

Responding Well:

**A guide to support for
victims and survivors
of church-based abuse**



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Purpose

This guide is designed for victims and survivors of church-based abuse, but we recognise that abuse can take place in any setting.

If you are a victim or survivor of church-based abuse, or if you are concerned that someone is experiencing or has experienced abuse in a church setting, this guide will help you understand what support you can expect from the Church. The guide summarises the "Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse" guidance, available on the Church of England website [here](#).*

If you have experienced abuse outside of the Church, your Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor can listen to and signpost you to relevant services. All diocesan safeguarding contact details can be found [here](#)** Alternatively, a list of support services that you can contact directly is included on page 11.

If someone is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical attention, contact emergency services by dialling 999.

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

** <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/reporting-abuse-and-finding-support/diocesan-safeguarding-contacts>

How can I access support?

Abuse is not and should not be tolerated.

If you have experienced or are experiencing abuse in a church setting or by a member of the Church, this is not acceptable. Abuse can take various forms and it can be difficult sometimes to make sense of your experiences immediately. To support with this, a definition of "abuse" and further guidance are included on page 12.

It is common for victims of abuse to feel unsafe, unable to trust others, ashamed or afraid of being judged. If you are facing these emotions, remember that you are not alone and that you are not to blame for the abuse that you have experienced. You can decide whether, when and to whom you may wish to disclose those experiences. We will listen and help you to get the right support to be able to move forward in your life.

We will listen to your experiences with compassion and humanity.

For some victims and survivors, disclosing experiences of abuse may cause anxiety and distress. Within the parish or Church organisation that you are part of, you may choose to speak to a person whose role involves safeguarding responsibilities or to someone that you trust. Every part of the Church has at least one person whose role involves safeguarding. In a parish, this is usually a Parish Safeguarding Officer. In a cathedral, it is usually a member of clergy who acts as Safeguarding Lead.

The person you disclose to will refer you to your Diocesan or Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor, who can provide information on next steps. If you want to report abuse to someone outside of the Church, you can contact the police or an independent helpline, such as Safe Spaces (see pages 8 and 11).

We will help you understand the choices that you have and explore what is right for you.

Once the information you disclosed has been referred to the Diocesan or Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor, they will be in touch with you. They will explain available options and work with you to provide a package of support tailored to your needs.

Each victim or survivor has their own needs - you may need practical and emotional support, you may find it helpful to access therapy, you may want to find out more about relevant support services outside of the Church, or you may wish to simply receive an apology. You can ask the Diocesan or Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor any questions that will help you make informed decisions about the support that you wish to access going forward. You can accept or refuse the options offered, and you can choose the type of support that you think would best meet your needs.

Your disclosure will be treated with sensitivity.

All members of the Church are required to respect an individual's privacy and treat any disclosure with sensitivity. However, it is important to know that, in certain circumstances, the Diocesan or Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor might need to share that information with other professionals, such as the police or social care services. This is a duty of care that all individuals in the Church have, to ensure that any harm to you or others is being addressed or that immediate action is taken to prevent such harm. For more details, please see the National Church Institutions' [safeguarding privacy notice](#) and speak to your diocese, cathedral or other Church organisation about their specific data protection arrangements.*

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/National%20Church%20Institutions%20Safeguarding%20Privacy%20Notice%20June%202019.pdf>

What support can I expect?



Therapeutic support*

We will enable you to access therapeutic support to address your emotional and mental health needs.

- Your diocese, cathedral or Church organisation can help you to find appropriate therapy, and may have local arrangements with a therapy provider. If that support is not appropriate for you, you may be offered financial assistance to access an alternative.
- Any therapeutic support will be delivered by a qualified and registered therapist / counsellor.
- Expectations about the length of time for which the support will be made available, and how that support will be delivered, will be discussed with you and will depend on your needs.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-4-arranging>



Support Person*

We will offer to you the assistance of a Support Person.

- A Support Person can help you by listening, showing compassion and liaising with the Church on your behalf.
- The nature and frequency of the support offered will be discussed with you and will depend on your needs and preferences.
- All Support Persons complete training that enables them to deliver support in a caring, trauma-informed and responsible manner.
- Some dioceses offer the support of an Independent Sexual Violence or Domestic Violence Advisor or a Safeguarding Advocate, instead of, or in addition to, the Support Person role. If available, your Diocesan or Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor will be able to discuss this option with you.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-5-support-person>



Spiritual and pastoral support*

We will help you access spiritual and / or pastoral support.

- You may find it difficult to deal with the impact that the abuse has had on your faith, spirituality or the relationship with your faith community.
- Your diocese, cathedral or Church organisation will help you to find a lay or ordained person to support you, based on your needs and preferences.
- Support will also be offered to help you practice your faith safely and in a way that you are comfortable with.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-6-spiritual-and>



Apology*

We will apologise for our failings.

