



The Safe Communities Unit
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RESPONDING TO ABUSE - GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL SUPPORT PEOPLE

PARAMETERS OF THE ROLE:

The role of a Pastoral Support Person is to provide pastoral care to a primary or secondary victim where the primary victim has suffered abuse in the church¹.

The key elements of pastoral support to be provided include:

- Listening
- Offer of prayer
- Offer of appropriate practical support

Elements **not to be included** in this role:

- Advocacy
- Legal advice
- Counselling

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES:

Whilst in a Pastoral Support Person role, a power imbalance exists and consequently, it is incumbent upon the Pastoral Support Person to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Boundaries that need to be established include:

- Where interactions take place
- At what time of the day interactions take place
- The length of time that interactions can take
- Confidentiality around subject matter shared as part of the pastoral support relationship

MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES:

When pastorally caring for a primary or secondary victim, there may be times when the person requests and indeed demands access to pastoral support outside of the stated parameters of this role as well as outside of the boundaries that have been established. Whilst it is important for victims to have their pastoral support needs met, it is vital that

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.

Pastoral Support people do not engage outside of the boundaries set at the beginning of the pastoral support role and not outside of the parameters of the role as outlined in these guidelines.

CARE FOR PASTORAL SUPPORT PEOPLE:

Supporting a primary or secondary victim of abuse can be challenging at times. The subject matter that may be shared by a primary or secondary victim can be distressing and may even cause vicarious trauma for the Pastoral Support Person.

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 support role
- Flashbacks to own experiences in the past either previously or currently acknowledged or unacknowledged

When appointing a person to be a Pastoral Support Person, the Diocesan representative will discuss support needs and advise what professional debriefing options are available.

If a Pastoral Support Person finds that they are experiencing signs of vicarious trauma they are to contact the Diocesan representative as a matter of urgency.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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