

FPMT Ethical Policy

FPMT Handbook, Nov 2008

Basis - the Five Precepts

The five Buddhist precepts are the basis of ethics in FPMT centers. The FPMT Handbook states:

For the centers to offer a Dharma environment depends on each member of the community emphasizing Dharma in their own life. To facilitate this all those visiting or living in a center, while in the center are required to live within the basic five precepts.

The five precepts are not to kill, steal, indulge in sexual misconduct, lie or take intoxicants. Intoxicants include alcohol, narcotics and cigarettes.

In Addition, The Following Policy Is Established:

- **Relationships:** Sexual relationships between FPMT staff in positions of authority, especially teachers (please see below for additional policy for Dharma teachers), and beginning Dharma students are strongly discouraged, due to the power and authority imbalances inherent in this relationship. FPMT teachers and staff should also be careful to refrain from behavior that could be interpreted as sexual advances or sexual harassment. In addition, even if a potential relationship between a staff member and a student would not otherwise be discouraged, no staff member should make sexual advances to any participant during a course or retreat.
- **Right Speech:** It is important that FPMT teachers and staff be careful not to gossip about or disparage other teachers, FPMT staff, or students, or use harsh or abusive language. We should avoid speech that is intentionally hurtful. If we are hurt or angry, we should wait before we respond and think about the impact and usefulness of our words. Overhearing conversations in which other teachers or students are disparaged can have an especially negative impact on newcomers and visitors to the center. If a difficult exchange is warranted, it should take place in private, away from the public areas of the center.
- **Center and Project Finances:** Great care should be taken in dealing with finances. In a Dharma center, the way certain financial transactions are handled is regulated by codes of conduct that are far more stringent than those of an ordinary business. Money that has been donated for specific Dharma projects should never be made available for general operating expenses, except as a temporary loan, and income from Dharma items should be used for Dharma purposes, not for general expenses. All income and expenditure should be clearly and transparently accounted for, according to generally accepted and nationally-approved accounting principles.
- **Non-discrimination:** The underlying principle, which is a fundamental part of our Dharma practice, is to treat others with respect, in a way in which we would like to be treated.

Non-Discrimination Policy

FPMT believes that it is a fundamental right for everyone to be treated equally, with respect and dignity; it will act directly and use its influence to ensure that this right is upheld.

The FPMT shall actively encourage participation of all people in its activities and will not discriminate in its membership, employment, or programming on the basis of age, ethnicity, disability of any kind, gender, ancestry, affectional or sexual orientation, religious or political affiliation, marital status, and personal and social circumstances.

The FPMT shall disseminate information and attempt by means of discussion as well as other proper means to educate the staff and members of the FPMT to a greater understanding, appreciation, and practice of human rights for all.

FPMT Dharma Teachers

Because of the uniqueness of the teacher-student relationship, **FPMT Dharma Teachers** are required to observe the following additional policy:

- **Confidentiality:** Teachers should respect the confidentiality of students, and treat all communications from students with professional confidence. Teachers should assume that all conversations with students are private, and should not disclose information acquired in the conversation without the consent of the student. This is another way of respecting the guideline of right speech mentioned above. **This is also required of interpreters.**
- **Qualifications:** Dharma teachers should be honest about their qualifications, and should be careful to correct any misrepresentation of their qualifications.
- **Relationships:** Teachers are not to engage in a sexual relationship or communicate such an intention while a student is attending the teacher's course, in order to protect both the teacher and the student from misusing the student-teacher relationship and to safeguard the high standards of conduct of Dharma teachers in our tradition.

Dharma teachers are usually held to high standards of conduct and thus should make every effort to conduct their personal relationships in an exemplary manner. Teachers should never use their authority and position in order to initiate sexual and intimate relationships with students.

If the Ethical Policy is Breached

It is FPMT policy that all complaints of alleged ethical misconduct will be investigated thoroughly, promptly, and that to the extent possible the individual(s) investigating will keep the information confidential, consistent with their obligation to investigate promptly and thoroughly.

If the individual(s) investigating determine that ethical misconduct has occurred, it is FPMT policy that every individual accused of breaching ethical policy be given the opportunity to explain their behavior, and if it is agreed that they indeed were unethical, have the benefit of receiving an explanation of why their conduct was considered unethical. If that individual agrees to change that conduct in line with FPMT Ethical Policy, they should be given the opportunity to continue offering service, and counseling, training, and/or disciplinary

measures may be put in place if they are considered necessary to correct the situation by the line manager or governing body.

