

Introduction

🕒 12 minutes read

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This Guidance outlines requirements and advice for Church Officers¹ and Church Bodies² on how to respond well to victims and survivors of all forms of abuse. It also contributes to the implementation of Recommendation 7 of The Anglican Church Investigation Report by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA):

The Church of England and the Church in Wales should each introduce a Church-wide policy on the funding and provision of support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse concerning clergy, Church officers or those with some connection to the Church. The policy should clearly set out the circumstances in which different types of support, including counselling, should be offered. It should make clear that support should always be offered as quickly as possible, taking into account the needs of the victim over time. The policy should take account of the views of victims and survivors. It should be mandatory for the policy to be implemented across all dioceses. (IICSA, 2020; p.117).

The allegations that Church Officers respond to will involve victims and survivors with different connections to the Church. Some may use the Church and its associated activities occasionally, some may be part of a church community, and some may be employees of the Church and some may be clergy. Some victims and survivors disclosing to Church Officers will allege abuse by people who have no links with the Church (e.g. in their family life) and others will allege abuse by Church Officers or within a Church context (e.g. activities organised by Church Bodies). Some victims or survivors may also disclose first to statutory services and other third parties who will then contact the Church.

Structure and application

Section 1 of this Guidance focuses on responding well to all people who allege abuse irrespective of the alleged abuser's relationship with the Church. **Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7** specifically concern the support that should be offered to victims and survivors of abuse by a Church Officer or in a Church setting ("Church-based abuse"). Much of this work will be led by the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) or the Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser³ (CSA) in the Church Body. **Section 8** explains the support provided by the Central Church.

The Guidance is about the relational and support aspects of responding well. It should be read alongside the specific procedural steps to be taken when concerns and allegations of abuse are raised. These are set out in:

- Practice guidance: Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against Church Officers (the sections on Support Persons and Apology will be superseded by the relevant parts of this Guidance from the effective date of 4 April 2022).
- Practice guidance: Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- The Parish Safeguarding Handbook.

This Guidance is about creating safe conditions for disclosure and the responsibility to meet the spiritual, pastoral and welfare needs of victims and survivors afterwards. It focuses on the response of Church Bodies. However, Church Bodies are partners within wider networks of support for victims and survivors, comprising statutory services – for example local authorities’ children’s and adults’ social care services, the police, services provided by the National Health Service (NHS) and local schools - and non-statutory organisations (for example, charities such as the NSPCC and local voluntary services for domestic abuse). To this end, this Guidance encourages Church Bodies to develop their knowledge and relationships with these organisations so that victims and survivors can be appropriately sign-posted or referred if necessary.

Victims and survivors were involved in the development of this Guidance. They participated through focus groups and interviews, and they were involved in reviewing drafts. The painful but vital lesson for the Church of England is that when some victims and survivors have disclosed abuse, poor responses by Church Officers compounded the trauma experienced. Although this breached their trust in the Church, survivors involved in developing this Guidance also highlighted the role of their faith, spirituality, the Church’s teachings, and therapy in their recovery and healing. This Guidance is offered as part of the Church’s commitment to responding better in the future and is dedicated to the survivors who have contributed to its formulation.

In addition to their participation in the developmental work, the Guidance also draws on the literature on the needs of victims of survivors; the ethics of involvement and the “Final overview report of the independent diocesan safeguarding audits and additional work on improving responses to survivors of abuse” (Carmi, Ed & Fish Sheila, 2019; [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#), 2019). It is also underpinned by the prevailing consensus that abuse can cause trauma:

“Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being”. ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), 2014; p. 7).

The status of this Guidance

Please note: this section will be amended when the Safeguarding Code of Practice comes into effect.

This is safeguarding Guidance issued by the House of Bishops under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016. The following must have “due regard” to safeguarding Guidance issued by the House of Bishops:

- All authorised clergy
- Bishops
- Archdeacons
- Licensed readers
- Licensed lay workers

- Churchwardens
- PCCs
- Cathedral Chapters (individual cathedral Chapters will be bound by this duty when the Cathedrals Measure 2021 comes into force for that cathedral. This will be on the date which the Church Commissioners certify that the new Constitution and Statutes come into force for that cathedral Chapter).
- DBEs

A duty to have “due regard” to Guidance means that the person under the duty is not free to disregard it but is required to follow it unless there are cogent reasons for not doing so. “Cogent” for this purpose means clear, logical and convincing. Failure by a member of the clergy to have “due regard” to House of Bishops’ safeguarding Guidance is an act or omission which may constitute misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 (“CDM”). Failure by a licensed reader or lay worker to have due regard to House of Bishops’ safeguarding Guidance would be grounds for the revocation of that reader’s or lay worker’s license by the bishop. Significant failure by charity trustees could result in a statutory investigation being carried out by the Charity Commission. If such an investigation uncovers serious misconduct or mismanagement, the Charity Commission could remove one or more of the trustees and disqualify them from acting as a charity trustee.

The draft Safeguarding (Code of Practice) Measure is expected to obtain Royal Assent in late 2021. Once in force, this Measure will amend the law to allow the House of Bishops to put in place a new code of practice on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. This will specify both requirements (which will be mandatory) and guidance (which will be advisory). The amendments will also expand the categories of person who must comply with the Code of Practice.

This Guidance is designed to be used both before and after the law changes. It is structured into sections that contain both “Requirements” and “Good Practice Advice”. Sections labelled “Requirements” are House of Bishops’ Guidance to which the people specified above must have “due regard” from the date that this Guidance comes into force. They will also comprise the mandatory parts of the Code of Practice when it becomes effective. In this document, “Good Practice Advice” refers to advice and information which supports Church Officers in meeting the Requirements – it explains the “why” and “how” to deliver the Requirements.

Terminology

“Victim” and “survivor” refer to people who have experienced abuse. In this Guidance, it is recognised that people have a right to self-define as “victim” or “survivor”. The former usually refers to all situations where people have been harmed or are subject to criminal acts, and the latter refers to peoples’ lives after these harmful experiences. Some people choose to identify as “survivor(s)” to show that they have reclaimed power from the abuser and furthermore that, notwithstanding the abuse, they have experienced positive outcomes in their lives, thereby expressing their strength to resist the abuser’s ability to dominate their lives.

The distinction between “victim” and “survivor” in this Guidance is for clarification and not intended as a hierarchy of importance. These terms should not be used in a fixed or rigid way and self-identification should be recognised. Furthermore, evidence from IICSA (please see the [research reports](#) section) indicates that although abuse has long-term impact, this also depends on institutional and professional responses to the disclosure. Whether people self-identify as victims or survivors, they want clergy and other Church Officers to listen to them, respect their right to protection and focus on addressing the harm caused. This requires Church Officers to provide the same quality of response to people whether they are “survivors” or “victims”. People from all backgrounds and positions can become victims and survivors of Church-based and non-Church-based abuse. This includes members of the clergy themselves and their partners and families.

The importance of relationships and empowerment

The quality of the relationships that Church Officers develop with victims and survivors really matters – these relationships are efficacious in their own right. Humane, compassionate and supportive relationships with victims and survivors are vital in responding well to disclosures and providing ongoing support. The expectations of survivors need to be considered from the start, setting up clear boundaries and limits of intervention while relating with compassion and empathy.

Survivors from several research groups point out that they do not need great experts to listen to them; they just need another human being who listens at their pace, does not push them too hard and who recognises that abuse is not their whole story. They also want people who can trust the survivor to be the expert in their own life and offer them the chance to say “no” to help and withdraw their involvement if it is difficult for them or their needs change over time.

Some victims and survivors will be keen, for example, to contact support agencies outside of the Church themselves, and just need help to identify them. The principle of empowerment is paramount: people being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions about the type and sources of support, and responsibility for making arrangements.

It should also be recognised that victims and survivors will decide who they want to make their initial disclosure to. This might be a Church Officer – but they also might not wish to disclose to anyone who is connected with the Church. Some will go directly to statutory authorities such as the police.

The journey to disclosing abuse

It is possible to use the analogy of “a journey” to describe the stages that victims and survivors experience before and after disclosure. The experience of abuse causes trauma; people then go through a period of contemplating disclosure, then they might disclose and, with appropriate support, recover and rebuild their lives. This whole journey might take several years or may not be completed at all.

Responses to disclosures can influence recovery from abuse. An uncaring approach can reaffirm survivors' self-blame and self-criticism that they are responsible for the abuser's actions and that their disclosures will not be believed. However, a caring and compassionate response underpinned by pastoral and spiritual support, if requested by survivors, can support recovery and healing, and can dismantle the false messages their abuser may have given them.

