

General standards of practice in pastoral care

Pastoral care is a fabric of interwoven activities and responses directed towards individuals, relationships, groups and communities, undertaken from within the overall context of a faith community. It is one way in which we foster the well-being of all people, individually and corporately. The activities involved may include visiting, befriending, promoting self-help activities, giving material aid, creating opportunities for increased learning, socialisation and development, campaigning and protesting against unjust events or structures, crisis management and conflict mediation. Counselling, psychotherapy and other specific disciplines are distinct and yet contained within general pastoral care activities as a whole. Care may be offered by clergy and lay ministers, trained counsellors and by people who help and support as volunteers.

All forms of care need to have clear and specific boundaries. See [A Safe Church, Section 4, *Activities with children and young people*](#), and [Activities with adults who may be vulnerable](#), for best practice guidelines.

In one-to-one pastoral care, further specific norms for practice include the following:

- i. to avoid harming the recipient by what is done or not done
- ii. to acknowledge that the relationship between carer and recipient is at that time asymmetrical and unequal. No advantages, personal, sexual or financial, should accrue to the carer from the relationship (except through those financial arrangements agreed in advance by contract), other than the satisfaction and fulfilment which belong to the carer knowing that the work has been done for the benefit of the other person
- iii. to accept that the recipient is always to some extent dependent upon the carer. The relationship of dependency places power in the hands of the carer. There needs therefore to be a continual effort to understand the nature of the pastoral relationship so that power does not become abused or misused. The carer should therefore avoid acting in such a way that the recipient misunderstands the nature of the relationship. Physical touch is often an important and valuable aspect of pastoral care, yet it is particularly open to misuse and misunderstanding
- iv. to work in such a way that the individual's or family's context, culture and social group are always taken into account with skill and respect
- v. to maintain the principle of confidentiality within any limits that may have been agreed in advance with the recipient
- vi. to maintain one's knowledge and skill at the level appropriate to maintaining competent caring and to be clear as to the limits of one's competency
- vii. to enable recipients to be free to disengage from one's services and/or from a relationship with one at any time
- viii. to ensure that one's work is supervised regularly by people who are competent to do so.

Clergy and spiritual carers

Clergy and spiritual carers carry a role that may have meaning and significance for others beyond any characteristics and gifts that they may personally possess. Much of the effectiveness of helping, healing, teaching and preaching arises out of the role and the authority with which people invest it.

The priestly role also carries symbolic and ambiguous meaning over and above the normal authority invested in carers, and this involves both conscious and unconscious aspects of pastoral relationships. In representing ultimate human concerns, the role may hold out idealised and

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unrealistic hopes of love, protection, nurture and fulfilment for those to whom he/she ministers. The primary responsibility for ensuring that such expectations are managed always rests with the priest.

Understanding the way in which a person's profound emotional and spiritual longings can be projected and displaced onto clergy and spiritual leaders helps to prevent pastoral contacts from being misunderstood or abused, and to channel an individual's proper needs. This may need to be done quite explicitly if a person admits to experiencing feelings of attraction for the minister, or seems to be seeking out their company inappropriately.

Decisions about whether to 'name' such concerns or suspicions should always be discussed with the priest's consultant, supervisor or other pastoral guide. In some circumstances, to 'name' what is happening clearly, but gently, and without rejection, may enable the pastoral relationship to grow in depth and closeness without becoming diverted into a set of unproductive fantasies or acted out in unprofessional transgressions of the role relationship. If the character of the relationship or of either one of the parties will not allow this 'naming', or 'naming' may exacerbate the situation or risk its outcome becoming destructive, a withdrawal by the carer and referral to someone else is strongly advised.

Vulnerability of the carer

In pastoral one-to-one situations, the carer is himself or herself vulnerable to potential misunderstanding or abuse. A pastoral relationship may evolve into one where the recipient of care, however vulnerable him/herself, may attack or abuse the carer in some way, such as through harassment or unfounded complaint against him or her. The risks of this happening may be greater when the recipient does not feel that his or her conscious or unconscious needs and longings are being met by the carer.

Where the carer feels he/she is in a position of such vulnerability, he/she should always consult with his/her Archdeacon or the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) at an early stage for advice and support, regardless of whatever agreements of confidentiality the carer may have with the recipient.

Care of survivors of abuse and their families

Many children or adults in the church may be suffering from the effects of abuse, which can present very differently from person to person. Even if a person seems to be carrying on with their life with no outward signs of suffering, this does not necessarily mean that they are not suffering. They may be unable to say what their problem is, or even to know why they feel ill-at-ease and unable to feel a sense of well-being. Adults and children who are abused can lose trust in those around them, especially if the abuse was within the home. They may decide, often unconsciously, never to trust anyone again, and this is likely to affect their faith and relationships.

An adult or child disclosing abuse is in a vulnerable state. Above all, they need someone to listen to them, and also to take them seriously. They may need to be 'heard' in different contexts and over several years.

