



God Welcomes All: How faith informs safeguarding Facilitator's Guide

Safeguarding is about the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture. It is integral to the mission of the Methodist Church and a part of its response and witness to the love of God in Christ. ('Theology of Safeguarding', 1.2)

The 'Theology of Safeguarding' report was adopted by the 2021 Methodist Conference and is therefore a significant report in the life of the Methodist Church. The report emphasises that safeguarding is not something we do because we have to, but because it relates to the heart of Christian faith. All Methodists are encouraged to read and discuss it as they continue to think about how they live out their beliefs in their ways of relating, working and worshipping.

God Welcomes All provides material for small groups or individuals to engage with the 'Theology of Safeguarding' report in a variety of ways.

Before you lead the session, please read the Reader's Guide to the report. You may also wish to read the full 'Theology of Safeguarding' report, available at methodist.org.uk/TheologyOfSafeguarding.

This Facilitator's Guide should be read alongside the God Welcomes All booklet as the session content is contained within that. The resource covers four sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The role of the facilitator

Good and sensitive facilitation is important when running God Welcomes All. The facilitator is not the person with all the answers, but someone able to draw out the experience and thinking of the whole group, making sure that no one person dominates the discussion and that every contribution is heard and respectfully received.

For some groups it will be expected that one person leads each session, other groups may feel more comfortable sharing the leadership role over the duration of the course or delegating elements of sessions.

Facilitators may include those with experience of leading small groups, local preachers or class leaders. Facilitators should also have completed safeguarding training prior to leading this course.

This resource can be helpful in a variety of contexts including existing house groups, Lent or Advent study groups and small community gatherings.

While you are together

As a leader of God Welcomes All, you need to be aware that this subject matter can trigger difficult and sometimes painful memories for anyone who has experienced any form of abuse. If you are worried about this, please do speak to your District Safeguarding Officer before proceeding.

At the start of each session, it is helpful to remind the group that the subject you are about to explore may be sensitive and that no one is obliged to stay if they feel uncomfortable or if it brings up difficult memories. Reassure members of the group that they are welcome to talk to you about anything after the session has finished.

If you do find that a group participant speaks out about their experience of abuse, please do not feel that you have to 'counsel' the person. They may just need someone to talk to who is compassionate. Please do offer a response such as, "It's terrible that you have had to suffer this awful experience; it wasn't your fault" and offer to help them find support, in the same way that you would respond to anyone sharing a difficult experience.

Most importantly, believe what you are being told and value the person who is telling you. It might be the first time they have ever mentioned it. Do not share with the rest of the group what you have been told. Only share with the people who need to know to enable the correct support to be given and – unless a child or vulnerable adult is at risk – always with the person's permission.

Looking after yourselves

There may be those who find the discussions difficult, or feel overwhelmed by the wider safeguarding agenda. At the beginning of each session highlight that:

- this subject can be difficult for any of us, at any time
- group participants who need a break should feel free to find a quiet space
- the material may raise some painful issues. If this is the case, participants should share them with somebody they trust.

If you are able, set up a quiet room where participants can go during the session if they need some space or to talk to someone. You could consider having a chaplain available during the session, or for participants to contact afterwards. It is also important that you look after yourself as the facilitator.

Ground rules

A group will feel much safer discussing together if there are some agreed ground rules. It is a good idea to let the group think about these at the start of the first session and make suggestions. Ensure that the rules include:

1. Respect confidentiality unless it puts others at risk.*
2. Listen without interrupting.
3. Listen to different views and question in a constructive way to enable learning.
4. Respect the feelings, experiences and views of other people.
5. Be aware of the potential impact of the subject on ourselves and others.

*Please contact your District Safeguarding Officer if you are unsure about issues around confidentiality.

As a group you may also want to agree that:

- Everyone will commit to attending all of the sessions unless ill, working or genuinely prevented from doing so.
- The start and end times of the sessions will be agreed, but those arriving late or leaving early because of their situation will be welcomed.