Church communities in which members are kind and empathetic to each other can provide support to victims and survivors living with the trauma of abuse who do not want to disclose their experiences. In these environments, positive attitudes and good inter-personal relationships can be conducive to survivors' recovery as they may experience support through the love and kindness people demonstrate to each other. This will not be the case in churches with strained inter-personal relationships, strife and unkindness. So, having a healthy church culture really matters.

For those victims and survivors who hold a Christian faith, the Church of England's values and theology may be part of their healing and recovery from abuse. For victims and survivors of abuse by Church Officers, notwithstanding the breach of their trust within the Church of England, they may still want assistance with re-integration and safe worship in their Christian community. Other victims and survivors may wish to sever ties with the Church because of their experiences. These must be recognised as justified responses to the Church's past failings for which they require an apology for the physical, psychological and spiritual harm done to them. Due to this recognition, spiritual and pastoral support and processes for an apology are also outlined in this Guidance (Sections 2 and 3).

Survivor-centeredness

This Guidance is underpinned by the values of co-design and co-production between Church Officers and victims and survivors. In 2020, the National Safeguarding Team (NST) commissioned [Survivors Voices](#) to contribute to the development of national standards in responding well to victims and survivors. Through a survey and focus groups with victims and survivors, they identified the following as "what good looks like" in responding well to victims and survivors:

1. Survivors know that they are heard, understood, believed and will be supported.
2. The response by Church Bodies and Church Officers to disclosures is victim and survivor-centered and does not cause further trauma to the person disclosing.
3. People with safeguarding responsibilities understand the impact of trauma and the best way to respond to it.
4. Churches create a culture of listening, transparency and respect that makes it safe to disclose.
5. Victims and survivors and Church workers know what process will be followed if someone reports abuse.
6. Survivors are helped to receive the support they need, both from the Church and other people and organisations.
7. Safeguarding concerns are acted upon appropriately, transparently, with accountability and in a timely fashion.

Church Bodies can draw on these statements of “what good looks like” in developing the support for victims and survivors outlined in the rest of this Guidance.

Responding well to victims and survivors, and Christian theology

For all people (of faith, no faith or different faiths), responding well to victims and survivors of abuse should be a natural and intuitive set of attitudes and behaviours flowing from their values and beliefs. It does involve following processes, but this needs to come from a position of love rather than fear. For Christians, it is also important to think theologically about safeguarding. A conversation has now started in the Church about theology and safeguarding. The paper ‘Theology and Safeguarding: trauma, justice, forgiveness, wholeness, experience and calling’ has been co-developed with survivors.

This paper is not a final product; rather it is the start of a process of continual dialogue and self-reflexivity which is essential if the Church is to get safeguarding right. The paper notes, for example, that there are four theological themes that run through Scripture powerfully and can help people begin to think theologically about safeguarding: care for the vulnerable, which is everyone’s responsibility, challenging unhealthy power dynamics, and unflinching honesty about our nature. It explains that “not only is Scripture shaped by trauma, understanding trauma is essential to comprehend the impact of abuse. So we cannot speak of theology and safeguarding without thinking about trauma and allowing trauma theory to shape our thinking and responses”.

“Responding well” is about helping victims and survivors to achieve “wholeness”, to be able to flourish. *“The primary task is to ensure well-being through creating physical, emotional spiritual and financial safety, and offering support to victims and survivors for their physical and mental health”.*

- 1“Church Officer(s)” refers to anyone appointed or elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.
- 2“Church Bodies” includes Parochial Church Councils (PCC), cathedral chapters, Diocesan Boards of Finance (DBF), Diocesan Boards of Education (DBE), National Church Institutions (NCIs) and Religious Communities.
- 3All references to CSAs in this Guidance are, unless otherwise stated, references to CSAs employed by cathedrals where there is no safeguarding Service Level Agreement in place with the DBF.

Section 1: Responding well to all victims and survivors

 18 minutes read

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Requirements

1.1 Church Bodies must promote a healthy, compassionate and safe culture which facilitates disclosures.

1.2 Church Bodies must regularly review their culture using the section “Characteristics of a healthy and safe culture” in the good practice advice below, to consider how their culture can be made healthier and safer, and make any changes identified. This must be done with the involvement of victims and survivors.

1.3 Church Bodies must provide clear and accessible information about:

- how victims and survivors can report abuse within the Church.
- the support available to disclosers immediately after their disclosure and how they will be assisted during and after the investigation.
- the processes that will be followed when abuse (or risk of abuse) is disclosed and what will happen to the personal information of people about whom abuse is disclosed.
- how allegations of abuse are reported to statutory services.
- how victims and survivors can contact statutory services if they believe that they have been abused or are at risk of being abused.
- contact details for national services for victims and survivors – for example [Stop It Now](#), [Samaritans](#), [NSPCC](#), [MACSAS](#), [Survivors Voices](#) – and local charities such as [Survivors' Network](#).

1.4 This information must be disseminated in a variety of methods relevant to that Church Body and those who encounter it through its activities, in order to meet different needs.

1.5 Information on safeguarding must be translated into the main languages commonly spoken by regular worshippers so that people who do not use English as their first language can understand it.

1.6 Church Bodies must also provide clear, jargon-free messages of support to victims and survivors of abuse.

Good Practice Advice

Getting safeguarding right is about more than following procedures. It is also about how they are implemented and how people are treated and related to. Getting the “how” right will make the difference between victims and survivors experiencing disclosure as helpful or more damaging. This section therefore focusses on the relational aspects of Church Officers’ responses (behaviours, sensitivity to survivors’ and victims’ needs, humanity and care) which can support healing and recovery.

Why disclosing abuse can be difficult

As explained by a survivor involved in the development of this Guidance, disclosing can be traumatic – *“Every survivor I know who has told me of their disclosure moment or moments has told me the process was traumatic. It does not matter if the disclosure is to a church person or secular person. The process is terrifying...”*

Disclosing current or non-recent abuse is extremely difficult for a range of reasons:

- As shown in survivors’ and victims’ accounts to the [Truth Commission](#), people have to remain undeterred by the history of indifferent professional and institutional responses to abuse. They must overcome the fear that their accounts will not be believed to report their experiences of abuse.
- Some victims and survivors may have witnessed disbelief and secrecy from their families or close social networks when they informed them that they had been abused. This previous inaction by others can create a psychological and emotional hurdle that people must overcome to tell others about current or non-recent abuse.
- Reporting abuse entails re-telling and re-living a truly traumatic experience. Victims and survivors will therefore judge whether people in the Church Body can be trusted to act on their disclosure before it is made.
- Some victims and survivors may have disclosed before and were not believed or their allegations were denied and covered up. This can lead to reluctance to make another attempt to disclose because they do not believe that action will be taken by Church Officers.
- Victims and survivors are likely to experience anxiety at the point of disclosure: “How will people react?”, “Will they believe me?”, “Will they blame me?”, “Will they think less of me or treat me differently?”, “Will everyone end up knowing?”, “Will my abuser find out?”, “Will the abuser seek retribution against me or a loved one?” “What happens to the information, who will be told?”
- Victims and survivors might be worried about possible consequences – for example, the possibility of being a witness in any ensuing court case can be terrifying, or that they may fear that the disclosure could lead to break up of their family or close friendships. Sometimes victims and survivors can also be threatened with harm (physical and psychological) by their abuser if they disclose and would have been told “no one will believe you.”
- Some victims and survivors may also feel that that once they tell their story, they will lose control about how the next steps will unfold.

The culture of Church Bodies

Church Bodies can become safer and prevent abuse if they create and maintain healthy cultures. These environments will also help to ensure that abuse is responded to well, including good care and support for victims and survivors.

“Organisational culture” is an essential part of facilitating disclosure. It is about the quality of the relationships and behaviours within the church community. Healthy cultures also recognise the effect of power imbalances arising from hierarchies within the Church while unhealthy cultures are critical, closed and generate fear or apathy.

Given the acute sense of vulnerability that victims and survivors will be feeling, most of them will be reluctant to disclose in unhealthy Church cultures. However, they are likely to feel safe to disclose if they see that other groups of people who can experience less power than others (e.g. those with the "protected characteristics" under the Equality Act 2010) are treated with kindness, fairness and equality within a Church Body. This is in keeping with the Church's principle of "Every person is equally precious to God" enshrined in Protecting All God's Children.

