



# ***TOWARDS HEALING***

*A Catholic Church response to Institutional/Clerical/Religious abuse*

## **Keeping Safe Policy**

### **Introduction**

**Towards Healing** provides a psychological support service. Our client group is adult men and women, and their families, who have experienced physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect in childhood, perpetrated by a priest, brother, religious sister, volunteer or employee of the Catholic Church. (See Appendix for the definitions of abuse which are covered by the service).

### **Child Protection Statement**

Towards Healing is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of all children by protecting them from physical, sexual, and emotional harm or neglect and is equally committed to the implementation of the legislation Children First Act (2015) and the National Board of Safeguarding Children's document Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland (2016).

While we explicitly state our commitment to upholding the client's rights of self-determination and the need for privacy, as well as the staff/psychotherapist's duty of care towards our clients and their professional responsibility towards the prevention of child abuse, we acknowledge also the alleged abusers right to defend themselves.

## Criteria for Reporting Abuse

It is the policy of Towards Healing that, at the time of registration for Face-to-Face counselling/psychotherapy the client will be informed that they will be required to name their alleged abuser(s) of sexual abuse or to give identifying information about the context of the abuse which they suffered, so that this information can be passed to the appropriate Authorities to comply with our duty to Child Protection. In some cases it is accepted that there might not be an identified person in relation to the abuse, but that the person was harmed in the context of being raised in a residential setting. In these cases a specifically named individual is not required.

It is acknowledged that this can be a difficult decision for many who contact Towards Healing. Towards Healing can refer the client for up to maximum of twelve sessions or three months of service, whichever is shorter, to a counsellor/psychotherapist, in order to explicitly work through the process and impact of naming their alleged abuser(s) for Child Protection purposes. Towards Healing will make the nature of this referral clear to the psychotherapist at the time of the referral.

At all times, the support and guidance of the Towards Healing Child Protection Officer will be available to the client and psychotherapist to discuss the process of reporting and any other aspects of concern.

All allegations/suspicions of abuse are taken seriously and the decision to make a report to the Statutory Authorities is not taken lightly. We are also aware that we are not in a position to make a judgement regarding the validity or credibility of an allegation. Judgement about abuse is to be made by the professionals who assess and investigate; this is a matter for Tusla and/or An Garda Siochana. It is Towards Healing's responsibility to pass on all reasonable grounds for concern to the professional investigating Authorities.

Reasonable grounds for concern are defined as:

- Specific indication that a child was abused currently or historically
- An account by the person who was abused or another who was witness to the abuse

- Evidence, such as an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse
- An injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be abuse
- Consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect

Although the majority of the reports to Towards Healing are of a historic nature, it is important to reflect on the information shared with our service in a holistic manner, taking into account both historic information and current concerns for children. There are times when a caller/client shares information about a current Child Protection concern - this would include information that the alleged abuser is alive and has access to children. For reasons outlined above, this information will be shared with the relevant Authorities without delay.

If there is a current Child Protection concern that involves a member of the Catholic Church, and a child can be identified, Towards Healing will inform the Civil Authorities and the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) within the Archdiocese, Diocese or Congregation. Any other disclosure of sexual abuse, Towards Healing will inform the Civil Authorities.

If there is reasonable concern that a caller/client is perpetrating abuse, the client will be informed that this information will be passed on to the assessing and investigating Authorities.

Towards Healing's policy follows Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011) advice that all information, however slight and including the client's name, must be passed on to the Statutory Authorities.

- Receiving information on a Helpline is very different to receiving information in Face-to-Face counselling. The information is usually received in the course of one or two phone calls, and obtaining detailed information about the abuse is not the main focus of the Telephone

Counsellor. Callers are informed at the beginning of the call, in the most appropriate way possible, that if they share information of reasonable concern of a Child Protection nature, Towards Healing is obliged to pass this information on to the appropriate Authorities.