There is no quick fix for healing from abuse, and it is crucial that survivors:

- are not pushed into forgiving – this is a complex process, and considerable damage can be done by treating forgiveness as something that they must do unreservedly and immediately
- are not put in a position of feeling even more guilty than they already do. Survivors tend to feel that the abuse was their fault
- are accepted as they are, however full of anger they may be. Anger can be seen as one step along the road to healing and forgiveness
- are encouraged to see themselves as survivors rather than victims, with strength and ability to move forward in their lives
- are given a sense that those within the church community who know about the abuse are 'with them' along the road to recovery. The journey can be long, and supporters are essential. Some may leave abusive relationships and then return, yet still need support.

Adult and child survivors may benefit from specialist appropriate professional counselling, and adults from joining a self-help group which may provide long-term support.

Abuse of an adult or a child may have a profound effect on the survivor's wider family, whose members may also need support and assistance in accepting that the abuse has occurred. Family members may not always be supportive to the survivor, especially if the abuser is known to them; it may sometimes be easier to accuse the survivor of fabricating the abuse than to face the fact that someone they care about is an abuser.

Survivors of domestic abuse

More information about domestic abuse can be found in Section 6 of this manual. Supporting domestic abuse survivors requires patience, time and reassurance. Domestic abuse can be inflicted by men on women, by women on men, and in same-sex relationships. Those surviving domestic abuse may disclose it to those in a position of pastoral responsibility or to someone in the church that they trust.

The role of that person is:

- to focus on the safety of the survivor and any children
- to provide a safe space for survivors to disclose abuse
- to support and reassure survivors with a non-judgemental attitude
- to provide survivors with information and refer them to relevant agencies

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- to emphasise those aspects of the survivor's faith which prioritise their equality, right to be free from abuse, their safety and the perpetrator's personal responsibility for ending the abuse.

The role is **NOT**:

- to tell the survivor to take any specific course of action, but to encourage them to think about options that can increase their safety and that of their children
- to act as their caseworker
- to use potentially harmful interpretations of the Bible or the church's moral teaching to put pressure on people in abusive relationships.

Important things to remember:

- the safety of the survivor and any children is paramount
- be alert to the possibility of domestic abuse
- the experience of abuse or violence within a relationship is often complicated by feelings of love towards the perpetrator and hope that they will change their behaviour. This means that there are very rarely simple solutions
- if someone is experiencing domestic abuse their lifestyle is likely to be stressful and sometimes chaotic. Their confidence may be low, perhaps magnified by the stigma communities frequently place upon survivors
- you will only ever get a snapshot of the relationship, not the whole picture
- survivors may minimise the levels of abuse they are experiencing, so it may appear to you as if their fear is exaggerated. Underestimating the level of danger present is a common coping mechanism used by survivors
- the relationship is not static, which means that the survivor's attitude to themselves, the abuse and the abuser will change over time.

Mediation and couples counselling

Research has shown that couples-based work is not an effective way to address one partner's abusive behaviour of the other. While these spaces may appear safe, the abusive repercussions for victims who speak out in front of an abusive partner can be serious. In addition, it is unlikely that a victim will feel free to speak openly about his or her experiences while the abusive partner is in the room.

Couples-based work also implies that both partners have a problem, rather than placing responsibility on the perpetrator. It is important to remember that mediation or couples counselling can put a victim at serious risk, and in some cases may be fatal.

Information-sharing and confidentiality

Those who experience domestic abuse are likely only to approach those they feel are worthy of their trust. Trust is tied to the idea of confidentiality.

Without confidentiality, they are less likely to talk about domestic abuse. It is important, however, to explain to those who disclose abuse that there are limits to confidentiality; if there is a reason to suspect that children are at risk of significant harm or have been harmed, or that an adult is a risk to him/herself, or to others because of his/her mental health, confidentiality must be extended and the appropriate social care agency or the police informed. In such circumstances, there should be full co-operation with agencies supporting the survivor, social care services and the police.

If information needs to be disclosed or a referral made in the context of domestic abuse, always try to obtain the consent of the survivor before sharing it.

Refuges

A refuge is a safe house where women who are experiencing domestic abuse can live, free from abuse. A woman does not have to be living with the abuser to be offered help. Women residents of refuges must keep their location confidential. This means they will not be able to tell friends or family where they are staying.

All refuges offer a safe place to stay, information, advice and support. The help offered includes the mutual support of others in similar circumstances. The refuge will provide a support worker to help each resident develop a support plan. Women are usually given a refuge place outside their own borough or immediate local area for their own safety. Some women may stay for a few days, others for several months. Some women stay in refuges for a break from violence and time to think, away from danger. Some women decide to return to their partners to try again.

There are some specialist refuges working with women from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and women who identify with a specific faith. To access a refuge space, or find out about services for specific communities, contact the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 200 0247, or visit www.womensaid.org.uk or www.refuge.org.uk.

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Care of perpetrators of abuse and their families

Introduction

The majority of abusers have also been abused themselves at some time in their lives, and are therefore also survivors of abuse. However, any help or pastoral support provided by the church to offenders of abuse against children or adults who may be vulnerable needs to run alongside the monitoring of the individual by the police and probation service. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) exist in all areas of England and Wales, and place a duty on the police, the probation service and the prison authorities to assess and manage risks posed by offenders in every community, including churches. When an offender is subject to a supervision plan (this will include all those on the Sex Offenders' Register) it is vital for churches to work closely with these agencies.