Victims and survivors who supported the development of this Guidance said that trustworthiness was a shared attribute of the people that they disclosed to – "*People [who are disclosed to] will have been selected because of their personal qualities, because the survivor trusts them enough.*" It is therefore imperative that Church Bodies create and maintain a healthy and safe culture. This applies to all Church Bodies and all levels of the Church, and not only to frontline parish churches.

Characteristics of healthy and safe church cultures

This section outlines some of the characteristics of a healthy and safe Church culture which Church Bodies should promote. Achieving this requires transparency and honesty, as explained below:

Some churches present too strongly that everything is wonderful, we are here to praise and be joyful, we are all so blessed, life is just amazing, God answers our prayers. Healthy churches need to own properly issues of brokenness, of failure and sin and disappointment - and this needs to come from church leadership who are secure enough to be appropriately honest and vulnerable. So the culture is then "real" and not closed or defensive or false. There can be too much avoidance of the "bad" in churches that want to be happy, positive, joyful, 'successful' places, and that (usually subconscious) approach leads to a culture where disclosures are less likely" (Right Reverend Ruth Bushyager, Bishop of Horsham).

Communication patterns

- The mode of communication adopted by people is "genuine dialogue", a respectful, person-centered exchange in which all people are open to being influenced, rather than "monologue disguised as dialogue."
- There is encouragement and welcoming of different perspectives and views.
- People do not feel they are "taking a risk" by expressing different views to other members of the community.
- People do not have anxiety or fear about raising concerns.

Behaviour patterns

- There is absence of coercive and/or controlling behaviour by ordained and non-ordained people and a "command and control" style of leadership.
- "Poor behaviour" (e.g. bullying) is challenged and resolved when it occurs.

- There is no evasion of responsibility to address difficult situations – for example, senior clergy or staff are not reallocated different roles when safeguarding concerns are raised about them, and the matter is addressed.
- Those involved in the Church Body support each other through difficult times.

Relationships

- Power is shared and distributed instead of being vested in a few people.
- Leadership styles are inclusive and consultative rather than controlling.
- There are no powerful elites or cliques dominating the life and affairs of the Church Body.
- Safe boundaries between people are understood and observed.
- No one is isolated or left out of the Church Body's life and activities.

Self-reflexivity

- Collectively and individually, the Church community devotes time to reflect on their behaviours and relationships.
- The tendency towards, and dangers of, clerical deference are acknowledged and actively guarded against.
- People are aware of the impact they can have on others.
- Feedback from others (for example, about communication style and behaviour) is welcomed.
- Leaders in the Church Body learn from failures and reviews and take appropriate actions to seek to prevent any recurrence.

Privacy and data protection

- The importance of protecting peoples' personal data and privacy is understood.
- People feel safe in sharing personal information because they know their privacy is taken seriously.
- People know how information about them will be used and they can trust people to use it appropriately to follow up their safeguarding concerns.

Promoting healthy Christian cultures

Healthy Christian cultures need to be consciously and purposefully developed, nurtured and reviewed. The starting point is to reflect on the quality of the existing culture. Church Bodies can do this by:

- Highlighting the importance of healthy cultures and raising it in peoples' consciousness at meetings (e.g. within Chapter meetings, diocesan senior leadership meetings, or PCC meetings).
- Having conversations at these meetings or with other groups involved in the Church Body where people ask and seek to answer the question: "How healthy is our culture?"
- Creating opportunities to include all those involved in the Church Body in this dialogue – for example, introducing yearly feedback and reflection sessions involving parishioners, clergy, PCC members and churchwardens to evaluate the "health" of the Church Body's culture and community. In some areas, the diocese may have to take the lead in these reviews on account of available resources and expertise.
- Drawing on the section "Characteristics of healthy and safe cultures" above in these dialogues.
- Proactively role modelling healthy culture behaviours and communication patterns – as individuals and senior leadership teams.
- Involving victims and survivors of abuse in helping to improve and maintain a healthy culture.

Accessing safeguarding information

Victims and survivors should be able to obtain safeguarding information without needing to identify themselves as such. Church Bodies can promote this by:

- Displaying leaflets, posters and literature about safeguarding on notice-boards or entrances to the church or cathedral. They can also regularly include safeguarding information in church services, notice sheets and monthly newsletters.
- Ensuring that safeguarding information is inclusive. Where a Church Body is a PCC or cathedral Chapter, they should ensure that safeguarding information is translated for worshippers who do not use English as a first language. It is also advisable for this information to be in accessible language so that people with learning disabilities, who **face more risks** relative to others, can also understand it. (Church Bodies can access resources for creating accessible information on the website of [CHANGE](#)).
- Having a dedicated safeguarding section on the Church Body's website.
- Including the need for responsive listening to safeguarding disclosures in sermons and other messages from the pulpit. A parish community could ask itself: "When was the last time the needs of victims and survivors were addressed in a sermon?"
- Once a year having a "safeguarding Sunday" to focus on safeguarding issues. This could include having a shared sermon or dialogue between a survivor and a priest to demonstrate and educate about a positive culture.
- Consulting victims and survivors to get their advice on what information is needed in their setting and the most effective method of communicating this for the desired impact.

Relational and survivor-centred responses to disclosure

Relational and survivor-centered approaches mean prioritising the needs of victims or survivors. The responses recognise the trauma experienced by victims or survivors, and their potential to heal and recover with appropriate support. Conversely, an inappropriate response can compound the harm and distress that victims and survivors feel. The Church's values of love, compassion and empathy should be central to relational approaches. Relational approaches should be underpinned by an understanding that abuse committed by Church Officers or in a Church setting has profound spiritual and theological consequences for victims and survivors. They should also emphasise the importance of the quality and nature of the relationship and interaction between victims and survivors and Church Officers. Believing that this relationship can motivate, inspire, and bring about change in its own right is central to relational approaches.

Survivors argue that *"[t]here is a Christian duty and a moral imperative to respond to disclosures with sensitivity and compassion. The victim has already suffered the trauma of clerical sexual [and/or other forms of] abuse, and this is just the first phase of an ordeal that should no longer be tolerated."*⁴ This means that Church Officers working with victims and survivors must recognise their humanity. They must also appreciate that some victims and survivors want to maintain the healthy relationships they have within their church because they can enhance their healing and recovery.

Clarifying early that information might be shared

A relational approach involves honesty and transparency by Church Officers receiving disclosures. They should not make promises that cannot be kept – for example, that the disclosure will be kept secret. This will involve clarifying that the information disclosed might be shared with others (such as the NST, DSA or CSA and statutory authorities) for safeguarding purposes.

A safe space for disclosure

Church Officers should listen to disclosures where confidentiality and privacy can be guaranteed and interruptions avoided. Some victims and survivors may want a quiet place while others may need suitably public places which are visible to others because this makes them feel safe. If the conversation is planned then it is preferable to allow victims and survivors to choose the location and time. Care should be exercised to avoid locations which might trigger negative emotions for the victim or survivor. If the disclosure is spontaneous, the person disclosing abuse should be asked if they would like to speak in a more private space.

Church Officers should make an accurate record of what the victim or survivor discloses because this will facilitate appropriate responses and it may also be used in future legal proceedings. The best way to ensure accuracy is for Church Officers to show the notes they have made to the victim and survivor and ask them to confirm that it is an accurate record of the conversation. At the end of the conversation, Church Officers should assure the victim or survivor of next steps and take immediate action.

Reflective listening

Research suggests that victims and survivors “*want to be actively listened to when they tell their story about spiritual [and other forms of] abuse*”. *‘Listening and hearing the person’; ‘careful honouring, listening and respect’ [...]* *‘This message was repeated again and again’* ⁵ Listeners can show “active listening” by reflecting back what the speaker says and what they hear, not in parrot-fashion, but by clarifying points and checking the meaning of phrases, words, or even events. This will enable the listener to understand what the disclosure means to the victim or survivor, while also showing empathy, humanity and care about recovery and healing. The [Parish Safeguarding Handbook](#) contains examples of good listening skills.

Understanding the victim’s or survivor’s position

Survivors disclosing abuse may feel as if they are reliving, rather than just remembering, some truly awful events. Victims disclosing recent or ongoing abuse may still be fearful of their abuser. How they are responded to at the point of disclosure can have a profound effect on whether they trust the Church to protect and/or support them. Church Officers can assure victims or survivors of their safety by explaining that they will immediately inform the DSA or CSA who will determine and take the required safeguarding measures. For some victims and survivors a response that recognises their humanity, their right to care, safety and the support of the Church can be powerful first steps to their healing.

