

# TARA MANDALA®

## Culturally Inclusive Communication Agreement

Tara Mandala has created this Communication Agreement for everyone in its community (Sangha members and participants, staff, retreat center residents, board and council members, and teachers) to engage in and commit to upholding in group and one-on-one interactions.

May this effort serve to remove any and all forms of discrimination and harassment from our Sangha and global community. May it provide the clear and simple understanding that can encourage constructive and positive dialogue, inclusion, and a deeper recognition of our interdependence.

### **Practice self-focus**

- I commit to exercising self-reflection, exploring, and figuring out what I need, feel, want, or expect.
- I am responsible for communicating what I want others to know about me.
- Recognizing I can speak only from my own experience, I use "I" statements when appropriate and possible.
- When speaking, I consider substituting "but" with "and". This practice acknowledges and honors multiple realities.
- I have the Right to Pass: I can say "I pass" if I do not wish to speak.

### **Silence**

Recognizing there are times we observe noble silence, we further commit to creating space for those who are observing silence as a form of Right Speech.

- Noble Silence is the commitment to refrain from speaking as part of adherence to one's practice, retreat, or observing a holiday or ritual for a period of time.
- Silence can sometimes be a skillful use of restraint.
- When observing noble silence, I communicate this clearly to others and also check up on my motivation for keeping noble silence.
- I understand that silence is not to be used as a weapon and does not involve ignoring others or not acknowledging others' presence.

### **Create space for learning and failure**

Mistakes are a natural part of personal growth. While they may be disruptive, mistakes can also serve as an opportunity to learn from and move forward with positive outcomes.

- I use mistakes as a chance to reevaluate, shift, and/or engage in open dialogue.
- I commit to learning in relationships, compassionately welcoming the mirror of others' views.

### **Practice mindful active listening**

I commit to listening with my whole self, with a present mind and open attention.

- When useful, especially if the speaker has not been feeling heard, I repeat what the speaker said, to check that I understood what they said.
- Try It On: I am willing to “try on” new ideas or ways of doing things that might not be what I prefer or am familiar with.
- I try to avoid planning what I’ll say as I listen to others. I am willing to be surprised, to learn something new, and to stay mindfully present when engaging with and listening to others.
- I avoid giving advice to others, which I recognize could be inappropriate or even harmful. Instead, I apply empathy and compassion when listening to others rather than trying to fix their problems or issues for them.

### **I make space and take space**

We all enjoy varying levels of privilege; it’s up to us to decide how we flex it or share it. Are you holding others back from participating in the discussion? Are you holding back because you don’t want to step on any toes? We all carry the responsibility of including everyone in the conversation, including ourselves.

- I lead with respect and curiosity, encouraging full participation by all present. I take note of who is speaking and who is not. If I tend to speak often, I commit to consider “making space” and vice versa.
- I practice inclusivity of the people in the room, at the table and engage in community building by making space in the conversation to include everyone present. If I need to speak about private matters, I will make time for one-to-one conversations.

### **Consider the difference between intent and impact**

I assume best intent, and attend to impact: Conflict in and of itself isn’t bad, but conflict without mutual respect is.

- When conflict arises and I feel disrespected, I remember that my peers are only human. I give them the benefit of the doubt and explain how their actions made me feel.
- I try to understand and acknowledge the impact. Denying the impact of something said by focusing on intent is often more destructive than the initial interaction.
- When I have harmed another, I commit to recognizing my fault in the matter, apologize, and attempt to repair the relationship as appropriately as possible.

### **Feedback is an offering**

We can’t grow if we don’t know. Feedback should be seen as a respectful demonstration of care for another person’s growth, success, and happiness. If we don’t give conscious feedback, we deny one another the opportunity for personal and professional growth and development.

- I practice taking in constructive, helpful feedback as a tool of self-improvement.
- I try to skillfully discern what should be taken up privately with another person and what should be taken up in a group.
- If I need a witness, facilitator, or mediator for conflict resolution, I will ask for one.

- I practice giving skillful feedback by being truthful, helpful, and kind and choosing my words carefully.
- I maintain confidentiality. I commit to keeping private or personal information about others to myself now and in the future. If I want to follow up with anyone regarding something they shared, I ask their permission first and respect their wishes.

### **Levels of communication**

There are types of communication that range from in-person to impersonal. Text messages are among the least personal, and communications around challenges and conflicts often benefit from more “in-person” types of communication.

- Although much of our work takes place over email, I commit to communicating professionally and courteously with my supervisors, co-workers, teachers, Board members and Tara Mandala participants and will not use email or text messages to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings.
- When conflict or misunderstandings arise, I commit to speaking directly with the person to resolve our miscommunication. If I cannot meet in person, I will meet by telephone or video call to resolve our misunderstandings.
- I avoid gossip and stirring up unnecessary anxiety in others. I refrain from blaming or shaming others, including myself.
- If I find myself speaking about someone who is not present, I am careful to honor that person, trying to say nothing I would be ashamed for that person to hear.
- Whether speaking to someone with authority over me or speaking with someone I have authority over, I commit to communicating with respect, courtesy, and kindness, recognizing they are human beings, with feelings and a wish to be treated well by others.
- If I am in a position of authority, I am careful not to order someone to do something for me, but with restraint and humility, I ask politely for their help rather than demand it.

For Staff, Teachers, Board, Council Members, and Residents:

*I have read and understood the contents of the Communication Agreement.*

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date