

Guidance on responding well to survivors / victims of abuse

1. Introduction

Over recent years, a growing number of people have disclosed and reported recent and non-recent abuse. There has also been significant focus on how organisations, including churches, have responded to survivors and victims of abuse. Sadly, there has been evidence that the church has often minimised, denied, or even ignored abuse. This has added to the trauma and distress of survivors and victims of abuse. This was a finding of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)¹ and particularly the [Child protection in religious organisations and settings Investigation Report](#)². There was a call to ensure that practice and support be significantly changed to improve the lived experience of survivors and victims. This document sets out our commitment to respond to those who are survivors / victims of abuse in a sensitive and compassionate way and outline how we will respond to disclosures of abuse and harm.

Who does this guidance apply to? The Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel³ (the Panel) was established in 2001 by the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the Union of Welsh Independents and the Baptist Union of Wales to support and advise them in relation to all aspects of safeguarding practice in their work. The denominations will not be named individually throughout this document but will be referred to as “the three denominations”. All Panel guidance, policies and procedures are applicable to the three denominations unless specifically stated otherwise⁴.

2. Language/ terminology

We acknowledge that abuse is an extremely sensitive subject, particularly for those who have experienced the pain and suffering that comes with it. Terms such as ‘*survivor*,’ ‘*victim*,’ ‘*perpetrator*’ or ‘*abuser*’ can hold strong emotions and connotations. Individuals may have personal preferences as to the terminology used, and this should always be respected. Throughout this document the term survivor / victim is used to describe people – including adults, children and young people who have direct first-hand experience of abuse. This term aims to acknowledge the ongoing effects and harm caused by abuse as well as honouring the strength and resilience of people with lived experience of abuse. However, we will always endeavour to use a preferred term requested by an individual in our communications with them.

3. Statement of Intent

The Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel, and “the three denominations” want to learn lessons from the past and from IICSA and are committed to respond to all disclosures of abuse, both recent and non-recent, in a sensitive and compassionate manner. As such we declare that:

1. We will strive to always respond to victims and survivors in a sensitive and compassionate manner and ensure that they are heard, understood and taken seriously.
2. We will provide details of support available and assist a survivor / victim to access appropriate support if that is what they wish.
3. We will provide easily accessible information about how to report abuse within the Church.
4. Any recent or non-recent disclosure or allegation of abuse or harm we receive directly, or become aware of, will be taken seriously. We will never dismiss any concerns or cover up abuse or alleged abuse.
5. We will, through training and example, promote **A trauma-informed approach**⁵ and a culture of listening, transparency and respect that makes it safe to disclose.
6. If a disclosure or allegation suggests that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm or abuse, we will not keep this a secret, even if requested to do so by the person disclosing.
7. We will make referrals to statutory agencies (social services and police) as appropriate.

¹ [The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse | IICSA](#). The Inquiry published its final Report in October 2022 and makes several powerful recommendations, based on separate investigations and a unique body of research. It also includes the voices of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

² Child protection in religious organisations and settings published by IICSA September 2021

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cp-religious-organisations-settings.html>

³ <https://panel.cymru/en/about-us>

⁴ See also [section 7](#) page 3

⁵ [See section 6](#) page 3

4. Responding to abuse⁶

Abuse can have a serious and long-lasting impact on individuals and families, and we acknowledge that disclosing abuse, even after many years, can be a traumatic process. The Truth Project, 2019, which was part of IICSA, received valuable input from people with lived experience of abuse. They emphasise the need for support when survivors disclose abuse and that resources, helplines, and support networks need to be available and known about within faith communities, alongside wider awareness raising. We should all be striving to adopt a trauma informed approach (see section 6 below) as a crucial step towards creating a safer environment for survivors / victims to report abuse or potential abuse, ensuring their protection and support.

We aim to respond sensitively, and effectively to those affected by abuse and will endeavour to ensure that the voice of the victim or survivor is listened to, heard, and taken into account. All our accredited ministers are required to attend regular safeguarding training that includes information on how to respond appropriately and sensitively to a disclosure. Training is also provided for volunteers.

Our response to a disclosure of abuse will include an offer to assist the survivor/ victim to access specialised support⁷ if this is what they want to happen. This will never be forced on an individual. Counselling or therapeutic work with victims and survivors of abuse is a specialised field and should always be left to those who are appropriately trained and qualified. Local churches should always respect this, as problems can arise when well-meaning but inexperienced and untrained individuals assume a "counselling" or therapeutic role. In [Appendix 1](#) there is a list of organisations who have experience and training in offering support to those who have experienced abuse.