Going at the victim’s and survivor’s pace

Victims and survivors should be allowed the space to disclose at their own pace and discretion. Church Officers listening to disclosures should avoid pressing for information and provide the required time for the conversation to unfold without either participant feeling rushed. They should also not ask leading questions. The extent of disclosure should rest with the victim or survivor, who should feel in control of their story – within the boundaries of good safeguarding practice – and what is going to happen with it.

Victims and survivors may not remember the details of their experience or articulate it in a way that appears understandable or in chronological sequence. This can be because of the impact of their traumatic experience of abuse and because they have not made sense of it themselves, or because their abuser has given them false messages – for example, that the victim or survivor was responsible for the harm caused.

Checking on well-being

While disclosing abuse is difficult for victims and survivors, they may feel more cared for if Church Officers regularly check on their wellbeing (during and after the disclosure). Therefore, after they have disclosed, Church Officers should arrange to check on their wellbeing (with their agreement). Who exactly does this will depend on the Church Body involved and the support provision within, or available to, the Church Body. This should be arranged with the victim or survivor. For a survivor to get a call or visit from someone they did not disclose to, who apparently now knows about their abuse, may be very upsetting.

Remaining non-judgmental and being self-reflexive

Listeners should be aware of their own emotions during disclosure. They should demonstrate appropriate empathy and avoid overt displays of shock and upset. The focus should be on the survivor's emotions, not the listener's, who should express deep concern for the victim or survivor whilst remaining calm themselves.

Church Officers should remain non-judgmental during a disclosure but they must take immediate action afterwards. They must take what they are being told seriously, respond empathetically and then act – for example, reporting to the DSA or CSA or others with safeguarding responsibility in the Church Body. It is not the role of Church Officers to judge whether disclosures are “true” or “credible”. The response must therefore not be one of disbelief.

To follow good practice, Church Officers should note the following:

- **Abuse can affect how a victim or survivor “presents” themselves:** The experience of abuse is likely to cause trauma and the disclosure process can be “re-abusive” (Stein, 2016)⁶. Therefore, victims or survivors may sometimes remember “snapshots” and not all the details of their experiences. This could make their account appear “unlikely” or “lacking credibility”, leading Church Officers to dismiss the truthfulness of their disclosure.
- **Abusers can be manipulative:** Some forms of abuse result from manipulation by the abuser in which victims and survivors feel “loyal” or “devoted” to them. This means that, even while disclosing, victims and survivors may wish to retain some information to “protect” their abuser, making their account appear distorted and therefore unreliable, untrustworthy and inaccurate. For this reason, Church Officers should prioritise listening and supporting the person to articulate their experiences; and record the information and report it to the DSA or CSA.
- **“Inappropriate” reaction to hearing abuse:** Church Officers hearing disclosures can become upset and overwhelmed by emotions, particularly if it triggers their own experiences of abuse. While this is an understandable reaction, it can also cause Church Officers to avoid talking to the victim or survivor about their disclosure in order to protect themselves from the details. The Church Officer facing this situation may react by preventing the victim or survivor from speaking further, “shutting them down”, challenging the victim or survivor on aspects of their account; questioning the veracity of their description of events, or even minimising the significance of what they are hearing. For these reasons, Church Officers have a duty to listen to the disclosure, take note (verbally and in writing) and inform the DSA or CSA.

If a Church Officer is struggling to manage their emotions in the course of a disclosure, they should inform the victim or survivor disclosing to them and connect them with another Church Officer who is able to hear the disclosure – for example, the DSA or CSA. Depending on the information disclosed, they will need to inform the victim or survivor that they will have to share this information, as appropriate and necessary.

Managing online disclosures

Occasionally, victims and survivors may make a disclosure on social media or through email, or by using other electronic platforms. Church Officers should contact the person to continue the discussion. It is up to the victim or survivor to decide how they wish to communicate online or in-person. The responsibility of the Church Officer is to keep that information safe, but they can of course make the person aware of the need to communicate safely.

Responding to concerns or allegations involving children or young people

The Church of England seeks to create and maintain a safe environment for all. This includes being open and responding appropriately to concerns and allegations raised by children and young people. Church Officers should avoid intentionally instigating a meeting with a child or young person to receive a disclosure or take a statement from them – that is the role of local authorities' children's social care services or the police. However, if a child or young person directly discloses about abuse happening to them, the following general guidelines should be followed:

- Remain calm.
- Listen to the child or young person carefully and in a manner that conveys they are being heard and taken seriously.
- Give the child or young person the opportunity to tell their story in their own time.
- Ask questions only for clarification.
- Reassure the child or young person they have done the right thing by disclosing and that the Church will work with statutory services to safeguard them.
- Do not make promises that cannot be kept – for example, that the disclosure will be kept secret.
- Explain to the child or young person what will happen next – i.e. that the Church Officer will inform the DSA or CSA who will progress the disclosure.

- ⁴Stein, J. (2016). Surviving the crucible of ecclesiastical abuse. *Crucible: The Journal of Christian Social Ethics*, July
- ⁵Oakley, L., & and Humphreys, J. (2019). Escaping the maze of spiritual abuse. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.(p.90)
- ⁶Stein, J. (2016). Surviving the crucible of ecclesiastical abuse. *Crucible: The Journal of Christian Social Ethics*, July

Section 2: Co-creating support with victims and survivors of Church-based abuse.

 10 minutes read

Last updated: 03 December 2021

Requirements

2.1. Following a disclosure, the Church Body where the abuse took place or is alleged to have taken place (the Relevant Church Body) must take such reasonable steps as it is permitted by law to provide the support set out in the “Summary of the Church’s Support Offer for Victims and Survivors” table in Section 3 of this Guidance. This applies even if the victim or survivor lives in a different area or is no longer connected with the Relevant Church Body.

2.2 Where the Relevant Church Body is:

- (i) a Parochial Church Council (PCC).
- (ii) a cathedral Chapter which has a safeguarding Service Level Agreement in place with the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF).
- (iii) a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) (nb: where a DBE is a Statutory Committee of the DBF, the Relevant Church Body where a disclosure is made to the DBE is, for the purpose of this guidance, the DBF)
- (iv) the office of a bishop (where the abuser or alleged abuser is or was a bishop); or
- (v) a Religious Community

The Relevant Church Body will be considered to have complied with the requirement in 2.1. above if the person responsible for safeguarding in the Relevant Church Body (or the person to whom the disclosure was made, as appropriate) makes a written request to the DSA in their diocese that the DSA works with the Relevant Church Body to co-ordinate the support provision for the victim or survivor on behalf of the Relevant Church Body.

2.3 Where the Relevant Church Body is the DBF, or a cathedral Chapter where there is no safeguarding Service Level Agreement in place with the DBF, the DSA or CSA is responsible for coordinating the support for the victim or survivor.

2.4 The DSA or CSA must work with and alongside the victim or survivor and Relevant Church Body to identify the support that is needed, how this will be arranged and by whom, and when the provision will start. This should be in addition to any necessary safeguarding actions undertaken. Where a Relevant Church Body has chosen to co-ordinate the provision of support themselves, this requirement must be undertaken by the safeguarding lead in that Relevant Church Body

2.5 Many allegations of abuse arise in connection with one or more Church Bodies (for example, in multiple parishes). Where the abuse is alleged to have taken place in more than one Church Body, the Relevant Church Body for the purposes of coordinating the provision of support is the Church Body to which the disclosure was made. However, the other Church Bodies in which it is alleged abuse has also taken place (Other Church Bodies) must work with the Relevant Church Body in relation to the provision of support.

2.6 Where:

(i) allegations of abuse are simultaneously received by more than one Church Body or

(ii) allegations are made in relation to abuse that took place in more than one diocese,

Church Bodies should inform the NST as soon as is reasonably practicable. The NST will then seek to reach agreement on the co-ordination of the provision of support for the victim or survivor with the Church Bodies involved. Victims and survivors must be told what sharing of information is taking place; that this is not based on consent but on required practice underpinned by the lawful bases stated in the safeguarding privacy notice.

2.7 The Relevant Church Body and any Other Church Bodies must take prompt steps to determine if they have a policy of insurance in place which may cover financial support for any therapeutic support needs of the victim/survivor. While they take those steps, the Relevant Church Body and any Other Church Bodies need to consider what alternative support may be available to fund any identified and agreed therapeutic support for the victim or survivor. Where the Relevant Church Body (or any Other Church Body) is the office of a bishop, the relevant bishop (or archbishop as appropriate) must ensure that the allegation is brought to the attention of the Church Commissioners as soon as possible.

