

# Common Street Spiritual Center



## Safe Community Policy

**Relevant bylaw: “6. The Council is responsible for implementing a comprehensive safe community policy, for the physical and emotional safety of all persons who participate in the life of our community, both on-site and off-site.”**

### I. Purpose

Common Street Spiritual Center affirms its commitment to being a community grounded in dignity, mutual respect, and accountability. All individuals are entitled to participate in the life of the community in a safe and respectful environment, free from abuse, exploitation, harassment, intimidation, or coercion.

This policy is established to:

- Prohibit sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and all forms of abuse.
- Provide a fair, impartial, and clearly defined process for receiving, investigating, and resolving concerns or complaints.
- Promote restorative justice practices when such approaches are appropriate and consistent with safety and accountability.
- Protect the rights, well-being, and dignity of all individuals involved in a complaint or inquiry.
- Reduce harm to individuals while ensuring responsible stewardship and minimizing institutional risk.

- Apply consistent standards of conduct and accountability to leaders, members, volunteers, and participants.

This policy applies to conduct occurring in programs, events, gatherings, meetings, communications, and activities under the auspices of Common Street Spiritual Center, whether onsite or offsite.

This policy is not intended to govern or prohibit consensual romantic or dating relationships between consenting adults, provided such relationships are not intentionally coercive, exploitative, or abusive.

## **Cultural and Ethical Commitment**

Common Street Spiritual Center recognizes that relationships within any community are shaped by broader cultural dynamics, including power imbalances related to gender, race, age, status, role, and social identity. As a love-centered and justice-aware community, we strive to cultivate relationships grounded in dignity, mutual respect, and care. This policy is intended both to prevent harm and to provide a fair, balanced, and compassionate process for addressing concerns when they arise.

## **II. Definitions**

### **1. Leader**

A “Leader” is any person serving in an official capacity within the Spiritual Center, including but not limited to:

- Staff
- Council members
- Committee members
- Program leaders
- Event facilitators
- Authorized volunteers
- Any person entrusted with defined responsibilities on behalf of the community

Leaders are required to maintain clear and appropriate boundaries that reflect dignity, respect, and accountability to prevent harm, avoid conflicts of interest, and uphold trust within the community.

## **2. Member**

An active member of Common Street Spiritual Center.

## **3. Non-Member Participant**

Includes:

- Inactive members
- Friends of the community
- Program participants
- Guests
- Event attendees
- Contractors
- Visitors

Non- member participants are afforded the same rights and protections under this policy and may serve as either complainants or respondents.

## **4. Abuse**

Abuse is the intentional or knowing act of causing physical, sexual, or emotional harm, including injury or neglect, to another person.

## **5. Sexual Exploitation**

Sexual exploitation is any sexual activity or contact obtained through intentional coercion, manipulation, or misuse of power.

Any determination of a power imbalance shall be made based on the totality of the facts and circumstances, and no relationship shall be deemed exploitative solely on the basis of role, gender, or identity category.

### **Clarification:**

This definition is not intended to prohibit or discourage respectful, consensual expressions of romantic interest between adults. A single invitation, mutual flirting, or reciprocated romantic interaction—when freely, clearly, and mutually engaged—does not, by itself, constitute coercion or manipulation.

## **6. Sexual Harassment**

- Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual's participation in the community or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

## **7. Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault is any non- consensual sexual act or contact that violates a person's bodily autonomy, dignity, and well- being.

## **8. Abuse of Power**

Abuse of power is the misuse of authority, influence, or positional advantage to control, manipulate, coerce, or harm another person, or to interfere with their autonomy, consent, or ability to participate freely in the community.

## **III. Ethical Standards**

The Spiritual Center maintains consistent ethical standards for Leaders, Members, and Non-Member Participants.

All individuals participating in the life of the Spiritual Center are expected to refrain from intentional abuse, exploitation, harassment, coercion, or intimidation of others.

Leaders are held to a higher standard of care, particularly in relationships where formal authority or influence exists.

Each complaint will be evaluated based on the specific facts and circumstances involved, rather than on assumptions based solely on identity, status, or role.

## **IV. Core Principles of Response**

The Spiritual Center affirms:

- Fairness
- Impartiality
- Due process

- Restorative justice
- Protection from retaliation
- **To protect the dignity, privacy, and well-being of all involved, information will be shared only on a confidential, need-to-know basis.**

Complaints shall not be presumed factually accurate solely by virtue of being reported.

This policy is not intended to address ordinary interpersonal conflicts, disagreements, or differences of opinion, including procedural or governance matters, unless they involve credible allegations of abuse, harassment, or exploitation.

