

‘Caring for children’ policy at Buddhafield North 2023

Each year at Buddhafield North we have a chance to create an intentional, temporary Buddhist village. Here we practice together, open our hearts, share food, get closer to nature and perhaps most importantly practice connecting with others in caring, generous and compassionate ways. Living alongside each other for a week is chance to form connections that are nourishing and safe. Part of this is helping each other – caring for the site, cooking food, leading teaching and perhaps taking care of the children.

For this to work well, our contributions need to be done skilfully and mindfully. Just as we take care to cook nutritious, safe food for each other – so we seek to care for our village children in a safe and wholesome way. To this end, some of us facilitate activities for children (children’s stories, parent & children drop-in activities, bushcraft, cooking, adventures) – supporting children to feel at home, to make friends, to contribute and create. As well as this, older children can play freely across the site – both alone and in groups. The levels of freedom given to each child, and the boundaries set for their play, will vary from family to family. Sleepovers – either in other families tents or in designated Teenage Dome – are by negotiation with a child’s individual family.

However, children attending Buddhafield North are the responsibility of their parents at all times.

The need for active parenting

As a community we recognise that when children are young, ill, hungry, tired, sad, angry, anxious or experiencing social challenges ... then they are likely to need their parents more. In these moments, if parents are occupied, members of the wider community might fetch parents, bring them out of activities, support them to attend to their child. We expect on the retreat, that there are core times that parents ensure they take care of their children. In general, these are during mealtimes, early in the morning and later in the evening.

If as parents, you ask a member of the wider community to look after your child on a 1-1 basis we ask you let Tejapushpa or Kate O’Brien (as safeguarding Officers) know who is with your child.

Wider community care

Examples of how the village community might connect with and take care of the children during the retreat includes doing things like:

- Taking care of crying child, whilst trying to find its parents
- Holding a baby during a puja with the permission of its parents
- Entertaining a bored child
- Babysitting outside a tent at the request of a parent so that they might attend an evening Puja
- Helping a child find their parent
- Taking part in group games
- Chatting to children by the hearth

We welcome this care and generosity. We see the value developing relationships across the village community and see the support this offers parents to participate. For this support to be skilful, we at Buddhafield North suggests the following guidelines:

- If you are taking care of someone else’s child, make sure that this takes place in the public areas: the village green, the hearth.

- Make sure you are in the presence of others and in public view. Please don't take the child into personal or secluded places out of sight.
- Any contact with babies or children that might mean you are alone with that child (like pushing a child to sleep in its buggy) must take place with the full permission of its parents.

Children taking part in activities

As well as informal play, at Buddhfield North activities are organised for children by a team of adults. These can include: group games, the Kids Area, Kids Kitchen and Bushcraft Area. **Where parents leave children alone at these short activity sessions, our volunteer team take care of children – but they still remain under the overall care of their parents on site.** The principles set out below are to guide our volunteers when running these activities. We suggest that volunteers:

- Find a child's parents, if a child is unhappy, withdrawn, unwell, injured in any way or exhibiting challenging behaviour that is making things hard for other children or adults.
- Do not accompany children to the toilet – instead we say let's find your mum and dad
- Do not help children in changing clothes
- Do not take children to secluded areas off the site alone
- Do not take children off site unless with permission of parents
- Avoid being alone with a child – and especially not alone in a tent with a child

However, we do support volunteers to use positive touch with children – to prevent harm to the child or other children; to comfort an upset child; to offer reassurance.

Challenges on this site

So that you can care for your child well at Buddhfield North, we want here to let you know of some of the risks and challenges on the Fell Edge Site. We suggest that you go round the site with your children and assess how much (if any) support your child needs around these. The key challenges we have identified are: the site is porous (it is possible to leave either through a gate or climb a low fence); there is a large pond on site with deep water in the middle and muddy edges that children can get stuck in; there are slippy and muddy paths; there are nettles, brambles and bees in the wooded area; there is a net strung in the large oak tree that older children play in; there are compost toilets which your child might not be used to; there open camp fires each evening; children assist with cooking and with chopping vegetables; the Bushcraft area makes uses of knives, ropes and fire within its activities. As well as this there are first aiders present on site to assist if needed – and these will be made known to you at the first Morning Circle.

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Declaration (please complete and return to the BFN team)

I declare that as an adult attending Buddhfield North 2023 I have read, understood and can abide by the 'Buddhfield North Caring for Children' policy.

Name

Signature