

Support — Listeners

When there is a gathering for victims and survivors of abuse, families and communities, it is important to provide some 'Listener Support'.

Prayer and liturgy can touch on powerful emotions and memories, but so can other meetings and times of reflection. It is important therefore that at any gathering that is about abuse there are people available, listeners, who can provide a sympathetic ear to anyone present who wants to talk. For some it may be about their own personal story, as victim, survivors, family member, friend; for others it may be a more general hurt about the Church.

There are often trained and experienced listeners in a Diocese. You know the wise and compassionate people in your community. It is helpful to have both women and men available as listeners. Include some from outside your particular parish/place.

Listeners might be coordinated by a member of a Diocesan Spirituality Team in collaboration with a member of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. They together brief the listeners before the gathering, based on this document (which could also be sent out prior), and it would be appropriate to end this briefing with prayer. It may also be helpful to send to listeners beforehand *Hurt by Abuse*, a leaflet which offers helpful guidance on listening.

Be Aware — and provide supportive listening

- On the principle of 'do no harm', it is helpful to know what **not** to do.
 - Do not 'debrief' or say 'tell me all about it' – do not pressurise to tell story.
 - Do not judge, do not be intrusive.
 - Do not minimise experiences and feelings.
 - Do not question on things the person found traumatic.
- And what you can do.
 - You are providing a kind supportive response to a fellow human being who is hurting.
 - Offer a safe welcoming space and attentive listening ear.
 - Be calm yourself. Comfort and help them to feel calm.
 - Accept and believe their experience.
 - Respect their boundaries — both physical and emotional.
 - Support through empathic listening, do not take over. No advice or platitudes.
 - Be hopeful.
 - If you are **not** an expert in trauma response, know when and who to refer on to — information, services, further support. E.g. 'There are services others have found helpful...'

Common sense guidelines would include:

- DBS check (though this ministry is in public and may not require one)
- Listeners are clearly identifiable — this could be by wearing something distinguishing such as a brooch, lanyard or sash.
- Listeners are clearly visible — placed around the church or hall but out of earshot of others. It may be helpful to have some background music.
- Listeners are there for this Gathering only: they do not arrange to meet those they have listened to privately afterwards.
- Listeners pray beforehand — ideally with those leading the gathering – and between each person who comes.
- Listeners should have lists of local agencies or Christian listening services for follow-up.
- It can be useful to have one or two 'roving listeners'. They should be experienced Listeners/Directors as their task is to be aware of people – participants or Listeners - who seem to be struggling. They will try to ensure that no-one leaves the church in distress.
- Listeners and priests should have a short session of prayer and reflection at the end to share (as appropriate) anything that needs to be off-loaded. A blessing would be appropriate.