Findings shall be based on a preponderance of the evidence (more likely than not).

All complainants and respondents — whether members or non-members — shall be afforded equal procedural protections.

This policy does not create contractual rights and shall be interpreted consistent with applicable law.

## **V. Response Team Structure**

1. The Council shall appoint a Response Team annually.
2. Members serve staggered two-year terms.
3. The team shall consist of 3–5 members.
4. Gender diversity is required.
5. Age and ethnic diversity are strongly preferred.
6. Members may not be current Council members.
7. Members shall sign confidentiality agreements.
8. One member shall serve as response lead and one as documentation lead for each event.

Response team members shall have experience working collaboratively and effectively on teams or committees. The Response Team shall be trained in this policy and restorative practices.

## **Recusal**

Any member of the Response Team who is the complainant, the respondent, or who is otherwise materially involved in the circumstances of a complaint shall recuse themselves from participation in the assessment, investigation, or deliberation of that matter.

If a Response Team member believes their impartiality may be significantly compromised, they are encouraged to disclose the concern and recuse themselves voluntarily.

If recusal reduces the Response Team below three members for a particular case, the Council may appoint temporary members for the duration of the investigation.

## **Volunteer and Professional Assistance**

The Response Team may engage outside volunteers or paid professionals (such as medical experts, lawyers, mediators, etc.) to assist in informal resolution processes and/or formal investigation processes. For each case, such costs are not to exceed \$1,000 without prior approval from the Council.

# **VI. Complaint Procedures**

## **A. Informal Resolution**

Where there is no threat of immediate danger, informal resolution is the preferred initial step.

This may include:

- Direct conversation
- Facilitated dialogue
- Mediation
- Restorative circle

Participation must be voluntary.

Restorative processes shall not substitute for mandatory reporting obligations.

Informal resolution does not apply in cases involving credible allegations of sexual assault, child abuse, or immediate safety concerns. Such matters must be addressed through formal procedures and, when required, referred to appropriate authorities or safeguarding bodies.

## **B. Filing a Complaint**

Complaints may be submitted to:

- A member of the Response Team
- A staff member
- A Council member

All complaints must be promptly referred to the Response Team.

## **C. Initial Assessment**

Within the first documented receipt of any complaint, acknowledgement must be sent immediately to the complainant.

Within 48 hours of receiving the complaint, the Response Team shall:

1. Interview the complainant and respondent (virtually or in-person) with any language translator of their choice, with written permission submitted for their participation.
2. Determine whether the complaint falls under this policy (e.g., whether facts alleged amount to abuse, exploitation, or harassment).
3. Assess whether informal resolution is appropriate.
4. Determine whether interim protective measures are necessary.
5. Request information about any conflicts between complainant/alleged victim and respondent preceding the complaint.

## **D. Interim Protective Measures**

Interim measures may be implemented when the Response Team, in consultation with the Council, assesses that there is a risk of immediate harm.

Such measures may include:

- Temporary separation of parties
- Modified participation boundaries

- Temporary administrative leave

Interim measures are precautionary and do not constitute findings of wrongdoing.

## **E. Formal Investigation**

If informal resolution is inappropriate or unsuccessful, a formal investigation shall proceed.

The investigation includes (with assurance of language accessibility):

- Interview of complainant
- Interview of respondent
- Opportunity for written statements
- Witness interviews (mandatory if the reporting complainant is not the same as the alleged victim)
- Review of documentation
- Written findings

Requests by complainants or alleged victims for withdrawal of complaints shall be dated for documentation and response considered by the Team.

## **F. Findings and Recommendations**

The Response Team shall prepare a written report including:

- Summary of allegations
- Summary of evidence
- Credibility assessments (if applicable)
- Findings under the preponderance standard
- Determination of Safe Community Policy violation
- Recommended corrective, restorative, or disciplinary measures

The Response Team is responsible for factual determinations. Response Team recommendations will be based on a majority vote; team consensus is not required.

The purpose of Response Team investigation and reporting is to keep members safe and informed; the Council may not prevent the information in the report

from being shared with members, but may choose to share a redacted or deidentified version of the report.

The Response Team shall act by majority vote, seeking consensus when possible. In case of a division of the Response Team, members may issue majority or minority reports.

## **G. Role of the Council**

The Council shall:

1. Review for procedural compliance.
2. Act on the Response Team's findings and recommendations.
3. Implement corrective, restorative, or disciplinary measures.

### **Recusal**

Any Council member who is the complainant, the respondent, or who is otherwise materially involved in the circumstances of a complaint shall recuse themselves from all deliberations and decisions related to that matter.

