

Safeguarding Policy

This is the Safeguarding Policy of YouBelong, an online support network of people who share the struggles and questions that arise from living as a Christian with chronic illness/disability. This policy has been written in line with legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children and adults at risk in England and Wales.

Throughout this policy we use the term “present” interchangeably to mean on-site or online. We use the term “children and young people” to mean anyone aged under 18; this is interchangeable with “child” throughout the policy and procedures. We use the term “adults at risk” as used in government guidance; this includes “adults with care and support needs”, the term used in the Care Act 2014, and “vulnerable adults” used previously.

We use certain criteria for assessing when individuals may be “at risk” in line with the Care Act 2014, as follows. An individual must

- have needs for care and support,
- be experiencing, or be at risk of experiencing, abuse or neglect
- be unable to protect themselves against the abuse or neglect, or the risk of it, as a result of their needs

About YouBelong

YouBelong has a Mission Statement which is as follows:

“YouBelong aims to connect, support and empower chronically ill and disabled people.”

YouBelong has a tagline which is as follows:

“Connect, Support, Empower”

YouBelong has three key aims, which are to provide:

- An online support network of people who share the struggles and questions that arise from living as a Christian with chronic illness/disability
- Spaces to discuss disability and chronic illness theology.
- A community, a church of people

These core values are central to the development and implementation of this policy.

Purpose and scope of this Policy

This document displays our commitment to keeping our community safe, in the recognition we can all be classed as “adults at risk” at times due to varying health needs and working within the social models of disability and health. (See Footnote)

This document provides members and attenders, as well as children, young people and their families should they be present at any point, with the overarching principles that guide our approach to the protection of children, young people and adults at risk in our YouBelong community.

What we do

Current activities undertaken by the YouBelong community via Twitter, Facebook, Zoom and our website are:

- Online Bible Study
- Online Mindful art, craft and journalling sessions
- Sharing Prayer Requests online in the YouBelong Facebook group
- Fundraising for Gifts to Specific Causes
- Informal Chat via Private Facebook, members website area and on other Social Media Channels
- Promoting Disability, Faith & Justice related issues online, at conferences and in journals as appropriate

Abuse in any form is unacceptable and we are committed to keeping everyone safe. Everyone, including children, young people and at-risk adults, has a right to participate in our community without suffering harm, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. We recognise 'that of God' in everyone. All people deserve respect, value and appropriate care. Our care extends to people who are potentially vulnerable to abuse and to those who may be perpetrators. We recognise abuse can include, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse and neglect. We know that our organisation may be open to risks because we foster a culture of welcome and trust for all. We accept that often an abuser is known to or in a trusted relationship with the individual abused. We are aware that harm can be caused by aspects of culture in our own community and seek to ensure that we meet our promise of respect, support, empowerment and inclusion. We are constantly vigilant around mitigating risks and invite discussion of any concerns at any point.

Responsibilities

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Our Safeguarding Lead has specific responsibility for Safeguarding, supported by our Safeguarding Deputy, YouBelong Lead and Core team, in line with the mechanisms established by Christian Safeguarding Association Thirtyone:eight. Roles and Responsibilities between individuals are agreed between the aforementioned people and the YouBelong Lead at regular Safeguarding Meetings. Contact details for our Safeguarding Lead and Safeguarding Deputy are at the bottom of this document which will be available to all YouBelong community members via the website.

Safer Appointments/Recruitment

The Safeguarding Lead will be involved with recruitment, alongside the Safeguarding Deputy, YouBelong Lead and Core Team, to ensure secure vetting practices are in place. These will include references, DBS checks and any additional information arising from such checks in line with Thirtyone:eight recommendations. Final decisions on recruitment will be made by the YouBelong Lead and Core Team once all checks are complete.

Training and Good Practice

Each member of the YouBelong team will be trained in line with guidance from Thirtyone:eight. It is embedded in the culture of YouBelong that safeguarding each other is everyone's responsibility, and as standard good practice the YouBelong team will model that approach while also recognising at times we may be the ones the YouBelong community will model that approach to in our times of need.

Procedure for responding to concerns or allegations of abuse

If a disclosure is made to any one of the YouBelong team, we will first and foremost listen carefully to the individual disclosing and ensure their immediate needs are met, while ensuring both the disclosing individual and the individual being disclosed to are not put at any further risk. Where the disclosure can be anticipated, another individual should be present or immediately contactable. Ideally this should be the Safeguarding Lead. Following the disclosure, the individual being disclosed to will ensure the disclosing individual is safe, before recording as close to verbatim as possible what happened. The Safeguarding Lead, if not part of the process, should be immediately informed and further action will be agreed from that point.

If the Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Deputy, YouBelong Lead or Core Team have reason to believe a member of the YouBelong community is at risk of harm (see appendix), advice will be sought from Thirtyone:eight. This may lead to concerns being reported to Local Authority Safeguarding Boards should that be agreed necessary.

