



Safeguarding Frequently Asked Questions – Open the Book (England & Wales)

1. Why do I need to give my Church Leader and Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer a copy of the Open the Book (OtB) Safeguarding Policy and Safeguarding Code of Conduct?

Your Church Leader has a responsibility for the recruitment of people who volunteer as OtB storytellers. To ensure they are suitable and known to them as part of the Christian family. They are responsible for ensuring that Storytellers are safely recruited and may organise DBS checks through the church as part of their recruitment process. Church /Denominational Safeguarding Officers need to know the procedure to follow and the notifications they need to make to OtB/Bible Society should a volunteer storyteller be reported to them as behaving inappropriately. They also need to know the reporting procedure should an incident occur and be reported outside of school hours involving a child. For Ecumenical teams, they need to know who their Safeguarding counterparts are and how to liaise should an incident be reported about a volunteer storyteller from another denomination.

2. My school is insisting that we are all DBS checked by the school – what do we do?

Speak to your Church / Denominational Safeguarding officer to explain the situation. Your church and school need to reach an agreement about safe recruitment and potentially getting a DBS check done.

Explain to the Head Teacher that as you are coming in to school as church representatives, the church needs to vet and make sure storytellers are suitable for the role. Team members can now own their individual DBS checks and can share it with anyone who asks to see it, provided they use the update service online soon after it has been issued but there is a time limit and a small charge. Check if the school are happy to see the portable DBS if you have one already.

3. The Head Teacher wants to keep copies of our DBS at the school. Is this necessary?

The school can either make a note of your details (as they need proof that you are safe to be there) or they can copy information, but anything taken must be stored in a locked cupboard. You have the right to ask where they are keeping it.

It is up to each of the Storytellers to decide if they want to allow their personal information to go to the school. If a Storyteller agrees to this and the DBS has other (unrelated) incidents on their record, this should not affect their going in, but it would be up to the school to decide. (If the school refuses, you may like to offer the Church Safeguarding Officer to visit the school to defend the person's character over a friendly chat.) If a Storyteller refuses to allow copies of their certificate to go to the school, it is up to the school to decide if they still want the Storyteller to be admitted.

4. I belong to an Ecumenical team – who do I report inappropriate behaviour of a volunteer storyteller to?

Report and seek advice from your own Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer. It is important that all volunteer storytellers know who their Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer is. This information should be displayed on church noticeboards but if anyone is not sure they should ask their Church Leader.

5. I notice that a child has lots of bruises and seems frightened when we are in school preparing as a team for an OtB assembly/act of Collective Worship. Who do I report my concern to?

You should know what the school's safeguarding policy is and who the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in England or Designated Senior Person (DSP) in Wales is in school to be able to report your concerns. It is important that all volunteer storytellers know who the school's DSL or DSP is. Some schools may ask OtB teams to attend a short training session for volunteers in school on their safeguarding policy and procedures. You should also be aware of OtB's Safeguarding Policy which should help you with safeguarding issues and teams should attend regular OtB training.

6. We normally collect children from the classroom to help with OtB assemblies can we still do this?

Agree with the Head Teacher the best method for children to come along to be part of an assembly/act of Collective Worship, for example: can they come to the assembly place five minutes early? If volunteer storytellers collect children, then two volunteer storytellers must go together. Remember you must never be alone with children.

7. What do I do if I find that I am the only person in the team available to do the OtB assembly?

OtB is designed to be done as a team. Discuss the situation with the Head Teacher or RE Co-ordinator and decide what the best option is bearing in mind that you cannot be left on your own with any children. This includes moving around the school premises.

8. A child asks you to take them to the toilet – what do you do?

Ensure that everyone in the team knows what the school's policy is regarding taking children to the toilet and follow their procedures.

9. A student wants to be part of our OtB team for a short time. Can they do this?

DBS checks can now be undertaken for young people aged 16 years or older. The team leader must ask permission of the Head teacher and Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer for the young person to join the team in school. The team leader must take responsibility for them and personally accompany the young person at all times within the school.

10. I currently have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) certificate – am I still covered by this?

Criminal Records Bureau certificates and DBS certificates do not have a set period of validity but your church will do regular reviews or renewals. Some denominations review or renew at three years, some at five years. Please check with your denomination what their renewal period is. At that point you will need to have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (without a check of the barred list). DBS checks replaced CRB checks in 2013 so you should have a DBS check done if you still have a CRB certificate. Churches usually renew their checks every three to five years because they are only as good as the day they were done and before. However, you should also apply for a DBS check if any of the information has changed e.g. address or name, in which case you will need to ask your Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer for a DBS check to be carried out for you.

11. I already hold a CRB/DBS certificate obtained through my church for working with children. Do I need another one specifically for OtB?

As long as the certificate is either an Enhanced DBS (with) or (without a check of the barred list). A Basic check would not be adequate.

12. My church/denomination/diocese says I don't need a DBS check. What do I do?

So long as the church use a 'safe recruitment' process and the school is happy with how the storytellers are covered, storytellers will be able to attend schools but it varies from school to school. Some schools insist on DBS checks now. Bible Society sought legal advice and consulted the DBS and denominational safeguarding teams in the preparation of this policy which made it clear that volunteer storytellers are eligible for DBS checks (without a check of the barred list).

13. What do we do if a DBS check comes back as not clear?

Your national denominational safeguarding team will be able to advise you on the details of the conviction and then together with the Church / Denominational Safeguarding Officer they will decide if the person is suitable for the role of a volunteer storyteller. A record should be kept by them of how they have reached their decision. If there is any history of child abuse they should not be allowed to join the team or go into schools.