ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

Providing pastoral support to people affected by sexual abuse

Guidance for clergy and church workers in the Anglican Church of Australia

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CONTENTS

Sexual abuse is a universal human problem. It occurs in all countries, at all levels of society, within institutions and within the context of the family home.

The failure of the Anglican Church of Australia to respond to those who have been sexually abused by people holding positions of power and trust in the Church was acknowledged by the General Synod in October 2004:

> *That this General Synod and we as members of it acknowledge with deep regret and repentance the past failings of the Church and its members.*
>
> *On behalf of the whole Anglican Church in this country we apologise unreservedly to those who have been harmed by sexual abuse perpetrated by people holding positions of power and trust in the Church.*
>
> *We apologise for the shameful way we actively worked against and discouraged those who came to us and reported abuse.*
>
> *We are ashamed to acknowledge that we only took notice when the survivors of abuse became a threat to us.*
>
> *We apologise and ask forgiveness for the Church's failure at many levels to listen to and acknowledge the plight of those who have been abused, to take adequate steps to assist them, and to prevent abuse from happening or recurring.*
>
> *We commit the Church to listen to survivors of abuse, to respond with compassion to all those who have been harmed, both to those who have come forward and to those who may choose to do so in the future, and to deal appropriately, transparently and fairly with those accused of abuse and negligence.*

INTRODUCTION

This document was written to assist you as a member of the clergy or as a church worker to provide effective pastoral support to people affected by sexual abuse.

'People affected by sexual abuse' includes, in the first place, people who have been sexually abused as a child, young person and/or adult, but it also includes a pool of others who are significantly impacted:

- family members, partners, carers and friends of people who have been abused;
- clergy and church workers responsible for responding to and supporting people who have been sexually abused, or who are affected by it;
- family members and friends of abusers and alleged abusers;
- people involved in parishes or church organisations where abuse has occurred;
- clergy and church workers who have been colleagues of abusers.

Whether you are aware of it or not, it is likely that in your church you will interact with people in some, if not all, of these groups. You may also meet children, young people or adults who are currently being sexually abused, or hear about this from others. However, it is also possible that you never become aware of all those in your church who have been affected by sexual abuse. There are many reasons for this.

Issues of disclosure. It takes a lot of courage and support for people to disclose and to seek help and justice. Many people who have been sexually abused—whether as children, young people or adults—never tell anyone. They carry a lot of shame and self-blame, and think they won't be believed. Some have been threatened and remain silent out of fear. Some find it hard to speak out against authority figures. Some expect they will be treated in the same way as other victims who have been blamed, with their allegations minimised or denied, and in some cases punished and retraumatised.

Issues of reporting. Many people who have been sexually abused are reluctant to report their abuser to the relevant institution or to the police. Most perpetrators do not accept responsibility. In the past, and sometimes still, perpetrators have been protected by institutions and their leaders. Where abuse has been reported to the police, prosecutions do not always follow, and the current rate of convictions is low.

Part A of this document focuses on providing a basic understanding of the nature of sexual abuse and its effects. These effects can be profound—principally on a person's psychological, emotional and physical well-being, their sense of self-worth, ability to form and keep healthy relationships and other areas of everyday functioning. For people of faith, experiencing sexual abuse may significantly impact personal beliefs, understanding and trust in God.

Part B of the document offers guidance for pastoral workers in supporting and responding to people who have been affected by sexual abuse.

People struggling with the impacts of their past abuse in childhood as well as others affected by sexual abuse will be in particular need of pastoral support. People who have come to terms with the effects of the abuse they have experienced may still need pastoral support, as from time to time they may struggle with its effects. Empathy, compassion, understanding, sensitivity and pastoral support from the broader community can play an important role in healing, even where those affected are receiving professional help. Every interaction regardless of how apparently minor can contribute to healing, rebuilding trust and a sense of safety.

Everyone has a role to play. Do not underestimate the contribution you can make. However, sexual abuse has so many repercussions that they can overwhelm not only those who have been abused, and those affected by the abuse, but also those who endeavour to provide support. It is important for pastoral workers to focus on the immediate needs of those to whom they minister. They should also be aware of the possibility of the risks of vicarious trauma when providing pastoral support to people who have been sexually abused.

'Someone has just told me that they have been sexually abused. What should I do?'

Listen calmly, attentively and respectfully to what they have to say.

Affirm them for the courage they have shown in making a disclosure.

Expressing heartfelt sympathy, or saying you can see that the person has been deeply hurt by the experience—or both—may be appropriate.

If the person is an adult, ask them in what way they would like your assistance.

Depending on the person's age and the law in your State or Territory, you may be required to report this to the child protection authority or to the police, or both.

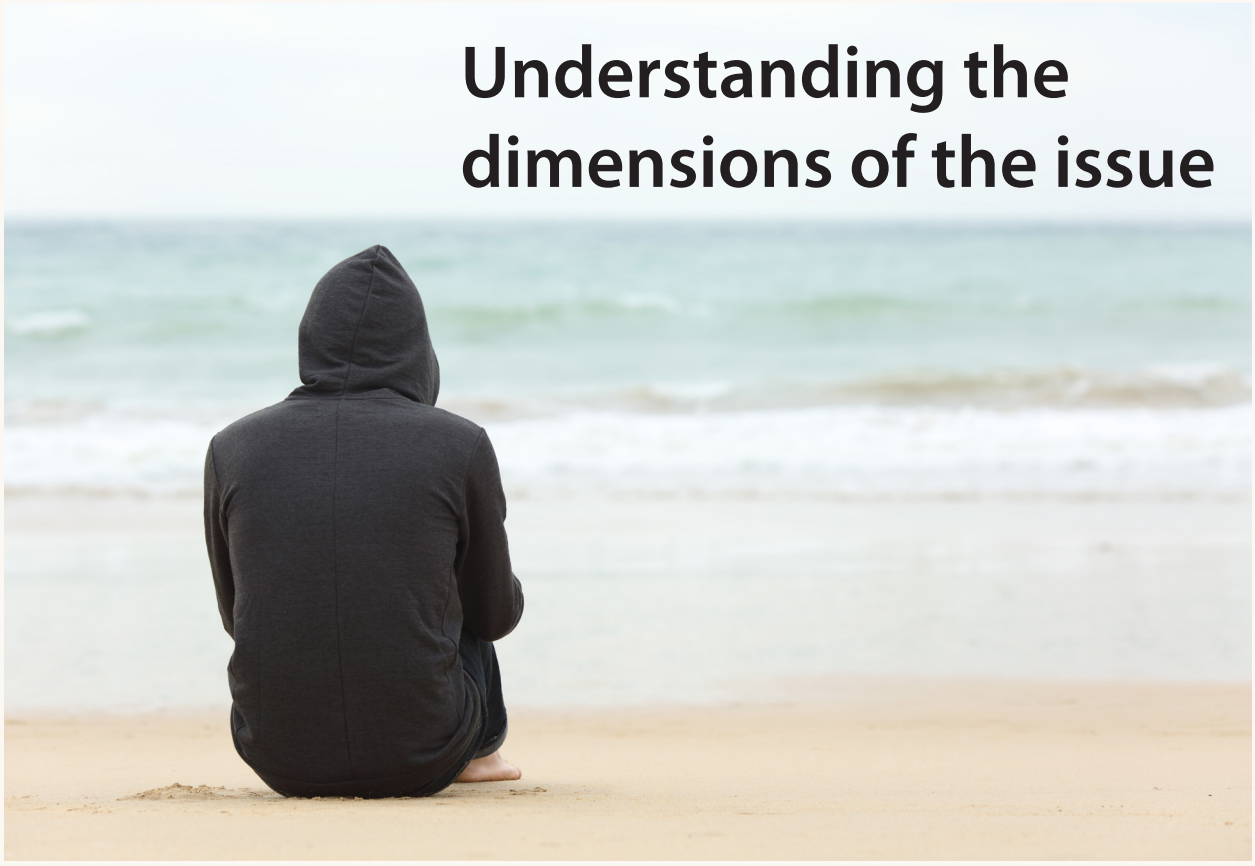
In accordance with Church requirements, you may need to report this disclosure to the Director of Professional Standards.

If appropriate, explain to the person your reporting obligations.

Further and fuller guidance is provided in Chapter 4.

PART A

Understanding the dimensions of the issue



'Sexual abuse does not only have profound and lasting psychological effects for those who are abused. It is also likely to have a damaging effect on people's faith.'

Patrick Parkinson
Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches, 2003, p. 161

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Royal Commission heightens awareness of the issue

Since the early 1990s there has been a growing public awareness of the extent and effects of the sexual abuse of children and adults in the Australian community and the Church. Despite government intervention and church action, sexual abuse of children and adults continues. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse examined the prevalence and nature of sexual abuse of children in institutional settings in Australia in great detail. The Commission's *Final Report* (2017) provided a wealth of material to assist the Church in understanding better the whole issue of childhood sexual abuse and how to respond in more helpful ways.