2.8 The steps outlined above must be undertaken in a timely manner following disclosure to avoid unnecessary delay to the provision of therapeutic support.

2.9 Relevant Church Bodies must obtain the written consent of victims or survivors before arranging any support under this Guidance or sharing information about them with any providers. The DSA or CSA must allow for the victim or survivor to withdraw their consent at any time, but they must be told the implications of withholding / withdrawing consent.

2.10 Relevant Church Bodies must give victims or survivors the time they need to decide whether they want any support services and/or how they want them to be delivered. Relevant Church Bodies must pay attention to whether the victim or survivor is a child or adult, any additional needs they have, their mental capacity to make their own decisions, and existing support within their professional and personal networks they wish to draw upon.

2.11 If a victim or survivor declines the offer of support, DSAs and CSAs must revisit this periodically to see if they have changed their mind, unless the victim or survivor has made it clear that they do not wish to be contacted. DSAs/CSAs must keep a record of these conversations.

2.12 To deliver the above effectively, DSAs and CSAs must keep themselves informed about the availability of local and national support services for victims and survivors and establish effective relationships with key organisations as and when required.

Good Practice Advice

Children and young people

The support for children and young people will usually need to involve statutory services and their parents (unless they are implicated as the abuser(s)). DSAs and CSAs should include the child or young person to arrange the support they need. In most cases young people aged 16 and 17 are able to give consent to support in their own right, but issues of age and consent should always be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Where there is a conflict between the child or young person's wishes and their parents', the DSA or CSA should seek advice from their local authority's children's services. Where a Relevant Church Body is co-ordinating the support provision themselves, the person doing this work should inform the DSA and follow their advice.

A survivor-centred approach to support

Church Bodies must avoid adversarial responses to victims or survivors who disclose allegations of abuse by a Church Officer. As they are morally and theologically obligated to provide them with support, their conversations with survivors must show that they are genuinely motivated to assist them in their recovery.

Sometimes victims and survivors may be uncertain of what they need or even whether they should engage with the support being offered by the DSA, CSA or Relevant Church Body. However, as advised by survivors involved in the development of this Guidance, the Church must prioritise *“supporting the victims and survivors to explore options, and what they want and need next, as an evolving conversation and picture. The main thing is to keep listening and supporting”*.

It is also possible that, having experienced abuse within the Church and the breach of their trust, victims and survivors would not want to discuss their needs with Church Officers, including DSAs or CSAs. Survivors may also not want to accept any support funded by the Church Body or Bodies in which their abuse occurred. This is because the association with the Church might re-traumatise them. Therefore, when arranging support, DSAs, CSAs or Relevant Bodies should be creative. For instance, they can explore provision by third-parties, such as specialist agencies, or engage local advocacy groups to be intermediaries between them and victims and survivors to arrange the services. The potential role of Safe Spaces should be considered. Where survivors have complex needs, a mixture of the support in Section 3 below may be required.

If it is suspected that some victims and survivors do not have the mental capacity to consent to the provision of support or sharing of information, the DSA, CSA or person co-ordinating the support should get advice from their local authority safeguarding adults team. Judging mental capacity requires training and it is important that this judgement is not reached arbitrarily. The starting assumption must always be that a person has the mental capacity to make a decision unless it can be established that they lack mental capacity (the role of mental capacity in safeguarding is explained in the [care and support statutory guidance](#) paragraph 14.55 onwards).

This means that Church Officers should also make every effort to encourage and support the person to access information and make the decision themselves. Even if a person makes a decision which they consider eccentric or "unwise", this does not necessarily mean that the person lacks the capacity to make the decision.

Aligning with criminal justice processes

Church Bodies should ensure that the support provided under this Guidance aligns with ongoing legal and criminal processes. For instance, if the police are involved, then any therapeutic support must follow pre-trial guidelines. However, as outlined in this Crown Prosecution Service's [pre-trial guidance](#) "therapy should not be delayed for any reason connected with a criminal investigation or prosecution." This means that therapeutic support for victims and survivors can be prioritised even during police investigations - legal advice should be sought and the police consulted.

Building relationships with other services

DSAs and CSAs should collate information about support and advocacy services in their area that victims and survivors can access. This can involve building relationships with relevant statutory services and independent sector providers, including agreements around data sharing. Some examples of relevant services are: [Independent Sexual Violence Adviser \(ISVA\)](#), [Independent Domestic Violence Adviser \(IDVA\)](#), [sexual assault referral centres](#) and [Victim Support](#). Further information about support services and advice is available on this [HM Government website](#).

There are also in-person and online support groups for victims and survivors. Some victims and survivors might also want to establish their own peer-to-peer support systems. Examples of these include group prayers, safe worship, and engagement with people with first-hand understanding of their situation. Victims and survivors should be encouraged to seek specialist advice if they decide to develop their own mutual support arrangements – for example, from existing victim and survivor groups.

How to support people to make their own decisions about support

Under this Guidance, it is a requirement that victims and survivors need to consent to the provision of support or before their personal information or details of their needs are shared with third-party providers of support. The section below, adapted from the [Mental Capacity Act 2005: Code of Practice](#), explains how people can be assisted to make their own decisions about the support in this Guidance.

Providing relevant information

- Does the victim or survivor have all the relevant information they need to make the decision? For instance, have you given them information about who will provide the services, when and how? Have you explained the options and permutations? Is the information clear and, for those with additional needs, is it accessible?

- If they have a choice, have they been given information on all the alternatives?

Communicating in an appropriate way

- Is the information about the support explained in a straightforward way, without using jargon? Could information about the support be explained or presented in a way that is easier for the survivor or victim to understand (for example, by using "everyday" language or visual aids)? If it is about therapeutic support, have you explained the benefits in jargon-free language?
- Where appropriate, have you explored different methods of communication, including non-verbal communication, with the survivor or victim?
- Could anyone else help with communication about the support using language or a communication medium that the survivor or victim can understand? For example, a family member, support worker, interpreter, speech and language therapist or advocate. If a friend or family member, they would need to agree to the confidentiality of the information. If a professional, there may need to be a contractual agreement that covers data processing and protection. The victim or survivor would need to agree to the involvement of a third person in this way.

Making the person feel at ease

- Are there particular times of day when the survivor or victim's understanding is better? This applies where people may be taking medication that affects their lucidity.
- Are there particular locations where the survivor or victim feels more at ease? Some places associated with the Church or the abuse may trigger re-traumatisation and therefore affect their ability to decide whether to accept the support package.
- Could the decision be put off in order to see whether the survivor or victim can make the decision at a later time when circumstances are right for them?

Supporting the person

- Can anyone else help or support the person to make choices or express a view (whilst also abiding by the need for confidentiality)?

Section 3: Summary of support for victims and survivors of Church-based abuse

 2 minutes read

Last updated: 03 November 2021

The table below summarises the support that Church Bodies must offer to all people who report abuse by a Church Officer or disclose that

they have experienced abuse in a church-setting.

Type of support	Responsibility	Eligibility
Locally arranged		
<p>Therapeutic support to meet emotional and psychological needs in the immediate and medium-term period following a disclosure.</p>	<p>The DSA or CSA is responsible for coordinating the provision of support, working with the Relevant Church Body and any other Church Bodies.</p> <p>Where a Relevant Church Body has chosen to coordinate the provision of support themselves, this should be done by their Safeguarding Lead.</p> <p>Where the NST is required to be informed, the arrangements for the provision of support for the victim and survivor will be coordinated as agreed by the NST with the Relevant Church Body and other Church Bodies involved.</p>	<p>All people who disclose Church-based abuse.</p>
<p>Support Person</p>	<p>The DSA or CSA is responsible for facilitating the introduction of the victim or survivor to a Support Person. This also applies where a Relevant Church Body is co-ordinating the provision - the DSA will work with them to provide a Support Person for the victim or survivor to meet their needs.</p> <p>The DSA is responsible for establishing and supporting a pool of Support Persons within the diocese and/or cathedral.</p>	<p>All people who disclose Church-based abuse.</p>

<p>Spiritual and pastoral support</p>	<p>The DSA or CSA is responsible for organising spiritual and pastoral support for victims and survivors, working with the Relevant Church Body and any Other Church Bodies, if required.</p> <p>Where a Relevant Church Body has chosen to arrange this themselves, it should be undertaken by its Safeguarding Lead.</p> <p>Where allegations are managed by the NST, arrangements for the co-ordination of the provision of support for the victim or survivor will be as agreed by the NST with the Relevant Church Bodies and Other Church Bodies involved.</p>	<p>All people who disclose Church-based abuse.</p>
<p>Apology</p>	<p>The most senior leader of the Relevant Church Body (bishop, cathedral dean, religious community leader) is responsible for overseeing this work.</p>	<p>See Section 4.5.1.</p>
<p>Centrally arranged</p>		
<p>Safe Spaces</p>	<p>This is provided by Victim Support through central Church funding.</p>	<p>All people who disclose Church-based abuse.</p>
<p>Interim Support Scheme</p>	<p>Central Church funding</p>	<p>This is intended as short-term assistance for eligible victims and survivors with urgent needs.</p>
<p>Redress Scheme</p>	<p>Central Church funding</p>	<p>This is being developed – further information will be provided by the Church of England when available.</p>

Section 4: Arranging therapeutic support

🕒 3 minutes read

Last updated: 03 November 2021

Requirements

4.1 The person providing the therapeutic support must have appropriate qualifications and must be registered with the requisite professional body.

