



Western Chan Fellowship CIO (“WCF”)

Policy for Mental Health Care in Groups and on Retreat

Purpose

This policy is aimed at the protection of any retreat or group participants who may reveal a vulnerability to serious mental health problems whilst participating in WCF activities. To be read by Retreat Leaders, Interviewers, Guest Masters, Group Leaders and Committee Members.

Most retreat hosts and group leaders are not trained in mental health assessment and this policy does not assume such training or experience. Rather, the aim is to ensure that reasonable care is taken to detect obvious and severe mental health problems and that participants are protected so far as possible should these phenomena become apparent to hosts and leaders.

There have been a number of instances of severe mental health problems in participants on retreat but it is fairly unusual for a retreat host to need to use this policy during a retreat. A small number of people with serious mental health problems have attended some local groups, but there is no evidence that group participation has exacerbated these problems, although it has been necessary to advise a small number of people that group meditation is not suitable due to their mental health condition.

The WCF has a number of members who are experienced in working with people with mental health issues who are able to advise in specific circumstances and who have been consulted on the wording of this policy.

Prevention

Retreat applicants are requested to self-declare any mental health treatment they are, or have been, receiving. Some people who have become unwell on previous retreats will be unable to make an online booking, necessitating a discussion with a retreat leader prior to another booking being accepted, or declined.

There is no requirement for people to disclose any mental health history on joining local groups, although this can be helpful.

Intervention on Retreat

If an individual is showing signs of deteriorating mental health the person concerned will usually be asked to talk to one of the Interviewers on the retreat who will check for unusual experiences that are obviously outside of the range that might be expected on retreat, e.g. suicidal intentions, ideas of being controlled, hearing voices, homicidal intentions.

If these or other serious mental health problems appear to be present the Interviewer may consult with another of the retreat staff and decide on a course of action. The following possible situations are described together with suggested courses of action

a Retreatant poses a significant risk to others.

If possible, the retreat leader (RL) would be informed (this may not be possible in an emergency)

Police and crisis team are alerted to situation (**see link at bottom of page.**)

Retreatants are asked by RL and GM (guest master) to evacuate to a safe space, previously identified. All GM's cooks and retreat leaders to be made aware of these safe spaces and the location of telephones.

b Retreatant is verbally abusive and disruptive to the retreat

Retreat leader and another retreat staff member attempt to calm retreatant down.

RL and retreat staff member decide if retreatant can continue with retreat.

If not, retreatant is asked /helped to leave.

If unsuccessful, i.e. retreatant refuses to leave, Police are alerted to the situation/ and /or local crisis team.

c Retreatant poses risk to self.

Retreatant is informed that next of kin will be contacted.

Next of kin will be asked to make arrangements to collect retreatant.

And/or Local crisis team will be asked to attend, and assess with respect to Mental Health Act.

2 people will stay with retreatant at all times until help arrives.

In case of urgent mental health crisis;

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>

After the Retreat

Notify the WCF administrator so that extra care is taken if the person applies for a further retreat. This is not intended to lead to automatic exclusion; acceptance onto the retreat would be on the basis of circumstances at the time of any future application.

Intervention in Groups

If a group member is obviously disturbed or disturbing others during group sessions, the Group Leader is advised to arrange a one-to-one interview outside of the group. This is to give the group member an opportunity to talk about their participation in the group and provides an opportunity to guide them in participating more effectively. At the same time the Group Leader should be alert to the possibility that the group member might disclose a personal issue. However, it is not the responsibility of the Group Leader to seek disclosure of such information.

Part of the role of Group Leader is to make a judgement about whether the person can benefit from being in the group and also whether their participation is going to be detrimental to others. A high degree of tolerance is essential, and a person should only be asked not to come if there are serious problems. It is recommended that the Group Leader discuss this matter with their WCF mentor before making any decisions about inclusion or exclusion of the group participant.

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