'Sexual abuse' covers a range of behaviours

The expressions 'sexual abuse of an adult' and 'sexual abuse of a child' are defined in *Faithfulness in Service (2004, updated 2016)*.

Sexual abuse of an adult means sexual assault, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment of an adult.

Sexual abuse of a child means the use of a child by another person for their own sexual stimulation or gratification or for that of others. It includes:

- making sexual advances to a child using any form of communication;
- exposing oneself indecently to a child;
- having or attempting to have vaginal or anal intercourse with a child;
- penetrating or attempting to penetrate a child's vagina or anus with an object or any bodily part;

- kissing, touching, holding or fondling or attempting to kiss, touch, hold or fondle a child in a sexual manner;
- staring at or secretly watching a child for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification;
- making any gesture or action of a sexual nature in a child's presence;
- making sexual references or innuendo in a child's presence using any form of communication;
- discussing or inquiring about personal matters of a sexual nature with a child;
- possessing, creating or exposing children to child exploitation material of a sexual nature;
- exposing a child to any form of sexually explicit or suggestive material including clothing with sexually explicit images or messages;
- giving goods, money, attention or affection in exchange for sexual activities with a child;
- giving goods, money, attention or affection in exchange for images of a child for the purpose of sexual gratification of themselves or others; and
- encouraging, or forcing or attempting to encourage or force a child:
  - to sexually touch or fondle another person;
  - to perform oral sex;
  - either to masturbate self or others, or to watch others masturbate; and
  - to engage in or watch any other sexual activity.

Sexual abuse of a child does not include:

- sex education with the prior consent of a parent or guardian; or
- age-appropriate consensual sexual behaviour between peers (i.e. of the same or a similar age).

Sexual assault means any intentional or reckless act, use of force or threat to use force involving some form of sexual activity against an adult without their consent. It includes:

- having or attempting to have vaginal or anal intercourse with a person without their consent;

- penetrating or attempting to penetrate another person's vagina or anus with an object or any bodily part without that person's consent;
- sexually touching and fondling or attempting to sexually touch or fondle a person without their consent;
- kissing or attempting to kiss another person without their consent;
- holding or attempting to hold another person in a sexual manner without their consent;
- forcing or attempting to force a person to sexually touch or fondle another person; and
- forcing or attempting to force a person to perform oral sex.

Sexual exploitation refers to any form of sexual contact or invitation to sexual contact with an adult with whom there is a pastoral or supervisory relationship, whether or not there is consent and regardless of who initiated the contact or invitation. It does not include such contact or invitation within a marriage.

Sexual harassment means:

- an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the other person, or
- other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the other person,

in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Such behaviour may consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time. It includes:

- asking a person for sex;
- giving a person to understand that you would like sexual favours from them;
- making any gesture, action or comment of a sexual nature to a person directly or making a comment of a sexual nature about them in their presence;
- making jokes containing sexual references or innuendo using any form of communication;
- exposing a person to any form of sexually explicit or suggestive material;

- making unwelcome physical contact such as touching, pinching, or patting;
- making unwelcome or unnecessary inquiries about or attempts to discuss personal matters of a sexual nature;
- deliberately intruding on an individual's personal space;
- staring at or secretly watching a person for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification; and
- stalking a person.

Sexual abuse is widespread

Sexual abuse occurs in every social group in the community. People who are sexually abused come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances and from different socio-economic, ethnic and religious groups.

The 2016 Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017) revealed:

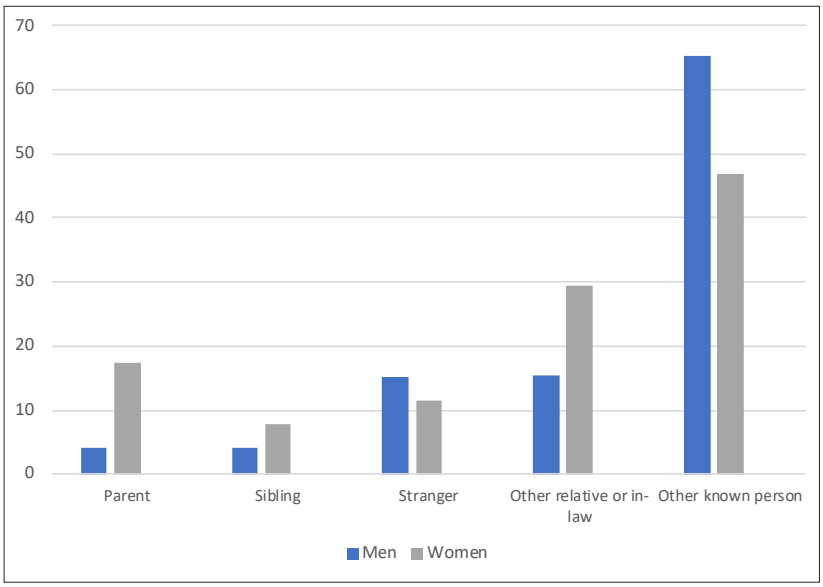
- one in five women (18% or 1.7 million) and one in twenty men (4.7% or 428,800) experienced sexual violence since the age of 15;
- one in six women (16% or 1.5 million) and one in ten men (11% or 991,600) aged 18 years and over experienced abuse (sexual or physical or both) before the age of 15;
- one in two women (53% or 5 million) and one in four men (25% or 2.2 million) had experienced sexual harassment during their lifetime.

Using data from the 2012 Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013), the Royal Commission noted that, as a conservative estimate, there are at least 69,000 people in Australia who were sexually abused as children by a doctor, teacher or minister of religion in an institutional setting before the age of 15. The Commission also found that child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts accounts for approximately 5 per cent of all reported child sexual abuse. These statistics may underestimate the real problem because some people who have experienced sexual harassment or violence may not be aware that the behaviour they have experienced is abuse.

It is hard to say how those who have been affected by sexual abuse are distributed in Anglican congregations in Australia. If the number of people who have been sexually abused were consistent with the statistics from the Royal Commission, it would mean that in a church of 100 people, where two-thirds were females and one-third were males, around 40 would have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime, and around 15 would have experienced sexual violence since they were aged 15. There would be other people significantly impacted.

Figure 1

Relationship of perpetrator to child who has been sexually abused[1]



1 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, *Personal Safety, Australia 2016*, ABS, Canberra. Data presents the percentage of respondents aged 18 years and over who were sexually abused before the age of 15 by type of perpetrator. The survey was conducted in all states and territories and across urban, rural and remote (excl. very remote) areas of Australia and included approximately 21,250 people. Totals add to more than 100 percent indicating that some children were abused by perpetrators belonging to more than one category. 'Other known person' includes foster carer or other person associated with care placement, family friend, acquaintance/neighbour, doctor or other health professional, teacher, other school-related staff, childcare worker, in-home care educator or carer, recreational leader, priest/minister/rabbi/nun/other person associated with place of worship, staff in a children's home/orphanage, corrective services personnel, and other known persons.

CHAPTER 2

THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Effects of abuse vary in severity and duration

The degree of harm caused by sexual abuse varies. However, it is never minor. Sexual abuse of a child is always a criminal offence and sexual abuse of an adult may be a criminal offence. Many people struggle day to day in their lives as a result of their sexual abuse. The impacts can be profound and far reaching. Other people find good support and build a road to healing and recovery over time. Some people who appear to be less affected may appear to function well but can struggle with a lack of meaning and purpose.

What factors affect the impact of childhood sexual abuse?

Factors affecting the impact of childhood sexual abuse include:

- ***the closeness of the relationship between the child and the abuser.*** Children who are abused by a parent, step-parent, grandparent, sibling or extended family member tend to be particularly affected;
- ***the role of the abuser in relation to the child.*** Sexual abuse by clergy or church workers can be very damaging because of the abuse of power, betrayal of trust and misuse of spiritual authority within a pastoral relationship;
- ***the duration and frequency of the abuse.*** While single incidents can be highly traumatic, generally the longer the duration and the higher the frequency of the abus, the more harmful it is to the child's wellbeing;
- ***the degree of invasiveness of the abuse.*** While sometimes the effects will be more severe where there was penetration of any kind, this will not always be the case. Non-invasive abuse such as being groomed or manipulated, being exposed to other children being abused or otherwise being exploited can also significantly affect children;
- ***the degree of force.*** The level of trauma tends to be greater where violence was involved;
- ***the level of support the child receives.*** Children who receive good support from parents and others through being believed, protected from further abuse and being allowed to express their feelings about what has happened, tend to do much better than those who don't receive such support.

In her book *Trauma and Recovery,* psychiatrist Judith Herman says, 'Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life' (Herman 2015, p.33).

Sexual violence against the body, such as sexual abuse, creates profound personal dislocation and pain. The effects of sexual abuse can be:

- acute, which is the immediate response to the trauma;
- chronic, which are the effects that persist over time; or
- delayed, which are the responses to trauma that develop later.

Some people experience all three effects. Others say that they have not been adversely affected by their experiences because many have not connected their challenges to their abuse or have not identified that what happened to them was abusive.

