

Bright Way Zen Safe Environment Policy
Adopted unanimously by the BWZ Board on 5/12/2017
Amended version adopted unanimously 5/18/2017

Bright Way Zen (BWZ) affirms that minors (under age 18) and vulnerable adults (special needs, elderly, etc.) have a right to pursue spiritual practice in a safe environment. BWZ is committed to providing an environment in which these individuals are safe from abuse and neglect, and can receive support and protection if they disclose such a history.

The responsibility to provide a safe environment applies to all BWZ members, but especially to the guiding teacher or clergy, those in preparation to become teachers or clergy, staff, and volunteers who have direct or indirect contact with minors or vulnerable adults in BWZ events.

Section 1. Creating a Safe Environment for Vulnerable Populations

BWZ currently does not offer programs or events that are specifically designed for minors or vulnerable adults. When BWZ develops such a program or event it will perform a criminal background check on all staff and volunteers involved in the program who will have direct contact with the minors/vulnerable population. If it is determined that one of the staff or volunteers is a Registered Sex Offender, s/he will not be allowed to participate.

Section 2. Safe Environment Policy Related Specifically to Registered Sex Offenders

Introduction

Spiritual communities face a dilemma in their attempt to provide a safe environment that protects vulnerable individuals and nurtures survivors of abuse and neglect, while simultaneously welcoming individuals who have committed a sex offense. Although BWZ's mission is to offer instruction in Zen practice and Buddhist teachings to all who are interested, BWZ recognizes that at times it has special responsibilities: (1) to protect vulnerable individuals from harm, and (2) to protect the identities and past details of a Registered Sex Offender (RSO) so that s/he may move forward and create a better future for themselves.

To further its goal of a safe place to practice for all, BWZ has developed the following Safe Environment Policy related to Registered Sex Offenders.

RSOs to Whom this Policy Applies (“RSOs of Concern”)

This policy applies to RSOs who are under legal supervision, including those on parole or probation, or who have been legally categorized as being “predatory” (at a significant risk of re-offending; in Oregon, these are Level 3 RSOs). (Hereafter, “RSO of Concern.”) If an RSO has

successfully served their sentence, met all legal requirements for their release, is no longer on parole, probation, or under legal supervision, and is not identified as being at a risk for re-offense (Level 3), BWZ does not feel it is appropriate to demand knowledge of their status or to treat them differently. The one exception to this is involvement in programs for minors and vulnerable adults, which is covered in Section 1 of this policy. The one exception to this is involvement in programs for minors and vulnerable adults, which is covered in Section 1 of this policy.

Identification

BWZ requests that an RSO of Concern notify the Executive Director/Guiding Teacher (hereafter simply “Guiding Teacher”) of his/her legal status, and indication that s/he wishes to participate in BWZ activities.

Confidentiality and Agreement to Abide by this Policy

Upon learning the legal status of an RSO of Concern who wishes to participate in BWZ activities, the Guiding Teacher will inform the RSO of this policy, ask him/her to read it, and ask whether they are willing to meet the requirements of this policy in order to attend BWZ. If so, the RSO will sign a letter indicating agreement to abide by the policy which will be in effect until s/he is no longer an RSO of Concern.

In the event that the RSO of Concern does not agree to fulfill the requirements of this policy, s/he may be denied permission to participate in BWZ activities.

Because revealing the identity of an RSO can be traumatic and dangerous to both the RSO and to others, the Guiding Teacher will, to the best of her/his ability, keep the identity of the RSO completely confidential 1) if he/she does not decide to attend BWZ, or, 2) if the RSO wishes to fulfill the requirements of this policy, confidential except for two other people, chosen by the Board to form a Safe Environment Committee (SEC) that includes the Guiding Teacher.

Involvement of the Board and the Safe Environment Committee

The Guiding Teacher will inform the Board of Directors when this policy is being enacted and therefore that an RSO of Concern has asked to participate with BWZ, but the identity of the individual involved will not be revealed to anyone except the other two SEC members. One or both of the additional SEC members will be member(s) of the Board, with the other Board-selected member possibly coming from outside of the Board if they have relevant skills or experience and agree to abide by the confidentiality aspects of this policy. Ideally, members of the SEC will be able to serve in a calm and objective manner, and Board members will recuse themselves from serving on the SEC if they have a great deal of reactivity around this.