Sexual offenders

There are accredited sex offender treatment programmes in many prisons as well as community-based services. Research shows that those who complete treatment are less likely to fantasise about children or deny they harmed their victims, and are less likely to re-offend. Any help provided by the church must not be seen as a substitute for working with the statutory agencies.

Sexual offending can be extremely addictive. However repentant a sexual offender may appear, there are no cast-iron guarantees that they will not re-offend, even if they have undergone treatment. Many offenders initially refuse to admit that they have committed an offence and may continue to deny their guilt. Some offenders do not accept that their behaviour is wrong and believe it is perfectly acceptable to have sexual relationships with children.

It is imperative that sexual offenders are monitored closely and strict boundaries placed on their movements and behaviour within the church setting.

Alleged perpetrators who are not convicted

Most people who offend against children are not convicted, and cannot therefore be classed as 'offenders'. Where there are reasonable grounds for concern that a person poses a risk to children or adults who may be vulnerable, his/her involvement with a church will still need to be assessed for risk and managed, and appropriate boundaries may need to be applied. Support for the person needs to be offered in this context.

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 involve actions by other agencies such as police responses or 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 there 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 vulnerable, the chances of re-offending are diminished, and the church thus has an important role in 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.

Forgiveness

Many offenders may need an assurance that they are not rejected by God, and will seek God's forgiveness for their crimes. Genuine repentance implies that the person concerned will accept that further help is required to prevent a recurrence of the offence and to deal with the human and social effects of the abuse.

As well as professional therapy, this may require continuing supervision and discipline within the church as part of the ministry to the perpetrator. A perpetrator may need to accept that no further contact or work with children or young people and/or adults who may be vulnerable can be permitted, and that a continuing pastoral role may be impossible.

Those who are supporting the perpetrator need to:

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

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

Their role is **NOT**:

- to undertake work with a perpetrator to address their abusive behaviour. In-depth work with perpetrators is a specialist field and holds potential for danger. It should only be attempted by trained professionals
- in the case of domestic abuse, to engage in mediation or couples counselling. This is not an appropriate response to domestic abuse, and can be very dangerous.

Organisations which can support churches

Circles of Support and Accountability, managed and supported by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, are small groups formed around sex offenders by voluntary workers from the community, which aim to balance the needs of the community for safety with those of the offender in being enabled to lead an offence-free life.

Circles aim to provide everyday, practical support to the offender and to help him or her to develop in order to reintegrate into the community, for example by developing new hobbies, interests,

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social activities, friendships and relationships. Voluntary workers can provide mediation between the offender and statutory agencies, and can also work alongside family members and any existing support networks he/she may have. <https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/circles-of-support.htm>

Stop It Now is also managed and supported by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and is a sexual abuse prevention campaign and helpline available to:

- adults worried about the sexual behaviour of other adults or children and young people
- those worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, including those with concerns about their online behaviour
- friends and relatives of people arrested for sexual offending, including internet offending
- any other adult with a concern about child sexual abuse, including survivors and professionals.

Helpline: 0808 1000 900

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

The following theological resources are available from the Faith and Order Commission:

1. *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church*, 2016: <http://bit.ly/GospelAbuse>
2. *Forgiveness and reconciliation in the aftermath of abuse*, 2017: <http://bit.ly/CofEReconciliation>

Families of perpetrators

Partners of perpetrators of abuse may be unaware of the offending behaviour right up until an arrest is made; this is particularly common for offences of downloading abusive images of children.

Partners and children of abusers may also find themselves victimised and blamed for the abusive behaviour by members of the public. In situations of domestic abuse, and of abuse of a child of the family, family breakdown may occur, and there may be restrictions on contact by the perpetrator of abuse with the children.

In all situations where a perpetrator is part of a family, the relationships between spouses and partners, and between parents and children, are put under great stress, and conflicting feelings may be unmanageable. The likely effects are isolation, loss of self-esteem and confidence, and possibly debt and loss of home.

Where families of perpetrators are part of church congregations, or seek to become so, they will need acceptance, love and care. They may also need time to be listened to while they come to terms with the abusive behaviour and in some situations make decisions about the future. What suits one person or family in terms of support will not suit another, so a range of coping strategies will be required.

Members of the church may be able to support them in the following ways:

- find out if the partner and children have support, for example from extended family or friends they can talk to, or through counselling
- accompany and include them in parish activities. For example, offer to sit with them in church; invite and accompany them to church events; encourage them to join activities and participate in the life of the church
- be practical. For example, signpost to childcare, offer transport, help with shopping, signpost to youth activities

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- commit long-term: whether or not a case goes to court, the process can take years; and what happens after the event is at least as important as at the time. So be prepared to commit for the long haul
- offer or signpost to specialist help, for example, solicitor, accountant, benefits or housing advice.