Long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse include:

- anxiety;
- mental distress, including depression;
- isolation;
- low self-esteem;
- difficulty forming healthy relationships; and
- a range of other impacts such as chronic physical health issues.

Many survivors develop coping strategies such as substance misuse, self-harm, and suicidality to try to numb their distress. Some survivors struggle with emotional regulation, impulse control and experience revictimisation or are involved with the criminal justice system. People who have experienced any form of sexual abuse in adulthood may experience similar difficulties.

Being abused, especially as a child, can affect learning, education and employment, and therefore many survivors experience welfare dependency, homelessness and cumulative disadvantage and attendant stigma. However, these effects can also indicate other types of trauma and distress. It is not appropriate for a person exercising pastoral ministry to suggest to someone that they may have been sexually abused in the past. Rather, the person should be encouraged to seek advice from a counselling professional with relevant experience.

Many people who have experienced sexual abuse—including those who experience long-term effects—are not readily identifiable. The adverse effects are hidden behind high-achieving and active lives. They work, have friends and families, and are involved in church life.

Effects on the survivor's well-being

i. Emotional effects

People who have been abused often have a low sense of self-worth. They may experience:

- **self-blame,** because of a belief that they are responsible for the abuse—by accepting inducements from the abuser to keep the abuse a secret, by not saying no, by allowing things to go too far before starting to resist, by gaining some level of pleasure from the abusive act, or by not doing more to stop it. This belief can be more confusing if the survivor depended on the abuser, loved them or was groomed into feeling special; and
- **shame,** because of who they believe they are. Some believe they have been abused because they are unworthy, unlovable and unacceptable. This belief will be reinforced when they have been told by the abuser 'you deserved it' or 'you're a slut' or 'you wanted it'. Others believe they have become unworthy because of the abuse; and
- **worthlessness,** because they have been used as an object, purely for the gratification of others. They were made to feel dirty, and that their own feelings counted for nothing.

ii. Psychological effects

The most common psychological effect is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which has a range of symptoms that can extend far into adulthood. PTSD often occurs after a single sexual assault as an adult. It is not the same for child sexual assault which is often repeated and extreme and often is associated with complex trauma, of which Complex PTSD is an associated diagnosis and which entails more impacts on sense of self, belief system and sense of meaning. Symptoms of PTSD include withdrawing, reliving the traumatic event, avoiding situations that remind them of the events, and being constantly on alert.

What are some common ways people experience the emotional and psychological effects of abuse?

Common effects are:

- finding it harder to trust and build healthy and intimate relationships;
- feeling inadequate, and inappropriately blaming themselves;
- seeking approval and trying to be 'good' and perfectionistic so as not to be criticised and made to feel more worthless;
- finding it hard to recognise unconditional love;
- living on high alert, being agitated, anxious and easily triggered;
- finding it hard to trust enough to seek and receive help;
- finding it hard to receive positive affirmation;
- having a desperate need for approval;
- feeling lonely and withdrawing into isolation to try and stay safe;
- experiencing strong emotions and finding it hard to manage them—moving from being agitated to shut down and withdrawn. Some coping strategies and complex behavioural responses can be present; and
- being easily triggered into trauma responses including anger and distress; experiencing a lot of grief and loss which is hard to process.

The following are normal responses to trauma:

- anger and aggression;
- anxiety;
- depression;
- dissociative symptoms, including disconnection from reality, flashbacks, emotional numbing and periods of blanking out;
- alcohol and drug misuse;
- self-harm and mutilation;
- suicidal thoughts and behaviour;
- repeated trauma may cause a stress response in which a person cycles between being hypervigilant and shutting down.

iii. Physical effects

People who have experienced sexual abuse may experience physical health impacts e.g. immune impacts, musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal issues, headaches and increased risks of diabetes, cardiovascular, and respiratory issues. They can also often despise their bodies. They may have experienced sexual arousal and even orgasm in

response to touch and stimulation. This is highly confusing because they may come to believe, sometimes not consciously, that their bodies have betrayed them. A profoundly altered attitude to the body may be expressed by the person consciously or unconsciously adopting one or more of the following coping strategies:

- hiding their bodies from themselves and others by not looking in mirrors, or dressing in shapeless or unattractive clothing;
- not caring for themselves, or not seeking dental or medical attention, or by abusing their bodies through poor hygiene, or by self-mutilation and, by developing eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia or overeating);
- harming themselves physically through coping strategies abusing food, substances, sex, self-harm, work, gambling;
- being obsessive about personal hygiene or dressing immaculately to cover their distress about being 'tainted' by the abuse;
- being extremely uncomfortable with any physical contact including sexual intimacy. Conversely, becoming sexually promiscuous based on an internal belief of their worthiness only being due to their value as a sexual object.

iv. Spiritual effects

Experiencing sexual abuse often has a profound impact upon a person's spiritual life. Some people find it difficult to believe in God. Whilst some people develop a sense of the transforming presence of God, others continue to hold on to their faith with difficulty.

Spiritual difficulties commonly experienced include:

- believing that God, who remained silent throughout their abuse, is cruel, impotent or uncaring;
- believing that they are being punished by God and deserved the abuse;
- finding it difficult to believe in a God who would forgive their abuser;
- being angry with God who did not answer their prayers for help;
- finding the concept of God as Father difficult. For some a male or father figure they have known has betrayed and abused them, and betrayed their position of trust;

- finding it difficult to experience God's love and grace;
- rejecting a relationship with an institutional church because what they have experienced is a perversion of love, trust, hope, and faith;
- rejecting some teaching of the Bible, such as encouragements to believe, to forgive, to triumph and to claim the victory of the Lord, because they live out their lives in deep hurt and pain.

The Reverend Dr Susan Shooter is an Anglican minister, researcher and survivor. In her book *How Survivors Relate to God: The Authentic Spirituality of the Annihilated Soul* (Shooter 2012), she explains that some survivors become aware of the 'timeless presence of God' who transforms them and their faith and enables them to relate differently to God and to others.

Effects on the survivor's relationships

i. Ability to form relationships

Since the abuse often takes place within a relationship which should be one of care, trust and nurture— for example within the family, with a family friend or with a member of the church— the capacity of the survivor to trust others is deeply affected by this primary betrayal and lack of safety in key relationships.

Additionally, in the abusive relationship the person abused learned that their needs were unimportant and that they had no choice or control. They were in a power imbalance. As a result, they did not develop secure attachments and an understanding of healthy boundaries. They need to experience safe relationships, rebuild trust and develop more secure attachments and bonds over time, including relating to intimacy.

ii. Family relationships

The effects of sexual abuse on the person's family relationships will vary depending on:

- where the sexual abuse took place;
- who the abuser was; and
- whether the person disclosed, was believed and found good support to help them feel safe, heard and find ongoing support to help them heal.

For example, a person abused by their father or other family member or carer may hate the abuser, and feel resentment and disappointment towards their mother and other siblings for their failure to act—whether or not they knew the abuse was happening. This is particularly severe where a child's mother knew about the abuse and failed to protect them.

Abuse by a person from outside the family but still in a position of trust, such as a babysitter, teacher, member of the clergy or a church worker—even where it has been acknowledged—may still leave a child unable to understand why and how their parents failed to protect them. Alternatively, abuse by an outsider may draw a family together.

The distress and anger of parents, stemming from the effects of abuse on their child and their own guilt at their failure to prevent abuse of their child, can have a negative impact on the child and play out in family relationships. Family relationships in adulthood may remain distant, superficial and lacking in trust. There may, however, be a sense of solidarity between siblings as silenced co-sufferers in the face of abuse.

Many people abused as a child will find it hard to be intimate, experiencing sexual challenges as adults. Sexual foreplay and intercourse are likely to be linked to many unpleasant memories, and trigger flashbacks and fear. Distressing responses to touch and intimacy may cause frustration, hurt and confusion for both the survivor and their partner.

Sometimes people who have been abused do not tell their partners for some time or at all. Reasons for this may be shame, fear of rejection, not coming to terms with the abuse themselves, wanting to put the abuse in the past and start afresh, or not having the support or resources to be able to seek help.

Some people who have been abused develop anxiety about their ability to protect children or fear that they may harm them. They may be hyper-vigilant and excessively protective of their own and other children. They often harbour an underlying fear that they are inadequate parents with an awareness that they were unable to acquire the skills for healthy relationships including parenting.

iii. Church and community relationships

The effects of sexual abuse on a survivor's church and community relationships can also vary. Survivors may be:

- very angry with the Church and those in a position of power and leadership. This will occur when those in authority are abusing their power, failing to support survivors and report crimes, and not being empathic and supportive. They may be angry or distressed when there are cover-ups, silence and secrecy, and a failure to act when sexual crimes occur. This can include failure to respond to historic child sexual abuse.
- withdrawn with people they know, and especially when meeting new people, because of their fear of rejection or disapproval. People who have been betrayed or do not feel safe find it hard to trust and build relationships. In the past, it may have been a 'trusted' person who betrayed them;
- compliant in their relationships with authority-figures, whether at work or in the church. They will be submissive, wanting to please and avoid criticism. This may have been the way they survived their abuse; and/or
- 'rescuers'—caring for others but failing to care for themselves.