The Church does however have a unique opportunity to offer sensitive, pastoral ministry and a supportive, caring, and protective environment to those affected by abuse. We acknowledge that disclosures may provoke shock, distress or disbelief and therefore require an openness and ability to hear upsetting details and a willingness to "think the unthinkable". There needs to be a recognition that abuse can affect people differently and lead to complex, sometimes conflicting views. This can require a range of responses, both within and beyond individual churches.

The Panel safeguarding officer is the designated safeguarding officer for the Union of Welsh Independents, the Baptist Union of Wales, and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. Many disclosures are initially shared with the local church or the central office of the denomination, and the Panel is dependent on individuals, including ministers, church safeguarding coordinators, church officers and members to bring these concerns promptly to the attention of the Panel. Local churches or denominations should not keep concerns and disclosures "in-house". All our safeguarding training emphasises the importance of reporting concerns at an early stage and stresses that, if in doubt, you should always call to get advice. We stress that there is no requirement for abuse or neglect to have occurred before deciding to act. It is enough to have a concern or suspicion in order to seek advice, and those reporting should not try to gain evidence or investigate first. Failure to report abuse is a serious contravention of our policy and guidance⁸.

5. Referrals to statutory services

Where a disclosure suggests that children or vulnerable adults are at risk or, may be at risk of abuse or harm, the panel safeguarding officer will make a referral or support the church to make a referral to the relevant social services department or the police. Disclosures or other safeguarding concerns which are brought directly to one of the three denominations will be passed to the Panel and will not be managed internally. We will never block or discourage appropriate reporting to statutory authorities.

⁶ See [appendix 2](#) and 3

⁷ The Panel /three denominations is unable to provide an in-house specialised support service for survivors but will signpost or refer individuals to specialised providers and can assist and support them to access the support.

⁸ <https://panel.cymru/en/advice-and-support> and [appendix 2](#)

It is not up to the local church or the denomination to decide whether abuse has occurred or not, or to assess the potential future impact of a disclosure. Their role is to report the concern. Local churches, a church minister or leader should not keep knowledge of abuse or alleged abuse internally within the church but should contact the Panel safeguarding officer or Thirtyone:eight⁹ for advice and support. A local church or denomination should never avoid making a referral to avoid offending or upsetting an individual within the church or to protect the reputation of an individual or organisation.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of forgiveness in the Christian faith and that forgiveness may be important in a survivor/victim's journey, this will never be forced on an individual. Neither will it be viewed as an alternative to support or appropriate referrals to statutory agencies and putting appropriate safeguards in place.

The safety and protection of a child or adult at risk should always take priority. We are dependent on local social services and the police to make the appropriate assessments regarding the safety and protection of children and adults at risk; this is not the churches role. This key step can only happen effectively if the relevant referrals are made in a timely manner.

6. A trauma-informed approach

We will promote and encourage churches to take a trauma-aware¹⁰ approach which is part of a trauma-informed approach¹¹. This should impact all aspects of church life as well as our specific response to survivor / victims. Rather than following a prescribed set of policies and procedures, a trauma-informed approach adheres to key principles:

Key principles of a trauma-informed approach (from NAPAC):

1. **SAFETY:** This means that we aim to make all those who come into contact with our churches feel safe. The physical setting is safe, and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety.
2. **TRUSTWORTHINESS:** We carry out our activities with transparency and aim to build and maintain trust among staff, members, and all visitors and those connected to our churches.
3. **COLLABORATION:** We work together across the Church and Panel in a partnering and non-hierarchical manner.
4. **EMPOWERMENT:** We aim to recognise and build on an individual's strengths and skills and help them to learn new ones.
5. **CHOICE:** We aim to offer appropriate choice and recognise that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualised approach. Offer support that gives control, voice, and agency to victim / survivors.
6. **CULTURAL:** Moving past cultural stereotypes and prejudices e.g. gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, geography, race or ethnicity.

7. Additional comments

The three denominations that form the Panel will endeavour to ensure that the procedures noted above for dealing with concerns and supporting survivors / victims is known widely across their churches and put into practice. The three central offices will refer all safeguarding cases to the Panel and offer relevant support and pastoral care as recommended by the Panel.

However, we must acknowledge that the three denominations operate different governance and legal processes and procedures. If a safeguarding case requires legal input, it will become the responsibility of the individual denomination to facilitate this, not the Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel. Having said that the Panel will be informed of the main decisions and developments in such cases and will make additional referrals to statutory agencies in the case of additional concerns or added information.

