Safeguarding
Best Practices

Alpha is fundamentally built on a welcoming environment that provides a safe space for guests to explore faith and share their own perspective in an honest, friendly, and open group setting. We believe that it is everyone's responsibility to play their part in ensuring that a safe environment is maintained for everyone on a course, including themselves.

We believe each and every person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139: 14) and loved by God. Throughout the Bible, God's concern for the vulnerable is articulated, with over 2,000 references to justice and injustice, which include principles of safeguarding; as well as consistently highlighting His special concern for the widows, orphans and strangers. Therefore, we believe that it is important to follow Jesus' example in his compassion and care for others through creating safe spaces for those attending Alpha, and striving to protect people from harm, abuse and neglect.

Please refer to our safeguarding statement:
https://alpha.org/safeguarding-statement/

In this document, we share some leading practices on creating a safe environment, both in person and online, for all those involved in an Alpha course. This is to help make sure no one is subjected to harm or abuse and that any disclosures are handled sensitively and correctly.

We believe that this is done by first establishing good safeguarding practices.

Safeguarding refers to the action we take to promote a safer culture by promoting the welfare of children, young people, and adults. It means:

1 Working to prevent harm or abuse happening

2 Seeking to protect any person who is at risk from harm or abuse

3 Responding well to those who may have been harmed or abused

We believe that for good safeguarding practice to happen you need to first be intentional in establishing a safe culture in your team, including safely recruiting and knowing your team members and everyone involved in helping to run the course, where everyone feels comfortable and free to identify and challenge inappropriate, abusive, threatening, and harmful behavior.

This also involves clearly raising the topic of safeguarding at team training sessions, which can include course leaders, hosts and helpers, prayer team, etc., and having a clear protocol outlining what you should do if an incident arises or is identified.

What are the possible signs that may indicate harm or abuse?

Harm and abuse can take many forms, such as sexual, physical, emotional, and many less obvious forms. You may have a guest disclose an incident of harm or abuse that they have experienced or are still experiencing. However, it is often the case that concerns are identified by others or by observation. Observations could be through physical injuries or through a change in behaviour, such as self-neglect.

How to respond when a safeguarding concern is raised, becomes apparent, or if there is a perception of a potential safeguarding concern?

It is important to respond sensitively and listen. It is important to capture what you have seen or heard accurately and factually and report it to the church authorities running or overseeing your course as soon as possible so that appropriate action can be taken to protect any individual at risk, or who has been harmed. If the issue is not dealt with or resolved satisfactorily, please direct your safeguarding concern as soon as possible to the appropriate local authorities and/or, if appropriate, the emergency services such as the local police. Team members should be aware that confidentiality should not be a reason to not disclose, and it is important to not promise confidentiality.

Is there anything specific to keep in mind for online courses?

The principles for hosting courses online are the same as within an in-person course. It is important, though, to recognize the specific risks created with all forms of online communication and to ensure that all activity avoids the risk of communications that are insulting, threatening or abusive. For example, you may want to consider adjusting the settings of your online platform, if possible, to restrict private messaging between guests.

It is important to recognize the specific risks created with all forms of online communication and to ensure that all activity avoids the risk of:

- Communications that are insulting, threatening, abusive, offensive, sexual or otherwise inappropriate

- Blurring the boundaries of public work/ministry and your private life

- Impersonation and grooming

- Forming inappropriate relationships

- Bullying and harassment

What do I need to know if the course is for youth / young people?

When running Alpha specifically for youth or young people, it is crucial to prioritize the safety and well-being of young people. In addition to following general safeguarding practices, which includes training hosts and helpers and following safer recruitment processes, it is important to create an atmosphere where young participants feel comfortable and empowered to express themselves. This will involve appointing youth leaders who understand the unique challenges faced by young people and can provide appropriate support or, in the case of an Alpha being hosted by youth or young people themselves, ensuring that a suitable adult or youth leader is present to help supervise and facilitate a safe environment. Additionally, it is essential to be willing to address topics relevant to youth that may come up, such as mental health, peer pressure, and healthy relationships within the context of faith. By catering to the specific needs of young participants, we can create a nurturing environment that encourages their spiritual growth and development.

In conclusion, good safeguarding practices enable us to both create a safe environment and to recognize the signs that could indicate harm or abuse and to know how to respond whenever a concern arises. Consistent with the best practices in this document including Alpha International's safeguarding statement (for which a link has been provided) we strongly recommend that churches and organisations running Alpha should have appropriate and legally compliant safeguarding policies and procedures in place, which are well understood by all involved, so that team members, volunteers and participants experience a safe environment.