People who have been abused can struggle to feel emotionally and physically safe. They may be afraid of using public transport, of accepting lifts, or being exposed as inadequate.

Effects on other people affected by abuse

Family members of a survivor and other people who have witnessed the effects of sexual abuse on people's lives, especially on loved ones, can experience their own trauma.

They may feel overwhelming sadness and anger. Where the circumstances of the survivor do not improve, or the survivor is involved in court proceedings relating to the abuse, they may feel a huge sense of failure, hopelessness and despair. They may also feel guilty that they did not prevent the abuse or give more support.

People indirectly affected by sexual abuse may experience stress and pressure within their family and work situation, as the futility and powerlessness they feel permeates all their relationships. They may also experience changes in their relationships, including in their church community, because there is a lack of trust, because they can't talk openly about the abuse, and because there are questions to which they don't have any answers.

CHAPTER 3

PARTICULAR CHALLENGES WHICH MAY ARISE IN THE RELIGIOUS AND CHURCH ENVIRONMENT

Many people who have been abused, and others affected by sexual abuse, depend on their church community for love and support, and their relationship with God nurtures and sustains them.

At the same time, some people affected by sexual abuse experience significant difficulties participating in public worship and in church life generally because of the expectations of fellow church members around belief and practice. They can expend huge amounts of energy trying to live up to others' expectations. This chapter outlines some of those difficulties.

Some beliefs and church practices may be difficult

i. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complex issue and is discussed further in Chapter 5 below. People who have been affected by abuse may choose to forgive or may choose not to forgive.

People who have been abused often find themselves under pressure to forgive their abuser. The pressure to forgive can be profoundly damaging, negating the person's experience and disempowering them. The pressure may be:

- *external*—when someone says 'Just put it behind you', 'Forgive and forget', 'Forgive and move on' or 'You will feel better if you forgive'; and
- *internal*—when the victim blames themselves for their abuse and that self-blame becomes destructive.

A survivor may think that forgiving means excusing the abuser's behaviour and consequently that the abuser's needs are being put before their own. They may condemn themselves and believe they are condemned by others if they are not willing or able or choose not to forgive. They may see themselves as 'hopeless' Christians, beyond the forgiveness of God and outcasts in the church community.

ii. Sexual behaviour

Sexual abuse may affect a survivor's sexual behaviour and experience, and other aspects of sexuality. This can be compounded if they were abused by a member of the clergy or a church worker—and are then rejected by the church because of how they express their sexuality. This is a complex area and may need the involvement of an appropriate professional.

Expectations and teaching in church about sexual behaviour may hinder the healing of those who have been abused. The church's teaching on sexual purity, particularly where sex is linked with sin, shame and self-blame, may intensify the survivor's feelings of guilt and shame—even if they know they are sinned against and are not the sinner and may in fact be a victim of a crime. Emphasising the virtue of chastity and needing to make a confession for their own behaviour can heighten the person's sense of shame. It is essential to understand that sexual activity can involve sexual coercion and violation. A survivor's understanding of self—that they are not morally upright because they are sexually impure—can be shaped or confirmed by such expectations and teaching. These expectations and understandings need to be put into the framework of sexual abuse dynamics.

Difficulties of this nature faced by people who have been abused may be compounded where they feel that discussing sexual matters is taboo. They will be reticent about disclosing—and this can be compounded by workers who have their own discomfort.

iii. Manner of life and discipleship

There are often expectations about the manner of life and patterns of discipleship of those participating in church activities. They may be spoken or unspoken. Many people who have been abused believe that they should be cheerful and 'rejoice in the Lord always' (Philippians 4:4) and feel worthless if they are depressed, suicidal or overcome with anger and grief. Trying to keep up the public front of 'being okay' is exhausting, yet some people feel that is the only way to be acceptable.

These difficulties may be increased where church people invalidate a range of emotions such as anger, grief or despair. It is essential to understand that people affected by abuse commonly experience distress, anger, and mental health challenges. They need to be supported pastorally as they work through these issues.

Some aspects of public worship may be difficult

Clergy and church workers engaged in leading a service or preaching need to understand that there are likely to be people present who have been affected by sexual abuse. Some possible responses are discussed in Chapter 5 below.

People who have been affected by sexual abuse may find the following aspects of public worship difficult:

- preaching that never acknowledges or validates the emotional pain of those who are suffering, or the experience of being angry with, or feeling abandoned by, God;
- language in Holy Communion and other services, hymns and songs that uses words like 'blood', 'flesh', 'body', 'victim' and 'sacrifice'. Words such as these can bring painful memories to the surface and trigger trauma responses and distress;
- Bible passages, hymns and songs that have words expressing physical intimacy or that focus on God caring for children. For example, Jesus' invitation to 'come to me' (Matthew 11:28) and Jesus taking a little child in his arms (Mark 9:36) can stir uncomfortable feelings;
- the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) can mirror an abuse experience, leaving people afected by abuse feeling overwhelmed;
- practices in Holy Communion services, including unexpected or unwelcome touch in the Peace or during prayer, kneeling to receive communion from a member of the clergy of the same gender as the abuser, having the bread or wafer placed on the tongue if the abuse involved oral sex;
- unexpected or unwelcome touch during prayer that brings painful memories to the surface;

- prayers of praise or thanksgiving to God—when He didn't protect them or their children;
- being in close proximity to other people or sitting or standing with others behind them;
- the unexpected, such as being asked to talk and share with someone they do not know without the opportunity to decline.

What doctrines can present significant difficulties for those who have been abused?

The knowledge, power, presence and transcendence of God	'Where was God when I was abused?'
The closeness of God	'How can God be close to me when I'm so unclean?'
The love of God	'How can a loving God allow abuse?'
Forgiveness	'How can you ask me to forgive once, let alone seventy times seven?' (Matthew 18:22)
God the Father	'You mean He's like the father who abused me?'

PART B

Providing effective pastoral support

'Christian leaders should be conscious that at all times we are potentially speaking to some deeply vulnerable people. Many people have been abused but have not disclosed their abuse to anyone. So we need to be aware that there may be a sizable number of individuals in our churches with unprocessed trauma. We must be careful how we speak...'

Tim Hein
Understanding Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors, 2018, pp. 14-15

CHAPTER 4

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Responding to a disclosure

It takes enormous courage for a person who has been sexually abused to share their experience—or any part of it—with another person. It means overcoming the shame and self-blame many survivors feel. It also means feeling safe enough and trusting enough. Your initial responsibility is to maintain the trust the discloser has placed in you. If a survivor has trusted you enough to disclose to you, it is critical that you honour that trust, support them to feel as safe as possible, and be empathetic and compassionate.

Disclosing is not a one-off event. Survivors often disclose aspects of their experience progressively over time. While a person might have various reasons for disclosing, it is probable that the discloser's overriding need is simply to be heard, listened to, believed and to find a pathway to support. Let this be your guiding principle as you respond with empathy, compassion and understanding.

In summary, if a disclosure is made to you, you should:

- do what you can do to make the person feel safe;
- remain calm and give the person disclosing your full attention;
- reassure them that you are there for them, to hear them and to find out what they need;
- reassure them that they do not need to tell you any more than they are comfortable with at any one time;
- listen with acceptance and honour the trust that the discloser has placed in you;
- allow them to use their own words and disclose what they feel comfortable with at the time at their own pace;
- if appropriate, explain to whom you are required to report the matter but that you will keep them informed;
- avoid confronting the alleged perpetrator;

- let the person know that you are sorry this happened to them and that it was not their fault; and
- ask the person what they would like you to do.

Choosing an appropriate place to talk

It is important for the person disclosing to be able to choose where to talk. A person disclosing may not choose a quiet place. If necessary, ask the person whether you can move to a place where you can hear them better. You can offer a place which is private and welcoming to talk but be aware that an isolated place may trigger memories, fear or apprehension.

Maintaining a calm demeanour

A person disclosing is wanting to share their experience and may be seeking support. The way you respond, with empathy, compassion, understanding and belief can make a big difference to the person disclosing. If you are calm and empathetic you are already helping, and your response can have a great impact on the discloser's willingness to seek further help and progress their recovery.

Be aware of your tone of voice and body language. Do not be surprised if the person tells you graphic details of their experience or just a hint of what happened. Telling anyone anything is a very big step. Honour it. Show them you are there for them in that moment. Show them that the trust they have placed in you is warranted.

Don't get distracted worrying if you are going to say the 'right' thing. The person has chosen you to disclose to, as they want someone to know. They may also want help. Listening deeply can help the person feel heard and be an important step towards recovery.

If you are distressed by what is disclosed to you it is okay to acknowledge your own distress and anger but reassure the person disclosing that your distress is not caused by them but because of the harm that they have experienced. This is particularly important where a child is disclosing, and you may need to reassure them that your response is caused by the fact that adults are meant to care and protect children yet this has not been the case for them.