If a Council member believes their impartiality may be significantly compromised, they are encouraged to disclose the concern and recuse themselves voluntarily.

### **Abuse-of-power complaints**

If a member of the Council or the Response Team is the subject of an allegation of abuse of power, the Membership Committee shall ensure that the complaint is handled impartially and without conflict of interest.

### **Possible Outcomes and Corrective Measures**

Actions may include one or more of the following:

#### **Restorative and Corrective Measures**

- Facilitated restorative dialogue or circle
- Written acknowledgment of harm
- Behavioral agreements or participation boundaries
- Required ethics or boundary training

- Counseling or professional support
- Supervised participation
- Community service within the Spiritual Center
- Structured reconciliation plan

### **Protective or Disciplinary Measures**

- Formal written warning
- Probationary status
- Temporary suspension from leadership or participation
- Removal from leadership or volunteer roles
- Suspension or termination of membership
- Restriction of access to programs or property
- Referral to civil authorities when required

The goal of any action is to address harm, restore safety, encourage accountability, and strengthen the integrity of the community. Extreme punitive measures taken in the name of safety qualify as abuses of power.

## **VII. Response Team Recommendations Requiring a Vote of the Membership**

In rare circumstances, the Response Team may recommend disciplinary measures that, under the CSSC Bylaws, require a vote of the membership. In such cases, the Response Team shall submit its final report to the Membership Committee, which will determine what information members need in order to cast a fair and unbiased vote on the proposed disciplinary measure(s).

When appropriate, and with careful protection of the confidentiality of all parties, the Membership Committee may provide members with relevant materials, including redacted investigative documents, summaries of interviews with the complainant, respondent, and/or collateral interviewees, a summary of the complaint, and the Response Team's findings and recommendations, or other materials as deemed necessary. In accordance with the Bylaws, all such materials must be made available to members at least two weeks prior to the vote.

## **VIII. Appeal Process**

Either party may appeal within fourteen (14) days of the date of the Response Team's final report.

Appeals go to the Membership Committee and may address:

- Procedural irregularities
- Errors in factual findings
- Insufficiency of evidence
- Disproportionate disciplinary measures

The Membership Committee may affirm, modify, remand, or reverse.

Its decision is final within the Spiritual Center, subject to review by a membership meeting.

## **IX. Youth and Minor Protection Standards**

The Spiritual Center is committed to safeguarding children and youth.

### **Screening Requirements**

All Leaders and volunteers working with minors must:

- Complete disclosure forms maintained separately from this policy
- Undergo criminal background checks
- Complete sex offender registry review
- Provide references
- Participate in safe community orientation

Volunteers working with minors must be members for at least six months or have participated consistently for at least one year.

### **Supervision Standards**

- At least two unrelated adults must be present in settings involving minors where participants are not readily visible to others.
- One-on-one private contact with minors is prohibited unless visibility safeguards are in place or parental consent is obtained.

- Written parental consent is required for offsite and overnight activities.
- Individuals transporting minors must hold valid licenses and meet driving record standards.

Mandatory reporting obligations supersede all internal processes.

## **IX. Mandatory Reporting**

Reasonable suspicion of child abuse shall be reported to appropriate civil authorities in accordance with Massachusetts law. In cases involving adult sexual misconduct or assault, the Center will offer support, resources, and information about reporting options, including how to contact local law enforcement and crisis services. The decision to report to civil authorities will be respected as the survivor's choice.

If the Response Team, in consultation with the Council, determines that there is a credible and ongoing risk of harm to others, the Center may make a report to appropriate authorities without the survivor's consent. This step will be taken only after careful consideration of available information, potential risks, and the safety of those involved. When possible, the individual who experienced harm will be informed in advance of this decision.

## **X. Screening and Forms**

The Spiritual Center shall maintain separate screening, disclosure, and authorization forms for leaders, volunteers, and those working with minors. These forms shall be reviewed and updated periodically by the Council to ensure compliance with applicable law and best practices.

# Appendix A

## Safe Community Complaint Process Flow Chart

Step 1: Complaint Submitted

→ Referred to Response Team

Step 2: Initial Assessment

→ Policy applicability

→ Informal resolution?

→ Immediate safety risk?

If risk → Interim measures

If no risk → Informal or Formal

Step 3: Informal Resolution (if appropriate)

→ If resolved → Document and close

→ If unresolved → Formal Investigation

Step 4: Formal Investigation

→ Interviews

→ Evidence review

→ Findings

Step 5: Response Team Report

→ Findings and recommendations to Council

Step 6: Council Action

→ Implements measures

→ Recusal if necessary

Step 7: Appeal (Optional)

→ Membership Committee within 14 days

→ Final decision