

Dear Students,

Welcome to the Preventing Sexual Misconduct Class. We will pursue two teaching objectives:

1. Helping you to become more emotionally intelligent within your community about personal, interpersonal and sangha dynamics
2. Preparing you through (legal) policy to weather a misconduct storm in your sangha.

We offer this class because the Western Buddhist community has struggled with sexual misconduct scandals for more than 50 years, and even though we have tried to set rules about teacher-student relationships, the difficulties and harm caused by offending teachers to our Buddhist communities and reputation continues.

Many people have read rules and guidelines about attraction and relationships in the Buddhist sangha. And yet, when meeting these real-life situations with OUR teacher, in OUR temple, we falter and often lose our way.. We need to understand why we become mired in complex emotions and evaluations. AND we need a map to guide us—clear policy and consequences for violation of policy. In this class we will introduce you to community members who went through this distressing ordeal so you can understand and feel for yourselves the roller coaster an entire community experiences when confronting sexual misconduct.

We will begin this class by introducing 3 sangha members who suffered with their community when a recent sexual affair between their teacher and one of his students was disclosed. We want you to note how you feel about their reactions and actions. Our legal counsel, Carol Merchasin, will later address how a clear policy and grievance procedure might have supported the community through this ordeal. In subsequent classes she will continue to outline the essential elements of policy, and we will also teach the council method for sharing the feelings and creating a wholesome style of communication within the sangha. In this way we will fulfill both of our teaching objectives.

We have created a page on our website with many background materials:

shogakuzen.org/march2023class

- readings and teachings about the disruption of a teacher betraying his/her community from Faith Trust and Safe Harbor
- pleadings from public record of a Civil Suit brought against a California Zen Center over incidents of sexual misconduct
- sample policies

We encourage you to explore this page before the first class.

There will also be a request for you to submit your community's policy, and an opportunity for you to create a policy with an attorney experienced in this area of the law.

These support materials cover both of our main focus topics for this class:

1. How do I understand this conflict in terms the emotions I and others will experience within my community
2. How do I prepare a policy to legally safeguard and guide my community

We look forward to seeing you on Thursday, March 30 at 1:00 to 3:30 pm PST (4:00 to 6:30 pm EST). The zoom link will be sent before class.

Sincerely,

Grace, Carol, Steven, Daishin, and Kanji