

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION AT ARCATA ZEN GROUP

It is the desire of the Sangha for individuals to resolve their conflicts outside of a formal process. Anyone is welcome to initiate the Conflict Resolution protocol, which is designed to provide a map for resolving persistent or deep conflicts.

During sangha activities misunderstandings, conflicts and unethical behavior may occur. It is with this in mind, that the Board of Directors is proposing the creation of a Conflict Resolution Team and an Ethics and Reconciliation Committee. This document is organized in four sections.

- First and foremost, the Precepts guide our intention and behavior;
- Secondly, we have articulated Core Values for preventing conflict;
- Thirdly, we have an Informal Conflict Resolution system in which - when conflict does arise – people can request the support of community leaders to resolve conflict and repair relationship;
- Lastly, we have a Formal Grievance Procedure - recommendations for steps to take when intra-community conversation has not resolved a conflict.

Precepts

The Bodhisattva precepts serve as the guiding principles for right conduct, right speech, and right sangha relations. Practice is based on trust, safety, respect, and true communication. We offer the following to nurture an atmosphere where people can practice without fear or distraction, where dharma comes first and where kalyanamitta (admirable friendship) is fostered.

Clear Mind Precepts

I vow not to kill and to cherish life

I vow not to steal and to honor the gift not yet given

I vow not to misuse sexuality and to remain trustworthy in relationships

I vow not to lie and to communicate truth

I vow not to intoxicate self or others and to polish clarity

I vow not to speak of others' faults and to create wisdom from ignorance

I vow not to praise self at the expense of others and to maintain modesty

I vow not to be possessive of anything and to practice generosity

I vow not to harbor ill will and to dwell in equanimity

I vow not to disparage the Three Treasures – to respect the Buddha, unfold the Dharma and nourish the Sangha

Core Values

These core values for communication and decision-making were articulated in 2019 as a way of preventing conflict in meetings at AZG.

We root our participatory group process in the realization of non-self, in the understanding of interdependence, and with faith in practice-realization. We vow, together with all beings, to ease each other's discomfort through our thoughts, words and actions, by rooting them in the

Noble Eightfold Path. In addition, we vow to do no harm, to do good, and to do good for others. This is the beauty and joy of the Sangha jewel. Our Core Values for Participatory Decision-Making are: Full Participation, Mutual Understanding, Inclusive Solutions, Shared Responsibility

Core Value: Full Participation as Practice

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak and say what's on their minds. To be able to speak and listen from the heart, and to encourage spontaneity, we offer each other the gift of fearlessness. Fearlessness is letting go of preconceived ideas, protective measures, competitiveness, and the delusion of separation. In offering this gift, we open up to the present moment, let the world come in, and offer our life to one another. Being fearless, we encourage each other to take risks, to give voice to controversial issues, and to embrace divergent thinking and an open process.

People involved in the conflict have the option to remain silent and to not attend or participate in "Full Participation" discussions about the conflict. Sangha members who attend meetings regarding conflicts are encouraged to respect persons who choose to remain silent; the act of silence is also a form of communication.

1. Share first draft ideas, half-formed thoughts and spontaneity.
2. Avoid criticizing, complaining, competing, and comparing.
3. Come prepared to engage fully by reviewing and considering agenda items before meetings.
4. Listen with an open heart and without preparing your own statement while someone else is speaking.
5. Honor each other's full participation by being on time, and keeping comments brief and related to the discussion.

Core Value: Mutual Understanding as Practice

Our group strives to integrate the perspective of each member through the practice of mutual understanding. Decisions made with mutual understanding are more fully participatory and result in lasting benefit for our shared practice life. Mutual understanding develops when each of us cultivates a sense of curiosity and openness to one another's views, a willingness to accept that other members' viewpoints are essential to our common effort, and trust that that the shared wisdom of our group is greater than the sum of its parts.

People involved in the conflict have the option to remain silent and to not attend or participate in discussions about the conflict. Sangha members are encouraged to respect the persons who decide to act with silence and non-participation.

1. Ask questions to understand another's view without critiquing it. Engage in an effort to reveal unspoken aspects of a view for the benefit of the speaker, as well as the group.
2. Reflect speaker's view in your own terms, spoken or unspoken, to verify a mutual understanding.
3. Acknowledge and integrate one another's ideas and recognize the richness of differing views and apparent differences between them.

