

## **SECTION 6 A SAFE SPACE FOR EVERYONE**

Who needs support?

Survivors of Abuse

- Why survivors do not disclose
- Care of survivors of historic abuse and their families

Perpetrators of Abuse

- What the church can do

Offenders or those who might pose a risk for children and adults at risk

- What to do
- Written Agreements

### **Who needs support?**

Situations are usually complex: sometimes victims and alleged perpetrators may both be part of the church community, and extended family and friends may also be affected and have views.

The following people may need support:

- The victim
- The family and friends of the victim
- The alleged perpetrator
- The family and friends of the alleged perpetrator
- Other members of the congregation affected
- The person to whom the disclosure was made, or who observed the signs of abuse
- The incumbent
- The Parish Safeguarding Officer.

It helps to be clear about who is supporting whom – separate out the roles. One person cannot support everyone, and some may require referral to specialist support.

## **SURVIVORS OF ABUSE**

### **Why survivors do not disclose**

Many, if not most, survivors say nothing about the abuse for many years. Some have buried their memories so deeply within themselves that they have 'forgotten' what happened - especially if the abuse happened when they were very young. Memories may be triggered in different ways, for example:

- Hearing about abuse on television.
- Being in another abusive situation such as finding difficulties with a domineering employer.
- Being in a situation where they feel powerless.
- Feeling vulnerable, ill, under stress, or suffering from burnout.
- The death of their abuser or of one of their carers.
- The birth of their own child.

Few victims can report their abuse close to the event so reported abuse therefore often relates to events from years before, leading to difficulties about finding any proof or corroborating evidence about what happened. It is often one person's word against another, and the likelihood of the survivor getting justice is slim. Some cases do go to court, but the experience can be devastating for both children and adults and they are likely to need considerable support.

Information about historic abuse cases should be responded to in the same way as current cases. Information should always be reported to the statutory authorities (police, adult or children's social care services, Local Authority Designated Officer as appropriate) when there is any current risk.

### **Care of Survivors of Historic Abuse and their Families**

Some survivors may show a range of symptoms such as:

- Repeated bouts of depression.
- Exhibiting anger and hostility - or being unable to connect at all with feelings.
- Behaving like a victim - experiencing low self-esteem, constantly feeling inadequate and apologizing.
- Inability to get close to people, or wanting to be inappropriately close.
- Disturbed sleep, nightmares.
- Tending to cut off from reality at times.
- Exhibiting fears, phobias and anxiety
- Self-harming (done as a coping mechanism, not as attention-seeking)
- Tending to feel an inappropriate amount of guilt and shame.
- Sometimes relying on smoking, drugs, alcohol or medication to cope.
- Experiencing hallucinations and/or flashbacks of the abuse.
- Sometimes moving from one abusive relationship to another

Grooming occurs within church communities because of the Church's desire to be open, accepting, and to focus on the possibility of benign interpretations. Although it is always difficult to withstand grooming behaviours, protection can be found through application in all cases of objective processes based on policies and through the regular checking of individual impressions and responses through consultation with relevant others.

The Church faces particular challenge in responding well to information about abuse from within the church community. *Responding well to those who have been sexually abused* addresses in detail how to respond pastorally to *all* situations of abuse. When the information relates to abuse by someone in the church, then not only is there a victim who has to be

## **PERPETRATORS OF ABUSE AND THEIR FAMILIES**

### **What the church can do**

The church's role must be to reinforce whatever is done by others to help perpetrators address their abusive behaviour. In some cases, this may require leaving events to take their course, either through reporting to the police or by the provision of professional help. Perpetrators may also need help with alcohol or drug misuse, or mental health issues. The church should encourage the perpetrator to adopt a realistic approach to recognise personal need and seek appropriate help. In this context, it is still possible to help and support those who accept that what they have done is wrong and want to change. When they leave prison or court they may feel:

- worried about how people will react
- frightened in case the temptation to re-offend overcomes them
- frightened of victimisation and abuse in the neighbourhood if here has been press reporting of their offence
- guilty and ashamed
- isolated and lonely.

Offenders or alleged perpetrators wanting to change need people around them who will love and accept them, and offer them care and protection. When an abuser, and particularly a sex offender, is known, befriended and helped by a group of voluntary workers to lead a fulfilled life without direct contact with children or adults who may be at risk, the chances of re-offending are diminished, and the church has thus an important role contributing to the prevention of further abusive behaviour. Members of a local congregation may be able to help by combining rejection of the abusive behaviour with acceptance of the perpetrator as a person.

### **Those who are supporting the perpetrator need to:**

- be aware of the many losses, such as of status, role or job be aware of the many losses, family, which the perpetrator may be suffering and coming to terms with
- be aware of the risks of physical and verbal abuse that the perpetrator may be subject to
- be able to set and manage limits on the perpetrator's involvement in church

- challenge risky or inappropriate behaviour
- maintain confidentiality, but be able to inform statutory agencies or Diocesan officers if the perpetrator's behaviour gives cause for concern
- not allow themselves to be manipulated
- be a reliable support to help the offender

**In every situation a careful ongoing assessment needs to be made as to whether the church can safely and adequately work with the person.**

## **OFFENDERS OR THOSE WHO MIGHT POSE RISKS TO CHILDREN OR ADULTS AT RISK**

As well as people with convictions against children there are others whose position in a congregation may need to be carefully and sensitively considered to decide whether they pose a risk to children or to vulnerable adults. This would include people convicted of violent or sexual offences against adults, including: domestic violence; people involved in drug or alcohol addiction; adults diagnosed with a mental illness or special needs which might, potentially, result in erratic behaviour. It would also include those who do not have convictions or cautions but where there are sound reasons for considering that they might present a risk to children.

In appropriate cases the approach recommended below for managing sex offenders should be adopted.

