

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

The Methodist Church seeks to create communities that are safe and inclusive, and where those who have experienced abuse can share their accounts in the knowledge they will be heard and acknowledged.

The language in this leaflet includes those who wish to call themselves victims of abuse, those who call themselves survivors and those who feel themselves to be thrivers.

What do we mean by a survivor?

We use the term ‘survivor’ to refer to someone who has experienced abuse during their lifetime and to reflect that person’s courage and ability to move on and even flourish.

Childhood abuse and neglect, domestic violence and the abuse of vulnerable adults are frequent in our society. When we talk about abuse, this includes physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse. All forms of abuse are about an imbalance of power. Abuse has a devastating effect on an individual’s life. Significant harm is also caused to a person’s spirituality, particularly if there is coercive and controlling behaviour within a religious context.

How should we respond?

Everyone is unique and reacts in a different way. An initial response to someone who discloses abuse, either past or present, should be a sincere expression of sorrow that the person has had to endure it. The individual may simply want their experiences to be heard and for someone to “walk alongside them”, or they may need more specialised help. If we listen attentively, the particular difficulties and needs of the individual will emerge and enable the appropriate support to be put in place.

What doesn’t help?

As a Christian community, the Church seeks to welcome everyone in safety. However, there may be aspects of public worship that might cause upset or even re-traumatise some survivors of abuse.

A few examples are:

- Too much physical touching and eye contact during the sharing of the Peace.
- Being asked to sit in a location from which it is difficult to 'escape'.
- Being pressured into donating more financially than a person can afford.
- A strong emphasis on "God as loving parent" or "the Church as a family of brothers and sisters" can be difficult for someone who has experienced abuse in a family setting.

It sometimes happens that when a person begins to talk about their experiences, we give the kind of responses that leave them feeling unheard, marginalised or even rejected, although we may mean well. Some examples of what we mean by this are:

- We offer advice and make suggestions before truly hearing what the person is attempting to say.
- We hear what is said, but make hasty judgements and either argue or pay little attention.

- We pressure someone to 'forgive' their abuser before they are ready to enter into the process of forgiveness.
- We fail to stay with the person's story when something they say triggers a chain of private associations for ourselves.

What helps?

Listening and attending in a non-judgemental way is the first step towards helping someone. Good listening validates a person's experience and is about giving our full attention to another person. It is not to stand in authority, rationalise or patronise. Neither is it to change the individual. Rather it is to take the person, their experience and their pain seriously. We hear their feelings, see their facial expression, are sensitive to the things that are both said and unsaid, and offer an acceptance of low feelings as normal and appropriate. In this way, we are attending to the One who is always with us, whose presence makes our presence to each other possible, and our listening becomes a gift of healing to others.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is very important. However, information should always be shared if concerns are raised about the safety of any individual, especially a child or vulnerable adult. If you suspect someone might be in danger, it should be reported to your Church or Circuit Safeguarding Officer. You can find their contact information on the laminated poster displayed in your church.

Our safeguarding policy

Our safeguarding policy states:

“The Church will offer care and support to all those that have been abused, regardless of the type of abuse, of when or of where it occurred.

“Those who have suffered abuse within the Church will receive a compassionate response, be listened to and believed. They will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support,

according to their expressed and agreed need, as they seek to rebuild their lives.”

Resources

A list of useful resources, including legal and therapeutic organisations, is available at www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding

Two key organisations are:

The Survivors Trust

www.thesurvivorstrust.org

National Association of People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

www.napac.org.uk

If you are unable to access the website, please look at the laminated poster in your church, which shows contact information for the local Church and Circuit Safeguarding Officers.

You can access large print and sign language versions of this leaflet at www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding


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