

Newsletter

Latest News from the National Office for
Safeguarding Children in the Catholic
Church in Ireland

ALERT BOX

This part of the Newsletter is designed to draw the attention of Church authorities to important developments outlined below:

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December 2022

National Office Staff

Click on any of the links below to send an email directly to any member of staff

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Introduction

In the wake of recent media coverage a number of people have come forward to disclose the abuse they suffered as children at the hands of clerics and members of male and female religious orders and congregations. This abuse should never have happened. Nor should the environment which enabled the abuse of children in Catholic ministry, have been allowed to develop. We want to express our sadness for the failures and the abuse, and acknowledge the far reaching and lifetime effects these horrendous crimes have on people, their family and community.

For the past year, National Board staff have engaged with victims and survivors to listen to their experiences, in an effort to put in place much more robust procedures and practices so that the response we give, recognises the depth and duration of the pain caused. It is important that every opportunity is provided to those who have been harmed to enable their voices to be heard. A voice which has often been taken away as part of the control exerted by an abuser.

The revelations over the past few weeks highlight that the existing systems that are in place to respond and care pastorally to victims and survivors, do not appear to be working for everyone. Some of the recent allegations are not new, but have been made by people who have felt dissatisfied by the response they have received from the Church.

If we are to truly listen to the voice of survivors, it is important that we act. Perhaps now in the period of the synod it is time for fresh thinking. Victims and survivors have told us they want to be included in determining an appropriate response; this can be in response to an individual who comes forward to share their pain, or at an institutional level, where a Church body needs to engage survivors who want the Church to provide redress and atonement. The National Board will host meetings early in 2023, to begin a discussion on what further needs to happen in terms of a Church response to victim and their families. If you have ideas or wish to join the discussion, please contact the National Office.

It is also important to acknowledge the significant improvements that have been made in how children are safeguarded in the Church. It would be wrong to ignore the efforts made across female and male religious congregations, and dioceses and by the many thousands of staff and volunteers who work hard to promote safe care of children. There have also been improvements in creating safe environments, responding and reporting allegations, managing respondents and caring for survivors, a sentiment acknowledged by some of the survivors that the National Board have met and evidenced in National Board reviews.

However, we need to do more. Pope Francis said it is '...our shame, my shame, for the inability of the Church for too long to put [survivors] at the centre of its concerns.' This process of consideration will not be easy, but it is vital that it happens and for it to be successful we need to 'enlarge our tent' to use the analogy of the Irish synodal pathway, to put survivors at the centre of the discussion of how we as a Church respond.

Reviews of Safeguarding Practice

All dioceses have now engaged in the review process. Reviews that have been completed and reported on can be found here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/publications/national-board-publications>. We hope to complete all diocesan reviews by June 2023.

Five (5) female and male religious order reviews have been completed, one is in planning. It is not a requirement for any religious order who no longer have ministry with children, and who are not managing allegations to be reviewed by the National Board. If you are uncertain about your status please write to Teresa Devlin at the National Office.

Provincials and superiors who are interested in inviting the National Board to conduct a review of safeguarding practice in their Church body please contact teresa.devlin@safeguarding.ie, or call on 015053124.

Data Protection and Information Sharing

Following further legal advice received by senior counsel, the National Board will be making changes to how advice is offered to Church authorities. The legal advice that we have received is as follows:

Advice from the National Board staff and NCMC

The National Board may be viewed as data controllers in respect of the processing of personal data when providing advisory services, and must comply with the obligations of a data controller under Article 5 of the General Data Protection Regulation. In particular, the National Board must have a legal basis to process the data and the church body must have a legal basis to transfer the personal data to the National Board and/ or the NCMC. We are of the view that both the Church body and the National Board can rely on the legal basis of legitimate interest when processing personal data for the purposes of the advisory services, however we do not believe that we have the legal ability to process special category personal data, such as medical information or information regarding sexual orientation, when providing advisory services.

Accordingly, in order to avoid any data protection concerns we would ask that you do not share any personal data with us when requesting advice (i.e. any data that identifies or could identify a living individual), whether special category personal data or not. If you require and further information on this, please do contact us.

Sharing information as part of child safeguarding Reviews:

In relation to child safeguarding reviews, we are of the view that the National Board acts as a data processor as opposed to a data controller, given that specific instructions are provided by the church with regard to the review and that the National Board is measuring the church against standards set out by that church. Accordingly, it could be said that the church body is determining the purpose of the processing. In this regard, the National Board will continue to carry out its review work, on the basis that it is acting as a data processor, under the data processing deeds already agreed with the Data Protection Commission.

Annual Self Audits

There is a requirement under Indicator 7.1 of the Child Safeguarding Policy, for a Church authority to put in place arrangements to ensure and evaluate compliance with safeguarding standards and produce a report on the level of compliance. The annual self-audits should be conducted between January – March 2023 and a report made to the National Board by first week in April, confirming that the self-audit has been complete. The self-audit provides an opportunity for a Church authority to review what is working well and what needs to improve in child safeguarding within the Church body.

Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for Catholic Church in Ireland (2016) Revision

The members of the Steering Group overseeing the revision of the Church's child safeguarding policy are: Garry Kehoe (Dublin Archdiocese); Mary Tallon (Safeguarding Coordinator for OFM Franciscans, Dominican Fathers, and MSC); Brendan Dineen (Redemptorists); Dame Joan Walsh (Meath Diocese); Saoirse Fox (Safeguarding Coordinator Jesuits); Philip O Hara (Down and Connor Safeguarding Coordinator); Archbishop Francis Duffy (Tuam Archdiocese); Abbot Brendan Coffey (Benedictines Glenstal Abbey); and Avril Halley (Safeguarding Coordinator for the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and Augustinians).

Listening meetings are continuing with children, young people and young leaders. We are also extending our discussions with external NGOs to learn of their experiences in working with victims/survivors.

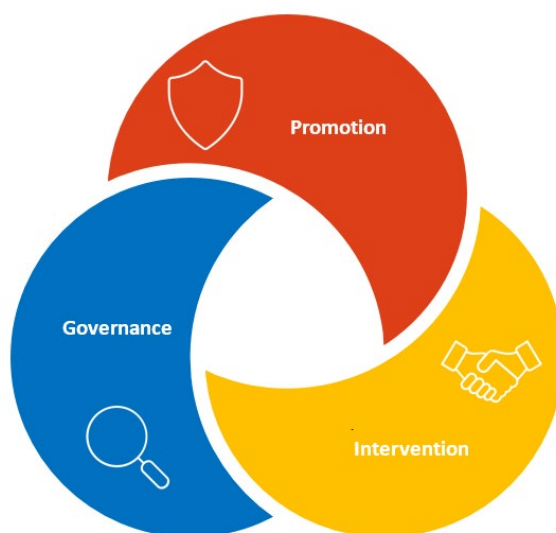
We have decided to extend the period of consultation, to allow us to hear and understand better the feelings and of victims for reparation.

In the meantime, the Steering Group is reviewing another iteration of a draft policy. The three main themes of the policy include:

- Promotion of good safeguarding practice – creating and maintaining safe environments.
- Responding to allegations – caring for complainants and ensuring a just response for respondents.
- Governance and leadership.

The aim of the revised policy is to embed a culture of safeguarding across the Church.

If you have views on the revised policy framework please contact teresa.devlin@safeguarding.ie.



Training and Support

A new training and support strategy has been produced and will be available soon at this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/news-events/events>. The strategy outlines the direction of travel for safeguarding training in Ireland between 2023-2025, and outlines our achievements against the objectives set in the last strategic plan.

Training for 2023

Two training dates have been set for 2023 and now available for booking these are:

- 1st February- Training for lay associations of the faithful- As the process for accepting lay associations to become constituent members of the National Board has been approved, this training aims to provide advice, guidance and support on the process and the implications for becoming accepted as an associate member of the National Board. Should you wish to take part in this training course you can do so by following this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/events/training-for-lay-associations> .
- 15th February- Training for new Church authorities- This training is for new leaders of Church bodies to induct them into their strategic role in relation to child safeguarding. You can book your place by following this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/events/safeguarding-training-for-new-church-authorities-3> .

Further training dates will be available on the website over the coming months. Please check <https://www.safeguarding.ie/news-events/events> for updates.

Child Safeguarding statements

It is important that all of those who have ministry with children in the Republic of Ireland check their child safeguarding statement to ensure it is the most up to date version following amendments made in December 2021. You can access the latest version here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/roles2/6-2d/download>.

In addition, a requirement of the statement is that it is reviewed on a regular basis, at the very minimum every 24 months. You should note at the bottom of the template statement, the date of review; failure to review and to note a date of review could result in Tusla determining that the statement is not compliant with the legislative requirements.



Guidance Updates

Since the last newsletter, there have been a number of important changes made to the National Board's guidance; these include:

- New guidance on managing allegations against Bishops and their equivalents
- New guidance on managing actions or omissions against Bishops and their equivalents
- New guidance on lay associations of the faithful.
- Updated guidance on Child Safeguarding Statement and boarding schools.

All guidance updates are now available on the National Board website here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/policy-guidance/view-latest-updates-to-the-guidance>.

In addition to these changes the Board has been in contact with relevant external agencies around the following areas of guidance:

- **Use of Church property for once off private functions** - The National Board is in discussions with Allianz to clarify the position around one off events and will update our guidance after this.
- **Reporting allegations against deceased priests**
In the Republic of Ireland following a decision by the IEC and AMRI alongside a recent high court judgement, allegations against deceased priests and religious should now be reported to Tusla as well as An Garda Siochana.

In relation to reporting allegations against deceased personnel in Northern Ireland, the National Board will be meeting with relevant Government officials in January to clarify the civil law requirements and will update the guidance on the website following this meeting.

- **Child Safeguarding Statement** – The Department of Education in the Republic of Ireland has issued new guidance to boarding schools in relation to child safeguarding statements. As a result the National Board has reviewed the guidance on child safeguarding statements and made amendments. The new guidance can be viewed here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/roles2/6-2d/download>. Please note that the changes have been made to the guidance only and not the child safeguarding statement template.



IICSA Summary

The investigation into the **Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, as part of the Independent Investigation into Child Sexual abuse** revealed that between 1970 and 2015, the Church received more than 3,000 complaints against more than 900 individuals. In the same period, there were 177 prosecutions, resulting in 133 convictions. Millions of pounds have been paid to victims and survivors in civil proceedings. Since 2016, there have been more than 100 reported allegations of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse every year. The true scale of abuse over a 50-year period is likely to be much greater.

The IICSA final report stated

“Responses to disclosures about child sexual abuse have been characterised by a failure to support victims and survivors – in stark contrast to the positive action often taken to protect perpetrators and the reputation of the Church.

The reactions of Church leaders over time were marked by delay in implementing change, as well as reluctance to hold individuals to account or to make sincere apologies. On occasions, they conveyed a grudging and unsympathetic attitude to victims and survivors. In order to shake off the failures of the past, real and lasting changes to attitudes are needed.

Although there have been some improvements to current safeguarding arrangements, more recent audits have identified weaknesses. The culture and attitudes in the Roman Catholic Church have been resistant to change.”

Resources

The **Blue Knot Foundation** is an Australian organization, which was established to respond to the problem of complex trauma. It's website at <https://blueknot.org.au/>. Blue Knot describes themselves on this website in the following way:

We are the National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma. That means that we advocate for and provide support to people who have experiences of complex trauma, and those who support them, personally and professionally.

They then describe complex trauma in the following terms:

Complex trauma includes lots of different, often damaging experiences. It also refers to the effects of those experiences. The experiences can occur at any age – in childhood, as a young person, in adulthood and into old age. Examples include violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation or growing up without a person who is able to care for, understand and protect you. Many people experience them repeatedly or over time. The good news is that people can and do recover from the impacts of complex trauma. Many people also develop remarkable resilience and grow beyond their trauma experiences.

The website is easily accessible and provided information and support for victims and for those who work with them. The foundation estimates that 25% of the population of Australia suffer from complex trauma.

The **Resources** section of the Blue Knot website is full of material, that can be accessed at <https://blueknot.org.au/resources/>. Among the items on which information can be accessed on this page are Understanding Trauma and Abuse; Coping Strategies, Impacts and Healing; News and Articles; Research; Working in a trauma-informed manner; Publications; Data; Fact Sheets; Videos; and Recommended Reading.

The Fact Sheets have a no-jargon approach, and they are written in plain English – as well as in a range of other languages. They are produced in a number of different series, including Trauma classification; Trauma-related experiences; Survivors and supporters; Talking about trauma; and Trauma and memory.

Practice Issue-Support

The National Office staff team have been facilitating meetings in the four Ecclesiastical Provincial Areas through the month of December. Recent media focus has been returned to the failings and crimes of the past.

Safeguarding personnel need to be aware of the dynamics of secondary or vicarious trauma, which may affect them in negative ways. Secondary or vicarious trauma is the impact that having a lot of contact with traumatised people can have on the individual who wants to assist them. Other related terms that are sometimes used are *compassion fatigue*, *emotional work*, and *burnout*.

Essentially, there is a price to be paid for caring deeply for another's pain. The real meaning of compassion is to suffer together. A dictionary definition is that compassion is *a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering*. While this definition does not mention empathy, there is the sense that while sympathy can create distance from the person suffering, empathy involves an effort to understand and share the difficult feelings. The motivational and behavioural component is the drive to intervene in order to relieve the pain that the other is experiencing.

What happened over time is that the person in the helper role begins to become stressed by being in constant contact with other people's suffering, which if unmitigated can and does lead to increased levels of fatigue, exhaustion, anxiety, anger, and eventually, breakdown. Stress accumulates if the helper allows it to, or if it is so great that their ability to cope is overwhelmed.

Standard 5 of *Safeguarding Children-Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016* has the full title, **Training and Support**. Both are important in protecting safeguarding personnel from being severely affected by the emotional toll of their work. If you need additional training to prepare you better for the safeguarding children role that you have taken on, please discuss this with your Church authority, and let us know in the National Board what particular focus you would want such training to take.





THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

Resources on Support

Support is a combination of professional supervision, routine self-care, and frequent linking up with others for opportunities to discuss work pressures, safely and in confidence.

Some of the following reading may be helpful:

- Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers, at https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/os_vicarious_trauma_guidebook-508.pdf
- “The Ugliness of It Seeps into Me”: Experiences of Vicarious Trauma among Female Psychologists Treating Survivors of Sexual Assault, at https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/7/3925?type=check_update&version=1
- The hidden price of repeated traumatic exposure, at https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/7/3925?type=check_update&version=1
- Vicarious Trauma and Resilience, at https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/vt_vt_and_resilience_training-508.pdf

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