

Further Input on Safeguarding

Common Reactions to CSA by Adult Survivors

- Unawareness (denial, suppression, repression, etc)
- "It's my fault"

Why is it relevant to Spiritual Accompaniment?

Adult "survivors" of CSA are likely to experience significant negative impact on their spiritual lives. In what ways?

- Image of God
- Anger
- Trust
- Distorted relationships with "authority" figures
- Various psychological problems

Particular issues relating to abuse by clergy: trust, alienation from God/Church, fear of confession

How to help a supervisee to talk about it with one they accompany?

It's normal for your supervisee to feel overwhelmed and confused in this situation. Child abuse is a difficult subject that can be hard to accept and even harder to talk about. Adults who have been abused as children usually have a whole host of difficult feelings, including the fear that they may not be believed and/or ashamed that they were in some way responsible for what happened.

The Four 'R's of talking about abuse in Spiritual Accompaniment

Receive: Listen to what is being said without displaying shock or disbelief. A common reaction to news as unpleasant and shocking as child abuse is denial. However, if you display denial to a victim, or show shock or disgust at what they are saying, the victim may be afraid to continue and will shut down. Accept what is being said without judgement. Take it seriously.

Reassure: Reassure the victim, but only so far as is honest and reliable. Don't make promises that you can't be sure to keep, e.g. "everything will be all right now". Reassure the victim that they did nothing wrong and that you take what is said seriously. Don't promise confidentiality – never agree to keep secrets. Tell the victim that you will need to tell your supervisor. Acknowledge how difficult it must have been to talk. It takes a lot for a victim to disclose abuse, even if it happened many years ago.

React: Listen quietly, carefully and patiently. Do not assume anything – don't speculate or jump to conclusions. Do not investigate, interrogate or decide if the victim is telling the truth. Remember that an allegation of child abuse may lead to a criminal investigation, so don't do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation. Let the victim explain to you in his or her own words what happened, but don't ask leading questions. Do ask open questions like "Is there anything else that you want to tell me." Explain what you have to do next and whom you have to talk to. Refer directly to the or designated person in your organisation (as set out in the organisation's child protection policy) or to your supervisor. Do not discuss the case with anyone else.

Record: Make some very brief notes at the time and write them up in detail as soon as possible. Do not destroy your original notes in case they are required by Court. Record the date, time, place, words used by the victim and how the victim appeared to you – be specific. Record the actual words used; including any swear words or slang. Record statements and observable things, not your interpretations or assumptions – keep it factual.

Remember, this happens rarely, but when it does it is very important to handle it well, so speak to your supervisor or to the safeguarding person in your organisation as soon as possible after the disclosure.

How and When to Refer/Report?

The Paramountcy Principle: The safety and well-being of any child (or adult at risk) is of paramount importance and must guide if and how one responds to concerns or disclosures of abuse.

Reporting: See appendix which is taken from the DRAFT Safeguarding Policy at St Beuno's and is quoted for information and education purposes.

What if the one accompanying has her/himself been the victim of CSA?

Just as in all other matters, the director must be careful that his/her own issues and life history do not impact negatively on the one being accompanied. This may be very difficult where the director him/herself has suffered abuse. It is essential that the director takes this to supervision at the earliest possible moment, both for the good of the one being accompanied as well as for the good of the director.