⁹ The Panel has a service agreement with Thirtyone:eight to enable churches from the three denominations to access their [SAFEGUARDING HELPLINE](#) when the Panel officers are unavailable and out of hours 0303 003 1111

¹⁰ A trauma aware approach is part 1 of a trauma informed approach. It challenges perceptions that maintain oppression and inequality and highlights that people in all communities have a role to play in preventing ACEs, adversity and trauma and supporting resilience through connection, inclusion and compassion. <https://traumaframeworkcymru.com/>

¹¹ [Trauma-informed practice: what it is and why NAPAC supports it – NAPAC](#)

See also <https://panel.cymru/en/survivors>

ACTION ON SPIRITUAL ABUSE (formerly Replenished Life): is a multi faith and inclusive support charity based in Wales offering support and information relating to abuse and trauma within faith, including a help line. They aim to make sure that everyone who experiences harm in a spiritual setting receives high-quality support, from organisations that are well equipped to deliver that support <https://www.actiononspiritualabuse.org.uk/>

SURVIVORS VOICES: is an abuse survivor-led organisation that turns the pain of abuse into power to improve responses to trauma. They work with survivors of all types of abuse. They are all 'experts by experience,' a community of volunteers, freelancers, workers, and advisers from a variety of backgrounds. Our vision is for a safer society with support for survivors that is survivor-sensitive, survivor-empowering and services that are trauma-aware and trauma-competent. <https://survivorsvoices.org/>

MACSAS: (Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors) supports those who have been sexually abused as children or adults, by ministers, clergy, or others under the guise of the Church. They support those who have remained within or left their Christian communities. Freephone Helpline 08088 01 03 40 (Wednesday 7-9.30 pm or Saturdays 9-11am). www.macsas.org.uk/

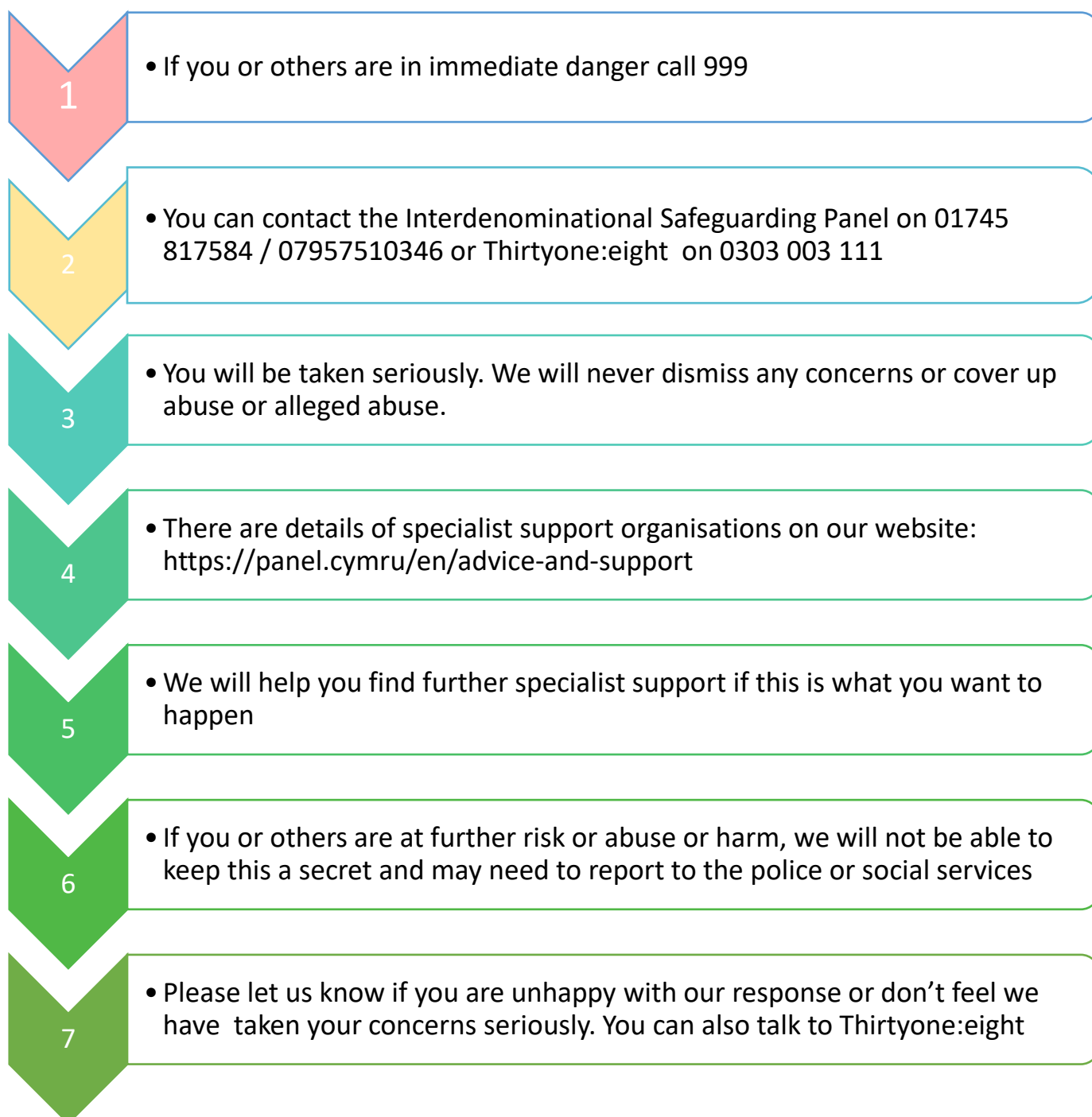
THE SURVIVORS TRUST: The Survivors Trust (TST) is a UK-wide national umbrella agency for [120 specialist organisations](#) for support for the impact of rape, sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse throughout the UK and Ireland. <https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/>