If, as may happen in a small community, Board members figure out who the RSO must be, Board members will keep any information about this process or the suspected identity of the RSO confidential.

Process of Acceptance

If an RSO of Concern expresses willingness to abide by this policy, one member of the SEC will, with the RSO's permission:

1. Review a copy of his/her relevant "safety plan" for participating in BWZ or similar situations where the RSO may encounter minors (or vulnerable adults, when relevant), if one exists. (Such plans are developed with and approved by his/her Parole Officer and/or therapist.)
2. Speak to the RSO's Parole or Probation Officer to make sure s/he is currently meeting the requirements of his/her parole/probation and the officer believes the RSO can safely participate at BWZ under this policy. In the case of a Level 3 RSO (someone considered at a high risk of re-offense), the SEC member will speak to a supervising law enforcement officer, and professional advice may be sought (again, with the RSO's permission).
3. Speak to the RSO's therapist/counselor, if present, to make sure the therapist/counselor believes the RSO can safely participate at BWZ under this policy.

The SEC will then discuss whether it is safe to accept the RSO of Concern into the BWZ community. In general, unless one of the three inquiries above raise any significant concerns, the RSO should be accepted as long as s/he agrees to abide by the conditional attendance requirements below. Additional attendance requirements may be made of the RSO of Concern if recommended by the Parole/Probation officer, therapist/counselor, or, in the case of a Level 3 offender, by a law enforcement officer or a professional. If additional attendance requirements are made, they will be put in a document which the RSO will sign.

Standard Conditional Attendance Requirements

The RSO of Concern will be expected to voluntarily:

1. Avoid attending activities where a minor is likely to present (*or*, if the RSO's offense involved vulnerable adults instead, where members of that population are likely to be present);
2. Leave any activity if minors (*or* his/her relevant vulnerable adult population) attend unexpectedly;
3. Avoid any other kinds of contact with minors (*or* his/her relevant vulnerable adult population) associated with the BWZ community.

Exceptions:

- When the minor in question is the RSO's own child, or if (when relevant) the vulnerable adult is a member of his/her own family, and the RSO is allowed contact with the person under the terms of their legal supervision.

- Exception to requirements 1 and 2 for participation in live, online (virtual) activities where the RSO of Concern will never have any unsupervised interactions with any minors/vulnerable adults who might also be participating.
- Exception to requirements 1 and 2 when the RSO is accompanied by a trained supervisor/chaperone approved by his/her parole or probation officer.

Security and Retention of Documents

All documents related to the RSO of Concern, including a copy of any safety plan and the letter of agreement to this policy, will be treated as confidential information and will not be emailed or shared digitally. A hard copy will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the Guiding Teacher except when it is being reviewed in closed meetings with the RSO or SEC. Once the RSO of Concern has been accepted into the Sangha, the file will be put in a sealed envelope. This envelope will be kept in the secure file even after the RSO of Concern no longer has to abide by this policy, or after s/he has stopped participating at BWZ, to be opened only in the event that questions arise in the future about the behavior of the RSO of Concern during the time they were under this policy.

Release from Conditional Attendance Requirements and Agreement to Abide by this Policy

If the status of an RSO of Concern participating at BWZ under this policy changes so the policy no longer applies to him/her (s/he is no longer an “RSO of Concern”), the RSO may inform the Guiding Teacher of this in writing. The information will then be added to the RSO’s secure file on this matter and the file will be re-sealed. Subsequently, the RSO will be released from the conditional attendance requirements and from their agreement to have their participation at BWZ limited by this policy.

I agree to abide by this Safe Environment Policy.

- There are no additional conditional attendance requirements.
- See attached document with additional conditional attendance requirements.

Full Name (print)	Full Name (signature)	Date
Witnessed by Guiding Teacher:		

Full Name (print)	Full Name (signature)	Date