



### Safeguarding statement

Safeguarding is very important to everyone connected with the Open Table Network. This page deals with how we implement our Safeguarding Policy to keep our children, young people and adults safe and secure.

The Open Table Network was created by, and for, LGBTQIA+ people, who have too often found churches 'unsafe', unwelcoming places to be. Not all churches intend to be hostile or hurtful; some have just never imagined themselves in other people's shoes. But until churches give an equal welcome to us all, the Open Table Network will continue to help create worshipping communities where LGBTQIA+ people need not fear being themselves. Owing to these issues of hurt and harm, we are particularly aware of issues around safeguarding, and particularly committed to protecting children, young people and adults within our gatherings.

Everyone connected formally with the Open Table Network (that means the Patrons, the Trustees, the paid staff, the community leaders and the volunteers) takes safeguarding very seriously. We hold positions of trust. But actually, *everyone* involved in the Open Table Network shares the responsibility for keeping worship spaces and gatherings safe. In a place where God is so central to our thinking and feeling, we all need to respect and protect each other, and to promote the welfare of LGBTQIA+ people, even if we don't have a specific safeguarding role.

Each Open Table community operates under the authority of a local 'host church', and is therefore covered by the safeguarding policy of that church or denomination. Each host church is required by law to comply with Government safeguarding legislation and guidance. Where abuse is disclosed, witnessed or suspected, it should be reported to the appointed person for safeguarding in the host church, who should then report it to the statutory authorities, in other words, Social Care Services or the Police. The exception to this is in cases of immediate danger, i.e. when witnessing abuse, in which case the witness should contact the police immediately.

#### **If you're hosting an Open Table community, safeguarding is especially important.**

If a member of your community is, or seems to be, at risk you need to feel confident to challenge unsafe practice or inappropriate behaviour. You must be prepared to record your concerns and share them with relevant people as soon as you can. You may need to act or respond within a short timescale. You will need to trust your judgement.

#### **First, to be prepared, here are also some practical things you'll need to do and to know:**

- Become familiar with the OTN Safeguarding Policy.
- Identify the appointed person responsible for safeguarding in your host church or denomination (e.g. Baptist, Church of England, Church in Wales, Methodist, United Reformed Church).
- Make yourself, and your contact details, known to them.
- Share their contact details with the leaders (more than one) in your community.
- Familiarise yourself with the safeguarding protocols of your host church.
- Familiarise yourself with the reporting process in your host church.
- If you, or anyone in your Open Table community, are involved in pastoral care, speak to your host church or denomination to ensure safeguarding training is provided.

**Remember: In matters of abuse, aggression or bullying, silence is not an option.**

### Safeguarding Policy for Children and People At Risk

The trustees of the Open Table Network commit to the support, nurture, protection and safeguarding of all children and all people at risk.

We recognise that any work that is undertaken with children, young people, and adults is the responsibility of the whole organisation. The Open Table Network is fully committed to acting within current UK legislation, guidance, and national frameworks, as well as within relevant local safeguarding procedures. We see the huge importance of working in open, transparent and accountable ways in partnership with Social Care Services, the Police, Probation Services and other relevant agencies to make our Open Table communities safe places to be. We will assist in bringing to justice anyone who has committed an offence against a child, young person or adult.

#### To this end, the Board of Trustees will:

1. Ensure that all necessary checks are made to promote the safe selection and recruitment of paid workers and volunteers.
2. Ensure that the necessary supervision, support and training is provided, in order that they can undertake their roles effectively and appropriately.
3. Ensure that the Open Table Network Director has a current enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate, renewed every three years.
4. Ensure that other staff members and volunteers working with individuals or groups who may be vulnerable or at risk, will also have a current DBS certificate.
5. Insist, as a condition of association with the Open Table Network, that Open Table communities are familiar with, and adopt, the safeguarding protocols of their 'host' church or denomination.
6. Require, as mandatory, confirmation that the leadership of each existing Open Table community is fully aware of the safeguarding regulations and procedures of its 'host' church.
7. Require, as mandatory, confirmation that the leadership of 'new' communities is fully aware of the safeguarding regulations and procedures of its 'host' church.
8. Respond, without delay, to every concern raised about a child, young person, or adult that may have been harmed, or may be at risk of harm.
9. Respond, without delay, to every concern about the behaviour of an adult or child.
10. Co-operate fully with the relevant church authorities and appropriate statutory agencies during any investigation into abuse, including those allegations made against a member of the Open Table Network.

**Open Table Network Trustees**

**June 2024**

**Policy review:**

**June 2025**