If the Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Deputy or YouBelong Lead have reason to believe a member of the YouBelong community is in immediate danger of serious harm or risk to life, the emergency services will be called as is required in our legal obligations.

A list of supporting organisations will be available to any member of the YouBelong community who needs additional support beyond the remit of the YouBelong community, such as the Samaritans helpline. However, please be assured we will accompany you on your journey as long as you want or need us to. Please contact the Safeguarding Lead on the email address at the bottom of this document should you require this.

Pastoral care

We will always offer Pastoral Care to members of the YouBelong community, in the form of responding to prayer requests, public conversations and private conversations where necessary. Ideally these should take place from the official YouBelong account. Any private conversations which become threatening, upsetting or otherwise inappropriate should be immediately stopped and the Safeguarding Lead should be informed. Further contact will be arranged with the individual to discuss next steps. Any abusive or criminal content will be reported to Facebook or the appropriate social media organisation and if appropriate, the Police.

Online Meetings

We ask that all Attendees take responsibility for the environment visible and audible on their screen to other Attendees when joining sessions. This includes but is not limited to ensuring that any under 18s are not visible or audible on screen, that any background noise, including music or pets are kept to a minimum, and that any material visible in the background is appropriate. Any material which could be deemed inappropriate, distressing or offensive (e.g. posters with sexual content, swearing or racist symbols) should be removed from view for the duration of the call. Any such material identified by the person leading the session, or reported to the session leader by another Attendee, will be identified to the Attendee with a request for removal. This will take place through a private chat channel. Should this request not be complied with, the Attendee's access to the group will be withdrawn for the remainder of the session and a follow-up call will be arranged between the Safeguarding Lead and the Attendee to discuss next steps. This call must be engaged with before attending a further session.

We ask that all Attendees take responsibility for their behaviour when joining sessions. We are a caring and inclusive community and seek to support each other in times of crisis. We do ask that Attendees use self-awareness skills when joining the group and be alert where possible to any behaviour which may become distressing to a member or members of the group. The session leader will always support Attendees in this. Should the Attendee become distressed beyond the capacity of the group to support them, the Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Assistant or YouBelong Lead will be called upon to provide additional assistance. This will take the form of a discussion through a private channel, advice to refer to a local support network and where we will use either the online Safeguarding Manual from specialist Christian Safeguarding Agency Thirtyone:eight or their helpline: 0303 003 1111.

We ask that all Attendees are respectful of differences of opinion and belief, and mindful of differing experiences within the group, as we come together to honour each other and create a safe space. Diversity is enriching if we honour it with kindness and respect. Lack of kindness or respect will be identified to the Attendee with a request for the behaviour to stop and be reflected on, with support of the session leader, Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Assistant or YouBelong Lead as necessary. This will take place through a private chat channel. Should this request not be complied with, the Attendee's access to the group will be withdrawn for the remainder of the session and a follow-up call will be arranged between the Safeguarding Lead and the Attendee to discuss next steps. This call must be engaged with before attending a further session.

Safe Space

YouBelong aspires to be a safe space and community for all people, regardless of faith, gender, sexuality, race or other characteristic. We maintain this through robust safeguarding, promotion of our vision and nurturing of our community. In doing so we proactively implement preventative safeguarding measures, such as

- Openness and transparency about our ethos and values
- Availability of team members to discuss issues and concerns
- Maintaining a Person-Centric Approach to all activity
- Focusing Outcomes on the things our community asks for
- Involving Thirtyone:eight in all planning, development and recruitment

→ Abiding by the Safeguarding Policy with regular reviews conducted

We encourage any concerns to be brought to the attention of the Safeguarding Lead in line with our proactive preventative approach.

Regular Reviews

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Safeguarding Lead to keep up to date with any new guidance, information or legislation. We look to include community voice as a core part of the review process each year. A more comprehensive review with the entire Safeguarding Team will take place every three years to ensure continued alignment with the overall Not-for-Profit ethos and goals.

Key Safeguarding Contacts

Safeguarding Lead: Emma Major - safeguarding@youbelong.org.uk

Safeguarding Deputy: Alison Orland - safeguarding@youbelong.org.uk

Signed:

Dated:

Emma Major

22 February 2024

Version: 1.1

Next Review 22 February 2025

Appendix

Harm:

We recognise harm comes in many forms, including exploitation, abuse, and neglect. We also recognise it can be intentional or unintentional. We will use discretion when making decisions around risk to members of our community to ensure, as far as possible, no further harm is caused by our actions.

Social models of Disability and Health.

The social model of Disability was developed by Disabled people to show it is the way society is structured which disables, not the condition of a person. If society was structured differently with better access and equality embedded in law, people would not then be disabled by the lack of opportunities to engage.

The social model of health arose from the social model of Disability, as a way of exploring the concept at an infrastructure level within the medical community. This takes into account barriers to all people accessing what they need to thrive on multiple levels including individual health, housing and society.