

# Diocese Safeguarding Handbook



## Section 5

### Pastoral Care for Survivors of Sexual Abuse

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The whole document can be found on the SEC website:

[Guidance-on-the-Pastoral-Care-for-Survivors-of-Sexual-Abuse.pdf \(anglican.org\)](https://www.sec.org.uk/guidance-on-the-pastoral-care-for-survivors-of-sexual-abuse.pdf)



## 5.1: Extract from the SEC Guidance on the Pastoral Care for Survivors of Sexual Abuse both Past and Present

This guidance is for those at all levels of church life who might be involved in or responsible for pastoral ministry and the provision of care within or from the local church. Some of those who read this guidance will be adult survivors of sexual abuse or, know someone who is a survivor. Others, may have no or little previous understanding of the issues relating to sexual abuse.

It is through an increased awareness of the issues for survivors of abuse that we will move towards our churches being safer and more inclusive places.

The word “survivor” rather than “victim” is deliberate to acknowledge the strength and courage required of the women and men who survive sexual, physical and emotional violence. Every survivor’s experience will be different as will their journey towards healing.

Survivors are people with particular needs and the advice contained in this document is intended to be a resource for everyone who would want to ensure that they do not suffer further harm as a result of a poor response from the church. The church recognizes the need to minister to survivors of sexual abuse and, while progress has been made in recognizing the consequences of sexual abuse, the Church needs to ensure that survivors understand that there is support for them and action will be taken in recognition of their suffering and pain. They need a Church that provides a safe environment for them where their experiences of abuse can be heard and appropriate support offered.

Churches can be well placed to offer safe places for survivors to come and where they can share their experiences; there is a need to reach out in a suitably compassionate way to these that need our support. We also need to recognize that the church may not be the best placed organization to help survivors so this document contains a list of other organizations that people can turn to for help.

Whether we realize it or not, it is likely that most of us know someone who has been abused as a child. Abuse knows no boundaries of gender, class, race or religion and people are affected by it in different ways and to different extents. Survivors live their lives just like anyone else but, for some there are long-term effects such as:

- Mental and physical health problems
- Alcohol and drug misuse to cope with trauma
- Homelessness, self-harming behaviours and suicide attempts
- Feelings of shame, anger and grief
- Mistrust, hatred or fear of the church.

Not all survivors go on to have these problems but may suffer long-term trauma in a different form.

The SEC is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and adults, and the establishing of safe and caring communities. It has worked hard to improve its culture of informed vigilance, the practices of safer recruiting and protecting vulnerable people at every level in Church life but there is always more that can be done.

Remember that you are not on your own; help is always available also, remember that you may not be the best person to help a survivor of sexual abuse in the long-term and it’s OK to refer someone for specialist help.



### **What is Child Abuse?**

The World Health Organisation defines child abuse or maltreatment as all forms of:

- Physical and/or emotional ill treatment
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect or negligent treatment
- Commercial or other exploitation

Any of these factors can result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Abuse can take place anywhere and be perpetrated by anyone.

### **What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

This is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that:

- He or she does not fully comprehend
- He or she is unable to give informed consent to
- He or she is not developmentally prepared for, or
- That violates the laws and social taboos of society

Sexual abuse can include:

- Inducing or coercing a child to engage in sexual activity
- Involving a child in prostitution or other sexual practices
- Involving a child in pornographic performance and materials

Sexual abuse is sexually, physically and emotionally abusive. It breaches the personal boundaries to which all human beings are entitled.

### **Survivors of Abuse**

Adults who have experienced sexual abuse will respond in a wide variety of ways. Some people forget or minimize the abuse for long periods but then re-experience the trauma at a later date which can be triggered by flashbacks, nightmares or anxiety attacks.

There is an assumption that people who have suffered childhood sexual abuse are damaged and incapable of living a normal life. This is a fallacy as may survivors manage to live successful lives in a range of professions, achieving important goals in life, career and relationships. However, some survivors find that difficulties remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Historically, it was assumed that most sexual abuse was perpetrated on females however, greater awareness has changed this misconception, and it is now recognized that the incidence of sexual abuse of boys and young men is much greater than was previously thought.

The consistent support of family and/or friends can be invaluable and good pastoral support can help a survivor to



overcome a troubles period. However, depending upon a number of factors then specific counselling is likely to be needed to help a person to recover. It should be recognized that such resources can be difficult to assess.

