

# **Common Ground Meditation Center Ethics and Reconciliation Policy (ERP)**

## ***Overview***

Common Ground Meditation Center values the cultivation of peace and harmony through individual responsibility, mutual respect, and practice of the precepts. However, conflict will inevitably arise within the community. We measure the health of our community not by the presence or absence of conflict, but by our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of addressing difficulties when they arise and to support reconciliation whenever possible. Common Ground Meditation Center is committed to making the community a safe and respectful place for all, and it has implemented several processes to address informal or interpersonal conflicts or difficulties, as well as a Formal Grievance Procedure for allegations of serious ethical breaches by a person in the Common Ground community.

Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. Rather, it is based on opening and responding to the suffering of all concerned. Hurt, fear, and anger are treated respectfully. We value inquiry over distraction, acknowledgment of unskillful or harmful acts over denial, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, and insight over lack of wisdom. The process of reaching such resolution can be difficult.

The Common Ground Board of Directors has appointed an Ethics Committee to promote the values and practices of community health and harmony. In addition, the Board has designated a small pool of respected senior members to serve as the Ethics and Reconciliation Council (EAR Council). The EAR Council is available to any community member who wants help in dealing with interpersonal conflicts, grievances, or ethical concerns within the Common Ground community. The EAR Council can help facilitate deeper personal reflection, serve as a sounding board, give guidance on how best to resolve conflict, assist in finding greater clarity about an issue, and offer other supportive means of addressing or working with conflict or difficulties.

On the rare occasion that allegations of a serious ethical breach are raised, a Formal Grievance Procedure may be implemented. Any Common Ground participant who believes that he or she has been subjected to, or who is aware of, any form of serious ethical misconduct or harassment involving a Common Ground leader or participant, are encouraged to set up a meeting with an EAR Council member to voice his or her concerns. The EAR Council is available to discuss these concerns and to help provide information about Common Ground's ethics guidelines and policies.

Other avenues also exist to address inappropriate, unethical, and/or grievous behaviors that may be more appropriately dealt with administratively. You may contact Guiding Teacher & Executive Director, Mark Nunberg, at Common Ground Meditation Center, 612-722-8260 or [Mark@commongroundmeditation.org](mailto:Mark@commongroundmeditation.org)

This document outlines the process for requesting a Formal Grievance Procedure, as well as how participants in the Common Ground community can access and utilize the EAR Council for informal consultations. Our intention above all is to foster an environment of responsibility and integrity and to treat all parties involved with fairness, compassion, and respect.

## ***Bringing a Concern Forward: Informal Process & Formal Grievance Procedure***

You may choose an EAR Council member with whom you feel most comfortable to discuss your concerns. The EAR Council member will listen to your concerns carefully and will discuss possible directions or courses of action depending on the situation. Outlined below are general guidelines and examples that may be helpful in clarifying your needs:

<u>Informal Consultation Process</u>	<u>Formal Grievance Procedure</u>
<p>Interpersonal conflicts, grievances, or individual ethical concerns where an EAR Council consultation could assist in facilitating honest inquiry and reflection, serve as a sounding board or a caring witness, facilitate dialogue between you and another member of the community, serve as a source of advice in how best to resolve a conflict, or suggest resources for reconciliation. Examples include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict with a friend or partner where both of you are members of the community</li> <li>• Request for resources on working with conflict</li> <li>• Ethical concerns and challenges and how to work skillfully with them</li> <li>• Creating and maintaining healthy boundaries with others in the community such as after a break-up.</li> </ul>	<p>Alleged serious ethical violations by a person(s) in the Common Ground community that include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misappropriation of Common Ground funds by Common Ground leaders and volunteers</li> <li>• Alleged gross and harmful behavior by a Common Ground leader or participant</li> <li>• Inappropriate sexual behavior or harassment by a Common Ground leader or teacher</li> </ul>

At the end of your first meeting, you and the EAR Council member will together make a summary record of your meeting, and decide on a next step, if any.

### **Conflict of Interest Policy:**

As a relatively small organization, many Common Ground participants and leaders have multiple roles and relationships within the community. When addressing any matters related to allegations of serious ethical breaches or ethical concerns, we aspire to maintain the highest standards of objectivity, impartiality, and integrity throughout the processes. Any involved parties concerned about potential conflict of interest or bias should inform an EAR Council member or the Chair of the Ethics Committee. Conflict of interest charges or concerns will be addressed at the joint meeting of the Ethics Committee and the Board of Directors (discussed later in this document under “Formal Grievance Procedure”). Throughout the informal consultations and formal grievance proceedings, any member(s) of the EAR Council, Ethics Committee, *ad hoc* team, or Board of Directors who feels that he or she cannot be objective and impartial for any reason is expected to excuse themselves from the proceedings.

## **Privacy Policy**

Great care will be taken to safeguard the information you share with the EAR Council. For informal consultations with the EAR Council, information will remain private.

Under rare circumstances when a concern involves a serious risk of harm, the EAR Council may provide information to the Guiding Teacher and the Board of Directors and recommend initiation of a Formal Grievance Procedure or other appropriate action. You will be informed if such disclosures are made.

In cases of a Formal Grievance Procedure, the Guiding Teacher, the Ethics Committee, the *ad hoc* investigation team, and the Board of Directors will have access to the information (unless allegations of ethical misconduct have been raised against any of these individuals). All efforts will be made to be discreet and respect privacy to the extent possible.

