
RESPONDING TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

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Responding to Victims and Survivors

The Church in Wales recognises the need to minister sensitively and considerately to victims and survivors of all forms of abuse and harm, whether current or non-recent. The Church is committed to the provision of appropriate and supportive pastoral care for victims and survivors, their families and anyone else affected by association. In particular, anyone who has suffered abuse within the Church will be listened to with compassion and humility, provided with a safe environment in which to reflect on their experience and offered support and care to meet their needs.

The sense of healing from the pain and trauma of abuse and harm is important for victims and survivors and those who seek to minister alongside them have a potentially important role to play in providing support in the recovery of victims and survivors. Each individual's journey is unique to them, and the things that are important, that help them and that provide them with hope and sustenance will be different in every case. In seeking to provide this care and support, it is essential that the voice of the victim or survivor is heard and that their knowledge of their own experience informs our response.

It is important for the Church in Wales to acknowledge that some abuse and harm is perpetrated by clergy and others in positions of responsibility within the Church, and to recognize that victims and survivors sometimes have received an inadequate response when reporting abuse or seeking support from our churches. In doing so, we seek to open the way for creating communities that are safe enough for all to belong, and where victims and survivors can relate their experiences, confident that they will be heard and receive pastoral care and support.

Some victims and survivors of abuse have experienced further trauma when they have sought help in their healing journey. In some cases, and possibly with the best of intentions, people in churches have attempted to impose healing rituals or prayers on the person seeking help. Imposing anything or mistaking acquiescence for informed consent is always inappropriate, lacking in compassion and understanding and has the potential to re-traumatise an individual. It fails to recognise the importance of ensuring they have control over what happens to them, how they might be touched and by whom. On rare occasions further abusive acts have also occurred from the person seeking to offer care or healing.

However, for many the church has an important role to play in helping victims and survivors process and understand what has happened and supporting their healing journey. Good practice in pastoral care and guidelines in safeguarding need to apply to all situations where healing prayer, healing practices and deliverance ministry are offered in church life. The quality of pastoral care, personal conduct and ministry in these circumstances needs to be of the highest standard and follow principles of agreed best practice.

Providing Support

A victim or survivor who chooses to talk about their experience might be sharing information that has been reported previously, including to the police or other statutory authorities. On some occasions, a victim or survivor might be disclosing information about abuse or harm for the first time and this must be treated with particular care and sensitivity.

Anyone who has survived abuse is likely to have considerable strength but also might have significant and complex needs. The victim or survivor's experience and pathway to recovery is particularly complex when abuse is perpetrated by those they have trusted and even more challenging when their abuser has held a position of spiritual or moral responsibility. When abuse has taken place within the church context the victim or survivor's recovery may include the challenging process of re-establishing a relationship with the faith community and with God.

In seeking to provide support and pastoral care, it is important that the Church has some understanding of the difficulty that a victim or survivor might have in speaking about their experience.

There may be many reasons why the victim or survivor has not spoken about their abuse before:

- fear that their concerns will not be heard or accepted
- concern that it may cause problems for their family
- feelings of shame or even responsibility for the abuse
- fear that they might be blamed for raising the issue
- concern that reporting abuse will damage the Church
- fear that it may damage their relationship with the church
- fear of the abuser

Deciding when, how and why to disclose abuse is a personal matter and the victim or survivor must be heard, taken seriously and supported on their own terms.

Victims and survivors are not to blame for what happened to them.

It is important to distinguish between non-recent abuse that occurred in the past, including in the victim or survivor's childhood, and abuse that has occurred much more recently or continues to occur at the time of the disclosure.

The Provincial Safeguarding Team can be contacted for advice and support in relation to responding to disclosures of abuse or harm, whether non-recent or contemporary.

If you have information about a safeguarding situation where a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical attention, please call the emergency services now on 999 – DO NOT DELAY.

If you think that a child or adult is at risk of harm but is not in immediate danger, please call the [local authority](#) social services department.

A person will disclose or share information about their abuse only when they feel safe and that they can trust the person to whom they are talking. It is not always possible to anticipate or control the situation or circumstances in which the disclosure occurs but there are things that can encourage the victim or survivor to talk and to feel supported:

- Time and Place
It is always best to let a victim or survivor speak when and where they are ready, but it might be possible to consider issues of safety, privacy, and confidentiality. Be mindful of the possible need for the victim or survivor to meet away from church-related surroundings and the consider the choice of where to talk carefully.
- Confidentiality
Confidentiality is important in gaining trust, but it is essential that the victim or survivor is made clear about the limits and boundaries on confidentiality and the possible need to report any ongoing risk of harm or abuse of a child or adult at risk
- Privacy
It should be explored with the victim or survivor whether it is appropriate to meet alone or whether another person should be present.
- Expectations
It is important to ascertain what the victim or survivor is expecting and to explore how that might be achieved.
- Hearing the disclosure
 - try to stay calm and to avoid showing shock or upset
 - accept what the victim or survivor is saying and show that you take them seriously
 - listen without judgement and allow the person to tell their story
 - try not to interrupt or prompt the victim or survivor to say more
 - seek clarification of facts but do not ask leading questions
 - reassure the victim or survivor that it was right to disclose
 - agree what you will do next
- Next steps
It is important to agree what will happen next, which might include taking immediate action to prevent further harm, seeking advice and support from the Provincial Safeguarding Team and/or signposting the victim or survivor to appropriate sources of specialist care. Ensure that the victim or survivor has a consistent point of contact.
Under no circumstances make any attempt to contact an alleged abuser.
If the disclosure is made by a child, efforts must be made to contact a Provincial Safeguarding Officer, before the child leaves in case immediate action is required.
- Consent
If the victim or survivor is an adult disclosing abuse that occurred when they were an adult, the action you take will, in most cases, require the consent of the individual. Adult victims and survivors should be encouraged to report their abuse, with support from the church if necessary, but should not be disempowered by taking away their control of the situation. However, if an adult victim or survivor discloses abuse that they experienced while still a child, it might be necessary to report the abuse to the police even without the consent or participation of the victim or survivor and advice must be taken from a Provincial Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible. Similarly, advice should be taken if the adult disclosing abuse appears to have impaired capacity to make informed decisions in relation to the abuse. A child disclosing their own abuse, or the abuse of another child must always be reported to a Provincial Safeguarding Officer and referred to the police and social services. Children disclosing abuse should be told that the information will be shared with trusted adults for their protection.
- Recording

It is essential that a detailed and accurate record of a disclosure of abuse is made as soon as possible following the disclosure, using the exact words of the victim or survivor as far as possible. The account must be signed, dated, and retained securely for sharing with the Provincial Safeguarding Team.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a gift from God (Col. 1:14) and brings us to a deeper experience of God's love. It is also a complex issue especially for those who have been abused. Survivors or victims of abuse ought not to be urged to forgive unconditionally when they are not able to make this decision. The dynamics of power in pastoral encounters must be acknowledged so that survivors or victims do not feel disempowered and unable therefore to reflect on their experiences. It is therefore inappropriate to suggest to a victim or survivor of abuse that they have failed if they do not forgive their abuser or that their progress will be impaired or imperilled. Forgiveness is a deeply personal matter. For some, it will be an important aspect of their healing and will bring peace and closure. For others, it might be judged either unnecessary or even inappropriate because the abuser has not shown remorse. Everyone will need to journey at their own pace and in a way which is manageable. The question of forgiveness is one which a victim or survivor may wish to explore in conversation with a Christian skilled in listening and pastoral care. The Church in Wales is able to provide such support, but no victim or survivor should be made to feel that this is necessary.

Care must be taken to ensure that the victim or survivor feels welcome and supported in their church, particularly when the harm or abuse they experienced is known within the congregation, perhaps following the arrest of an abuser. It is essential that the church community does not speculate on the abuse or in any way blame the victim or survivor for speaking out about their experience.

The church is called to provide a safe space in which people can discover peace, acceptance and a loving welcome.

Supporting Victims and Survivors at Tribunal

Where victims and survivors are asked to engage in internal processes such as giving evidence at tribunals, it is important that they are offered support at every level. Should they be requested to attend a tribunal they should be given the opportunity to take a supporter with them and to have their needs met. They should be protected from direct contact with their abuser or alleged abuser at any such meetings, unless they specifically request otherwise, in which case the situation must be managed safely and sensitively.

The welfare needs of victims and survivors throughout these processes should be paramount and their needs discussed at the outset.

Supporting Workers

The church has a unique opportunity to offer sensitive pastoral ministry to all who are involved in abuse cases. When, in a case of suspected abuse, the safety of the individual has been assured, it is vital that the church creates structures whereby workers can be counselled and supported, especially those who have witnessed harm or received a disclosure of abuse. Providing pastoral ministry takes skill and is complex and demanding work and the stress of providing this over a protracted period, such as a court case, should not be underestimated. Those undertaking it will need support, and possibly professional advice, guidance and perhaps counselling and this should be made available if required.

Support for Victims and Survivors

Safe Spaces

<https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk>

0300 303 1056

Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

New Pathways

<http://www.newpathways.org.uk>

01685 379 310

New Pathways is a registered charitable company that provides a range of specialist counselling and advocacy services for women, men, children, and young people who have been affected by rape or sexual abuse.

The Survivors Trust

0808 801 0818

www.thesurvivorstrust.org

The Survivors Trust is an umbrella agency for specialist rape and sexual abuse services in the UK and provides information, advice, support and therapy to survivors.

MACSAS

0808 801 0340

(Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors)

www.macsas.org.uk

MACSAS supports women and men who have been sexually abused, as children or adults, by ministers, clergy, or others under the guise of the Church. MACSAS supports both Survivors who have remained within their Christian communities and those who have left.

NAPAC

0808 801 0331

(National Association for People Abused in Childhood)

<https://www.napac.org.uk>

NAPAC offers support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect.

Broken Rites

<https://www.brokenrites.org>

Broken Rites is an international group offering mutual support and information to separated and divorced spouses and partners of clergy, ministers, and Church Army Officers.