

Section 5: The Support Person role

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Requirements

5.1 Church Bodies must offer all victims and survivors a Support Person to assist them.

5.2 DSAs and CSAs will take reasonable steps to ensure suitable Support Persons are available. This will include developing and supporting a pool of Support Persons who may be able to help victims and survivors and /or contracting with other organisations to provide Support Persons.

5.3 Church Bodies must promptly, following a disclosure, liaise with the DSA or CSA to facilitate the agreement of a person to perform the role of "Support Person" to support those victims and survivors who state they would like this form of help.

5.4 Church Bodies must ensure the Support Person has completed the NST "Support Person" training before being assigned. This also applies to Support Persons supplied by third party organisations.

5.5 The Support Person must only be assigned after consent by the victim or survivor (or in the case of children, their parent or guardian who is not the subject of the safeguarding concern).

5.6 A written statement must be provided which sets out exactly what help the Support Person will provide to a victim and survivor, and this will explain how information about the victim and survivor will be recorded, shared and used.

5.7 Church Bodies must take reasonable steps to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between the Church Body or Bodies involved and the Support Person assigned to the victim/survivor. The Support Person assigned must not have any involvement in the safeguarding or other investigations into the allegations made by the victim or survivor they are assigned to support. The Support Person must not be a witness for, or have any other involvement in relation to, the allegations of abuse by the victim or survivor they are supporting.

5.8 Church Bodies must give the contact details of the person responsible for the oversight and support of the Support Person to the victim and survivor so that they can contact them to provide feedback, if they wish to.

5.9 Church Bodies must ensure appropriate support and oversight for the Support Person. In dioceses and cathedrals this will, respectively, be the DSA or CSA.

Good Practice Advice

Following disclosure, some victims and survivors might welcome the help of a “Support Person” – others will not want this form of support, especially if the person is a volunteer and is associated with the Church. The idea of this volunteer role is to have someone who can provide emotional and practical support for a victim and survivor during the period after their disclosure.

The responsibility of DSAs or CSAs is to take all reasonable steps to source suitable people to take on the Support Person role, to link victims and survivors with matched Support Persons, and provide oversight of, and support for, the Support Person. The DSA or CSA can discharge this responsibility in different ways. They can:

- have an arrangement with a local voluntary organisation to provide Support Persons.
- commission an organisation to supply a Support Person.
- develop a pool of Support Persons.

About the role - what Support Persons can do

The Support Person is a volunteer role which can assist victims’ and survivors’ recovery by listening, empathising, showing compassion and maintaining their connections with the Church.

Church Bodies should consider on a case-by-case basis what a Support Person might do. It may include some of the following elements:

- Support within the community and the Church.
- Listening, being alongside the victim or survivor in their distress.
- Some might be able to provide pastoral and spiritual support (and some victims and survivors might prefer this from a lay person).
- Being easily contactable and readily available to liaise between the victim or survivor and the Church Body or DSA about the management of their safeguarding disclosure.
- Explaining support being offered and assisting victims and survivors to choose and engage with the support options that meet their needs.
- Supporting victims and survivors during meetings with statutory services and other professionals, where appropriate. This should not extend to meetings about the Church Body’s investigations about their disclosure as this will be a conflict of interest.
- Assisting the victim or survivor with exploring how their longer-term spiritual and welfare needs can be managed.
- Signposting victims and survivors to Safe Spaces, the Interim Support Scheme and the Redress Scheme, and work with any appointed advocate for the survivor.
- Being a befriender to assist the victim or survivors to build their confidence and networks. ([this study](#) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation contains useful advice for Church Bodies that wish to develop this element of the Support Person role).

What the Support Person role is not

The Support Person is not the confidant of the victim or survivor. They must be bound by a responsibility to disclose to the appropriate authorities (e.g. the police, DSA or CSA) where:

- others are at risk of harm.
- the victim or survivor makes disclosures of intentions to hurt themselves.
- safeguarding information needs to be shared with statutory social care services and criminal justice professionals to assist in the prevention, detection or prosecution of a crime.
- the Support Person is a volunteer.

No one directly involved in the management of the case, or who may be required to give evidence in court proceedings, should be directly supporting the victim or survivor, since their roles or their status may be compromised.