## ***Informal Consultation Process***

The EAR Council is available to support any Common Ground participant(s) who would like to move towards understanding and resolution of conflict through informal reflection or dialogue. People who are looking for assistance from member(s) of the EAR Council may contact them as described below.

### **Contacting a Member of EAR Council:**

EAR Council members can be contacted at [EARCouncil@commongroundmeditation.org](mailto:EARCouncil@commongroundmeditation.org) or by leaving a phone message at Common Ground Meditation Center. E-mail messages will be forwarded to specific EAR Council members or the Chair of the EAR Council. Phone messages should include your name, phone number, and specific EAR Council member to whom you would like to speak.

## ***Formal Grievance Procedure***

A Formal Grievance Procedure has been set in place to address allegations of serious ethical misconduct by persons in the Common Ground community. Our intention is to be respectful, attentive, and compassionate with both the person making the allegation and the person against whom the allegation is made.

### **The following is the process for requesting a Formal Grievance Procedure:**

#### **1. Contacting an EAR Council Member for an Initial Consultation**

The EAR Council person will assist you in assessing the situation and informing you of the steps involved in a Formal Grievance Procedure.

#### **2. Writing a Letter of Request for Formal Grievance Procedure**

A letter requesting a Formal Grievance Procedure should be sent to Common Ground Meditation Center (Attn: Ethics Committee Chairperson) and should include:

- A clear statement that a formal procedure is requested
- The names of all the people involved in the grievance

- A description of the alleged behavior sufficient enough to decide whether the grievance warrants an investigation
- A history of attempts, if any, to resolve the concern through other means
- A general statement about resolution or outcome desired

### **3. Accepting and Investigating the Grievance**

Upon receipt of the letter requesting a Formal Grievance Procedure, the Chair of the Ethics Committee will immediately inform the Guiding Teacher and the Chair of the Board. The Chair of the Ethics Committee will work with the two of them to set up a joint meeting of the Ethics Committee and the Board of Directors. In addition, the Guiding Teacher, the Board Chair, and the Ethics Committee Chair will together determine what information needs to be gathered before the initial meeting, and whether or not any parties named in the grievance should be notified prior to the joint Board/Ethics Committee meeting.

The Board Chair will convene the meeting and will request the Ethics Committee Chair to present the letter of request for a Formal Grievance Procedure and facilitate the discussion regarding the content of the grievance. A quorum of the Board and at least three members of the Ethics Committee will be present to review the grievance and discuss a course of action at this meeting. The Board will formally vote on how to proceed with the grievance such as:

- Creation of an *ad hoc* team to investigate the matter
- When and how best to notify all parties named in the grievance
- Dismissal of the grievance based on the lack of merits of the charge

Within 2 weeks of the receipt of the letter, the Chair of the Ethics Committee will convey in writing to the involved parties (i.e., person(s) raising the grievance and the one(s) alleged to have committed the serious ethical breach) the Board's decision and outline the process to be followed.

If an *ad hoc* team is created, the team will include one or more members of the Board of Directors and the Ethics Committee, with the Board designating one of the team members as the facilitator. As appropriate, people with special expertise or resources relevant to the grievance may be invited to be on the team.

The *ad hoc* team is responsible for:

- Investigating the matter
- Interviewing the person initiating the grievance, others involved in the grievance, and additional people who may provide pertinent information to the matter
- Summarizing their findings
- Presenting findings to the Common Ground Board of Directors
- Making preliminary recommendations to the Common Ground Board of Directors

### **4. Outcome**

The Common Ground Board of Directors will review the findings and recommendations and assess each situation fully. The Board may elect to accept or reject all or some of the recommendations and will act to preserve and/or restore the health and safety of the community and its members.

Board actions may include but are not limited to:

- A reconciliation process for those involved
- Corrective action designed to protect the community
- Preventive and healing practices

Within two weeks of the Board's decision, all parties mentioned in the grievance will be notified of the Board's decision in writing.

Under certain circumstances, the Board or the Ethics Committee, as requested by the Board, may communicate to the Common Ground community the outcome of the Formal Grievance Procedure. This communication may include any healing measures under way and steps being taken to prevent similar matters from rising to this level in the future.

### **Record Keeping and Privacy Policy for the Formal Grievance Procedure:**

The Ethics Committee and the Board of Directors will keep written records of all grievances, investigations, and outcomes, filed in the Board's and Ethics Committee's formal records. Every person who makes a statement at any stage in the investigation should understand that his or her statement may become part of a written record. The record may be reviewed by the members of the Board and the Ethics Committee, and, in some instances, during legal proceedings. For the safety and the well being of the community, the Board may choose to disclose parts of the formal record.

### **Ethics and Reconciliation (EAR) Council Members**

(Currently the EAR Council is comprised of all the members of the Ethics Committee.)

Kyoko Katayama (Also Chair of the Ethics Committee)

Jean Choe

Mariann Johnson

Craig Vollmar (Currently on leave)

Jessie Ware (Currently on leave)

EAR Council members can be contacted at [EARCouncil@commongroundmeditation.org](mailto:EARCouncil@commongroundmeditation.org) or by calling and leaving a message at 612-722-8260.