- If a client chooses to engage with our counselling service an assessment with the client will be carried out over the phone. During this assessment the client will be informed in a clear and appropriate way that Towards Healing works within the “Children First” Guidelines and that information that they share with the Telephone Counsellor and/or their psychotherapist which is of a Child Protection nature will be passed on to the appropriate Authorities. It is part of the Towards Healing registration process to inform the caller that they will be required to name their abuser, if the abuse was of a sexual nature, within the up to a maximum of twelve sessions or three months service, whichever is shorter.
- If the alleged abuser is deceased or the abuse has already been reported to the Authorities by the client, Towards Healing will still need to complete the Child Protection reporting to the Authorities (including Redress clients).
- It is possible to refer a client for up to a maximum of twelve sessions or three months service, whichever is shorter, to explore the impact of reporting the name of the alleged abuser before the client gives specific names or the context of their abuse. This information can be shared with their psychotherapist, during therapeutic sessions. This allows clients to establish a safe, therapeutic relationship to explore the impact of reporting and sharing the information within a protected, therapeutic environment.
- When referring a caller for *Face-to-Face counselling*, the reporting status of the caller should be passed on to the psychotherapist. It should be made clear to the psychotherapist that the client has given

Child Protection information to *Towards Healing* and that this will *need* to be reported. Alternatively, the referral might be for a maximum of twelve sessions or three months service, whichever is shorter, for the client to specifically look at the impact and choice around naming the alleged abuser or the context of their abuse. The psychotherapist should be informed that the Towards Healing Child Protection Officer is the contact to discuss all aspects of reporting.

- Contracted psychotherapists are obliged to report cases of abuse, as laid down in Towards Healing's Keeping Safe Policy. If, during the course of the psychotherapy, the client discloses to the therapist additional information or named alleged abusers, it is mandatory that the psychotherapist shares this information with the Towards Healing Child Protection Officer. It will be the role of the Child Protection Officer to make the formal report to the Authorities. Towards Healing states that adherence to this policy is mandatory, in accepting a contract with Towards Healing.

## Criteria

A report should be made when a retrospective disclosure is shared or if there is current or potential risk to a child or children. In addition, if a Telephone Counsellor or therapist picks up on a concern / suspicion / disclosure from a caller/client about their own children or other children. The Child Protection Officer, as the Designated Liaison Person, should be consulted in all cases that have a Child Protection concern. An allegation may be considered to be of reasonable concern if the caller gives clear information about the abuse experience / concern / suspicion and identifying information about the alleged abuser. If there are reasonable grounds for concern, a report will be made. If it is decided that a case will not be reported due to lack of information, a record of action taken to date will be maintained by the Child Protection Officer and will be updated as information becomes available. This evolving information may progress the case to reporting status. It is

clear that Towards Healing's role is not to investigate but to pass on information that is of reasonable concern without delay.

## **1. Clear Information re Abuse Experience**

**Would normally include A and some combination of B – F**

- A. The type of abuse: emotional, physical, sexual abuse or neglect.
- B. Approximate age at onset
- C. Some details of the abuse
- D. When the abuse happened: dates or a timeframe
- E. Duration of the abuse: ranges from one incident to multiple incidents over a period of time
- F. Location of the abuse

### **Alleged Abuser Identifying Information**

- A The name of the alleged abuser or
- B Identifying information: "the parish priest in X parish in 1987", "the maths teacher in Y School in 1977"
- C Order / Diocese to which alleged abuser belongs (if a priest or religious)
- D Current location of alleged abuser, if known

## **Reporting Procedures**

### **Clients Who wish to Make a Complaint Themselves**

If the Client wishes to make a complaint to Tusla, An Garda Siochana and the Designated Liaison Person of the Archdioceses, Dioceses and Congregations, then Towards Healing will support the person in making the complaint, regardless of the level of information provided. Towards Healing staff and/or psychotherapist can assist the client in completing the forms or in writing a letter. Towards Healing will follow up all self-reports by clients with a letter to support and reinforce the information. This information will be passed to Tusla and An Garda Siochana.

