



Bible Society

## Safeguarding Policy – Open the Book

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The component parts are:

- Policy Statement
- Safeguarding Code of Conduct for Open the Book Storytellers, as found on the Open the Book website and provided to all Open the Book storytellers.
- Procedures and guidance based on the government's *Working together to safeguard children* (March 2015).

For the purpose of this policy, 'children' refers to all non-adults (i.e. those under 18 years of age), unless otherwise stated. 'Storytellers' refers to those voluntarily engaged in the work of Open the Book (OtB). 'DBS' refers to the Disclosure and Barring Service, the vetting scheme in England and Wales. In the case of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, this will be the local safeguarding vetting authority.

The policy statement included in this document has been adopted following approval by Bible Society ('the Society'). It will be reviewed and re-endorsed annually, and is available from the OtB website and in written form on request.

### 2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, temporary workers, volunteers, consultants, contractors, agents and subsidiaries acting for, or on behalf of, the Society ('associated persons'). Every employee and associated person acting for the Society is responsible for maintaining the highest standards of business conduct. Any breach of this policy may constitute a serious disciplinary, contractual and/or criminal matter. It may also cause serious damage to the reputation of the Society.

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All employees and associated persons are required to familiarise themselves and comply with this policy, including any future updates that may be issued from time to time by the Society.

### 3. POLICY STATEMENT

OtB is a project where local volunteers from the local church (or churches together) visit schools to present Bible story telling assemblies/acts of collective worship. OtB is part of Bible Society where paid staff oversee the initiative and establish new volunteer teams.

**Bible Society/Open the Book has adopted the following principles:**

We believe that all human beings are of equal worth in the sight of God and aim to follow biblical principles in all that we do.

Therefore:

- We commit ourselves to the nurture, protection, and safekeeping of all, especially children and young people.
- It is the responsibility of each one of us to protect children and young people from physical, sexual and emotional abuse ('abuse'), and to report any abuse suspected or discovered.
- OtB activities in schools should be carried out in such a way that neither children nor storytellers are vulnerable to possible abuse.

In order to implement these principles, OtB requires all involved, and especially storytellers, to commit to following the guidelines and procedures outlined in this document and in the Safeguarding Code of Conduct.

### 4. GUIDELINES

#### 4.1 SCHOOLS SAFEGUARDING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The schools which OtB teams visit are expected to have in place their own Safeguarding Policy and procedures and a named Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in accordance with the government's *Working together to safeguard children* and *Keeping children safe in education* ( March 2015).

#### 4.2 MINIMISE SITUATIONS WHERE THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN MAY OCCUR

As the work of OtB always takes place openly in school assemblies/acts of collective worship with responsible teachers present, and is always carried out by a team of adults

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together, situations should not arise where a storyteller is alone with an individual child. OtB teams are visitors in the school and their visits are prearranged according to a regular schedule. OtB will not register teams who are not linked to their local church community.

#### **4.3 BIBLE SOCIETY'S COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING**

All staff engaged by Bible Society in connection with OtB are required to undergo the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks through Bible Society under the current DBS guidelines. It is the responsibility of each church that recruits storytellers to ensure that they are appropriate for the role. It is recommended that all storytellers should receive a clear DBS check in accordance with the current DBS guidelines through their church before visiting any school in their capacity as storyteller. For the purposes of this policy, a 'clear DBS check' means that the results of a DBS check reveal no information which would, in the view of the church conducting the vetting, make the individual unsuitable for the volunteer role.

If storytellers are operating a rota system where they go into school less frequently than weekly or fortnightly they may not fulfil the requirement to have a DBS check. The recruiting church should have a clear audit trail of the decision making process.

Guidance and advice on good conduct when in contact with children is given and included in initial and ongoing training of storytellers where provided by locally approved trainers. Advice and support is given by Bible Society. Storytellers are recruited for OtB work by churches across the country, not by OtB or Bible Society. It is therefore the responsibility of each church to ensure the appropriate vetting of the volunteers it recruits, including conducting DBS checks in accordance with current DBS guidelines, and to satisfy itself that each individual is suitable for the OtB storyteller role.

If, when a DBS check is carried out, the results reveal criminal history information relevant to the role of OtB Storyteller, an assessment of the individual's suitability for the role should be carried out by the church vetting that individual. Information revealed that is not relevant to the role of storyteller cannot be relied upon as a reason for refusing an individual for the role.

All churches should ensure that each of its storytellers has been appropriately checked and is suitable for OtB work prior to the commencement of their role. Bible Society will, through its audit process, carry out sample checking of a percentage of the storytellers to confirm that they have been appropriately vetted.

#### 4.4 STORYTELLERS' COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING

All storytellers are given a copy of the Bible Society written Safeguarding Code of Conduct and this policy and are briefed on each school's own Safeguarding Policy and relevant procedures. Every storyteller agrees to follow this policy, the Safeguarding Code of Conduct and school's relevant local policies and procedures.

#### 4.5 USE SUPERVISION AS A MEANS OF PROTECTING CHILDREN

All OtB teams have an identified Team Leader who plans and reviews their voluntary work with the church leader to whom they are accountable. The Team Leader and church leader will liaise with school authorities where necessary to protect the vital interests of a child.

#### 4.6 RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR STORYTELLERS

Storytellers are not interviewed or selected for their roles by OtB or Bible Society staff, but are required to be members of churches and approved for this ministry in schools by their respective church leaders. Recruitment to the role of storyteller includes vetting by individual churches as set out above (see 4.3, Bible Society's Commitment to Safeguarding). The recruitment and selection process listed below should be followed by all churches.

