

# THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESAN SUPPORT PERSON



**Safeguarding  
Office**

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR

## What is a Support Person?

Those who have suffered abuse as children should receive a sensitive and compassionate response when they disclose their abuse. Coming forward to make a complaint or disclosure of abuse takes enormous courage, strength and trust. Those adults and their families should be offered appropriate support, advice and pastoral care (*NBSCCCI Safeguarding*).

One of the ways in which the Church can offer support is through the service of a Diocesan 'Support Person'. Within Down and Connor the Support Person provides a specific service for those adults and their families who have made allegations or a disclosure of abuse.

## What does a Support Person do?

When an adult discloses a concern of abuse to the diocese or the Safeguarding Office, the offer of the service of a Support Person will be made. This service is optional, free and at the complete discretion of the person making the allegation and may form part of a number of services, which a complainant can avail of.

When contact is made or offered the role of the Support Person is to

- Listen to what the adult is saying.
- Offer advice and guidance to the adult at this difficult and often traumatic time and to keep the adult informed about 'what is happening' in relation to their complaint. 'What action' is being taken by the Church to ensure the protection of children.
- Help the adult identify and access other services of counselling or support that they may require. The support work should be sensitive to and attentive to the expressed needs of the adult. The role of the Support Person should always be led by the needs of the adult making the disclosure.
- Keep the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who manages the allegation/complaint on behalf of the diocese appropriately informed of any significant information relevant to the complaint.

A record of all meetings will be made by the Support Person and will be accessible to the adult. These records are shared with the DLP whose role is to manage the complaint made by the adult. All records are stored securely and adhere to Data Protection legislation.

The Support Person does not provide:

- The Support Person does NOT provide counselling. The Support Person may help the adult to access counselling if they so wish. The service provided by the Catholic Church In Ireland, free of charge, is that of Towards Healing ([www.towardshealing.ie](http://www.towardshealing.ie)). Whilst this is a self referral service the Support Person will assist the adult to access the service if they so wish.
- The Support Person does NOT manage the case, that role is carried out by the DLP or his/her deputy/manager, nor does the Support Person have access to the case file.
- The details of the allegation made by the adult to the diocese or the safeguarding office will not be discussed with the Support Person unless the adult making the complaint freely chooses to talk about it.

It is however important to note that the role of the Support Person is a professional role which forms part of the overall safeguarding personnel in the diocese. They must work to a Code of Practice and in line with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland's (NBSCCCI) standards.

Should you wish to avail of this service or want to know more about how the service works please contact the Safeguarding Office and ask for the DLP for Safeguarding.

The direct line is **028 9049 2798** or you can email at **[philip.ohara@soddc.org](mailto:philip.ohara@soddc.org)**

Helpful contacts can be found on the back page of the information leaflet.

## Contact details

If you would like further information regarding the role of the Diocesan Support Person or, regarding any of the information on this leaflet, please contact:

**Philip O'Hara** – Designated Liaison Person  
Diocesan Safeguarding Office  
120 Cliftonville Road, Belfast BT14 6LA  
Email: [philip.ohara@soddc.org](mailto:philip.ohara@soddc.org)  
Tel: **028 9049 2798** Mob: **07534 992 124**

## Other Important Contact details

### Victim Support NI

Email: [belfast@victimsupportni.org.uk](mailto:belfast@victimsupportni.org.uk) or Tel: **028 9024 3133**

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**Towards Healing** (independent organisation providing professional support for people who have experienced institutional, clerical or religious abuse in Ireland)

Email: [info@towardshealing.ie](mailto:info@towardshealing.ie) or Freephone (UK): **08000 963 315**

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**Towards Peace** (offers help for those who seek a spiritual dimension to their support) for Survivors of Abuse by Catholic Church Personnel in Ireland)

Email: [towardspeace@iecon.ie](mailto:towardspeace@iecon.ie) or Tel: **00 353 1 505 3028**

or Mob: **00 353 86 771 0533**

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### PSNI

Tel: **101**

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**Social Services** (Regional Out of Hours Service)

Tel: **028 9504 9999**

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**National Board for Safeguarding Children  
in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)**

Email: [teresa.devlin@safeguarding.ie](mailto:teresa.devlin@safeguarding.ie) or Tel: **00 353 1 505 3124**

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