



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

Belong To Open Access Policy

1. Rationale

Belong To is committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible youth work services for LGBTQ+ young people. Open access youth work ensures that young people can engage voluntarily in supportive environments that promote wellbeing, belonging, personal and social development.

Many LGBTQ+ young people may not feel safe or comfortable discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity at home, school or within their wider community. Some may still be exploring their identity and may not be ready to disclose this to family members or others. An open access service provides a safe and affirming space where young people can explore their identity at their own pace, build supportive relationships, access accurate information and connect with peers who share similar experiences.

This policy supports Belong To's commitment to reducing barriers to participation, promoting young people's rights, and ensuring that all LGBTQ+ young people have access to spaces where they feel respected, valued and supported to be their authentic selves.

2. Purpose

Belong To is committed to providing open, accessible, inclusive and welcoming youth services for LGBTQ+ young people. This policy allows young people to independently choose to engage with its youth groups without strict referral requirements. Participants can join directly or be referred by parents, schools, or other organisations.

3. Policy Statement

Belong To will provide access to youth work opportunities that are voluntary, youth-centred, inclusive, rights-based and delivered in accordance with safeguarding and equality principles.

The open access model focuses on voluntary participation, personal development, and inclusion, ensuring youth workspaces are accessible to all LGBTQ+ young people regardless of background.

4. Core Principles

- **Direct Engagement:** Young people can drop in or contact the project themselves.
- **Universal Access:** Designed to provide out-of-school activities, allowing LGBTQ+ young people to build skills, socialise, and participate actively in society.



- Safety Protocols: All open access and drop-in operations are backed by robust child safeguarding policies and procedures that ensure adult-to-young people ratios, proper supervision, risk and safeguarding procedures.

5. Eligibility and Access

Our open access policy is confined to LGBTQ+ young people attending our weekly groups who are in our programme age range of 14-23.

Exclusion to policy include:

- young people from our 10-13 cohort- parental consent will be required for this age range to attend any programmes, groups or activities within our service. We also request that parents/ guardians drop off and pick up young people from group.
- Young people 14-17 attending any of our external events or activities outside of our weekly group including external events, residentials and programme activities, must have parental consent to participate.

6. Registration and Consent

Registration Forms:

Belong To will only collect information that is necessary to ensure the safe, effective and appropriate delivery of services. Registration and consent procedures will vary according to the age of the young person participating in the service.

Ages 10-13 years

- A parent or legal guardian must complete the registration process on behalf of the young person.
- An In Case of Emergency (ICE) contact must be provided and must include a parent or legal guardian.
- Written parental/guardian consent will be required before the young person can participate in activities or programmes.

Ages 14-17 years

- Young people may complete their own registration form.
- Registration must include an ICE contact, which should normally be a parent or guardian.
- Where a young person is not open about their LGBTQ+ identity at home, Belong To will implement appropriate safeguarding and confidentiality procedures to ensure the young person's safety and wellbeing while meeting legal and child protection obligations.



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Ages 18 years and over

- Young people may register independently.
- An ICE contact must be provided and may be any person aged 18 years or over who is based in Ireland and can be contacted in the event of an emergency.
- No parental or guardian consent is required for participation.

All registration information will be stored and managed in accordance with Belong To's Data Protection Policy and relevant GDPR requirements.

Consent Form:

Belong To is committed to ensuring that informed consent is obtained in a manner that is age-appropriate, compliant with safeguarding requirements, and respectful of young people's rights, privacy and wellbeing. No young person will be able to attend activities/ programmes without a consent form being completed.

Ages 10–13 years

- Consent forms must be completed and signed by a parent or legal guardian before the young person can participate in programmes, activities, trips, residentials, , or any activity requiring specific consent.
- Consent forms will be issued directly to the parent or guardian through Dropbox Sign using the email address provided during registration.
- Consent forms will not be sent through the young person.
- Participation in relevant activities cannot commence until the required signed consent has been received.

Ages 14–17 years

- Where parental or guardian consent is required, consent forms will be sent directly to the parent or guardian's registered email address through Dropbox Sign.
- Consent forms will not be issued through the young person except where specifically approved by management and in line with safeguarding procedures.
- Young people may also be required to provide their own consent or agreement in addition to parental consent for specific activities.

Ages 18 Years and Over

- Young adults aged 18 years and over may review, complete and sign their own consent forms.
- Consent forms will be sent directly to the participant through Dropbox Sign using the email address provided during registration.
- No parental or guardian consent is required.
- The participant is responsible for ensuring that the information provided is accurate and up to date including their ICE contact.



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Record Keeping

- All signed consent forms will be securely stored in accordance with Belong To's Data Protection Policy, GDPR requirements, and records management procedures. Consent forms will be stored in the Youth Team folder, with access restricted to authorised personnel on a need-to-know basis, including members of the Youth Services Team, the Director of Operations and the CEO.
- Consent forms will be deleted from Dropbox Sign once they have been securely saved to the Youth Team folder.
- Consent records will be retained for 6 years from the date consent is obtained, unless a longer retention period is required by law, safeguarding obligations, or organisational policy.
- Consent records will only be accessible to authorised staff members who require access for the safe, effective and lawful delivery of services.
- Consent may be withdrawn at any time. Withdrawal of consent will not affect the lawfulness of processing carried out prior to withdrawal and may be subject to safeguarding, legal or operational requirements.

7. Safeguarding

All services will operate in accordance with Belong To safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, risk assessments and relevant legislation. Please familiarise yourself with the following policies and procedures:

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Young People Conduct of Conduct
- Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Residential & Day Trip Policy
- Vetting Policy
- One to one working policy
- Harm Reduction Policy
- ICE Procedure

8. Data Protection

Personal data will be managed in accordance with GDPR and organisational policies.

9. Supporting Young People to Come Out

Where a young person wishes to come out to a parent or guardian, Belong To will provide appropriate support, guidance and information to help them make this decision in their own time. Support will only be offered where the young person feels ready and where it is



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assessed as safe and in their best interests to do so, with their wellbeing and safety remaining the primary consideration at all times.

Support will also be offered to parents/ guardians through our Family Support Service where parents/ guardians require additional support or information.

10. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored regularly and reviewed at least every two years.

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