

National Policy for the Support of those Affected by Allegations of Abuse within a Church Setting

The Catholic Church in England and Wales seeks to provide a caring response to any person affected by allegations of abuse within a Church setting, and who seek its help and healing.

The Scope of the Church's Support Arrangements

The policy applies to any of the following Groups within a Church context:

All children and young people under 18 who allege they have experienced abuse (past or current) by a person acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church;

- All adults alleging that, as children, they experienced abuse by an adult acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church;
- All adults who allege they have experienced abuse by an adult acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church;
- The families of those who allege they have experienced abuse by an adult acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church;
- The Parish, or apostolic work of the local community of Religious, including where abuse has or is alleged to have occurred in the past;
- Priests or pastoral workers entering a parish or apostolic work of the local community of Religious, where abuse has or is alleged to have occurred.

Principles underpinning the Church's Support Arrangements

All those affected by allegations of abuse by an adult acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church, and seeking or receiving support under this policy are entitled to be treated with compassion and respect.

To receive appropriate pastoral care according to their needs is the norm for all members of the church. Where allegations of abuse lead to additional support needs, the Church will so far as is reasonably practicable and appropriate, either address those needs or liaise with statutory agencies to assist the individual in accessing the appropriate support.

All reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that support is offered to those who seek it, confidentially, quickly and effectively.

All support offered by the Church will be focussed on the best interests and welfare of children and adults. All appropriate actions relating to public protection and to risk management will be carried out according to the Church's National Safeguarding Policies.

Where support is provided, it will be done in a manner which respects the individual's dignity, privacy and safety, and which ensures so far as possible that particular needs relating to race, culture, age, language, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation or disability are addressed.

Where statutory agencies are involved, all arrangements for the provision of support will be undertaken in close liaison with these agencies.

NB. Children and young people under the age of 18 will usually be offered services and support by or through the Local Authority. However, there may be circumstances where it is appropriate for the Church to supplement or replace this support. Any such supplemental arrangements must be made in conjunction with the Statutory Authorities.

Procedures for the Provision of Support

Anyone in the above categories, who requires support or is identified by someone as potentially being in need of support following allegations of abuse by an adult acting in a church capacity within any parish, congregation or other setting within the Catholic Church, must refer the matter to the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and/or Religious Safeguarding Lead. Consent for the referral must be gained from the person identified as potentially being in need of support.

Once a referral is made, the support needs of the person(s) referred should be identified by the Safeguarding Co-ordinator at the earliest opportunity and pastoral support¹ will be offered and made available. Allegations of non-recent or non-current abuse will be treated in the same way as current allegations of abuse.

Some individuals may request support beyond routine pastoral support, such as the provision of formal counselling, or financial support. Any such requests must be directed to the Safeguarding Co-ordinator or the Safeguarding Lead in a Religious Congregation who must provide their recommendations to the Insurance Officer, who must liaise with the Insurers, before referring the request to the Trustees to decide on the extent and nature of any support to be offered.

Where the Trustees have agreed that formal counselling or financial support may be appropriate, the Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Religious Safeguarding Lead will arrange this. There will be a written agreement between the Church and the individual setting out the parameters of the support to be offered by the Church. This and any other written communication or documents relevant to the issue of support will be kept by the diocese or religious congregation. Record of the support provided should also be kept on the safeguarding file.

This file and access to its contents will be managed in accordance with the record retention schedule and the national Policy on Right of Access requests.

The Role of the Bishop / Congregation Leader and the Safeguarding Commission

The Bishop/Congregation Leader and his or her advisers are responsible for the implementation of this policy. Where appropriate, guidance will be sought from the Church's insurers and the requirements of the Charity Commission will be followed.

The Safeguarding Commission is responsible for supporting the Safeguarding Coordinator with the implementation of this policy, including:

¹ Pastoral support includes, for example, emotional and spiritual support, accompaniment, time to listen and time to reflect.

- Monitoring and evaluation;
- Ensuring effective supervision of those providing pastoral support;
- Implementing processes for dealing with disagreements;

Publicising the availability of pastoral support in every church.

Support for the Local Parish / Apostolic Work of the Local Community of Religious

In appropriate circumstances, such as where there has been a criminal trial or publicity about cases of abuse which has affected a parish, as soon as practicable, and in liaison with the Statutory Authorities and where appropriate the Church's insurers, the Bishop/Congregation Leader and Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Religious Safeguarding Lead will arrange with the priest in charge to visit the parish or local community where abuse has or is alleged to have occurred. The Bishop/Congregation Leader's presence in the parish or Apostolic work of the local community of Religious signifies leadership and is a voice that can acknowledge the pain of the parish or local community and offer a strong lead to a wounded community. In those parishes supplied by Religious Congregations, both the Bishop and the Congregation Leader should visit.

The purpose of the visit by the Bishop/Congregation Leader is to:

- Begin to identify the pastoral support needs of the community and agree how they can best be addressed;
- Advise on how to access individual pastoral support, in conjunction with the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and/or Religious Safeguarding Lead.

The aim of pastoral support for a parish or local community is community understanding/awareness and healing.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and/or Religious Safeguarding Lead and other appropriate members of the community will arrange for agreed plans of pastoral support for the parish or Apostolic work of the local community of Religious to be carried out.

Support for new Parish Priests / Religious / Other Community Leaders

It is the Bishop/Congregation Leader's responsibility to offer support to Clergy or Religious before they take up a role in a parish or Apostolic work of the local community of Religious where abuse has or is alleged to have occurred in the past, while it remains relevant.