**Interview/discussion.** Have a face-to-face interview or discussion with pre-planned and clear questions to assess a person's suitability for the role as a storyteller. Always ask if they know of any reason why they should not be working with children.

Should the applicant not wish to apply for the appropriate vetting that is required by the recruiting church, which is entirely their choice, the application must not proceed further and must be terminated.

#### 4.7 HOW TO DEAL WITH THE DISCLOSURE AND DISCOVERY OF ABUSE (SEE APPENDIX)

In the event of any OtB staff or storyteller becoming aware of a concern regarding a child's safety or wellbeing – either a disclosure by a child or their own observed concern/discovery of abuse – they will report it immediately to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

#### 4.8 CONCERN ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF A VOLUNTEER (SEE APPENDIX)

In the event of any OtB staff or storytellers becoming aware of a concern regarding a Storyteller's suitability to carry out OtB work because of risks posed to the safety and wellbeing of a child or children, they should immediately report their concern to the relevant Church Safeguarding Officer and notify the Human Resources Manager at Bible Society.

Where relevant and necessary, Bible Society should report the concern to the relevant school.

For the avoidance of doubt, nothing in this policy prevents a member of OtB staff or storyteller reporting concerns regarding a storyteller's suitability to carry out OtB work. They should report their concerns immediately to the relevant Church Safeguarding Officer and notify the Human Resources Manager at Bible Society.

Church Safeguarding Officers will follow their church's safeguarding procedures including notification to the local Safeguarding Authority when required.

Where concerns are of a nature to require the temporary suspension of a storyteller from OtB work in the interests of child safety, Bible Society's Human Resources Manager should be informed that the particular volunteer storyteller will not be participating in OtB work for the time being.

### 5. GOOD PRACTICE COMMITMENT

All storytellers have agreed to:

- stick to the script and present the story simply, without addition or improvisation, following the guidelines in the Open the Book Handbooks
- allow each story to speak for itself, as a Bible story, not as a sermon
- liaise closely and sensitively with schools, and be mindful of the educational environment
- make minimal demands on schools and be aware of being invited visitors
- show respect and sensitivity to those of other faiths, and to those with none
- fulfil the relevant safeguarding requirements i.e. follow this policy and the Safeguarding Code of Conduct and any related procedures.

We recommend that storytellers are accompanied by the school's staff during all storytelling sessions.

## **6. RISK MANAGEMENT**

Each storyteller should have a copy of the Handbook which contains the Code of Practice. Team Leaders will update storytellers of changes to a school's Safeguarding Policy and procedures. Storytellers should, where possible, attend local training annually which will include a safeguarding update. Additionally, Team Leaders should ensure that safeguarding matters, this policy, any relevant procedures and the Safeguarding Code of Conduct are discussed with their teams once a year. This will ensure everyone is up to date and aware of how to handle any concerns about safeguarding in respect of children or volunteers. Bible Society will ensure that storytellers are informed through newsletters and the website of any changes to safeguarding legislation and related policies and procedures.

New teams are encouraged to undergo initial training either through approved trainers or using the training DVD. New Team Leaders should contact Open the Book for support and advice. We also recommend that storytellers attend their denomination's Safeguarding training and a session with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

## **7. REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE OF A CHILD**

The Society depends on its employees and storytellers to ensure that the highest standards of conduct are maintained in all its dealings. Employees and storytellers are requested to assist the Society and to remain vigilant in preventing, detecting and reporting abuse.

Employees and storytellers should report any concerns that they may have regarding the suspected abuse of a child using the procedures in sections 4.7 and 4.8 of this policy (see also attached Appendix).

If action is not being taken by the local Safeguarding Authority, church or school and Bible Society reasonably considers it is appropriate, an investigation will be carried out, in the interests of child safety, following the Bible Society's internal procedure.

## **8. ACTION BY THE SOCIETY**

The Society will fully investigate any instances of alleged or suspected abuse by its employees and, to the extent possible will fully investigate any instances of alleged or suspected abuse by its associated persons. Employees and associated persons suspected of abuse may be suspended from their duties, where necessary, while the investigation is being carried out. The Society may invoke its disciplinary procedures where an employee is suspected of abuse, and proven allegations may result in a finding of gross misconduct and

immediate dismissal. Storytellers are volunteers and as such are not subject to Bible Society's disciplinary policies which are applicable to its employees only.

The Society reserves the right to terminate without notice its relationship with any person who it deems is unsuitable to act for or on its behalf by reason of their involvement in such abuse.

The Society may also report any alleged or proven abuse to the relevant authorities, including the police. The Society will provide all necessary assistance to the relevant authorities in relation to any subsequent investigation.

The Society will report any concerns concerning alleged abuse by an employee to the Local Authority Designated Officer and comply with Local Safeguarding Children Board policy and procedures including statutory investigations.

## **9. REVIEW OF PROCEDURES AND TRAINING**

The Society's Human Resources Department will monitor and review the implementation of this policy and related procedures periodically.

Employees and those working for, or on behalf of, the Society are encouraged to contact Human Resources with any suggestions, comments or feedback that they may have on how these procedures may be improved.

The Society reserves the right to amend and update this policy as required. For the avoidance of doubt, this policy does not form part of employees' contracts of employment.

## APPENDIX – WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

Storytellers who have a safeguarding concern about:

