

Essential information when managing allegations of non-recent abuse.

What do we mean by non-recent abuse?

“Non-recent child abuse, sometimes called historical abuse, is when an adult was abused as a child or young person under the age of 18.” NSPCC 2020

Non-recent abuse refers to both abuse which occurred within institutions or at the hands of professionals and to historical abuse allegations made about non-professionals, i.e. family members, carers, or other young people.

It is important to follow your church safeguarding procedures just as if the allegation was one of current sexual abuse.

What should we do if someone discloses non-recent abuse?

When someone discloses that they have been sexually abused it is important to reassure them of your support. Clarify whether this is something that they have previously shared and if the police have been involved. This will help you to work out what the next steps may be.

You should always pass on the disclosure to the Designated Person for Safeguarding within your church, even if the person disclosing to you states that they do not want any action to be taken on their behalf. This can be done verbally but should then be followed up in writing. It is important that you tell the person who has made the disclosure what you are doing and that the Designated Person for Safeguarding may need to speak to them.

The Designated Person for Safeguarding will take the lead in making any reports to the police or social services that are necessary.

It is important to remember that whilst someone might be disclosing abuse that happened to them many years ago, that does not mean that there are not others who are still at risk from their abuser. This is why it is always important to pass the information on to the Designated Person for Safeguarding, and why the statutory services may also need to be involved.

Why might someone choose to disclose non-recent abuse at a later date?

When someone discloses non-recent abuse for the first time they may have been considering it for a long time or there might have been something recently that has triggered the need to disclose now. For example, it is not unusual for someone to disclose non-recent abuse after they have attended safeguarding training with their church or after the birth of a child or grandchild. Other reasons why people might choose to disclose now are:

- Their circumstances have changed and they now feel safe, away from their abuser.
- They have undergone counselling and now feel ready to tell someone about their experiences.
- They have become increasingly aware that their abuser may still have access to other children and they may be at risk.

- They have heard recent news about their abuser, even that the abuser has died.
- They have previously tried to disclose but have not been believed. They now have confidence that they will be believed and helped this time.
- There is heightened coverage of sexual abuse in the media as a result of high profile celebrity investigations, the MeToo campaign and abuse within institutions which makes them feel more confident that they would be believed.

Case Study – Helena

Helena is in her late 60's. She stopped attending church when she was 16, but until that time had been attending a Baptist Church. She has recently started attending church again. The minister at the church has chatted to her a few times but noticed that Helena appears slightly uneasy and has sometimes left church quite suddenly during the service.

One day Helena appeared upset. When the minister went to comfort her, Helena told her that when she was a child, she had been sexually abused by a teenage boy who helped with the Sunday school. Whenever she sees the children going out to class during the service it reminds her of this. She knows those children are perfectly safe but can't help wondering where her abuser is now and if he is still teaching Sunday school. She is worried that he might have abused other children and feels bad that she didn't say anything about what happened to her so he could be stopped.

Why haven't they disclosed before now?

There are many reasons why someone might not have disclosed before now. Here are some examples:

- Fear of not being believed
- Not recognising that what they experienced was abuse
- The memories are too traumatic to share
- Concerns about other people's discomfort
- Fear about what will happen once they disclose
- Concern about the impact on other people of disclosure (for example family members)
- Feeling ashamed
- Feeling responsible for what happened to them

Case Study: Nigel

Nigel is a man in his late 30's. He has a successful career and has been married for a few years. When he was 14 he was groomed and sexually abused by a teacher at his school. The teacher had made him feel special and it was only when he was in his 20's that he realised that the relationship wasn't appropriate and that he had been sexually abused. He felt torn between loyalty to the teacher, who had been an amazing support to him when things had been tricky at home and also embarrassed that he had been 'taken in' by them so he didn't tell anyone about it. He just got on with his life.

Nigel's son has just started secondary school and he has found himself worrying about him. Nigel listens intently when his son talks about his favourite teacher but feels uncomfortable. He is

worrying about his son so much and it is affecting his sleep and he is remembering his own experiences as a teenager.

Nigel decides that he needs to talk to someone about what happened to him and how it is affecting him now. He decides to talk to one of the pastoral workers at church who he knows well.

Referring Disclosures of Non-recent Abuse to the Police

In most cases of non-recent abuse the Police are the most relevant authority to refer the matter to. If the alleged abuser has children within their family or social network or works in a position of trust with children and young people there may be a need to involve the LADO (Local Area Designated Officer) or Children's Social Care team. If these agencies need to be involved then the police will contact them and call a multi-agency strategy meeting to agree who will lead the investigation.

Some police forces now have a specialist team to investigate non-recent abuse but this is not always the case. Regardless of whether there is a specialist team or not, the route to reporting the abuse is the same, using the 101 number in the first instance. If you believe that others may be at imminent risk of harm as a result of this disclosure contact the police using 999.

As far as possible you should report the disclosure to the police force covering the area where the abuse is alleged to have taken place, not the area where the person disclosing the abuse is now living. It is easy to do this using the 101 service as it gives you the option of choosing either your local police force or a different one. If you are unsure where the abuse took place then report it to your local police force. The important thing is that it is reported to the police somewhere.

The police will ask you how you came to have this knowledge and it is important to explain that you have received a direct disclosure from the person who has experienced the abuse. (This means that before the DPS contacts the police, they need to have had a direct conversation with the person making the disclosure, clarifying specific details that the police might need to proceed)

Often the police will be reluctant to accept a report from a third party, which you would be in this case. Wherever possible involve the person who has experienced the abuse in speaking to the police. It might be that you are with them when you make the initial call and then hand the phone to them once you have outlined the concern.

Information the Police may ask for in an initial conversation about the abuse and alleged abuser:

- The alleged abuser's full name
- Date of birth (or rough age now)
- Their address (or at least the town that they resided in)
- The connection between the person disclosing and the alleged abuser (ie. Family member, youth worker, teacher, babysitter etc)
- Where the abuse is alleged to have taken place (ie. Name of school, church, alleged abusers house)
- When it took place (ie. Specific dates, years, ages of person making the disclosure at the time)
- What was the nature of the abuse (ie. Touching breasts or genital area, sexual intercourse)

Even if you don't know all of the information the police are asking it is still important to share the information that you do have when someone has disclosed non-recent abuse. Explain to the police that you are making the report because you are concerned that others may be at risk. You will need to share the name and contact details of the person who has disclosed the abuse.

What happens if the person disclosing abuse does not want to make a complaint to the police?

This is not an uncommon situation. Often someone disclosing non-recent abuse will be hesitant to make the report to the police themselves. They may be fearful about not being believed or having to go to court to give evidence against their abuser. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and recognise that whilst they may have taken the first step in sharing the disclosure with you they may not feel ready to take things further. This is always challenging because it is important to also consider the wider risk of harm.

In these situations you should contact the police anyway and explain that the person making the disclosure is not currently wanting to make a formal statement but you are concerned that others may be at risk. It is helpful to pass on the contact details to the police for the person making the disclosure. Often the police will then initiate contact with the person making the disclosure. Until they have spoken to them it is unlikely that the police will take further action.

Explain to the person making the disclosure that this is a process that the church needs to go through, but it will remain their choice whether they speak to the police and pursue an investigation or not. It is not uncommon for someone who initially said that they did not want to make a statement to opt into this process if they are contacted by the police directly.

Communication and Pastoral Support

People who have experienced abuse are likely to be anxious when you explain that you need to pass their disclosure on to the DPS, and then to the police. It is important that throughout the process of reporting you keep in touch with them and let them know what is happening; especially if someone else who they haven't shared information with might contact them about it (the DPS or police).

It is important to work with the person disclosing abuse to identify someone to provide pastoral support to them. This might be the person that they originally disclosed to but if they do not feel able to offer that support on a long term basis consideration should be given to who else could support that person. It might be that the person making the disclosure would feel more comfortable with being supported by someone outside of their immediate church family. If this is the case then the DPS could speak to their regional Baptist Association safeguarding lead and they can help to identify someone locally who is experienced in providing pastoral care and who they consider to be appropriate.

