



Insight Meditation Center of Pioneer Valley Code of Ethics

As teachers, sangha leaders and board members at Insight Meditation Center of Pioneer Valley (IPV), we are updating our guidelines in response to some of the problems which have arisen in Buddhist sanghas regarding student-teacher relationships and abuse of power.

We teachers and sangha leaders aspire to right conduct in every aspect of our lives. In this aspiration, we have committed ourselves to maintaining the five precepts and we cannot improve upon them as guides and standards for our thoughts, words and deed. The Precepts are open to interpretation, however, so with this Ethics Agreement, we establish a clear and specific set of minimum expectations to which we should be held accountable now and in the future. We hope that publicly specifying these standards of behavior will sharpen our awareness of ethical issues, ensure the trustworthiness of the sangha, and serve to protect and perpetuate the Dharma.

We recognize that our work is founded on trust – the trust placed in us, each by our own teacher, to transmit the Dharma faithfully and the trust placed in us by our students to provide them with respectful and appropriate instruction. In this document, we concern ourselves explicitly with trust placed in us by our students, but we know full well that the we cannot hope to fulfill our responsibility to transmit the Dharma if we do not endeavor to live up the Dharma’s ethical implications.

We understand that, in our capacity as Dharma teachers, we may fail our students in many ways and to vastly differing degrees. At one end of the range of severity are isolated errors and instances of neglect; it is quite possible, for example, to disappoint a student keenly by forgetting to return a telephone call. While we consider even the slightest failure unfortunate, as fallible beings we will all inevitably suffer lapses of this sort and simply have to be ask to be forgiven. The failures that concern us more, and that this Agreement is intended to address, are of greater severity – those that are demonstrably harmful to our students, either to their practice or to their general well-being, either to one individual or a group. We commit ourselves to refrain altogether from such injurious conduct, but especially from any that is intentional, repeated or protracted in duration, deceitfully concealed, exploitive of a student’s trust, or any combination of the foregoing.

1st Precept

We undertake the precept to refrain from harming other beings. Specifically, as teachers and leaders, we commit to cultivation of compassion and wisdom and understanding in all of our interactions with students.

Teachers will honor the dignity of students by respecting the students’ values, culture, conscience, and spirituality. They will recognize the inherent imbalance of power in the student-teacher relationship and take care not to exploit it.

Teachers assume responsibility for continuing personal growth and deepening dharma practice. They should nurture self-knowledge and freedom, and cultivate insight into the influences of culture, social-historical context, race and gender, age, environmental setting, etc. Teachers should receive regular supervision from either peers or a mentor.

For teachers who are also professional psychotherapists, there can sometimes be a lack of clarity when a student requests a dharma consult with them, particularly if requested to meet with the teacher in an ongoing manner. It is up to the teacher/psychotherapist to determine with the student what the primary focus of their dyadic engagement is, and to keep that focus intact for the duration of their meeting time. If this focus shifts over time from a dharma consult into more of a psychotherapeutic process or vice versa, it is the teacher/therapist's responsibility to address this as soon as possible, and either refer the student elsewhere or mutually agree to re-contract their current relationship. While each discipline influences the other, it is the responsibility of the teacher/psychotherapist to assess and adhere to their primary consciously agreed upon role with the student and/or client. Psychotherapy clients may attend classes and or retreats given by the teacher if determined to be beneficial by both parties. If a student requests psychotherapeutic services from a teacher who is also a psychotherapist, a professional assessment must be made by the therapist as to the appropriateness of shifting into a psychotherapeutic relationship with a student. They should mutually agree upon the necessary boundaries and parameters such a professional relationship entails.

2nd Precept

We agree not to take that which does not belong to us and to respect the property of others. We agree to be honest in our dealing with money and not to misappropriate money committed to dharma projects. We agree to offering teachings without favoritism in regard to any students' financial circumstances.

We agree to accept individual economic support (dana) from individual sangha members only when it is freely given, never making it a requirement for instruction during classes and meetings at IPV or during IPV non-residential retreats. Teachers commit to practice being aware of energy, words, or behavior that could be seen as coercive in regards to economic support, while at the same time encouraging students to develop the practice of generosity.

A different understanding of the precept is in order when a student asks a teacher to do longer and more regular dharma consultations than is the norm for occasional meetings. This is considered more of a professional contract, such as would be the case with psychotherapy, and they can 'agree' to a certain remuneration for those meetings.

