

Open Table Network 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, our young people and our vulnerable 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 vulnerable 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.