Who to go to for support

If you need support with a safeguarding concern arising from God Welcomes All, please contact your District Safeguarding Officer. Their details are available on the [Methodist Church website](#) or your district website. They will be able to supply you with advice, guidance and signposting for group members who need focused support. The District Safeguarding Officer will also be able to advise on what direct support the Methodist Church can offer to survivors of abuse.

Inclusion

The Methodist Church aims to live out its conviction that all people are made in the image of God and that God's love is for all. Yet there have been too many incidents of discrimination, coercive control and abuse of power within the life of the Methodist Church, which have not been prevented or challenged.

Inclusion is seen as a universal human right and its aim is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender identity, status, sexuality, mental or physical impairment or any other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities, and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance by removing barriers.

Format of the sessions

There are four sessions in God Welcomes All:

1. All are Welcome
2. Language, Listening and Hearing
3. Power
4. The Impact of Abuse: Symbols and liturgy in worship

Each session follows the structure below with the exception of session four.

- Prayer (5 minutes)
- Setting the Scene, and reflections from the previous session (5 minutes)
- Video (5 minutes)
- Reflection (5 minutes)

- Discussion (10 minutes)
- Break
- Video (5 minutes)
- Reflection and discussion on this video (20 minutes)
- Putting it into practice (10 minutes)
- Closing reflections (10 minutes)

Session four is the final session and so is structured in a different way.

- Prayer (5 minutes)
- Setting the Scene and reflections from the previous session (5 minutes)
- Video (5 minutes)
- Reflection (5 minutes)
- Video (5 minutes)
- Break
- Discussion (10 minutes)
- Reflection and discussion on this video (20 minutes)
- Putting it into practice (10 minutes)
- Closing reflections (10 minutes)

These are suggested outlines, it may be in different contexts you choose to alter the timings and structure.

Preparing for the session

Prior to each session watch the film clips, read through the material and look again at the Reader's Guide. All the videos can be accessed at methodist.org.uk/TheologyOfSafeguarding Spend some time reflecting on how best you will facilitate your particular group during the session, noticing the points that may require more input or that participants may find difficult.

'Putting it into Practice' comes at the end of the session so there is a danger that if the session was to overrun this would be cut short. However, this is a key aspect of the sessions which enables participants to reflect on the impact for themselves and what they will do as a result. **Please make sure you plan the timings well and allow plenty time for this section to enable participants to reflect.**

The closing reflections provide a passage from Scripture and some questions to prompt further thinking. These could be used in the session, given to participants to take away and focus on further, or combined with some closing devotions.

As you plan consider how the closing reflections will work best in each session and with the group you are working with.

Resources needed

- A TV screen or monitor for the videos, accessible for all to see and hear. It is worth doing a sound check before the meeting, and if there is a 'loop system', ensuring it is switched on
- Copies of the God Welcomes All booklet – enough for one per person
- Pens and sheets of blank paper for session three
- Bibles, or copies of the Bible passages referenced
- Transcript of the videos (optional)

The videos and transcripts are available on the Methodist Church website.

Looking after people in session four

In session four, you will be discussing the impact of abuse and the way the symbols and liturgy we use in worship may be difficult for some.

The information below is contained in the God Welcomes All booklet. Please make sure all participants have seen this information at the end of session three or before they arrive at session four.

When someone experiences abuse the impact on the individual can be devastating. When this abuse takes place within a church setting, the aftermath affects both the family of the person who has been abused and the person who carried out the abuse, as well as the whole church congregation and local community.

Research indicates that when abuse has taken place in a church setting – a setting considered to be a 'safe place', the house of God – the impact can be much more severe and the betrayal and damage of this 'safe space' can leave survivors rejecting everything to do with religion and the Church.

During these sessions you will be studying areas that you may find difficult. If this happens, please do take time out from the session and share this with your local minister or someone else you trust.

Further support

Materials to support you including a podcast about the report can be found at methodist.org.uk/TheologyOfSafeguarding

If you have any questions or comments about the God Welcomes All course, please contact gwa@methodistchurch.org.uk

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk

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