3rd Precept

We agree to avoid creating harm through sexuality and to avoid sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or relationships of a sexual manner that are outside the bounds of the relationship

commitments we have made to another, or that involve another who has made vows to someone else.

Teachers commit to practicing being aware of their sexual energy and how it may impact other people. Teachers are expected not to get their intimacy needs met through relationships with students, but outside of the sangha. Teachers will establish and maintain appropriate physical and psychological boundaries with students. They will refrain from sexualized behavior, including but not limited to manipulative or coercive behavior or language towards sangha members.

A teacher who receives sexual advances from a student is obligated to directly and unambiguously tell them that such actions are detrimental to the student's spiritual training and will not be allowed.

IPV teachers in committed relationships will honor their vows and refrain from adultery. All teachers agree not to use their teaching role to exploit their authority or position in order to assume a sexual relationship with a student.

If a teacher and a student develop a mutual attraction and are interested in establishing an intimate relationship, they should terminate their student-teacher relationship for a minimum of six months before engaging in a romantic relationship. The teacher - student relationship may need to be terminated for a longer period of time, based on the length and nature of the student - teacher relationship and any other factors of concern, to be reviewed by and discussed with a senior teacher or the Ethics Committee. This waiting period is to allow the resolution of any potential transference issues and permit both individuals to enter the relationship on an equal footing. They must consult with the Ethics Committee or a senior teacher before proceeding. While both partners may likely want to participate at the center, the guiding principle should be to avoid confusion and blurring in the teaching relationship and to avoid harm to either partner and to the sangha.

Exceptions to the consultation may be made if they previously knew each other outside of the sangha, and were already in a friendly, close, but not intimate relationship. If there are questions about individual circumstances, they should approach the Ethics Committee.

4th Precept

We agree to speak that which is true and useful and to refrain from gossip in our community. We agree to hold in confidence what is explicitly told to us in confidence. We agree to cultivate conscious and clear communication, and to cultivate the quality of loving-kindness and honesty as the basis of our speech.

Teachers will keep confidential all oral, electronic, and written matters arising in teacher-student meetings, unless in the case of a student's potential harm to self or other, in which case the teacher will invoke appropriate IPV or legal interventions.

Regarding confidentiality, teachers may consult with other teachers or practice leaders about the conduct of a student if they are concerned that a student's behavior or speech may be detrimental to the sangha or to the transmission of teachings to other students. Teachers may also

confidentially consult with each other when they feel the need for additional perspectives in order to best serve the students' needs.

5th Precept

We undertake the precept of refraining from intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness. We agree that there should be no use of intoxicants at the center. We agree not to abuse or misuse intoxicants at any time. We agree that if any teacher has a drug or alcohol addiction problem, it should be immediately addressed by the Ethics Community.

Grievance Procedures

The center is obliged to make information about ethics and the grievance procedures publicly and widely available in the center, on the website, posted on the bulletin board, and by email notification of the policy, as deemed appropriate by the IPV Board.

IPV will maintain both an Ethics Committee and Ethics Procedures.

The Ethics Committee will consist of a teacher, board member, practice leader, a non-leader sangha member, and an outside party not involved with the center. The Committee will meet as needed to address matters involving ethics, and is required to meet within 3 weeks to address an incident brought up by a teacher or student. A majority of the members of the Committee need to be present in order to hold a meeting.

If a student believes that a conflict or breach of trust has arisen, we want to ensure the student's best interests and their safety are given top priority. It is essential that there be a path to effectively and safely address the conflict and work toward an acceptable resolution. It is the responsibility of the Ethics Committee to ensure that the matter is addressed appropriately and within 3 weeks, and by following through with the issue to its conclusion. Depending on the specific situation, any of the following procedures may apply:

- Student has the option of speaking with the teacher with whom conflict arose, if they feel safe enough to do so, including bringing another teacher or ally with them. Student is not required to do so if they do not feel it is appropriate or safe.
- Student may make an official complaint to the Ethics Committee by contacting the teacher or board member who sits on the committee. They should submit a written complaint, including details of time, place and witnesses. If the teacher on the Committee is the one involved in the grievance, another teacher will be chosen for the duration of the specific grievance.
- If the student feels it is appropriate, they have every right to seek help or advisement outside of the sangha, including but not limited to legal help and law enforcement.

