriate support and referrals in confidence. If any sangha member develops concerns regarding substance use on the part of a Teacher, Board member, or Practice Leader, they should communicate their concerns to the Ethics and Reconciliation Council.

We acknowledge that addiction to different substances is considered a disease, and should a leader at VIMC be struggling with an addiction we pledge, as an organization and as individuals, to support, as best we can, that person's effort to get help towards recovery.

The Review and Updating of this Code of Ethical Behavior

The Ethics and Reconciliation Council endeavors to keep this document updated, and will review it annually. This version of the Code of Ethics was last updated in March 2021.