



The Alliance for Buddhist Ethics

Promoting non-harming for a safe, just and compassionate world

The Alliance for Buddhist Ethics is committed to advancing the cause of safe Buddhist communities free from all kinds of abuse.

Encore to Abuse: Common Responses to Victims

These responses are so common that victims can typically be expected to be met by some of these, to some extent. They can even be indicative that abuse has taken place. There are significant incentives for organisations, teachers/lamas, and regular members, to dismiss victims and engage in cover-ups. This leads to these predictable and common responses. Victims often report that the second wave of their ordeal did more harm than the initial abuse.

1. M.O.B. Attack

This is where the victim is conveyed as Mad Or Bad (or both) among the community. This is to help the perpetrator, and often an organisation as well, by encouraging its members to exclude a person as no longer “one of us” because they have “gone bad”. It encourages antipathy towards the victim and destroys friendships or sympathy that might have existed towards the person. It also is a way to discredit anything the victim says. It allows the group to be guilt-free and can even assist group cohesion by pitting members against a “bad apple” and allowing members to express their loyalty to the group and their teacher by their commitment to refusing to believe and excluding the victim.

2. D.A.R.V.O Attack

Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender. This common response involves identifying something the victim has done, typically exaggerating or de-contextualising it, or completely inventing it, in order to make that the focus. So now, the victim and offender are reversed.

3. Gaslighting

This involves all the ways in which people’s own perceptions and judgements are put in doubt by another. At its worst, it involves convincing a victim that their memories of what happened are incorrect and that they are “crazy” and have it all wrong. If a perpetrator can make a victim doubt their perception of reality, it undermines their self-belief and capacity to report abuse. People subject to gaslighting are encouraged to doubt themselves which opens them to accepting a version of reality offered by an authority figure or organisation. Gas lighting includes all the ways organisations and individuals explain away, minimise, white-wash, or ignore abuse.

4. Stone-Walling

This involves ignoring a person who is trying to raise a concern. Emails, letters, or phone calls go unanswered. Or the victim might be told that the person they are trying to reach, be they someone in charge in the organisation or the perpetrator themselves, is unavailable, absent, uncontactable, unwell, or their whereabouts unknown.

5. Victim Blaming & Expelling the Victim

The victim may find themselves blamed for whatever happened, or some other reason given, and formally excluded from the organisation. This can happen pre-emptively even when the victim has not raised a complaint. Blame shifting and expulsion can be the simplest approach for an abuser and for the organisation which then is not required to address the victim’s concerns. In other cases the victim might



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leave because they have been bullied or subjected to subtle or explicit threats, and flee or hide in fear. Expulsion can involve loss of livelihood and accommodation for victims, as well as loss of friendships and community. It can literally ruin every aspect of a person's life.

6. Online Attacks & Bullying

Victims (and their supporters) can be bullied or threatened online, either privately such as in messages or emails, or publicly, such as on the internet, in order to discredit, frighten, and silence them.

7. Not Being Believed & Discrediting of Evidence

It is hard for people to acknowledge that a group they are a part of, or a teacher they admire and have dedicated years of their life to, have been abusive. Thus they will be inclined towards disbelief. This involves disbelieving the victim and also dismissing any supporting evidence as fabricated. Even if there are multiple complainants and significant evidence many will still not believe it or simply do not wish to know. It can also be hard for colleagues or friends of the accused to believe what the person is capable of and to act decisively. People who are abused usually assume that being a Buddhist the perpetrator would want to make amends, and that a Buddhist organisation will wish to support the victim. It is always a shock when this does not turn out to be the case and often turns the person away from Buddhism.

— Jack Wicks