4.2 The support is intended to meet immediate and medium-term needs (not long-term needs) and must be arranged as quickly as is practicable in the circumstances.

4.3 Any decision to end this support must be based on a review of the needs of the survivor or victim rather than on an arbitrary end-date. This review must include the victim's or survivor's views of their needs. In case of children and young people, the review must include their parents (or guardians) unless they are implicated in the safeguarding concerns.

4.4 Any communication and contracting by the Church Body/DSA/CSA with a therapist needs to comply with the UK data protection law (e.g. data processing agreement) and appropriate legal advice sought.

Good Practice Advice

A helpful starting point for Church Bodies in implementing the requirements in this section is an exploration of the [different types of therapy](#) that victims or survivors may need. These can be provided by statutory services or specialist providers in the third sector. The priority should be arranging help promptly to meet immediate need. Church Bodies should consider suggestions by survivors or victims about therapists who can meet their needs.

Church Bodies may have existing commissioning arrangements for therapy but these may not be suitable for all victims or survivors who are eligible. In these situations, the Church Body should consider offering financial assistance to fund the identified therapy, if it cannot easily locate another provider or alternative statutory provision. This offer should be in addition to the other services summarised in Section 3 of this Guidance. (In practice, a victim or survivor has a menu of options and so, for example, they can decline the offer of a Support Person but still be eligible for funding for therapy).

DSAs and CSAs in cathedrals without a safeguarding SLA with the DBF should lead the discussions with victims and survivors about arrangements and funding for their therapeutic support and assist them to organise it (they can do this directly or through the Support Person).

Where there is an ongoing criminal investigation, an offer of funding can be made by the Church Body via the police, usually with the Officer in the Case (OIC) as an intermediary. Some victims and survivors do not want Church Officers or safeguarding professionals to know their personal or contact details and this can complicate the arrangement of funding for their therapy. In these situations, the Church Body can make an offer of funding through the OIC, stipulating that therapists should invoice the Church Body directly using minimal information that does not lead to the full identification of the victim or survivor.

After disclosure, Church Bodies' offers of financial assistance for therapeutic support for victims and survivors should be made swiftly. However, this should not be an open-ended commitment. For instance, financial assistance can be offered for initial therapy sessions (e.g. up to 15) with a later review to ascertain if more sessions are required. The combination of swift, generous support and clear, managed expectations can be extremely important at this stage.

If the survivor or victim is likely to make a formal legal complaint (either to the police or within a civil claim) regarding their abuse, any therapeutic support should follow the Crown Prosecution Services [guidance for pre-trial therapy](#). The funding of therapy does not jeopardise insurance cover and is not, at this stage, a legal admission of liability. (see the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group's [guiding principles](#) document).

Section 5: The Support Person role

 9 minutes read

Last updated: 18 November 2021

Requirements

5.1 Church Bodies must offer all victims and survivors a Support Person to assist them.

5.2 DSAs and CSAs will take reasonable steps to ensure suitable Support Persons are available. This will include developing and supporting a pool of Support Persons who may be able to help victims and survivors and /or contracting with other organisations to provide Support Persons.

5.3 Church Bodies must promptly, following a disclosure, liaise with the DSA or CSA to facilitate the agreement of a person to perform the role of "Support Person" to support those victims and survivors who state they would like this form of help.

5.4 Church Bodies must ensure the Support Person has completed the NST "Support Person" training before being assigned. This also applies to Support Persons supplied by third party organisations.

5.5 The Support Person must only be assigned after consent by the victim or survivor (or in the case of children, their parent or guardian who is not the subject of the safeguarding concern).

5.6 A written statement must be provided which sets out exactly what help the Support Person will provide to a victim and survivor, and this will explain how information about the victim and survivor will be recorded, shared and used.

5.7 Church Bodies must take reasonable steps to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between the Church Body or Bodies involved and the Support Person assigned to the victim/survivor. The Support Person assigned must not have any involvement in the safeguarding or other investigations into the allegations made by the victim or survivor they are assigned to support. The Support Person must not be a witness for, or have any other involvement in relation to, the allegations of abuse by the victim or survivor they are supporting.

5.8 Church Bodies must give the contact details of the person responsible for the oversight and support of the Support Person to the victim and survivor so that they can contact them to provide feedback, if they wish to.

5.9 Church Bodies must ensure appropriate support and oversight for the Support Person. In dioceses and cathedrals this will, respectively, be the DSA or CSA.

Good Practice Advice

Following disclosure, some victims and survivors might welcome the help of a “Support Person” – others will not want this form of support, especially if the person is a volunteer and is associated with the Church. The idea of this volunteer role is to have someone who can provide emotional and practical support for a victim and survivor during the period after their disclosure.

The responsibility of DSAs or CSAs is to take all reasonable steps to source suitable people to take on the Support Person role, to link victims and survivors with matched Support Persons, and provide oversight of, and support for, the Support Person. The DSA or CSA can discharge this responsibility in different ways. They can:

- have an arrangement with a local voluntary organisation to provide Support Persons.
- commission an organisation to supply a Support Person.
- develop a pool of Support Persons.

About the role - what Support Persons can do

The Support Person is a volunteer role which can assist victims' and survivors' recovery by listening, empathising, showing compassion and maintaining their connections with the Church.

Church Bodies should consider on a case-by-case basis what a Support Person might do. It may include some of the following elements:

- Support within the community and the Church.
- Listening, being alongside the victim or survivor in their distress.
- Some might be able to provide pastoral and spiritual support (and some victims and survivors might prefer this from a lay person).
- Being easily contactable and readily available to liaise between the victim or survivor and the Church Body or DSA about the management of their safeguarding disclosure.
- Explaining support being offered and assisting victims and survivors to choose and engage with the support options that meet their needs.
- Supporting victims and survivors during meetings with statutory services and other professionals, where appropriate. This should not extend to meetings about the Church Body's investigations about their disclosure as this will be a conflict of interest.
- Assisting the victim or survivor with exploring how their longer-term spiritual and welfare needs can be managed.
- Signposting victims and survivors to Safe Spaces, the Interim Support Scheme and the Redress Scheme, and work with any appointed advocate for the survivor.
- Being a befriender to assist the victim or survivors to build their confidence and networks. ([this study](#) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation contains useful advice for Church Bodies that wish to develop this element of the Support Person role).

What the Support Person role is not

The Support Person is not the confidant of the victim or survivor. They must be bound by a responsibility to disclose to the appropriate authorities (e.g. the police, DSA or CSA) where:

- others are at risk of harm.
- the victim or survivor makes disclosures of intentions to hurt themselves.
- safeguarding information needs to be shared with statutory social care services and criminal justice professionals to assist in the prevention, detection or prosecution of a crime.
- the Support Person is a volunteer.

No one directly involved in the management of the case, or who may be required to give evidence in court proceedings, should be directly supporting the victim or survivor, since their roles or their status may be compromised.

The Support Person is not providing a professional service. Some victims and survivors will need a higher level of professional expertise to meet their needs, and in these circumstances the DSA or CSA or Relevant Body should help secure appropriate professional help e.g. through an Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA) or Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) if available in the area. Church Officers should note that Safe Spaces is a professional service and their advocates have undertaken ISVA training.

Victims and survivors who are children or young people will usually require specialist support which should be provided by a professional agency qualified to provide such support.

The Support Person must not attend core group meetings.