4. Help build connections between apparently disparate views.

Core Value: Inclusive Solutions as Practice

We value the Wisdom that can emerge only from inclusive solutions. We recognize that we need each other's experience and perspectives to creative innovative and sustainable responses to the opportunities as well as the challenges of our shared life. We realize that, to the extent that we practice inclusive solutions, we will reach the best possible decisions.

1. Be active in discussion as both a listener and a speaker.
2. Be prepared to explain every person's position in terms that they can agree represents their thought.
3. When all have spoken, return to summarize each person's thoughts before proceeding to conclusions.
4. When consensus seems likely, ask
 - “what have we left out?”
 - “what part of our potential decision is still troublesome?”
 - “what seems particularly pleasing about our decision?”

Core Value: Shared Responsibility as Practice

Sustainable decisions require everyone's support, and responsibility for the decision-making process helps ensure that each person will be willing and able to implement the proposals. Our vows support us in relinquishing our self-concern and cultivating the qualities of empathy and assertiveness. This helps us realize that it is really only through the support of others that we can accomplish our goals.

1. All voluntary participants help design the agenda, take on meeting roles, and are willing to implement the proposals.
2. Make every effort to raise issues that are important to you, and make sure you are satisfied with the proposed course of action before a final decision is made.
3. Assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process during the meeting even when you are not the facilitator.

Other Suggestions for Practicing

1. Speak from your heart, without concern for what others may think of you.
2. Listen with your whole mind-body, taking in the whole person speaking, not just the words being said.
3. Speak from the perspective of your own practice.
4. Listen for what is right with what the other person is saying, not what is wrong.
5. Participate in the group fully, because without you, everyone else's experience is diminished.
6. Respect what you don't know.

Informal Conflict Resolution

This section is intended to guide conversations between individuals who may be in disagreement related to AZG program, processes and property. These suggestions may be used by individuals who agree to work on their conflict with each other directly, or by people who may have requested the support of a neutral facilitator or facilitator team. Anyone may ask for a neutral facilitator in order to learn these skills by using their own live issues.

Inevitably, being human, conflict will occur. A first step toward resolution is for the individuals involved to voluntarily make time to speak with each other openly and honestly, making agreements to listen carefully, restate what was heard, acknowledge shared responsibility and coming to mutual agreement on actions to be taken.

It is our hope that such resolution takes the form of reconciliation with oneself and with others. Whenever possible, disputes and disagreements should be resolved informally and directly between the people involved. It may occur that an individual does not feel safe or have the confidence to engage in a conversation such as this. In this situation, people may request the support of facilitator(s). Or the individual may choose to be silent and not participate in a conversation such as this. The individual does not have to provide a reason for the silence or non-participation. What follows are guidelines for engaging in difficult conversations with each other and/ or with the support of a facilitator.

We wish our life within the AZG sangha to express our Zen practice and bodhisattva intention. As the bodhisattva path is our heartfelt response to suffering, then turning away or skimming over suffering through silence, rationalization, assigning blame, minimizing, feeling self-deprecating guilt, or not listening deeply to its causes and conditions are all steps directed away from the bodhisattva path. Furthermore, avoidance is a condition for additional suffering.

Thus, when a conflict, grievance, dissonance, or violation of the precepts arises in our interpersonal relationships it is essential to attend to it fully. Individually, this involves waking up to our own contribution to the suffering in these situations through understanding our reactions, emotions, and attachments. Collectively, this involves taking the time to discuss the conflict with the other parties to clarify the actual causes, conditions, feelings, and responses that come together in a situation.

The suggestions that follow are intended to give all persons involved in a dispute a chance to be fully heard in an environment of respect and kindness. We make these suggestions because we understand that despite differences of opinions, we meet in the identity of our Buddha nature.

Witness

It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or facilitators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness, providing a sense of calm and presence, or may be an active participant who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunity to speak. Invited facilitators can be anyone whom both party's respect: e.g., neutral acquaintances, people trained in mediation or members of the ERC

council. If a person would like counsel on whether an informal conflict resolution meeting is necessary then one or more of the following people are available to discuss the matter privately: members of the ERC Council or Rev. Eugene Bush, teacher for the AZG.

Being Heard

It is important that everyone is given the opportunity to be fully heard unless they decide to remain silent. This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of the conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Each person should have a chance to speak, uninterrupted by questions or comments from others. Taking calm, deliberate and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for reconciliation to begin.