The Support Person is not providing a professional service. Some victims and survivors will need a higher level of professional expertise to meet their needs, and in these circumstances the DSA or CSA or Relevant Body should help secure appropriate professional help e.g. through an Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA) or Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) if available in the area. Church Officers should note that Safe Spaces is a professional service and their advocates have undertaken ISVA training.

Victims and survivors who are children or young people will usually require specialist support which should be provided by a professional agency qualified to provide such support.

The Support Person must not attend core group meetings.

Required attributes of Support Persons

People who might make suitable Support Persons could come from a range of backgrounds and life experiences. The main consideration is that they have the right talents and personal attributes. The Support Person role can be a combination of pastoral care, support and reassurance for victims and survivors. Consequently, the Support Person's value-base, their compassionate nature and attunement skills will be important attributes in successfully undertaking this role.

Other key attributes include:

- good communication skills.
- respecting peoples' choices.

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good timekeeping.

- timely responses to emails and telephone calls.

Above all, the Support Person should be motivated to act for survivors and victims. Victims and survivors involved in the development of this Guidance advised that listening skills, flexibility and “availability” are also important skills:

You have the counsellor but the other person [Support Person] walks beside you in what capacity you need, giving you different areas of support. You just need someone who is happy to listen, someone who is happy to go shopping, day out to give you confidence, someone who will help you manage the services. Just being alongside you.

Information recording and sharing

Support Persons might, to fulfil their role effectively, need to keep a written record of what they do or key points from some meetings. If the Support Person is a volunteer undertaking the role for the diocese or other Church Body, they should share their recordings with both the victim or survivor and the DSA / CSA / Relevant Church Body concerned. The Church Body must make sure that the Support Person is able to record and transfer this information securely.

If the Support Person comes from another organisation, the DSA / CSA / Relevant Church Body is responsible for ensuring the contract with that organisation addresses issues of information sharing and security.

Matching and information

The DSA or CSA should produce written information about the Support Person role which can be shared with other Church Bodies. This can include details about what the Support Person can offer, explanation of their independence from clergy or safeguarding investigations, their training and their approaches to confidentiality and anonymity.

Before being assigned a Support Person, the nature of the role and who will discharge it should be discussed with the survivor or victim. They should decide if and how they want to engage with the Support Person. If the initial offer is declined by the victim or survivor, at key points in the safeguarding process, DSAs and CSAs should re-offer them the Support Person role. For example, if a case goes to court.

Victims and survivors may not want to work with a Support Person who is a member of clergy and therefore this should be discussed with them.

If a victim or survivor accepts the offer of a Support Person, it is recommended that a written description of the Support Person’s specific agreed role and responsibilities in respect of that victim or survivor should be provided to them. Another recommendation is that this document should set out the position on information sharing and security as described above. It should also indicate the expected period of time that the Support Person will be involved with the victim or survivor. When the involvement of the Support Person ends, it is important that this is handled well so that it does not have an adverse impact on the victim or survivor.

Overseeing Support Persons in their role

Given that the Support Person will engage with people in distress and trauma due to abuse, they will require support and oversight (usually from the DSA or CSA) to manage the emotional impact of their role. Exactly what form this takes and the frequency of contact should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Developing a pool of Support Persons

It is recommended that Church Bodies should review how many Support Persons they need to meet their local need and explore the option of collaboration with neighbouring dioceses or cathedrals to create an adequate pool of Support Persons.

Church Bodies should aim to have a number of volunteers in a pool in order to achieve the best possible match between victims and survivor and Support Persons. For example, some victims or survivors may prefer to work with Support Persons of the same gender, race and ethnicity or even lived experience.

This is an opportunity for Church Bodies to collaborate to develop a pool of volunteers as Support Persons to meet the needs of survivors in their respective areas. For example, a victim or survivor might not want a Support Person from the diocese (or cathedral) where they were abused but might accept one connected with a Religious Community or another cathedral. Having a pool in this way allows for the possibility of greater independence and options which will be important for some victims / survivors.

Bishop's Visitors

In cases where a clergy marriage ends as a result of abuse, a Bishop's Visitor should be appointed by the Bishop to assist the spouse or partner with practical aspects of the change. This might include practical help with finding new accommodation, accessing sources of funding etc. The Bishop's Visitor is not a Support Person but may assist with the day-to-day issues for a limited period of time.

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