### **Family and Friends**

Sexual abuse doesn't simply affect those who have experienced it. It can also profoundly affect partners, family and friends. Many survivors will not disclose their abuse until adulthood and realizing that a partner has experienced such a trauma can be baffling and upsetting. However, it can also help make sense of patterns of behaviour or problems in the relationship and bring greater trust and understanding.

Sometimes non-abusing members of families can find it difficult to accept that a child or sibling of theirs has been sexually assaulted and, whilst this is understandable, it can prove damaging to everyone concerned. Seeking help and support is essential to help families deal with emotions.

To be the first person a survivor confided in can seem overwhelming but, it is also a compliment, and it's tremendous for the survivor to be believed and accepted. It can be a catalyst to moving forward, and to recovery.

### **Recovery**

Research shows that the people who help survivors do not come from any one professional background or use a particular therapeutic approach and they do not necessarily have high professional status. The majority have not attended specific training courses on child sexual abuse, although they may well have gathered expertise in other ways. However they did do the following:

- They were secure and firm about boundaries, but related with warmth and kindness
- They were informed and aware about the main effects of the trauma of childhood sexual abuse and had examined their own personal issues around working with sexual abuse
- They worked non-hierarchically, consulting respectfully with survivors about what their main needs were and what their service could offer; and
- They neither hid behind confidentiality nor broke it insensitively.



## 5.2 Specific Advice for Clergy

1.	Clergy need to remember their wider duty to the general public and their accountability to civil authorities in matters of sexual abuse. Whether or not the alleged abuse has taken place within a church context, a crime may have been committed and others could be at risk.
2.	It is important to differentiate between a disclosure of abusive conduct that occurred some time ago which is only now being disclosed and abuse that is occurring at the time of disclosure. <b>If you think that anyone is in immediate danger, you must phone 999</b>
3.	If a child comes to notice as having suffered abuse when younger, a referral will need to be made to the police or the Local Authority Children and Families Department.  A list of contacts can be found in Section 1 of this handbook.
4.	Professional support and consultation should always be obtained – a list of support organisations can be found at the end of this section.

Abuse, which thrives on secrecy, loses some of its power to harm when this secrecy is broken. However, the survivor needs to give careful thought about who to tell, when and for what purpose. For some, this trusted relationship is with a clergyman.

Thus, in the course of their work, rectors and those offering pastoral support in the Church may find themselves hearing disclosures from adults of abuse that happened to them when they were children. It is important to remember that some people may have been further hurt when the person to whom they decide to disclose had not been able to cope with the disclosure and has responded in an appropriately.

If it appears that abuse is happening at the time of disclosure, immediate action is required and local arrangements for child or adult protection may be needed. The Church is responsible for referring such cases not to investigate them.

If the perpetrator is in a position where he/she could still be abusing children today, then the person making the disclosure (the survivor) should be encouraged and supported to report the matter to the police if this hasn't already been done as a prosecution may be possible. If the alleged abuser is still working (employed or voluntary) or caring for children a referral must be made to the Provincial Safeguarding Officer to take further action if appropriate.

There is no single correct procedure for dealing with a disclosure of previous abuse by an adult but the wishes of the person disclosing abuse will be very important. For some adults, just being able to talk to a trusted person about the experiences can be a powerful healing event and the pastoral care of the person who has been abused will be important.



A person will only make a disclosure if they feel it is safe to do so. Once they feel it is safe to proceed then responsibility falls upon the person to whom they have made it. You should think about:

- Is the time and place appropriate? If not assure the person making the disclosure that you want to listen but to do so well the conversation needs to be in a more private space. Make the time to listen – if you suggest returning on another day the person may not say anything.
- Offer confidentiality but be clear about the limitations of this if there is an on-going risk of harm to them or to others. Confidentiality in this context applies to the victims of abuse only.
- Does someone else need to be present? You need to protect yourself from potential allegations if the person is particularly fragile.
- At this stage remember to listen not counsel – you may not be the best person to counsel and give advice.
- Find out what the person making the disclosure is expecting to happen.
- Stay calm but be careful not to appear disinterested. This can be difficult if you are angry, upset or disgusted by what you are hearing – this makes listening not speaking or judging even more important.
- Show that you are taking seriously all that you are being told. Survivors almost always fear that they will not be believed.
- Do not make judgements or statements – listen, listen and listen again!
- Survivors often need to repeat the account many times – be patient.
- Sexual abuse thrives in secrecy. It may be useful to give an assurance that disclosing is the right thing to do.
- Talk through in a calm manner what are the possible next steps.
- The person may require several meetings and should be able to control when and where. The survivor should also be in control of when, if at all, contact is made with the police. This only applies if the abuse is historic, and the abuser is no longer in a position of trust.
- Be prepared to be in it for the long haul. The person making the disclosure needs to know that you will continue to be there for them although your role may change.
- Don't make all your interactions about the abuse, find other topics to discuss to keep the relationship/friendship about more than just that.