Restating What was Heard

To ensure that everyone understands one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said, highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate and makes corrections.

Acknowledgment of Shared Responsibility

Resolution and reconciliation are greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how he or she may have contributed to the conflict and then explains this to the other. Self-reflection by all can provide a safer, more trusting environment for everyone.

Mutual Agreement on Action

When voluntary and when appropriate, both parties to the grievance will mutually agree how to prevent the problem from arising again and decide on a procedure if the problem does happen again.

Conflict Resolution Team

This section describes the characteristics of the members of a team of sangha participants who have the skills to support difficult conversations.

When a conflict in the sangha occurs, as a first intervention, we recommend some in-house conflict resolution supported by a facilitator for all involved parties who agree to this proposal. The involved parties who agree to the request for facilitation team help can also request a facilitation team.

Facilitator / Facilitation Team criteria / The preparation of a facilitator/ facilitator team: Facilitators must have the knowledge, skills, techniques, and strategies needed to handle a broad range of disputes. This includes training in:

- Employing effective communication and active listening
- Balancing power
- Managing a negotiation
- Addressing diversity and gender issues
- Dealing with strong emotions

- Breaking impasse
- De-escalating anger
- Drafting agreements that work

The individual/team should be able to demonstrate the capacity to

- Know the scope of their roles
- Know when to refer to a more formal mediation
- Set aside preferential relationships/ dual relationship
- Listen objectively and summarize what has been said accurately,
- Encourage participants to express their perspectives and responsibilities
- Suggest possible resolutions based on the complete context
- Coordinate for any needed follow up

The task of a facilitator/facilitator team:

- Ask the involved persons individually and confidentially if they are willing to participate in the Facilitation Team's effort to resolve the conflict.
- Reassure each person involved in the conflict that participation in the Facilitation Team's efforts is entirely voluntary.
- For persons who agree to participate in the Facilitation Team's efforts to resolve the conflict, the following tasks by the Facilitator/Facilitation Team are advised (but not required) if the Team and the participants believe that the tasks are appropriate for the conflict situation:
 - Before a multi-person meeting, listen to each person's concerns and assure that they are understood
 - Set up a meeting at a mutually agreeable time, then within the meeting:
 - Establish rapport; support and encourage non-judgmental communication
 - Listen to each person separately; say what you heard, ask for clarifications, correct misunderstandings, gather information and context
 - Ask each person to articulate the perceived need(s)
 - Have each person say what they will do to remedy the situation, repair relationship
 - Summarize and confirm next steps

We recognize that for certain grievances, complaints and conflicts, informal resolution may not be possible. We offer a formal grievance procedure, available through the Ethics and Reconciliation Committee (ERC) for such situations. These formal procedures can be used to resolve disputes concerning administrative decisions or actions, and for addressing misconduct of sangha members.

Formal Grievance Procedure

A formal grievance procedure is available when informal attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted or deemed inappropriate by the participants or by the Reconciliation Team. The primary purpose of the formal grievance procedure is to come to a decision regarding the specific issue or complaint submitted.

The Ethics and Reconciliation Committee (ERC), a subcommittee of the AZG Board, receives formal grievances. The ERC consists of three members appointed by the Board: at least one Board member, and two other AZG members. Its task is to resolve conflicts and promote harmony in the sangha, not to assign blame or mete out punishment.

A formal grievance is initiated in the following way: (1) A written complaint (from anyone in the sangha or outside of the sangha) is given to the President of the AZG Board, describing the alleged behavior, and including a summary of informal attempts used to try to resolve the conflict. (2) The ERC meets within thirty days, reviews the complaint, and decides whether a formal grievance procedure is warranted or whether other informal channels should be attempted first. If necessary, the ERC may request further information from the person filing the complaint. (3) If the ERC agrees that a formal grievance procedure is warranted, one or more meetings are then held with the ERC and the parties involved in the grievance.

Moving to Formal Mediation

If it should occur that conflict has not been resolved in a series of at least three meetings, formal mediation will be encouraged and is available to the persons involved and is optional for the persons involved. An involved person does not have to provide a reason for non-participation in formal mediation.

Resources include:

Humboldt Mediation Services

Alternative Dispute Resolution, Eureka/ Humboldt County