Explaining your approach to maintaining confidentiality

The person disclosing may ask you to not tell anyone. Be honest about your obligations and explain the reasons why and when you have to report or tell someone. If you are asked to keep a disclosure secret, say something like 'I can't make that promise but I can promise I will do everything I can to keep you (and those you love) safe.'

If you understand that the matter will have to be reported to the police or other authority, tell the person who you are going to speak to and why.

If the person disclosing is a child, explain that you are there to support them, reassure them and help them to feel as safe as possible. Do not use formal titles of authorities, just say that you have to report these things to people who work to keep children safe, to help them as well as other children. As children often forget details you may have to repeat this information.

Providing support, not counselling

Act within the limits of your role. You are not there to provide counselling or give professional advice. Validate the experience of the person disclosing by showing empathy and compassion for what they have been through. Show that you take what they have said seriously. People who have been abused or affected by abuse may fear not being believed and some may not have been believed or may even have been punished for trying to disclose.

Being a patient listener

The person disclosing needs to feel in control of how much to say, when and to whom. This helps to balance the feelings of loss of control they experienced when they were abused.

Allow the person disclosing to proceed at their own pace, using their own words. Tell the person that they can say as much or as little as they are comfortable to say. Some will only give minimal details. Do not press for too many details but you can gently prompt with questions like 'Can you tell me more about that?' It is not your role to conduct an investigation or even to get the whole story. Doing so can be highly traumatising for the person disclosing.

Your role is to elicit just enough information to allow you to make a decision about what action you should take next. Be careful to respect the person's own words and not to substitute your own. Asking the person to repeat details may give them the impression you do not believe them. If you have to ask them to repeat something, reassure them that you believe them but just need to make sure you heard them correctly.

Do not be surprised if a child wants to resume regular activities after disclosing. The disclosure process may take days or weeks. During this time, you can let the child or young person know you are available to listen if they want to talk further.

Providing reassurance that the person will be safe

While it is important that the person disclosing has control over the process and continues to trust you, this must be balanced with concern for his or her safety, and the safety of others.

If the person disclosing expresses concerns about their safety, reassure them that you will do what you can to keep them safe.

If they express fear of consequences of disclosing for themselves or others, it is vital that you explain that they have done the right thing in telling. Explain that you and the people to whom you have reported will do what they can to stop anyone else getting hurt. People disclosing may need to hear this more than once.

Not confronting the alleged perpetrator

It is not your role to confront the alleged perpetrator. To do so may risk the safety of the person disclosing and adversely affect any future legal or disciplinary action. It is the role of the authorities to investigate the disclosure and circumstances around any alleged crime or misconduct.

Not suggestingt forgiving the alleged perpetrator

Do not suggest, especially at the time of disclosure, that the person should forgive the alleged perpetrator. It is not usually helpful, and may even be harmful, to suggest that a survivor forgive the perpetrator especially at the time of disclosure or before the abuse has been exposed or investigated.

Suggesting forgiveness may be more about your own emotional response to the abuse and harm caused. It may also discourage the person disclosing from speaking more.

Clarifying the next steps

If the person disclosing is an adult, ask them how they are feeling and what they need. You are there to listen, hear and believe them, and to provide them with whatever support you can and help them find other help and support. Do they want to go to the police? Do they have any practical needs at this time? Do they want professional assistance? Do they want to take any other action?

It is important that the person disclosing is given the option of meeting with you again. Let the person know how they can reach you and when you can be available. Be transparent about needing to keep records detailing your conversation and, depending on the age of the person and legalities, the confidentiality and access around those records.

The process of disclosure and working through the steps related to reporting, seeking justice and getting help will take some time. Be prepared to be there for the person as long as is possible and be clear with the person disclosing what they can expect from you.

If the person disclosing is a child, you will also have a duty to disclose the matter to the police or other child protection authority, who will then have the responsibility for the investigation and the child's safety. Your role may be to provide pastoral care and support the child's wellbeing. Any action must be undertaken within the context of the requirements of the police or child protection authority.

Creating a record of the conversation

Once the person disclosing has said all they want to say and left, make a note of the conversation. Record the main details and try to capture your recollection of exactly what was said. Try as much as possible to use the words of the person disclosing. Document the facts and be as specific as you can. Take whatever steps are appropriate to ensure your record—including any electronic record—is kept confidential.

The record may become part of an investigation or other legal or disciplinary process.

Following the relevant immediate response protocol

If a child or young person discloses abuse, it is imperative that you comply with any obligation to report the abuse to the police and/or child protection authority in your state/territory as well as follow any applicable code of conduct of the Church.

If you are a member of the clergy or a church worker providing ministry to children, and your diocese has adopted the *Safe Ministry to Children Canon 2017*, you are required to observe the following standards of *Faithfulness in Service*:

> 5.14 If you know or reasonably suspect that a child is at risk of harm from child abuse, you are to report this to the appropriate civil authorities.
>
> 5.15 If you know or reasonably suspect that another member of the clergy or a church worker is abusing or has abused a child, you are to report this to the appropriate civil authorities and the Director of Professional Standards.

In other dioceses you may have an obligation to report known or suspected child abuse in accordance with the diocesan code of conduct or other applicable policy.

If you are a church worker not providing ministry to children and your diocese has adopted *Faithfulness in Service*, you have an obligation to report known or suspected child abuse. In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for receiving reports of suspected child abuse and neglect from members of the public. Certain groups of people are required by law to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect of a child or young person to the child protection authority. Further information and guidelines about mandatory reporting can be obtained from the applicable child protection authority in your jurisdiction.

If an adult discloses abuse which constitutes a criminal offence such as sexual assault, you must comply with any obligation to report the abuse to the police in your state or territory.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is my pastoral role if the matter becomes one involving the child protection authority or the police?

Continue to provide pastoral support if the person requests this and if you feel competent. If not, help the person to find an appropriate person who has these special skills.

What do I do if the alleged perpetrator is in my congregation?

You should not confront or inform the alleged perpetrator. Without delay, seek the advice of the Director of Professional Standards and tell the person disclosing that you are required to do this but that you will do what you can to keep them safe during this process.

How do I support and be with a person who becomes distressed as they speak about their abuse?

Remember that your caring and empathetic ear is the vitally important thing you have to offer. The person has trusted you enough. Honour that and support them to feel as safe as possible.

Expect the person disclosing to display a range of emotions. These emotions can be strong and frightening—both to the person and to you. Be with the person. Stay calm and be understanding. Do not try to minimise the impact of the person's experience of sexual abuse, or to silence or placate the person in any way.

If you have any concerns about the person's immediate safety seek professional advice or refer them to a support line.

Understand that you also may feel anxious and distressed. Seek supervision or your own support as soon as possible after the disclosure while maintaining confidentiality.

Can I give the person—child or adult—a hug?

If requested by the person, you can give them a hug. However, do not initiate any form of physical contact.

What should I do if I think that the person claiming to have experienced sexual abuse is not telling the truth?

It is not your role to decide if a person is telling you the truth. You are there to support the person regardless of your own point of view.

Do precisely what you would do for anyone in distress—listen, hear, accept and validate what they are saying and feeling.

Raise your concerns with your supervisor or the person providing you with support, while keeping the disclosure confidential.

CHAPTER 5

DEVELOPING A MINISTRY OF HOPE AND HEALING

Helping to embed fresh spiritual understanding

You may find that the following five motifs in the Bible will help provide pathways to a truer, fuller and more helpful spiritual understanding for all those who have been affected by sexual abuse.

i. Identity

The experience of many of those who have experienced sexual abuse is that their identity is determined by what their abusers have said and done.

This does not have to remain the case. Through being present, listening, accepting and responding to particular requests you can help those who have been abused to discover or re-discover that they are loved and valuable for who they are. Through this support they can replace lies they have believed about themselves with truths of God's love for them.

ii. Community

People who have been abused can be helped to overcome their isolation and vulnerability through reflection upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He too was abused; he too was betrayed by a kiss; he too was naked before others as he hung upon the cross; he too felt abandoned by God; yet he was raised to new life by God.

A loving church community can provide people who have been abused with a safe environment to make new relationships. Through experiencing relationships based on mutual respect they can grow in self-confidence and develop their sense of self-worth. The development of safe and trustworthy relationships in the church community can assist people who have been abused to discover or re-discover that they can have a growing closeness in their relationship with God.

iii. Justice

People who have experienced or have been affected by abuse may doubt whether justice will prevail, given the Church's many failures in the past. They may doubt that where a person has sexually assaulted a child or adult, that it will be reported to the relevant authorities and investigated.

God's love for justice is grounded in his love for the victims of injustice. Those who have experienced or have been affected by abuse need to know that the perpetrator will be called to account. In particular, they need to know that if the perpetrator is a member of the clergy or a church worker, the matter will not be 'swept under the carpet' or covered up—that the Church's policy of zero tolerance for abuse will be honoured and implemented.

iv. Healing

Both children and adults may have misgivings that they have done the right thing by disclosing. You can reassure them about that—and that the trust they have placed in you will not be betrayed. If the abuse is still occurring and they are feeling trapped, they need to know that mechanisms are in place to address the abuse, and that help and support is available.