Required attributes of Support Persons

People who might make suitable Support Persons could come from a range of backgrounds and life experiences. The main consideration is that they have the right talents and personal attributes. The Support Person role can be a combination of pastoral care, support and reassurance for victims and survivors. Consequently, the Support Person's value-base, their compassionate nature and attunement skills will be important attributes in successfully undertaking this role.

Other key attributes include:

- good communication skills.
- respecting peoples' choices.
- good timekeeping.
- timely responses to emails and telephone calls.

Above all, the Support Person should be motivated to act for survivors and victims. Victims and survivors involved in the development of this Guidance advised that listening skills, flexibility and "availability" are also important skills:

You have the counsellor but the other person [Support Person] walks beside you in what capacity you need, giving you different areas of support. You just need someone who is happy to listen, someone who is happy to go shopping, day out to give you confidence, someone who will help you manage the services. Just being alongside you.

Information recording and sharing

Support Persons might, to fulfil their role effectively, need to keep a written record of what they do or key points from some meetings. If the Support Person is a volunteer undertaking the role for the diocese or other Church Body, they should share their recordings with both the victim or survivor and the DSA / CSA / Relevant Church Body concerned. The Church Body must make sure that the Support Person is able to record and transfer this information securely.

If the Support Person comes from another organisation, the DSA / CSA / Relevant Church Body is responsible for ensuring the contract with that organisation addresses issues of information sharing and security.

Matching and information

The DSA or CSA should produce written information about the Support Person role which can be shared with other Church Bodies. This can include details about what the Support Person can offer, explanation of their independence from clergy or safeguarding investigations, their training and their approaches to confidentiality and anonymity.

Before being assigned a Support Person, the nature of the role and who will discharge it should be discussed with the survivor or victim. They should decide if and how they want to engage with the Support Person. If the initial offer is declined by the victim or survivor, at key points in the safeguarding process, DSAs and CSAs should re-offer them the Support Person role. For example, if a case goes to court.

Victims and survivors may not want to work with a Support Person who is a member of clergy and therefore this should be discussed with them.

If a victim or survivor accepts the offer of a Support Person, it is recommended that a written description of the Support Person's specific agreed role and responsibilities in respect of that victim or survivor should be provided to them. Another recommendation is that this document should set out the position on information sharing and security as described above. It should also indicate the expected period of time that the Support Person will be involved with the victim or survivor. When the involvement of the Support Person ends, it is important that this is handled well so that it does not have an adverse impact on the victim or survivor.

Overseeing Support Persons in their role

Given that the Support Person will engage with people in distress and trauma due to abuse, they will require support and oversight (usually from the DSA or CSA) to manage the emotional impact of their role. Exactly what form this takes and the frequency of contact should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Developing a pool of Support Persons

It is recommended that Church Bodies should review how many Support Persons they need to meet their local need and explore the option of collaboration with neighbouring dioceses or cathedrals to create an adequate pool of Support Persons.

Church Bodies should aim to have a number of volunteers in a pool in order to achieve the best possible match between victims and survivor and Support Persons. For example, some victims or survivors may prefer to work with Support Persons of the same gender, race and ethnicity or even lived experience.

This is an opportunity for Church Bodies to collaborate to develop a pool of volunteers as Support Persons to meet the needs of survivors in their respective areas. For example, a victim or survivor might not want a Support Person from the diocese (or cathedral) where they were abused but might accept one connected with a Religious Community or another cathedral. Having a pool in this way allows for the possibility of greater independence and options which will be important for some victims / survivors.

Bishop's Visitors

In cases where a clergy marriage ends as a result of abuse, a Bishop's Visitor should be appointed by the Bishop to assist the spouse or partner with practical aspects of the change. This might include practical help with finding new accommodation, accessing sources of funding etc. The Bishop's Visitor is not a Support Person but may assist with the day-to-day issues for a limited period of time.

Section 6: Spiritual and pastoral support for victims and survivors

 3 minutes read

Last updated: 03 November 2021

Requirements

6.1 Church Bodies in which abuse occurred must offer spiritual and pastoral support to the victims and survivors. This should be discussed with the victim or survivor and they must consent to the support, using an appropriate consent form.

6.2 The DSA will support PCCs, Diocesan Boards of Education and cathedrals (with which the diocese has a safeguarding Service Level Agreement in place) in arranging spiritual and pastoral support.

Good Practice Advice

The spiritual dimension of Church-based abuse

Spiritual and pastoral support can be important components of recovery for victims and survivors and can lead to their reconciliation with their local church, if this is what they want. However, it should be needs-led. Sometimes, this is exemplified by the needs of victims and survivors for a theology that can assist them to make sense of their traumatic experiences. On other occasions, some victims and survivors need arrangements to worship in a different church, to prevent re-traumatisation.

Victims and survivors with faith, or those who wish to explore faith, may, understandably, have great difficulty in reconciling the Christian teaching of a loving God with the reality of their abuse. Others may struggle with Christian references to God as “Father” or to discipleship as “submission” or “obedience” because they imply an acknowledgement of their powerlessness *vis-à-vis* clergy. Some Christian survivors also struggle with the notion of “forgiveness”, as they may think of it as absolving their abuser of their criminal conduct. These complexities can be compounded by the misuse of theology to silence survivors at the point of disclosure or in their demand for redress – for example, “You must forgive and forget”. This is a very sensitive area of ministry and Church Officers should avoid exacerbating the trauma that victims and survivors have experienced by suggesting that they should “move on” from the harmful abuse.

Some survivors of abuse in the Church have maintained their faith but, understandably, they struggle to engage with formal Church settings. Many have expressed the desire to stay connected with their faith even as they keep their distance from the Church. Consideration should be given, for victims and survivors in this situation, to whether pastoral support can be provided in addition to specialist therapeutic support as previously discussed.

Arranging spiritual and pastoral support

The pastoral response of the Church, and the responsibilities of the bishop who has the ‘cure of souls’ for their diocese, are not wholly discharged by providing a Support Person. The services of the Support Person should be in addition to, rather than a substitute for, the pastoral care provided by the diocese and the bishop. However, some Support Persons, with the appropriate training, might be able to provide pastoral and spiritual support and some victims and survivors might prefer to receive that support from someone who is not ordained.

Experience shows that many survivors of abuse in the Church need to see that the Church and its leadership have understood their experience, including any complicity of the Church in that experience, and has fully taken responsibility for any failures and the actions required to avoid abuse in the future.

The DSA (or CSA) working with the Archdeacon, Area Dean and Spiritual Director should identify a pool of clergy with the skills and theological knowledge to undertake the work. The nominated clergy will also require training and support to undertake this work. Not all victims and survivors will want to receive this support from a member of the clergy. There may be highly able lay people who can undertake this work.

In their conversations with victims and survivors who have disclosed abuse, the DSA (or CSA) should inform them of support available, describing the skills and knowledge of clergy alongside exploring the spiritual or pastoral needs to be addressed.

Section 7: The issuing of apologies by Church Bodies

Requirements

7.1 Church Bodies must apologise to a victim or survivor:

- after the conviction of a Church Officer for abuse they committed against them.
- where there has been a finding (for example as part of civil proceedings or a CDM) that the alleged abuse is proven on the balance of probabilities.
- if it finds, after Independent Case Review(s) as outlined in relevant House of Bishop guidance, that previous allegations against a Church Officer have not been investigated or pursued in an appropriate manner. The apology will be for the lack of action about the original allegation and it should state a commitment to (re)investigate without delay.

7.2 In situations where these criteria are not met Church Bodies must consider whether to make an apology and, if so, when, irrespective of whether the Respondent is living or deceased.

7.3 In all circumstances, Church Bodies must take their own legal advice before issuing an apology, particularly whether any apology should be made with or without an admission of liability.

7.4 Senior leaders in the Church Body in which abuse occurred are responsible for organising and overseeing the issuing of an apology. In NST-led inquiries, this will be the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding.

7.5 Church Bodies must establish from the survivor their wishes in respect of the apology including who should make the apology, how it is communicated (e.g. in writing, in person, both) and the issues it should address. Wherever possible, the Church Body should comply with the victim's wishes.

7.6 Church Bodies must ensure that the apology is issued as soon as possible, subject to the particular circumstances of each situation.

7.7 If a victim or survivor requests that the senior leader of the Church Body issues the apology in person, that senior leader must be accompanied by an appropriate professional adviser, which could include the DSA / CSA.

7.8 The victim or survivor can be accompanied to this meeting by up to two people to support them.

7.9 If a living bishop or dean is the subject of the investigation or allegation, then any apology by the Church Body must involve the Archbishop for the relevant province.