The police should be consulted in case there are links with potential abusers still living or other matters of concern – this will be done by the Provincial Safeguarding Officer. Regardless of the outcome of the meeting a record must be kept and filed in accordance with SEC policy.



## Disclosure of Abuse by a Perpetrator

1.	<p>A member of the clergy may find themselves being sought out by someone who wished to admit to having been the perpetrator of some form of abuse on another either at some point in the past or on-going.</p> <p><b>If the abuse is on-going and someone is at immediate risk, you must call 999.</b></p>
2.	<p>If an abuser discloses abuse outside the seal of the confessional the member of the clergy has a responsibility to report the matter to the Provincial Safeguarding Officer. The person disclosing the abuse should always be advised that the matter will be reported to the relevant statutory authorities.</p>
3.	<p>Canon 29 of the Code of Canons makes it clear that a priest may not divulge anything that has been revealed in Confession nor refer subsequently to such matter without leave of the penitent. The seal is absolute and is not abrogated on the death of the penitent. However, the priest should advise the penitent that such behaviour requires external intervention and he or she should be directed to make contact with the Provincial Safeguarding Officer so the matter may be properly dealt with.</p>
4.	<p>If the priest is subsequently contacted by the penitent outside the Seal of the Confessional, the priest must make it clear that the Seal of Confession no longer applies and, if the information is repeated, the priest must explain that he/she has a responsibility to take all reasonable steps to protect anyone who is at risk of being or has been abused.</p>

Dealing with disclosures can be harrowing, remember to look after your own mental health when dealing with survivors of sexual abuse. Do you have a support network you can turn to?



## 5.3 Support Organisations

**The Association of Christian Counsellors** facilitates the provision by Christians of quality counselling and pastoral care.

[www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org)

0845 124 9569/9570

**Breathing Space** is a free and confidential phone line service for any individual who is experiencing low mood or depression.

[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

**The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOPS)** is part of the UK policing system and is dedicated to eradicating the sexual abuse of children.

[www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

0870 000 33 44

**Children 1<sup>ST</sup>** helps to support families under stress, protect children from harm and neglect and help them to recover from abuse.

[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)

**First Person Plural** is a small UK-wide charity lead by abuse survivors with first-hand experience of complex dissociative distress.

[www.firstpersonplural.org.uk](http://www.firstpersonplural.org.uk)

**Izzy's Promise** based in Dundee offers free and confidential support services to ritual/organised abuse survivors.

[www.izzyspromise.org.uk](http://www.izzyspromise.org.uk)

01382 206 222

**The Lucy Faithfull Foundation** works with adult male and female sexual abusers and young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours, abuse survivors and other family members.

[www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk](http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk)

01527 591 922

**Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS)** is a support group for women and men who have been sexually abused by clergy as children or adults.

[www.macsas.org.uk](http://www.macsas.org.uk)

0808 801 0340

**The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)** provides support and information for people abused in childhood.

[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

0800 085 3330

**One in Four** offers a voice to support for people who have been abused in childhood or experience sexual violence.

[www.oneinfour.org.uk](http://www.oneinfour.org.uk)

0208 697 2112

**Open Secret**, offers safe spaces in the Forth Valley for those aged over 12 who have been affected by abuse.

[www.opensecret.org](http://www.opensecret.org)

01324 630 100





**Safe Space** offers support, counselling, group work and Justice Support to survivors of sexual abuse aged over 12 and living in Fife. They also provide awareness-raising courses.

[www.safe-space.co.uk](http://www.safe-space.co.uk)

01383 739 084

**Stop it Now** a campaign which aims to prevent child sexual abuse by raising awareness and encouraging early recognition and responses to the problem by the abusers themselves and those close to them.

[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

0808 1000 900

**Survivor Scotland** oversees the National Strategy for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. Its work is done in a variety of ways, see the website for more information.

[www.suvivorscotland.org.uk](http://www.suvivorscotland.org.uk)

**Victim Support Scotland** is the leading voluntary organization in Scotland helping victims of crime. It provides a wide range of support including emotional support, practical help and essential information for victims, witnesses and others affected by crime.

[www.victimsupportsco.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk)

0845 603 9213

NB: This is not an exhaustive list of support agencies and support services. There may be other resources more relevant to an individual's needs.