Until a grievance is addressed by the Ethics Committee, all information related to the grievance will remain confidential except as mandated by law. This does not prevent the student from

obtaining support from a few allies, so that they are able to better handle the situation. However, they will ask their allies to maintain confidentiality.

The Ethics Committee will address the grievance and provide a recommendation to the Board within 3 weeks after the official complaint is received. A majority of the members of the Ethics Committee need to be present for the meeting. The person who's conduct is of concern and the student lodging the grievance should be heard separately at first, and then should be heard together if all parties are comfortable with that arrangement. Both parties may choose to have an ally present.

The Ethics Committee Board representative will provide the Board of Directors with recommended actions. The Board will conduct a closed special session, within 3 weeks of the recommendation by the Ethics Committee, and may include all available members of the Ethics Committee if agreed by all parties. In the event that the Board's deliberations occurred in a session without the Ethics Committee, the Board will relay information about the decisions to the Ethics Committee.

If the Grievance is not dismissed, and no resolution has been reached, a further ad hoc committee may be formed by the Board. Membership shall include at least 2 members of the Board and 2 members of the Ethics Committee, as well as other members of the IPV community who are not involved in the conflict, but have specific knowledge or skills of value to the inquiry. The ad hoc committee will meet within 3 weeks after being formed.

In the event of a dismissal, the Ethics Committee will determine an appropriate, compassionate and respectful course of action for informing the student who brought forth the concern. The Ethics Committee will also determine if and how to address the concern with the member about whom the concern was raised.

The ad hoc committee will meet with all parties to the grievance so that a wider and more complete understanding of the grievance may be obtained. Such meetings may be held with individual parties, or with all parties at one time. The person registering the complaint and the person who's conduct is of concern may each have a non-voting ally present. Emphasis should be given to holding all parties and viewpoints in a place of compassion. Additional care will be given to understanding the preferred resolution from each party directly involved. The ad hoc committee may request information, written or in person, from other members of the IPV community who may have information relevant to the grievance.

Conclusion of the Formal Grievance Process

The ad hoc committee chairperson will provide the committee's findings & recommendations for resolution of the grievance to the Board chairperson and the Ethics Committee chairperson.

The Board will then meet to determine the final resolution of the grievance. The parties involved in the grievance will be notified by the Board of the final decision. In matters of importance to the larger IPV community, the Board will also relay the findings and conclusion to the community after notification has been made to the grievance parties.

As in each of the previous sections of this process, all communication should be made with consideration for compassion and healing to the parties as well as to the larger IPV community.

In communication with the IPV community, the privacy and confidentiality of all parties should be maintained unless circumstances of the grievance warrant disclosure and, in the event that such disclosure is made, continued consideration should be given to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the parties so long as such confidentiality does not jeopardize the safety and well-being of members of the IPV community or hinder the process of healing within the sangha.

Addressing Lesser Issues

In the event that a teacher becomes aware that another teacher is acting in a way which may cause harm/distress to a student, but it does not rise to the level of a major ethical violation, the issue should be addressed informally. One or more teachers from the teacher's council may ask to consult with the teacher in question and share their views and suggestions. It can be advanced to the formal grievance process if needed. This informal process will also be kept confidential.

STUDENT CODE OF ETHICS

While all of the precepts, and most of the above, applies to students, the following are specific guideless students should keep in mind when interacting with other students and teachers:

Overall, we aim to maintain the precepts within our meditation space and at IPV events.

3rd Precept - sexual energy at the center. Be aware of keeping safe sexual and emotional boundaries with other students and with teachers—do not flirt with teachers either at the center or outside of the center.

Keep safe sexual and emotional boundaries with other students while at the center. If you want to deepen a relationship with another student, ask if they would like to get together to discuss this at a time and place outside of the center.

Power issues. If there appears to be an issue of abuse/power between students ie. Someone's abuser coming to the center, start by talking to your teacher about it to discuss what options may be available. If that does not alleviate the problem, the Ethics Committee can be contacted to help deal with the issue.

If other unforeseen issues arise which you need help with, and there are no readily available means of addressing them, please contact the Ethics Committee through the board member or teacher on the Committee.

May our ethical conduct lead to the happiness and well-being of all teachers and students of the Dharma.

Thanks to all our sister sanghas for their valuable ideas in creating this document.

If you have any issues to discuss, contact Kim Weeber at KimW@insightpv.org or 413-587-0597 or Mark Hart at 413-259-2145 if Kim is not available.