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EVERY TABLE, CHURCH OR NOT

Keeping people safe

Two adults, always. What to do when somebody tells you something.

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The honest part first

Tables meet in kitchens, coffee shops, backyards, and parks. Nobody registers them. Nobody screens them. Nobody inspects them — and we're not going to pretend otherwise. There is no office watching your table, and a project built on freely given trust isn't going to build the theater of one.

So this guide is just words. Here's what we ask of you: treat them as the most binding words in the whole model. Everything else here — the stories, the questions, the rhythm — flexes to fit your table. This page doesn't. If a table won't keep these rules, it shouldn't have kids at it. Full stop.

The rules, when kids are at a table

Two adults, every time. No adult is ever alone with children who aren't their own — not in a room, not in a car, not "just for a minute while everyone else steps out." Most tables with kids are households eating together, so this usually takes care of itself. Keep it taken care of on the nights it doesn't.

Nothing behind closed doors. Wherever kids are, the space stays open and visible. Doors open. Sightlines clear.

No private messages between an adult and a kid. If an adult at the table needs to communicate with a child who isn't theirs, a parent is on the message. There is no table business that requires otherwise.

Parents stay in charge of their kids. The table never becomes childcare, and no adult at it ever has authority over a child that the child's parents didn't hand them in plain view.

Why so firm, when most people at most tables are trustworthy? Because these rules aren't an accusation — it's a protection that covers everyone, including the trusted. A table where these things are simply how it's done is a table where a predator finds nothing to use, a child finds nothing confusing, and no good adult is ever alone in a situation that could be misread. They protect the innocent in every direction.

If someone tells you something

Sometime, at some table, someone — a child or an adult — may tell you about abuse. Theirs, or a child's. The path is short and it is not optional:

Listen. Believe them. You are not the judge of whether it's true. You are the safe person it got said to.

Don't investigate. No pressing for details, no confronting anyone, no gathering evidence. That's not your job, and doing it can destroy the real investigation.

Never promise secrecy you can't keep. Say it honestly: "Thank you for telling me. Here's what has to happen next."

If a child is involved or anyone is in immediate danger, emergency services come first. And know this: reporting suspected child abuse is, in most places, a legal obligation — not a judgment call, not a last resort, not something love talks you out of. Reporting *is* the love.

Write down what was said, in their words, dated. Facts, not interpretation.

Then stay their friend. The table's job doesn't end when the professionals arrive. Somebody showing up next week with food is part of how people survive what happened to them.

The confidentiality rule

Say it out loud at your first gathering, so it's never a surprise later: *what's shared at the table stays at the table — with two exceptions, harm to self and harm to others. Those don't stay in the room, because love doesn't keep that kind of secret.* A table that states this on night one never has to improvise it in a crisis.

The bench

Your first bench is local, and you build it before you need it. In your first month — while nothing is wrong — write down your table's short list: a counselor or two somebody at the table can vouch for, the local crisis line (988 in the US, or your country's crisis line), and any trusted pastor or elder your table has a relationship

with. Ten minutes of work. The night somebody's world caves in is the wrong night to start looking.

Behind your list is a second bench: real people. The project keeps a small team you can reach when your local list isn't enough or you don't know where to start. Reach them at **comehungry.org/ask** and you'll have a name before you need one. You are not doing this alone, and you were never supposed to.

For ordinary hosting questions — story prep, table dynamics, what-do-I-do-when — ask at comehungry.org/ask. It can take a week; there are only a few of us. But hear the line clearly, because it doesn't move: anything involving safety, harm, or a person in real trouble goes to people, now, not to us. Your local list first, then emergency services. Always people, always immediately.

If your table is part of a church

Your church's safeguarding policy governs — screening, two-adult rules, reporting paths, all of it. This guide still applies; your church's policy tells you how it's implemented in your house, and your bench has a name on it: the contact your church gave you. Same-day, every time. If your church doesn't have a written child-safety policy yet, the church kit includes a starting template — which must be reviewed by your insurer, your denomination's safeguarding office, or a child-protection expert before you rely on it.

The last word

Nobody polices living rooms. Hosts do. These rules are short so that no host can honestly say they didn't know them — and strong so that the smallest person at your table is the safest person at it. That's not a rule we added to the model. That's the model: the table exists so that people are safe there. Kids most of all.

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