

Brooklyn Zen Center  
**Community Agreements**  
*A Working Guide for Our Sangha*

**Intentions**

Each time we enter Brooklyn Zen Center (BZC), we step into a shared practice container. We water a collective intention to create and hold cherishable spaces rooted in safety and bravery. In such spaces, we are witnessed and encouraged to express ourselves without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience. A cherishable space invites us to risk intimacy, trust, and transformative love, and to be mirrored by our practice and our sangha (practice community).

We use the phrase “brave space” with “safe space” to evoke the possibility of fearlessness alongside the fleeting realities of safety. We carry and express varied histories, traumas, and experiences of oppression. We embody different forms of power, privilege, and entitlement. Conflict may arise, and at times we may not feel safe.

Together, we explore how to hold conflict with tenderness. We cherish our sangha and its members by taking responsibility for the impact of our actions. With bravery, we practice letting go of the conditioning that keeps us from sharing our vulnerability. We practice being curious and brave enough to acknowledge our blind spots, to ask for support, and to learn how to care for each other. We return to our intentions, and return to sangha.

This is our practice of collective liberation. It will be uncomfortable, joyous, terrifying, and profound. And we begin again anew, in every moment, together.

**Acknowledgements, Resources, References, Input**

- Brooklyn Zen Center sangha members
- East Bay Meditation Center, *Agreements for Multi-Cultural Interaction* , adopted from Visions Inc.'s “*Guidelines for Productive Work Sessions.*” [www.visions-inc.org](http://www.visions-inc.org)
- Buddhist Peace Fellowship, *Block Build Be Shared Agreements* , July 2017
- Intergroup Dialogue trainings (dialogue and debate, University of Michigan, University of California Los Angeles)
- “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” (article from *The Art of Effective Facilitation*, Stylus Publishing, 2013)
- *Natural Bravery* by Gaylon Ferguson (Shambhala Publications, 2016)
- Mindfulness, Concentration and Grounding Exercises (as taught by BZC guiding teachers and practiced by its sangha)

Brooklyn Zen Center  
**Community Agreements**  
*A Working Guide for Our Sangha*

**1. ARRIVE GENTLY, BE WITH**

We begin and end our meetings on time. Arrive and leave when best for you. Appreciating how refreshing it is to be in a place that is well cared for, we take care of our ourselves and our community by keeping the space uncluttered and accessible, especially near doors, aisleways, bathrooms, kitchen, and tea area.

**2. HONOR INTIMACY, PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY**

We do not share the names or personal stories of anyone other than ourselves, now or later. If we want to follow up with anyone regarding something they said in community, we ask first and respect their wishes.

**3. ASSUME NONE, BE ONE**

We do not assume the race, class, gender, sexuality, or ability of anyone else. We have the individual option to share pronouns, and we will collectively respect pronouns.

**4. DIALOGUE OVER DEBATE THROUGH MINDFUL LISTENING**

We listen deeply with our full attention, in body, heart, and mind. We listen to understand, not to respond. We are willing to be surprised, to learn something new, to be changed by all viewpoints and ideas. Not knowing is most intimate.

**5. PRACTICE CARE AND CONSENT**

We practice care and consent by participating in what feels right and speaking our needs and concerns as they arise, as much as we can. We can say “I pass” or “No, thank you” if we don’t wish to speak. We ask before touching, and we are free to say no to touch. We ask for permission before offering advice, unless directly asked.

**6. PRACTICE SELF FOCUS AND SPEAK FROM THE “I”**

We attend to and speak about our own experiences and responses. We speak using “I” statements and do not speak for a whole group or express assumptions about the experience of others.

**7. PRACTICE “BOTH / AND”**

We substitute “and” for “but” when speaking. This practice acknowledges and honors multiple realities. This also supports creating spaciousness around our binary ways.

**8. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTENT AND IMPACT**

No matter our intentions, we take responsibility for the impact our actions have on others. Denying our impact by focusing on intent can be more destructive than the initial interaction.

**9. REFRAIN FROM BLAMING OR SHAMING SELF & OTHERS**

We practice giving skillful feedback and not performing quality control on another’s expressions, or our own, understanding that powerful emotions can arise as a shout, a stammer, a cry; and that these expressions, too, deserve space and care.

**10. TAKING SPACE, MAKING SPACE**

We encourage full participation by all present, knowing that courage takes different forms for each of us. Take note of who is speaking and who is not. If you tend to speak often, consider “tuning in” through mindful listening. If you tend to rest in silence, consider “making space” by sharing your experience.