7.10 Any apology issued by Church Bodies must express, in a candid and meaningful manner, sorrow and remorse for the harm that the

victim or survivor has experienced. It must also convey the Church Body's understanding that it regards safeguarding as a core responsibility and having not successfully discharged this, it has caused a breach of the victim or survivor's trust.

7.11 When an apology is issued, if it is possible to do so, the Church Body must also explain the lessons that it has learnt from the incident and what it has done to prevent or reduce the chances of a recurrence.

7.12 As part of the act of apologising, Church Bodies must also initiate discussion about reconciliation between the Church and the victim or survivor. This work can be undertaken within a restorative practice framework – for example, giving the survivor the opportunity to explain the impact of the abuse on them, and what they need from the Church to heal. A Support Person with the requisite skills and training can undertake this work.

7.13 In following the requirements above, an apology will not be able to be made in all cases where allegations are made. Church Bodies must nevertheless give consideration to whether ongoing offers of support are still appropriate and consider different forms of reconciliation or restoration.

7.14 Professional safeguarding adviser (e.g. DSA/CSA) must be involved in these considerations.

Good Practice Advice

Apologies and liability

Church Bodies must offer an apology in the circumstances set out in paragraph 7.1. Where those circumstances are not met, Church Bodies should still consider whether it is appropriate for them to offer an apology in addition to any acknowledgement of what has happened to the victim and survivor.

Part 1 (section 2) of the [Compensation Act 2006](#) makes clear that “offering an apology, an offer of treatment and other redress shall not in itself amount to an admission of negligence or a breach of statutory duty.” Any apology should take account of the particular circumstances of any matter and the Church Body should consider such action in consultation with professional advisers and their insurers.

Church Bodies should consider whether it is appropriate for them to offer an apology based on the available information or whether they need to investigate further.

Apologies and deceased Church Officers

Where an allegation is made against a deceased Church Officer, Church Bodies must take into account the fact that the deceased Church Officer cannot respond to the allegation. As a consequence, in such circumstances Church Bodies should undertake further investigation.

Church Officers must ensure that as part of the investigation reasonable steps are taken to identify any close living relation of the Respondent and to afford them (or someone on their behalf) an opportunity to make representations as part of the investigation process. Further, the investigation must take reasonable steps to obtain and examine evidence which might exonerate the Respondent. In an appropriate case this may require a public call for evidence. Any such investigation should also seek to identify material which supports the allegation.

Church Bodies should bear in mind that the close living relations of the deceased have a reasonable expectation of privacy and Church Bodies should ensure that they take appropriate advice about information sharing as part of any investigation.

Apologies and healing

Apologies can be therapeutically beneficial for victims and survivors, and support their healing. When issuing an apology, Church Bodies can draw on the Church's teachings on the need to express and demonstrate ownership of one's sins and ask God for forgiveness. Translating this into the relationship between the Church and victims and survivors, this means that where Church Officers have harmed people, the Church Body should "own" that sin. Furthermore, with humility, the Church Body should ask the victim or survivor how it can repair and redress the harm caused.

Apologies by Church Bodies: illustrative content

- **Acknowledge the harm caused** - To begin repairing the harm caused, Church Bodies should explain in their apologies that they have understood the emotional or physical harm that the victim / survivor has experienced.
- **Renounce the act** – Church Bodies should state in the apology that what the victim / survivor has experienced was wrong and should not have happened. If there has been a formal investigation, the apology can restate the facts of the outcome and Church's renunciation of the acts of the Church Officer(s).
- **Explore atonement** – Church Bodies should invite the victim / survivor to discuss how the Church Body can atone for the harm caused.
- **Reassure the victim** – Church Bodies should explain the measures taken to prevent recurrence of the harm caused.
- **Show appropriate values** – the Church Body should demonstrate sorrow and repentance for its actions or the sinful activities of the Church Officer(s).

Adapted from DeYoung, K. (2018). [Toward a theology of apology](#)

Involving Support Persons

Where appropriate, Church Bodies should involve the Support Person to liaise with victims and survivors before issuing apologies. The purpose of this is to identify what victims or survivors want apologies to express, whether they want public announcements or private conversations with clergy, and how they want written apologies delivered to them.

Support Persons should also clarify with victims and survivors whether they want apologies to be delivered in their home, on the premises of the Church Body or at another appropriate location, to avoid re-traumatisation.

How Church Bodies should deliver apologies

To effectively support the victim or survivor's healing and recovery, apologies need to address their needs. They should show sincerity and the language and tone should reflect the magnitude of the transgression. Therefore, when Church Bodies issue apologies, they should fully consult with the victim or survivor to determine how, when and where they want the apology to be made to them. Some victims or survivors may want a written apology, others may require a verbal apology; and depending on their faith, others may want one expressed in the Church's teachings and led by senior clergy.

Senior clergy (Archbishop, bishop, dean) are the figureheads of the Church and they should oversee this work, ensuring that they involve their safeguarding teams. The DSA or CSA should sign-off any letters of apology and attend any meetings with victims and survivors.

Where a victim or survivor requests the Church Body to issue an apology in person, Church Bodies should ensure that the conditions below are met. This is a minimum threshold and the tone and disposition of Church Officers should be to listen, acknowledge the harm caused and show contrition on behalf of the Church.

- The victim or survivor should be asked who they wish to represent the Church to issue the apology.
- The survivor and victim should be encouraged and supported to attend the meeting with up to two people of their choice.
- The person representing the Church Body should start by explaining the purpose of the meeting and restate the profound sorrow of the Church for the abuse caused to the victim or survivor.
- The victim and survivor should be invited to talk about any aspect of the abuse they experienced and how it has impacted on them. This can have profound therapeutic and emotional benefit for them.
- The representatives of the Church Body should listen and demonstrate empathy and evidence of acknowledgement of the harm caused to the victim or survivor. They should explain lessons learnt from the investigations and what the Church Body will do to prevent recurrence.

Section 8: Centrally arranged support for victims and survivors

 3 minutes read

Last updated: 03 November 2021

Safe Spaces

Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service for victims and survivors over 18 years old, providing a confidential, personal and safe space for anyone who has been abused through their relationship with either the Church of England, the Catholic Church of England and Wales, or the Church in Wales. Victim Support has been commissioned to run this national service, providing remote support through a helpline, live chat service and website. Remote support is provided for as long as the survivor needs. This can be advocating for the survivor, giving them support, providing information (including on Church and police procedures), understanding individual needs and jointly working on individual support plans. If face-to-face support is required, contact and referrals will be made with appropriate local organisations depending on need.

The Safe Spaces team can be contacted by:

- Tel: 0300 303 1056 (answerphone available outside of opening times)
- Email: safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk
- Website: <https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/>

Interim Support Scheme

The Archbishops' Council has established a support scheme for urgent survivor needs to improve the Church's response to current and non-current survivors of Church-related abuse. This Scheme is part of the Church's recognition that harm has been caused by both that abuse itself, and the Church's responses to survivors. This Scheme is not intended to provide long-term compensation or restitution to survivors, nor is it a redress scheme. It is intended to provide immediate help and support to survivors whose life circumstances are significantly affected by the abuse suffered, and the response to it. The Scheme is designed to address immediate and urgent needs that help in the short-term to put the survivor's life back on track.

Email: SupportScheme@churchofengland.org

National Redress Scheme

This guidance does not address questions about financial compensation for victims and survivors because a national, cross-Church, Church of England scheme to be known as the National Redress Scheme is in development. This is further to a commitment made by the General Synod in February 2020, and as the response to Recommendation 7 of the IICSA report to introduce a Church wide policy on the funding and provision of support to victims and survivors. The Scheme aims to have a formal but flexible structure, seeking to minimise painful experiences for applicants to the Scheme by avoiding overly formal process or an adversarial approach, where possible. Its objective is to provide means of redress that will go some way towards delivering financial compensation, therapeutic and pastoral support, apology and closure for victims and survivors.

Besides providing restitution, part of the Scheme's rationale is for the Church to face its moral responsibilities and be seen to publicly atone for any wrongdoing on its part. It is hoped that the Scheme will be able to include the development of arrangements for early mediation for those claims where this is appropriate. A development manager and a project manager are in place and work on the Scheme is ongoing. It is hoped that the Scheme will be in place by 2023.

This document is version and was printed on 31 January 2022. The most up to date version of this policy can be found on the Church of England website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding>

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-well-victims-and-survivors-abuse>