Those who have been abused, and their parents or carers, may blame themselves for the abuse as if it was their fault. They may feel guilt and shame as a result of the abuse. They may need help to understand that no perceived failure on their part excuses the conduct of the abuser. Sexual

assault is never the survivor's fault, it is always the perpetrator's responsibility—and the perpetrator needs to be held accountable. Therefore, the survivor does not have to forgive themselves. For all of those affected by sexual abuse the ability to express anger and other emotions is vital in the healing process. This is especially true for those who have been abused but is also true for other people who have been affected by the abuse: they have also had their trust betrayed by the abuser's behaviour.

The impact of abuse is profound. Healing and recovery are not necessarily uniform or linear and both may be a life-long process. Even where progress is made, the degree of healing can vary. Some people may feel that there is no hope of healing, that the scars of their experience will remain with them forever.

A ministry of healing typically involves facilitating access to those who are trained and experienced in supporting people who have been sexually abused, including a range of health and other practitioners and services. While the benefits of these supports may take months or years to emerge, many people affected by sexual abuse have found that professional help assists their healing through developing knowledge, tools and strategies to heal the body, emotions, mind and spirit; and builds resources to help cope and foster hope.

As a member of the clergy or a church worker, you can help throughout the healing process by offering to listen and to pray and by providing a safe environment in which the abused can experience the love of God.

What might show that a survivor is on a pathway to healing?

- Accepting that they have been abused.
- Recognising that they were not responsible for the abuse—but their abuser was.
- Being able to identify the effects that the abuse has had on them.
- Having safe and healthy ways to express their distress, regulate their emotions and build internal resporces and external support networks.
- Accepting that their true self is a person who is made in God's image and loved by God.

v. Forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness is one of the most complex and difficult issues faced by people who have been abused and by church workers who minister to them and their abusers.

Biblical accounts of forgiveness in the Old Testament begin with the idea of forgiveness being the gift of God to His people. God's forgiveness restored them to their relationship with Him. New Testament accounts indicate that interpersonal forgiveness is a gift of kindness and mercy that one person gives another with love being the underlying, guiding principle. At the same time, both the Old and New Testaments point to the importance of justice and advocacy for those who have been mistreated.

People who have been abused often find themselves under pressure to forgive the abuser. This pressure may be external—from family and friends—or internal, arising from their own beliefs or a special set of circumstances. Often those who do not understand the depths of harm and distress experienced fail to understand how wounded someone has been by abuse; they may make the suggestion to forgive, without appreciation of the full circumstances. For example, they may not be aware of:

- the extent of the betrayal;
- the impact of boundary violations;
- the depths of anger;
- the extent of the harm experienced;
- the lack of repentance by the perpetrator; or
- other challenges that may be present for the person affected by the abuse.

Forgiveness is rarely a one-off decision or something that can be done in a moment. For some, the process can be life-long; for others, forgiveness of the perpetrator is not a choice they wish to make.

From the Gospel accounts, the centrality of interpersonal forgiveness can be seen when considering God's forgiveness as embedded in the Lord's Prayer—that we are to forgive others as we are forgiven by God. This indicates that the practice of interpersonal forgiveness is one of the paramount

characteristics of being a follower of Jesus. This may be misunderstood to mean that survivors must always forgive abusers. Factors that may affect the difficulty and ability to forgive include where the abuser maintains their innocence, does not acknowledge the harm that they have caused, or has died. These circumstances can be very distressing for the survivor.

In her book *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, author Susan Shooter summarises the perspective on forgiveness of Margaret Kennedy—founder of Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS) and Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CSSA)—as follows:

> It is almost impossible to forgive some abusers, yet blame is often poured on survivors who find they cannot forgive their abuser. They are held responsible for their own lack of healing because many Christians do not want to stay with the difficult and messy issues involved; on the contrary they want a 'quick fix'. Thus, exhorting forgiveness becomes a tool of social control, because getting forgiveness over with quickly restores silence about abuse (Shooter 2012, p.17; Kennedy 1999, pp. 68-70).

If a survivor is not able or chooses not to forgive, they may feel self-condemnation and believe they are condemned by others. They may see themselves as 'not being Christian' and being beyond the forgiveness of God. A survivor may feel unable to forgive a parent, a carer, a school principal or a leader in the Church for allowing the abuse to occur by either ignorant or culpable failure to provide protection. For some survivors, this situation can provide an opportunity for a person providing pastoral support to witness to God taking the initiative in reconciliation. For others, the lack of repentance by their abuser or the level of harm they have experienced means this is an impossibility.

Whatever the motivation to do it, forgiving an abuser can be very difficult for a survivor to do. Yet forgiveness may also be an important part of a survivor's healing journey. However, it is important to add that it may never happen—and pressure for a survivor to forgive and then re-establish their relationship with their abuser should never come from church workers. This can cause additional harm. If it does

happen, it is rarely a single event, but is more often a process which occurs over an extended period of time and in stages.

Sometimes the abuser may ask to be forgiven. When this happens, the three requirements expressed in Scripture for forgiveness, which together are commonly called 'repentance', are:

- **confession**, involving the abuser fully acknowledging the abuse and harm caused, which may include an unconditional apology by the abuser to the victim for the abuse and its effects;
- **contrition**, involving the abuser taking full responsibility for the abuse with a willingness to bear any consequences, including sexual and child sexual assault being reported to the civil authorities and, if appropriate, to the church; and
- **reparation**, involving the abuser offering to the victim a tangible expression of their contrition, to the extent that this may be possible, as proof through their action that the abuser has recognised the impact and consequences of the abuse.

Where an abuser satisfies these conditions, a survivor may choose to forgive. If the abuser does not or cannot repent a survivor may still choose to forgive.

If choosing to forgive, the survivor may express their forgiveness to their abuser in a face-to-face meeting. But there are many other possibilities not involving contact, especially where this is necessary for the survivor to feel safe. These may include writing a letter, communicating through a third party, or using a liturgical expression or other ritual.

Even when the survivor is able to move to a place of forgiving their abuser, reconciliation in the relationship may not occur and should not necessarily follow, especially if the abuser has not completed the steps outlined above. In many situations of childhood sexual assault forgiveness may not be achieved, either because the abuser has not completed the tasks of repentance, or because the survivor is so deeply harmed that they are unable to acknowledge or accept the repentance offered.

Where an abuser has genuinely repented and been forgiven, this does not mean:

- the survivor should minimise the abuse, excuse the abuser or forget the ways in which the abuse has harmed them;
- the church should appoint or re-appoint the abuser to a ministry role or trust the abuser with the care of children, young people or vulnerable adults;
- the abuser should avoid punishment for the abuse; and
- the person who has been abused and the abuser should be reconciled, in the sense of a return to the relationship as it existed before the abuse occurred.

Helping to renew the experience of church

You can help to transform the experience of church for those who have been abused and those who have been affected by abuse. There are no 'right' answers, but through greater understanding, increased sensitivity, acknowledgement, compassion and understanding, your church can become more inclusive of them.

You can help the spiritual recovery of people who have been abused by giving careful attention to the following aspects of public worship:

- preaching and teaching that:
  - acknowledges the reality of sexual abuse, the harm done, abuse of power, betrayal of trust in relationships and forgiveness; and
  - uses the range of metaphors in the Bible when speaking and writing about the effect of the death of Christ: restoration, reconciliation, and liberation, as well as sacrifice and substitution;
- declarations of acceptance by God can help those who have been abused who have feelings of self-blame and shame;
- alternatives to touch in Holy Communion services (during the Peace or prayer, or if the bread or wafer is placed on the tongue) and in healing and other services should be provided. A nod or bow can be an alternative to shaking hands or a hug in the Peace;
- using language about God which is helpful to people who have been abused. Addressing God in prayers as

'compassionate God' or 'creating God' rather than always using 'Father' or 'Almighty God' can make a big difference for someone who has been abused. In the usual pattern of services, prayers referring to sexual abuse will be meaningful for all those who have been affected;

- making use of 'meaningful liturgy'.

You should consider providing special services for those who have been abused and those who have been affected by abuse. For example, an individual Holy Communion service may be all they can cope with as formal 'worship'.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is my pastoral role if the person affected by sexual abuse doesn't want to have professional counselling?

Continue to be their pastoral carer to the best of your ability, recognising your own and the person's limitations in this situation.

Even if you have professional qualifications and experience as a counsellor or psychologist, it is not your role to provide this service. Let the other person decide if and when they wish to raise the matter again.

What do I say if someone affected by sexual abuse asks me 'How is God at work in this?'

There is no easy answer. Be careful to avoid a glib response. Remember that many believe their abuse is evidence that God doesn't care about them. Allow the person to express their confusion or anger against God. Providing pastoral support means standing with them in their pain and conveying God's love without having answers.

