

Teacher Student Ethics - Dual Relationships

Definition of dual relationship -

Dharma teacher and therapist/counsellor/coach

Dharma teacher and friend

Dharma teacher and employer

Dharma teacher and accepting gifts other than dana

The role of Dharma teacher requires that we bring discerning wisdom to the complex issue of dual relationships in sanghas and close-knit communities of friends and colleagues.

Very little consensus exists about nonsexual dual relationships, and Dharma teachers need to be vigilant in terms of potential risks to students and to themselves.

It is recognised that because of the many roles Dharma teachers assume in their work, family, community and social lives, dual or multiple relationships arise in unexpected ways. Some of these multiple relationships are potentially harmful.

A Dharma teacher refrains from entering into a multiple relationship if the multiple relationship could reasonably be expected to impair the teacher's objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her functions as a Dharma teacher, or otherwise risks an excessive power differential in relation to the person with whom the professional relationship exists.

Dual relationships that would not reasonably be expected to cause impairment or risk of an excessive power differential or harm are not unethical.

If a teacher finds that, due to unforeseen factors, a potentially harmful multiple relationship has arisen, the teacher takes reasonable steps to resolve it with due regard for the best interests of the affected person.

It is cautioned that therapy clients are particularly vulnerable to unintended harm in the case of a dual role of therapist and Dharma teacher.

It is therefore recommended that teachers take responsibility for the following:

1. Clients attending retreats/days of mindfulness or workshops are informed that the teacher's attention will necessarily be divided amongst a large number of people and that the teacher will not be in a position to offer the type of attention experienced in a therapy session. The client is given the choice of attending with a full understanding of these constraints on the therapeutic relationship.
2. Clients attending retreats or days of mindfulness where open Dharma Inquiry is offered, are requested to attend Dharma Inquiry with the co-teacher or if there is no co-teacher to refrain from attending Inquiry.
3. Clients attending retreats are asked to attend one to one interview sessions with the co-teacher.
4. Dharma teachers are very careful to differentiate mind states and meditation experiences that may appear to have similar characteristics to harmful mental states such as trauma dissociation or nihilistic mind states. For example, meditative dissolution experiences arise in many forms and could be confused with a trauma state.

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