- Dioceses, cathedrals and other Church organisations will issue apologies in circumstances such as (but not limited to): where there has been a finding of guilt (for instance, in a criminal court or civil proceeding), or where there is evidence of poor or inappropriate responses to reported abuse.
- Your wishes in respect of an apology, including who should make the apology, how it would be communicated and the issues it should address, will be discussed.
- Any apology issued will express, in a candid and meaningful manner, sorrow and remorse for the harm that you have experienced. It will also convey the lessons that the Church has learnt from its failings.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-7-issuing>



Safe Spaces*

You can choose to access advice independent from the Church.

- Safe Spaces is a free support service for victims and survivors aged over 18, which provides confidential, personal and safe advice (through a helpline, chat service and website).
- Safe Spaces comprises trained support advocates, who can liaise with authorities and other agencies on your behalf, providing you with emotional support and information (including on Church and police procedures).
- The service is run by First Light and is independent from the Church.
- The service is available to anyone who has experienced abuse as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Church in Wales and / or the Catholic Church of England and Wales.
- The contact details for Safe Spaces can be found on their [website](https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/).**

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-8-centrally>

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



Interim Support Scheme*

You can apply for urgent and immediate support.

- This is a scheme intended to provide support for the urgent and immediate needs of victims and survivors of either current or non-recent church-based abuse, whose life circumstances are significantly affected by the abuse suffered and the response to it.
- This can include a range of types of support, depending on your needs. Examples of support previously funded include: various types of therapeutic intervention, disability related costs and support to return to employment.
- Although the scheme is intended to provide support within a relatively short period of time, applying for support through the Interim Support Scheme can sometimes be a lengthy and challenging process. If you wish to apply, you will be advised on your application by members of the scheme's team and can also request the assistance of an advocate to support you through the process.
- This scheme is not intended to provide long-term compensation or restitution, and it is not a redress scheme.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-8-centrally>



Redress Scheme*

- The scheme will consider the best ways to deliver financial compensation, therapeutic and pastoral support, and apology for victims and survivors.
- This scheme is currently under development and updates can be accessed on the Church of England [website](#).**

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-8-centrally>

** <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/redress-scheme>

External support services

Rape Crisis England & Wales - Website: www.rapecrisis.org.uk; Phone: 0808 500 2222.

The Survivors Trust - Website: www.thesurvivorstrust.org; Phone: 0808 801 0818; Email: helpline@thesurvivorstrust.org.

Refuge - Website: www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk; Phone: 0808 2000 247.

Samaritans - Website: www.samaritans.org; Phone: 116 123; Email: jo@samaritans.org.

NSPCC Childline - Website: www.childline.org.uk/get-support; Phone: 0800 1111.

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) - Website: www.napac.org.uk; Phone: 0808 801 0331.

Thirtyone:eight - Website: www.thirtyoneeight.org/help-and-resources/safeguarding-helpline; Phone: 0303 003 1111.

Minister And Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS) - Website: www.macsas.org.uk; Phone: 08088 010 340.

Survivors Voices (Peer Support) - Website: www.survivorsvoices.org.

A more comprehensive list of organisations offering support to victims and survivors, including therapy resources, helplines and self-help resources, can be found on the Church of England [website](#).*

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Survivor%20Support%20Services%20for%20CofE%20website.pdf>

Language and terminology

"Victim(s)" and "Survivor(s)" - In this guide, the terms "victim(s)" and "survivor(s)" refer to those individuals with lived experience of abuse. However, these terms are used for ease only, and it is recognised that they do not represent all personal experiences and journeys. Individuals with lived experience have a right to self-identification, and may choose to refer to themselves using different terms.

"Abuse" - This term encompasses different types of abuse and neglect, including (though not limited to): physical, domestic, sexual, emotional, financial and spiritual abuse. The "Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults" guidance provides definitions and advice on recognising the signs of those various types of abuse.*

"Church-based abuse" - This term refers to any form of abuse by a member of the Church (e.g. clergy, employee, volunteer) or that has taken place in a church setting.

"Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor" / "Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor" - Diocesan and Cathedral Safeguarding Advisors are safeguarding professionals with the relevant skills and knowledge to manage safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding is primarily concerned with the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults, but can be more broadly understood as the practice of acting in ways that mitigate any risk of harm to individuals.*

"Diocese" - A diocese is a region within the Church of England, which encompasses a number of parish churches. Each diocese is presided over by a diocesan bishop and has its own boards and structures that support the different aspects of the Church's work.

* <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults-1>



Copyright © 2023 The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England