CHAPTER 6

EXERCISING APPROPRIATE PASTORAL PRACTICE

You must be aware of the importance of discerning what is being asked of you as the pastoral carer, and of being adequately trained and equipped for your role. As well as the recognition of your own limitations, you need to have an understanding of the dynamics of power, clear boundaries, discernment and self-awareness, structures of accountability and a resource for referral. You also need to be attentive to self-care—understanding and mitigating the risks—and with access to debriefing and supervision. When you take responsibility for yourself in these matters you will be less likely to make errors which will harm either those affected by sexual abuse or yourself.

Understanding the nature of pastoral support and your role

Providing pastoral support to someone affected by sexual abuse is essentially about you spending time with them in a safe and accepting relationship. This may involve talking or doing activities together like going for a walk. When the person talks, be a patient and gentle listener. It is important to normalise the struggles of those who have been affected and not be judgmental or critical. Where the person seeks your help or advice, only provide assistance or advice that you are competent to give.

It is important that you understand your role in providing pastoral support. It will depend on the circumstances. Sometimes your role will be limited, such as when you are approached for spiritual advice or prayer on a one-off occasion. Sometimes your role will be ongoing, such as when you spend time with the person on a regular basis.

Recognising the dynamics of power

When you provide pastoral support to a survivor or other person affected by abuse, it is easy not to recognise yourself as being in a position of power—and not to feel powerful. Providing pastoral support to a survivor or other person affected by abuse puts you in a role where you are more powerful than them. This inequality does not have to be a problem, but without its recognition, you are more likely to have difficulties arise in the pastoral relationship.

Being disempowered, coerced and without choice is frequently a significant aspect of the original abuse. Hence when working with people who have been abused it is important that as far as practicable they are able to make choices about the pastoral relationship: for example, by asking them firstly, if they would like to meet, and then asking them when and where they wish to meet. Being allowed to make choices about the pastoral relationship gives the survivor a sense of safety.

Be aware that the gender of a pastoral carer is often important to a victim. They frequently prefer a carer to be of the opposite gender to their abuser.

Maintaining clear boundaries

When you are providing pastoral support to people affected by sexual abuse, you should establish and maintain clear boundaries in matters of time, location, touch and confidentiality. In consultation with the person concerned, do what you can for them to feel as safe as possible.

When you are supporting a child who has been abused it is inappropriate to explore the circumstances of the abuse. This requires expertise and may contaminate evidence where there are legal or disciplinary proceedings. By listening to and affirming children who have been abused you will be providing appropriate pastoral support.

Time

Providing pastoral support to people affected by sexual abuse takes time and energy and is often difficult and confronting. You should confirm clear boundaries about the

amount and kind of support you offer, recognising that in some circumstances flexibility will be required.

If you offer a lot of time at the beginning and then withdraw because it is too intense, you will risk causing them to feel hurt and rejected. It is far better if you offer a consistent, caring presence over a long period of time. You may find it helpful to agree on a planned time for the provision of pastoral support. Setting clear limits is not so much around the risk of the person becoming dependent but on setting expectations, showing you are trustworthy and transparent. A person disclosing to you has given you a lot of trust. For someone who has been betrayed in this way it is important for them to have someone who can keep them in mind and walk alongside them.

Location

You should ensure that conversations with people affected by sexual abuse take place where a person feels safe—but never in secret or in a place that is enclosed or isolated. You should hold these conversations in a place where they cannot be overheard or easily interrupted. You should give careful attention to location when supporting someone affected by sexual abuse where there is the possibility of sexual attraction.

Touch

It is vital to understand that people who were sexually abused were violated and boundaries were crossed, meaning that touch often signals danger and is a trigger. It is important to ask the person what they want and what might be safe touch for them. You must use touch with sensitivity and self-awareness. Not touching may be the safest and wisest precaution when first providing pastoral support. Unwanted, aggressive and sexual forms of touch are unethical and extremely damaging in pastoral relationships. However, withholding touch can be a damaging reinforcement of self-loathing that the survivor may feel.

Confidentiality

Many people who have been abused find it is very difficult to disclose their sexual abuse. When they do so, they will expect the conversation will remain confidential. Except

where the law (such as under legislation requiring mandatory reporting of child abuse) or the Church requires, you should keep disclosures confidential. Before making any wider disclosure, you should discuss this with the person concerned and obtain their permission.

Exercising discernment and self-awareness

When providing pastoral support to people affected by sexual abuse you need to be aware of your limitations. Many will need counselling or psychotherapy from an experienced professional. If you do not have appropriate qualifications and experience, you should never provide counselling or psychotherapy to someone affected by sexual abuse. Even if you do have appropriate qualifications and experience, you will need to guard against your role extending beyond pastoral support to providing counselling or psychotherapy.

A person who has experienced sexual abuse may discuss matters of a very personal and sexual nature with you. Intimacy will naturally develop. You should never attempt to give any physical or sexual expression. Remember this is a pastoral relationship, not a friendship.

Maintaining appropriate self-care and structures of accountability

Your effectiveness in providing pastoral support to someone affected by sexual abuse will depend upon many factors including your intellectual stimulation, spiritual vitality, physical health, emotional well-being, supportive collegial relationships and healthy ministry practices.

You may hear from people affected by sexual abuse about matters of a very distressing nature which you must keep confidential. There needs to be an understanding of the risks of vicarious trauma for the pastoral carer. You need to be able to recognise the early signs of vicarious trauma and know how to mitigate and manage the impacts.

These disclosures will often cause you to experience deep emotional reactions. You should have a recognised process of supervision to assist you with your own well-being, and to ensure

the effectiveness of your pastoral support. You should tell your supervisor or a trusted colleague that you are pastorally supporting someone affected by sexual abuse, along with the frequency and location of your conversations.

You should adhere to the standards and guidelines for behaviour in *Faithfulness in Service*.

Accessing resources for referral

People affected by sexual abuse may present problems which are beyond your competence and require the specialised assistance of a counselling professional. In this case, you will need to refer the person concerned to other sources of help. You should have access to a list of professional persons to whom people in this situation can be referred.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who do I call for help and support in my role?

Your supervisor or a trusted colleague, the Director of Professional Standards or any other diocesan resource person.

How long is it appropriate for me to provide pastoral support to a person affected by sexual abuse?

Be clear about your role and what you are able and willing to offer. Later, after discussion, you may refer the person to another pastoral carer. Be aware that for many people, recovery is a long-term process and they may need long-term support.

What is my responsibility to my family if providing support to people affected by sexual abuse becomes a big issue in my pastoral ministry?

Under no circumstances should you allow your pastoral ministry to detract from your ongoing responsibilities to your family and your own wellbeing. Recognise your limitations and your need for self-care. If possible, request assistance in your ministry and/or seek specialised help. Refer people affected by sexual abuse to another pastoral carer or specialised support.

APPENDIX 1

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

As the foregoing guidance has sought to show, being sensitive to the needs of those who have been affected by sexual abuse may present particular challenges for pastoral care, Christian ministry, and public worship. These challenges include negative perceptions of God and of self, complex issues of justice and forgiveness, questions about healing and wholeness, and significant impact on trust and relationships. The Bible and Christian theology contain resources that are relevant and can provide assistance. Nevertheless, for the same pastoral reasons of sensitivity and compassion, considerable care needs to be exercised in how exactly how and when these resources are used. For example, Kathy Olsen notes in her book *Silent Pain* (Olsen 1992) that in times of deep grief and pain, 'Scripture may often sound like a cacophony of empty words'. She adds that what may help people to understand God in times like this is loving support, people who weep with those weep (Romans 12.15), an 'audible, visible expression' of God's compassion'.

An afterword of this length will not be able to address all the questions and issues that may arise from a brief consideration of biblical and theological resources. The aim, however, is to sketch a number of areas of relevance and support for the themes in this pastoral handbook.

The Bible is uncompromising and transparent about the dangers and damage that will occur from failing to live as God intended, from Genesis 3, Genesis 4.7 and Genesis 6.5-6 onwards. The words, in translation, most often used for this are 'sin', 'evil' and 'wickedness'. These are portrayed as both actions and attitudes that are highly destructive of other people, of relationships, including with God, and ultimately damaging to the person or persons responsible themselves. Just a few examples are listed here: Numbers 5.5-7 directly links wronging another person with unfaithfulness to God.

Psalm 66.18 mentions the connection between unanswered prayer and cherishing 'sin' in one's heart. 2 Samuel 13 describes the rape of Tamar by Amnon and its impact on Tamar and her brother Absalom. Absalom subsequently had Amnon killed and, as a further consequence, became estranged from his father, King David. Psalm 7.14-16 is a summary version of the ultimate impact on the perpetrator of their own evil, echoed in Proverbs 5.21-23, 13.6, and 29.16. Jesus' recorded words in John 8.34-35 associate sinning with being a slave to sin and therefore not having the same liberated status as someone who has been released from sin. Galatians 6.7-8 refers to people reaping what they sow: those pleasing their sinful natures reap destruction for themselves and others. Sexual sin is specifically named, as with 2 Samuel 13 and 1 Corinthians 6.18.

All sin represents the opposite of the intent of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.2-17), of their summary (Leviticus 19.18, Matthew 19.19, Luke 10.27) and of Jesus' recorded words in Matthew 7.12, 'do to others what you would have them do to you'.

