

Thinking About Making a Disclosure of Church-Based Abuse?



The Church of England
Diocese of Ely

What you can expect

Making a disclosure of abuse can feel difficult, frightening or overwhelming. You may have lived with your experiences for many years, or you may only recently have begun to understand what happened to you.

There is no right or wrong time to come forward. You can choose whether, when and to whom you disclose your experiences.

We (the Diocese) are committed to listening carefully, responding respectfully, and treating all disclosures seriously. Abuse is never acceptable, and everyone who comes forward should be treated with dignity, compassion and sensitivity.

What do we mean by Church-based abuse?

Church-based abuse can include abuse that:

- Took place in a church, cathedral, school, group or activity connected to the Church.
- Was carried out by clergy, church officers, employees or volunteers.
- Involved the misuse of spiritual authority, trust, status or power.
- Happened recently or many years ago.
- Happened to a child, young person or adult.

Abuse can take many forms, including sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, financial, spiritual or neglect.

You may feel:

- Anxious about not being believed.
- Worried about what will happen next.
- Unsure whether what happened was abuse.
- Concerned about the impact on others.
- Fearful of being judged.
- Reluctant to revisit difficult memories.

These feelings are common. You will not be pressured to share more information than you feel able to give.

Deciding whether to tell someone

When you contact us

The first thing we will do is **listen**.

You can choose to contact:

- The Diocesan Safeguarding Team.
- A Parish Safeguarding Officer.
- A member of clergy.
- Another church officer you trust.

If you contact someone other than the safeguarding team, they will normally refer your information to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser so that appropriate support and safeguarding action can be considered.

What will happen during the initial conversation?

We will aim to:

Listen

You will be given time to explain what you want to tell us.

Take You Seriously

We will take your concerns seriously and treat them respectfully.

Explain Our Responsibilities

We will explain what we can and cannot keep confidential.

Talk About Safety

We may need to discuss whether anyone is currently at risk.

Explain Possible Next Steps

We will help you understand the options available to you. You will not be expected to prove what happened during your first conversation.

We will handle information sensitively and respect your privacy.

However, there may be circumstances where we need to share information with safeguarding agencies, social care services or the police if:

- A child or adult is currently at risk of harm.
- A crime may have been committed.
- There is a legal or safeguarding duty to share information.

Wherever possible, we will explain this to you and keep you informed.

Will what I tell you remain confidential?

Do I have to report to the Police?

No.

Many survivors simply want to be heard and understood.

You will be supported to understand the options available to you, which may include:

- Reporting to the police.
- Seeking therapeutic support.
- Accessing independent support services.
- Receiving pastoral support.
- Exploring other ways the Church may respond.

If there is a safeguarding concern relating to current risk, the Diocese may have responsibilities to share information with statutory agencies even if you decide not to make a report yourself. We will explain any such actions to you wherever possible.

What support is available?

Everyone's needs are different.

We will discuss what support may be helpful for you, which could include:

- Emotional support.
- Independent support services.
- Counselling or therapeutic services.
- Information and guidance.
- Support through Church processes.
- Signposting to specialist organisations.

You can decide which support options you wish to explore and which you would rather decline.

Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service for anyone who has been abused through their relationship with the Church.

You do not need to make a formal disclosure to the Diocese to access this support.

Telephone: 0300 303 1056

Email: safespaces@firstlight.org.uk

Safe Spaces – Independent Support



What if the abuse happened many years ago?

You can still tell us.

Many people disclose abuse years or even decades after it occurred.

The Diocese will take non-recent disclosures seriously and will listen to what you wish to share. Safeguarding concerns relating to past events may still require action where there is a current risk to others.

Our Commitment to you

If you choose to contact us, we will seek to:

- Listen with compassion.
- Treat you with dignity and respect.
- Take your concerns seriously.
- Explain processes clearly.
- Work in a trauma-informed and survivor-centred way.
- Support you in understanding your options.
- Help you access appropriate support.

You will be listened to, and your experience will matter.

Diocesan Safeguarding Team

Telephone: 01353 652747

If someone is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical assistance, call **999**.

Need to talk?

Important: You do not need to be certain that what happened was abuse before speaking to us. If you are worried about your experiences, or the experiences of someone else, we encourage you to make contact and discuss your concerns.