### **What to do.**

An assessment of risk must be carried out, which should be done together with the police, probation services and children's social care, and with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. The statutory agencies will provide appropriate information and guidance in this. It is important that cooperation between the church and the agencies is assured at all stages.

### **Written agreements**

When it is known that a member of the congregation has sexually abused a child, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser must be consulted, so that a safe course of action can be agreed in conjunction with the relevant statutory agencies. A written agreement or contract will usually be entered into with the offender and a the Incumbent and church wardens.

If the offender's victim, or in some cases the victim's family, attends the church, it is likely to be necessary to introduce the offender to another congregation.

Consideration must also be given to other people who have been abused in the past.

The offender must not accept any official role or office in the church which gives him or her status or authority; a child may deem that person to be trustworthy. Some roles, for example that of churchwarden, are statute-barred to people with convictions of this kind, including offences against the person.

A meeting should be held with the offender, explaining that the appointed small group will need to know the facts in order to create a safe environment for him or her. The police should be invited to the meeting, and in addition to the probation service, the local authority and children's social care, if they are currently involved.

It must be made clear that no one else apart from those identified on the agreement will be informed of the facts without the offender's knowledge. This includes the spouses or partners of those who are party to the agreement, apart from the spouse or partner of the offender. The highest levels of confidentiality should be maintained unless there is a breach of the agreement and it is necessary to inform others to protect a child. The group should offer support and friendship as well as supervision. They should endeavour to keep channels of communication open. It will be necessary to establish clear boundaries, both to protect children and to lessen the possibility of the adult being wrongly accused of abuse.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will guide and advise throughout the process of drafting a written agreement which might include the following elements:

- attend designated services or meetings only
- sit apart from children
- stay away from areas of the building where children meet
- attend a house group where there are no children
- decline hospitality where there are children
- never be alone with children
- never work or be part of a mixed-age group with children
- take no official role in the church

The offender must be asked to sign the agreement.. The agreement must be monitored, and no changes made without consultation with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and other parties involved. It must be made clear that a breach or other relevant information could lead to a

referral to the police and probation service and advice that the offender attends a different church.

The agreement must include provision for close support and pastoral care. The agreement must be reviewed regularly, at least annually, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser should be invited. A review must take the form of a face-to-face meeting with the offender and at least two members of the group. The meeting should be recorded, the record retained and a copy sent to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

An agreement must remain in place so long as the person is a part of the congregation, whether or not they are on licence or their name appears on the Sex Offenders Register

## Needs of Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Please refer to the document : Responding to Domestic Abuse. A guide for those with pastoral responsibility

### **Needs on disclosure**

- Respectful listening, talking and reassurance form the basis of appropriate pastoral care. In many ways it is a multiple and complex loss or bereavement with many of the same emotions attached and the same exhaustion and loss of confidence.
- Survivors are in control of their decisions and options. They need to lead rather than be told what to do and need to choose the person they talk to. Considerations such as gender and age need to be taken into account.
- People begin to move from victim to survivor when they are believed and not blamed, when they begin not to take responsibility for the abuser's behaviour.
- Trust takes time to build. Survivors may disclose little by little.
- Survivors might need support in telling the children's school, family members such as grandparents, and the church about what is happening.

### **Practical needs might include**

- A safe place, protection and medical attention.
- A safety plan, including personal safety devices (e.g. alarm, mobile phone, improved locks) – obtainable from the police or community care schemes
- A list of items to take with them, e.g. money, birth and marriage certificates, passports, benefit books, chequebooks, address book containing names and addresses of friends and family, children's favourite toys.

- Expert professional help
- Childcare while seeking help
- DIY assistance, e.g. mending windows
- Furniture, household and baby equipment, toys, etc. in cases of rehousing.
- Care for pets
- Advocacy and support during the legal or financial processes such as getting benefits.  
Longer-term pastoral and support needs
- Continued interest, care and support are needed, as leaving is a bereavement and takes years to get over. Sometimes people return to abusive partners, or young singles move back into abusive homes, out of loneliness, isolation or sexual need.
- All abuse robs people of healthy self-esteem and sexual confidence. Abusers often repeatedly tell victims that they are sexually unattractive and no one else will want them. This can have two effects on survivors in future sexual relationships – a need to prove that wrong, or a lasting belief that it is right. Talking with others, either fellow survivors or sensitive friends, in open honest discussion enables recovery and may avoid repeating patterns.
- Survivors need more support than just Christian groups, and their experiences have to be worked through or may cause serious problems in later life, including repeating patterns.
- Survivors should be encouraged to take up post-trauma services for adults, children and young people. Counselling, group and play therapy are offered by many domestic abuse organizations. Fear, anxiety, loneliness, a deep sense of failure, sexual longing and despair about one's attractiveness or adequacy are all long-term outcomes, and a safe place to acknowledge these powerful emotions is needed.

- 'Disclosure anxiety' and sense of guilt afflicts survivors sometimes for a lifetime as the social sanctions against 'telling' are powerful, especially in Christian contexts of honouring parents, loving and forgiving relatives, even abusive ones.
- Self-esteem, assertiveness training and counselling are vital if the survivor is to avoid future abusive relationships. Sometimes a conversion or spiritual reawakening accompanies an escape, especially if Christians have proved supportive. It is easy to say, 'All that's past now and things will be different', and not to deal with the underlying attitudes and childhood scripts of both adult and child victims that allow abuse to occur.
- Support is needed from the wider community, particularly if the perpetrator is a key member of a church community. There are likely to be many confused feelings around, including shock, disbelief and people's affection for the perpetrator. Help is needed in making sense of the situation and sorting out issues. Openness is crucial, especially with the abuser, as all abuse thrives on secrecy and misplaced 'confidentiality'.