The Bible notes that sinning is associated with deceit and self-deceit (Jeremiah 17.9, Mark 7.22, Ephesians 4.22, Hebrews 3.13). This loss of truth is frequently confusing and further damaging to people who have been affected by sexual abuse.

People who have been sexually abused refer to being violated, and to the associated losses of childhood, innocence, joy, relationships, work, status and peace of mind. The consequences for those who have been abused may include shame, disgrace, rejection, social isolation and mental health issues. The Bible is uncompromising in spelling out the serious consequences of evil and sin, including of sexual assault and abuse, which it neither minimises nor condones. The consequences for Tamar and for her family, for example, recorded in 2 Samuel 13, and mentioned above, are very telling.

Furthermore, the Bible defines sin not solely as behaviour, serious as that is, but also adds an even higher standard of thoughts and intentions: see Exodus 20.17 (you shall not covet), Psalm 36.1-4 (self-flattery, deceit and plotting evil and

sin), Jeremiah 17.9 (the human heart as the source of deceit), Matt. 5.27-28 (thoughts alone about another person being as adulterous as the actual act), and Ephesians 4.22 (deceitful desire). In Mark 7.20-23, Jesus clearly asserts that all significant evil thoughts and actions emanate from the human heart.

The welfare of the most vulnerable in society is a repeated theme in the Old and New Testaments: see Deuteronomy 10.18 ('he defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien'), Psalm 68.5 ('father of the fatherless, defender of widows'), Psalm 146.9 (similar wording), and James 1.27 ('Religion that God … accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...').

Jesus treated women with respect in a way that was counter-cultural in First Century Middle Eastern society. For example: Jesus' conversations with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15.21-28), the Samarian woman at the well (John 4.1-30), the woman caught in adultery (John 8.1-11), and with Mary and Martha (Luke 10.38-42, John 11.17-47). The gospel accounts suggest that women were among Jesus' followers from the outset and throughout his earthly ministry (Luke 8.2-3, Mark 14.3-9, Luke 24.1-10).

Jesus also welcomed children (Matthew 19.13-15), commending their example of trust (Matthew 18.1-4) and humility. He commented that whoever welcomed a child welcomed him (Matthew 18.5) and also the one who sent him (Mark 9.37). Jesus observed that children are the recipients of God's wisdom (Matthew 11.25) and the providers of God's praise (Matthew 21.16, quoting Zechariah 9.9). Jesus does not mince his words about the preferential fate ('better to have a large millstone hung round his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea') for anyone who adversely affects a child or a young believer's faith, and the personal responsibility that such a perpetrator bears: Matthew 18.6-7. Moreover, to the extent that Jesus extolled childlike faith and trust, it must be construed that anything that destroys that trust is to be avoided at all costs.

Trinitarian theology is having a significant impact on Christian anthropology—our understanding of what it is to be human, from a Christian perspective. Rather than solely seeing each

individual human being as 'made in the image of God', it is enabling theologians to conceive of human being as a more corporate activity in the image of a triune God whose chief distinguishing characteristic is love. This trinitarian approach places equal emphasis on each unique and individual person, the quality of relationships and boundaries between them and the existence of outgoing, creative, and supportive reciprocal love, one to the other. Sexual abuse is thus particularly damaging because it affects each of these significant facets of being human in the image of God, simultaneously eroding the identity and worth of each individual, the sense of self, the relationships and trust between people, and the creative reciprocity of supportive and outgoing love. James Poling and Susan Shooter both note the lack of differentiation between 'self' and 'other' that can occur in abuse situations (Poling 1991, p.66; Shooter 2012, p.25).

Where was God when this was happening? Why did God allow this to happen, or not stop it? The Bible offers a range of responses to these pressing and traumatic questions of theodicy, including the encouragement to ask God directly. The Psalms and the books of Job, Jeremiah and Lamentations provide rich sources and examples of of addressing God about the reality, breadth, depth and harshness of things going seriously wrong. The Psalmist takes God to task, asking why these things have happened and expecting God to act. The Psalmist even describes sexual sin as ultimately being committed against God (Psalm 51). The Psalms also encourage us to pray specifically for those who suffer as a result of sin; Psalm 7.9: 'O righteous God, who searches hearts and minds, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.' The book of Job similarly takes God directly to task. The last five chapters of Job, and the abrupt changes from lament to praise in some of the Psalms, suggest that God graciously responds to such acute questioning.

The Bible proffers other responses to dreadful experiences and events. One response is God's clear unequivocal view on, and complete opposition to, all behaviour and thoughts that are damaging, or potentially damaging, to human beings. See Proverbs 15.26: 'The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked.' Thus, to be on God's side requires the complete relinquishment of such behaviour and thought, summed up in the word 'repentance'. 2 Timothy 2.19 affirms that 'everyone who confesses the name of the Lord *must turn away from wickedness*.'

Another response and persistent theme in the Bible is that God will deal effectively with those who do damage to others. 'The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous', Psalm 1.5. See also Proverbs 11.5-6, 21, Jeremiah 17.10, Matthew 25.31-46, Hebrews 10.30-31, and Revelation 21.27. In this ultimate court of justice, Abraham's attributed question in Genesis 18 resonates: 'Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

The Bible contains a further extraordinary theme that runs alongside these twin considerations of God's opposition to all that damages human beings, and of justice, and that is of God's love, mercy and grace. This is encapsulated in passages such as Isaiah 55.7-9, Ezekiel 18.21-32, 33.14-20, and Micah 7.18-19. The New Testament gospels and the epistles describe and explain the extent of God's love, mercy and grace as demonstrated specifically in the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, for example: John 1. 9-14, 29, 3.16-21, and Philippians 2.6-8.

In Christian thought the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the means by which God ultimately deals with evil and sin and their disastrous impacts on people. J.B. Phillips (1960) translates Colossians 1.19-20 as follows:

> It was in him (Jesus Christ) that that the full nature of God chose to live, and through him God planned to reconcile in his person, as it were, everything on earth and everything in heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross.

Romans 3.22-26, 5.6-11 and Ephesians 2.1-10 amplify these themes of God's justice and God's love coinciding in the death of Christ on the cross. The cross thus acknowledges and addresses the awful significance and consequence of evil and sin, whilst simultaneously underscoring God's extraordinary love for human beings. Susan Shooter (2012, p. 17) suggests that God suffering with, as well as for, us has proved helpful for healing in the journey of some survivors.

There has been some relatively recent discussion about the Biblical accounts of the crucifixion in relation to sexual abuse. Michael Trainor (2013; 2014) has argued that the nakedness, degradation and shame associated with Roman crucifixion holds relevance for those who suffer from sexual abuse. David Tombs (Figueroa & Tombs 2019) has similarly referred to sexual

humiliation, and to the power and control exercised by Roman authorities containing echoes for those affected by sexual abuse, intimidation and violence. Tombs tested this proposition out on a small-scale with adult male survivors of institutional sexual abuse in Peru. Elaine Heath, Professor of Mission and Pastoral Theology at Duke Divinity School and herself a survivor of sexual abuse, has also suggested (Heath 2011) that, in Jesus' culture, being stripped naked in front of the Roman soldiers and later a watching crowd was an act of sexual violation.

The Guidance refers to some of the key emotional effects of being abused as feeling guilty, ashamed and worthless. Gospel accounts record that Jesus was particularly compassionate towards, and went out of his way for, people who exhibited such emotions. Survivors may need specialist counselling to assist with these debilitating and negative feelings. The Bible reinforces that God's love is unconditional and extended to all people, whatever their experience may have been (see Lamentations 3.19-23). This love is personal, individual, respectful and caring, regarding people as being of infinite worth (Psalm 139, Luke 12.6-7). The Bible contains reassurances about the extent of any forgiveness that might felt to be needed from God (Psalm 130.11-12). It also acknowledges that faith in God is not easy, especially when people have suffered, and are still suffering (Psalm 88, 137). In around half of the healing miracles recorded in the gospels, it was the faith of the sufferers' family or friends, rather than the sufferer themselves, that is commented on.

Healing is also a process that may take considerable time, or appear not to be occurring at all. Again, the Bible suggests that God has an active interest in people's healing, blessing, wholeness and peace. See Exodus 15.26 'I am the Lord who heals you', or Numbers 6.24-26, Psalm 29.11, 30.2, Isaiah 53.5, John 14.27, Hebrews 13.20-21. There is also a sense from the Bible that God has an interest in seeing tangible good replacing damage done and years lost: see Numbers 5.5-7, Joel 2.25.

APPENDIX 2

RESOURCE MATERIALS

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Prayers and liturgical resources

Prayers for those suffering abuse, from:

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- Anglican Church of Australia, at https://www.anglican.org.au
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Liturgy of Healing from Abuse for Women: Anglican Church of New Zealand, at https://liturgy.co.nz/resources/New-Zealand/Worship-Template/healing_abuse.pdf

Resource page at Faith Trust Institute, at https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/liturgy

Information about sexual abuse in the Church and the community

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