



ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF
CANBERRA & GOULBURN

**GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY
RESPONDING TO ADULT
DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE**

**Safe Ministry Helpline
1800 070 511**

GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY RESPONDING TO ADULT DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE

WHAT TO SAY:

If an adult discloses that they have been abused in this Diocese, it is important to:

- Listen to what they want to share with you and do not seek more information than what they want to share.
- Advise them the Diocese's primary concern is for the care and welfare of those who have **suffered abuse in the church**¹ and it will strive to provide **appropriate support**² for them.
- Where the disclosure involves criminal abuse, advise that you will need to let the Professional Standards Director (PSD) know about their disclosure.
- Advise that the Diocese is required through NSW legislation to report criminal matters to the police and that we follow the same model for reporting in the ACT.

Where the person expresses a desire to report to the police, advise that the Diocese will be able to provide support for the person to do so, if they so desire.

Both NSW and ACT jurisdictions have process options for people to report alleged abuse to the police.

NSW: a report may be made to the Local Area Command, where the person resides. The officer will take a preliminary statement and advise of the next steps in the process. This may involve either attending the police station in the area where the alleged abuse took place or another location as negotiated with the person or submitting a written account of the alleged abuse.

ACT: a report may be made via email or over the phone to ACT Policing through Operation Attest. Once a report is made, an officer will be allocated to the case and they will make contact with the person.

¹ **Abuse in the church** means that whilst being a member of a church in this Diocese or attending a church event or ministry program in this Diocese or engaging with Diocesan personnel within the context of their professional or vocational role, the person has suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

² **Appropriate support** is determined in consultation with the person who has suffered abuse and may include, but is not limited to: provision of a pastoral support person, professional counselling, support with police, and/or diocesan process and a care and assistance package

The contact details are:

- **Op-Attest@afp.gov.au**
- Calling ACT Police Operations on **131 444**. When speaking to the operator state you wish to speak with a member of Operation Attest and leave your contact details. A member from Operation Attest will then make contact with you.
- Via mail addressed to:
**Operation Attest
Winchester Police Centre
GPO Box 401
Canberra ACT 2601**

WHAT TO DO:

After an adult discloses abuse make contact with the Professional Standards Director by ringing the Safe Ministry Helpline – 1800 070 511.

The Professional Standards Director will take the contact details of the adult and advise the clergy person what the next steps might need to be taken.

WHAT THE DIOCESE WILL DO:

Where the disclosure involves a crime, the PSD will encourage the alleged victim to report to police and support them to do so. Where the victim does not wish to do so, the PSD will report the alleged crime to the police.

Where the disclosure involves a church worker, the PSD will enact the Professional Standards Ordinance or the Protocol for Addressing Grievances as appropriate.

The PSD will contact relevant Statutory Bodies in the case of disclosures of child abuse.

The PSD will discuss support options for the person who has disclosed abuse.

The PSD will discuss support options for the clergy person where they have pastoral oversight for the person making a disclosure.

POSSIBLE TRAUMA FROM EXPOSURE TO DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE:

Each person has a unique response to receiving a disclosure of abuse. There may be some common reactions such as: shock, anger, sympathy for the victim and frustration.

However, there may also be more severe reactions which may in some cases have a more invasive impact on a person's ability to function effectively within their ministry and life in general. This might include vicarious trauma.

Some signs of vicarious trauma could include:

- Hypervigilance – in relation to the primary victim of abuse and/or all vulnerable people
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Flashbacks to receiving the information – “seeing yourself” in the space where the information was revealed, hearing the information repeatedly
- Overwhelming sense of powerlessness to being able to protect the vulnerable
- Overwhelming sense of guilt that the leader was not able to protect the child or young person prior to abuse occurring
- Mistrusting of ability to discern that abuse may be occurring
- Questioning of core beliefs
- Difficulty in “switching off” from ministry role
- Constant questioning of ministry ability
- Flashbacks to own experiences in the past either previously or currently acknowledged or unacknowledged

In these situations, it may be helpful for clergy receiving disclosures to seek additional professional support. The 1800 number may be accessed in this situation for assistance.

The 1800 number may also be accessed:

- If someone is a victim of abuse and would like support
- If someone is a family member of a victim of abuse and would like support

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

SAFE MINISTRY UNIT

Ph: 02 6245 7158

E: safeministry@anglicands.org.au

Postal Address: PO Box 1981

CANBERRA ACT 2601