NAPAC: (National Association for People Abused in Childhood)
Offers support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect. Support line 0808 801 0331 (Mon-Thu 10am-9pm & Fri 10am-6pm) free from landlines and mobiles *calls will not show on your bill* <https://napac.org.uk/what-napac-does/>

Stepping Stones is a registered charity providing therapeutic services to adults who have been sexually abused as children across North Wales
<https://steppingstonesnorthwales.co.uk/>

Safe in Faith is a project of Caritas Westminster working to support survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation in ways that understand how their faith impacts their experiences. Although this is a Catholic organisation, based in the values of Catholic Social Teaching they work with people of different faiths. The project grew out of the Domestic Abuse Working Group of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, as well as work of Caritas Westminster and the National Board of Catholic Women.
<https://caritaswestminster.org.uk/safe-in-faith/who-we-are/>

VICTIM / SURVIVOR: HOW TO REPORT RECENT OR NON-RECENT ABUSE OR CONCERNS



Appendix 3: HOW TO RESPOND TO A CONCERN

12

- 1 • If you suspect abuse or it is disclosed to you listen carefully, don't ask leading questions
- 2 • Believe that abuse can happen never ignore a hunch, never cover up for others or keep abuse a secret
- 3 • Write down your concerns / conversations as soon as possible
- 4 • Share your concerns with your designated safeguarding person(DSP)¹² as soon as possible
- 5 • In an emergency call 999 immediately
- 6 • Do not investigate or approach an alleged perpetrator yourself.
- 7 • Inform the individual you are concerned about (victim/survivor) what the next steps will be if appropriate and possible. Take advice from the DSP
- 8 • Keep up to date with the churches safeguarding policy and procedures

Responding to concern 2-sided card [https:// panel.cymru/images/leaflet_03-24_eng_2_page.pdf](https://panel.cymru/images/leaflet_03-24_eng_2_page.pdf)

If you HEAR, SEE or SUSPECT that a CHILD, YOUNG PERSON or VULNERABLE ADULT has suffered, or is at risk of ABUSE, NEGLECT or HARM

 **MAKE A CAREFUL NOTE** of what you have been told or what you have seen or suspect

 If someone is in IMMEDIATE DANGER: contact the police, ambulance or social services duty team without delay

 **FOR ALL OTHER CONCERNS SEEK ADVICE**

 **PANEL SAFEGUARDING OFFICER: 07957510346**
For out of office hours advice call the THIRTYONE:EIGHT HELPLINE: 0303 003 1111

 Or visit our website for more sources of support <https://panel.cymru/en/advice-and-support>

 **IF IN DOUBT — CALL TO GET ADVICE**
Don't assume that someone else will take action or it's not serious enough to take action.
It's not up to you or the church to decide if abuse has taken place

 In all cases let the Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel office know about the situation and action you have taken

If you are concerned about an individual or a situation, call for advice

During office hours (9-5) please contact the Panel officers
01745 817584 / 07957 510346
post@panel.cymru* <https://panel.cymru>

 Panel Diogelu Cydenwadol
Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel



Outside of office hours for urgent advice call:
0303 003 1111

 **thirtyone:eight**
Creating safer places Together

The Panel now has an out of office support agreement with thirtyone:eight covering evenings, weekends and bank holidays.
Please contact their safeguarding helpline for advice quoting Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel.
Please do not contact thirtyone: eight with any DBS queries

*Do not use email for urgent safeguarding concerns

¹² The Panel safeguarding officer is the designated safeguarding person for the three denominations
Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel – Responding well to survivors /victims of abuse 03-26 review 03/2027