

Chapter 4: Management of non-recent disclosures of abuse

Aim of the chapter

- i. To describe what non-recent abuse is
- ii. To understand our context
- iii. To know how to respond to a disclosure of non-recent abuse
- iv. To outline the responsibilities of personnel
- v. To assess current risk

What is non-recent abuse?

Non-recent child abuse (sometimes known as historical abuse, or retrospective disclosure) is when an adult was abused as a child or young person under the age of 18.

Sometimes adults who were abused in childhood blame themselves or are made to feel it's their fault. But this is never the case – there's no excuse for abuse occurring at any time.

Someone might have known they were abused for a very long time or might only recently have learnt or understood what happened to them.

Whether the abuse happened once or hundreds of times, a year or 70 years ago, whatever the circumstances, there's support to help. It's never too late. (NSPCC)

Our context

Disclosures can be about abuse that:

1. Has occurred within Joymount Presbyterian Church. That means abuse perpetrated by a leader of Joymount Presbyterian Church at any time, or abuse that occurred on Joymount Presbyterian Church premises or abuse that was instigated through a Joymount Presbyterian Church contact or activity.
2. Has been disclosed pastorally and is not connected to Joymount Presbyterian Church – for example, familial abuse disclosed to a Minister for pastoral support.

Adults have come forward – and will continue to do so – to report experiences of abuse as children within our denomination.

This should be of great sadness to us, and such disclosures must be met with compassion and concern.

Disclosures of non-recent abuse can occur within pastoral situations, when the adult has developed a trusted relationship with an individual who is part of their faith community.

This can also occur when an adult has left Joymount Presbyterian Church and feels they are in a safer place to disclose their experiences.

When they feel ready, adults choose to disclose these experiences for many reasons. These include but are not limited to:

- they feel safe – possibly with a person or in different situation
- something significant has changed: for example, the perpetrator has passed away
- they are concerned that the perpetrator is still active and they want to protect others
- they want justice and/or redress

Responding to a disclosure that is non-recent

Critically, we must respond with the victim/survivor as our central focus.

We should not jump too quickly into the management of the allegations; instead, we should ensure the well-being of the person in front of us, both immediately and in the near future.

It is critical that we respond in an attentive manner, reassuring them for the steps they have now taken, praising their bravery and demonstrating compassion.

Most disclosures occur within the pastoral relationships between individuals and their Minister or Elder.

Ministers/Elders working with adults, particularly in the provision of counselling or spiritual support, must explain about the limits of confidentiality where child protection is concerned.

It is additionally important to remain aware that some individuals need more specialist and professional input as part of their survival journey; Ministers and Elders should know when they need to refer outwards.

Follow these simple steps if someone begins to disclose non-recent abuse:

Always stop someone who is about to disclose to you and remind them you cannot keep secrets – that you have an obligation to pass on information of any crime or suspected crime and on every occasion where a child or adult may still be at risk of harm or abuse.

Listen carefully

- stay calm
- try not to ask lots of questions or make clarifying points

Reassure

- acknowledge the courage of the individual and tell them they've done the right thing
- tell them you have understood them

Be serious

- let them know that you believe them
- let them know that you are going to continue to support them

Safety first

- if there is any immediate risk of harm established, protect them first
- use emergency services if necessary

What is next

- tell them what you are going to do
- tell them who you need to tell

Record

- write down everything you have been told
- use the person's own words

Report

- take advice from the PCI central Safeguarding Office

Reporting non-recent abuse: Responsibilities

If, because of information received from an adult, the person knows, believes or has a reasonable suspicion that a person who **is currently a child** has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, they must report this information without delay to Social Services/PSNI. This information could come from a variety of sources and it is your legal duty to report.

Where possible, pastoral support should extend to supporting the individual to engage with any report to Social Services themselves. A direct report to Social Services/PSNI will help them to quickly examine the current or potential future risks to children.

All individuals are responsible for reporting any crime/potential crime of which they have knowledge to PSNI.

Advice should always be sought from PSNI/Social Services where there is any doubt.

CHAPTER END