Bear in mind that if an allegation progresses to a police investigation and then onto court proceedings the person who has made the disclosure may be in need of consistent support for several months or even years. They may also need time to process the outcome of the case when it draws to a conclusion.



Be kind to yourself

Whether you are the DPS, the minister, or someone else in the church you need to be kind to yourself as well as the person making the disclosure. We can be surprised by our reaction to hearing someone's disclosure and in the immediacy, it is right that we focus on the person disclosing but once the initial actions have been taken, ensure that you seek support from an appropriate person. Your regional association safeguarding lead will be able to help you find someone who is more distanced from the situation and an experienced pastoral carer. Remember in these conversations to maintain confidentiality.

APPENDIX 1

What can you expect from the statutory agencies when you report historical abuse?

It is noted that in most cases when we refer to the statutory agencies in cases of non-recent abuse the lead agency will be the police.

The initial stages of reporting the disclosure you can expect:

1. They will try to gather as much information from you as possible to establish whether a crime has been committed and there is a need to investigate.
2. They will want to speak directly to the person who has experienced abuse to ascertain whether they would like to proceed with the complaint and they will engage in the process of an investigation. In most cases the statutory authorities will not be able to proceed with an investigation without their engagement.
3. They will want to know if the alleged perpetrator presents an on-going risk. For example, they have access to children in their family, or continue to have an active role in church or community groups where children are present.

If a police investigation proceeds you can expect:

4. To be asked to give a formal statement to the police of how the disclosure came about and exactly what was said
5. To be asked to provide any written records of conversations relating to the disclosure. Under Data Protection legislation and GDPR information can be shared with the statutory agencies because it is evidence or a crime or evidence of a safeguarding concern. Any agency requesting written information should put that request in writing. In most cases they will have a procedure and form to follow to make this request. If you are unsure about what to share then speak to your church Data Protection Officer.
6. To hear very little about how the investigation is progressing directly from the police. Whilst you may have provided information to the police this does not entitle you to know what is happening throughout the investigation. However, if the person making the disclosure to you originally is engaging with the investigation they should be kept informed of what stage the investigation is at.
7. There may be long periods where it appears nothing is happening on the investigation. It might be that the alleged perpetrator has been arrested but they have not co-operated with the investigation and therefore there is more work for the police to do. It might be that the police are waiting for the alleged perpetrator's phone or computer to be analysed. In general this can take several months and can severely delay the outcome of an investigation.
8. It is important to remember that this period of waiting can be a very difficult time for the person who has experienced abuse and it is important that they continue to be offered support. They will have a police officer from the investigation team assigned to them as well as being offered a referral to victim support. The victim support offer is something they can pick up any time during the process of investigation and court proceedings it is not just at the beginning.

When the police reach a decision about whether charges should be brought against the alleged perpetrator you can expect:

9. Before the police decide to charge someone with an offence they share their evidence with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This will include any information from the person who has been abused and made the disclosure, and evidence gathered more widely through their investigation. The CPS make the final decision on whether the alleged perpetrator is charged with offences and therefore whether they should go to court or not.
10. Even though you, as a representative of the church may have provided information to the police they are unlikely to share the outcome of their investigations with you. However they will tell the person who disclosed the abuse to you if the alleged abuser has been charged and will be summonsed to attend court.
11. At this stage the outcome of the case is likely to be either Charge or No Further Action. It is important to support the person who has disclosed abuse at this point. They will either face the daunting prospect of potentially having to give evidence in a court case or they will feel that the No Further Action outcome means that they have not been believed. This is not necessarily the case as No Further Action could have been the outcome for a number of different reasons. Without detailed evidence from the time of the offences or witnesses it can be deemed that there is insufficient evidence to proceed or the CPS do not consider there to be a realistic chance of a conviction.

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