If the misconduct was severe, and the line manager or governing body considers it too detrimental to allow the individual to continue serving that center, they may determine to dismiss that individual from their position.

Also if the individual does not agree to counseling, training or disciplinary measures, or are considered to have breached Ethical Policy a second time, the line manager or governing body may determine to dismiss that individual from their position.

No staff will be retaliated against in any way for reporting in good faith any allegations of misconduct. Such retaliation in and of itself may result in disciplinary action, to be determined by the appropriate line manager.

In a case where someone is accused of having breached the FPMT Ethical Policy, the individual affected should be encouraged and helped to initiate a grievance procedure.

[Please refer to the Grievance Procedure Guidelines in the FPMT Handbook chapter Offering Service for more information and next steps].

Updates to the Ethical Policy

The Board of Directors of FPMT Inc. may modify the Ethical Policy from time to time and FPMT International Office shall communicate any such update in a reasonable time and manner. Any updates shall supersede in whole or part the original Ethical Policy agreement.

Signing the Ethical Policy

1. Center, project and service directors, spiritual program, regional, national and study group coordinators - please sign and return your signature slip to the Center Services department.
2. Center or project board members, resident geshe or teacher, other teachers (including non-Dharma teachers), interpreter, and any others in a position of authority at the center - all should sign and give a copy to the director to keep.
3. Touring teachers: in the case of FPMT registered teachers who are not resident in a center, the Center Services Department at International Office will hold their signed Ethical Policy. Please check with the Center Services director whether we have this for any teacher visiting your center.
4. Members of the Board of FPMT Inc. and the staff of International Office have all signed the FPMT Ethical Policy.

Displaying the Ethical Policy

1. Display the FPMT Ethical Policy on your notice board, together with the information that your center, project or service abides by this policy, and has a set of grievance procedures to be followed in case of need. Please state a contact name if anyone requires more information.
2. The Ethical Policy should be included in any staff and volunteer training.

Background and Overview

The purpose of FPMT’s Ethical Policy is to help maintain and foster a supportive environment for Buddhist practice within the FPMT. This document describes the ethical responsibilities of people in positions of authority within the FPMT, such as teachers, center and project directors, spiritual program coordinators, board members, study group coordinators and interpreters in the centers, and FPMT Inc. board members and members of the International Office management committee within the larger organization. This document should be accompanied by the center or project’s Grievance Procedures, which outlines the procedures that should be followed if complaints or grievances against any of these people should arise.

FPMT center, project, or service teachers, directors, and staff are trusted to behave in ways that further the community’s well-being. The community expresses its special trust in individuals by placing them in these positions. In addition, these individuals are seen as representing Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and the FPMT; in that way, they act as ambassadors, and their behavior is a reflection on Rinpoche and the entire organization.

A fundamental responsibility to ourselves and to the FPMT community is to create a supportive, harmonious, and safe environment for Dharma practice. In this, we are caretakers of the community’s well-being and share a responsibility to foster an environment of integrity and respect. Part of this shared responsibility involves refraining from behavior that harms other participants or the community as a whole.

Another part of our shared responsibility is to attend to any concerns we may have about misconduct within the FPMT. If we notice conduct that we believe is harmful to an individual or the community, it is crucial that we recognize and express our concerns, so that a culturally appropriate forum for dealing with problems can be developed and applied.

Examples of misconduct include, but are not limited to, physical violence; sexual harassment, such as inappropriate and unwanted sexual advances; and misappropriation of community funds for personal use. Misconduct on the part of those in positions of trust can significantly undermine the community’s integrity; and users of the center can be considerably demoralized, and lose faith in the center. For these reasons, this behavior is prohibited, and the procedures outlined in a center or project's grievance procedures should be put into place if such a breach occurs.

As Buddhists, one of our main concerns when grievances arise is the ability to forgive and be compassionate within an understanding of karma. Genuine forgiveness and apologies for inappropriate actions should in general be accepted and encouraged. This means that the “victim” also has a responsibility to work on developing compassion for the “perpetrator”. In no way does this attitude condone inappropriate behavior, but such an attitude can help one to best deal with the situation and avoid problems in the future.

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Please sign and return to Center Services, FPMT International Office

I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the Ethical Policy document. I am aware that this Center has Grievance or Disciplinary Procedures that will be followed in case of any allegations of ethical misconduct.

Signed: *Please Print Name*.....
Position:..... Center.....
Date:.....