- **Callers who wish Towards Healing to Make a Report**

If the client wishes Towards Healing to report the allegation but does not wish to involve themselves, Towards Healing will formally inform Tusla and An Garda Siochana in writing. Copies of this correspondence will be shared with the client, if the client requests a copy. The client's name and contact details will be passed on to the appropriate Authorities. Towards Healing has the responsibility to ensure that any reasonable ground for concern is shared in full with the assessing and investigating Authorities.

#### **Named versus Anonymous Callers**

An allegation of abuse will carry more weight if the caller/client is prepared to give his/her name and contact details to Towards Healing than if the caller is anonymous. However, in the case of anonymous callers who give information, a report will be made by Towards Healing to Tusla and An Garda Siochana.

#### **Reporting Procedures**

The Designated Liaison Person responsible for Child Protection with Towards Healing is the Child Protection Officer. It is imperative that staff/psychotherapists share all information of a Child Protection nature with the Child Protection Officer, in his/her role as Designated Child Protection Person. It is the responsibility of the person in this role to ensure that all staff/psychotherapists are aware of their responsibility to pass this information on by the end of their working shift. Staff and psychotherapists should inform clients in a supportive and appropriate way about their Child Protection responsibility.

It will be made clear to callers/clients that Towards Healing will pass on all information shared that is of reasonable concern. If a client does disclose information that is of a Child Protection nature, the staff member/psychotherapist should record in writing all the information shared.

This information should be factual, accurate, legible, initialled and dated. The Child Protection Officer will ensure that this information is reported to Tusla and An Garda Siochana, in an appropriate fashion without delay, and that appropriate follow up is completed. It is important that all parties are kept informed of the progress of information that is reported to Tusla and An Garda Siochana.

At all times callers/clients should be supported and encouraged in their role of providing information that will enhance the safety of children.

It is Towards Healing's policy to support any client who has been threatened or intimidated against sharing information that will safeguard children. Towards Healing will do all it can to ensure the safety of clients and their families. This may require involving other agencies in providing support and protection.

### **Reporting Steps**

1. Caller/Client/Therapist is informed of Towards Healing's Keeping Safe Policy
2. Information is shared with Towards Healing Staff/Psychotherapists
3. Caller/Client/Therapist is reminded of Keeping Safe Policy
4. All Information is recorded in writing in a factual, accurate, legible manner, dated and initialled
5. By the end of the working shift this information is passed to the Child Protection Officer
6. If a referral is made the status of the case's Child Protection is made clear to the psychotherapist
7. The Child Protection Officer identifies the case as having Child Protection concerns and monitors the case until the concerns are reported
8. The Child Protection Officer confirms whether or not there is a Child Protection concern



9. The Child Protection Officer works with the client and psychotherapist to clarify the information to be reported and to inform all parties of the process
10. The Child Protection Officer informs the client/psychotherapist, if possible, that a report will be made to the Statutory Authorities without delay
11. The Child Protection Officer will report the information in writing to the various agencies.
12. The Child Protection Officer will keep an accurate and up to date record of all future correspondence and communication regarding the allegation. This information will be kept in a factual, accurate, legible manner, dated and initialled.
13. The Child Protection Officer will keep client/therapist/caller informed and updated as information is shared with Towards Healing office

## **Record Keeping**

All clinical information is of a sensitive nature and information regarding Child Protection is of particular concern. This information will be held in the Towards Healing office under lock and key. The Child Protection Officer, in his/her role as Designated Liaison Person, has responsibility for the safety of this information.

If information is shared, it is on a “need to know” basis in the best interest of children at risk.

Record keeping is of critical importance to this area of work. A file will be held for each case pertaining to Child Protection. Records should be factual, accurate and legible. If actions are taken or new information added this information should be dated and initialled after each entry.

## **Confidentiality**

The sharing of this information is not a breach of confidentiality. This is highlighted to clients/callers on the phone at initial contact and again via an information sheet which is to be shared with clients upon their first meeting with their psychotherapist. Child Protection information will be passed on when there is a reasonable concern that there is a current or potential risk of abuse or neglect to a child.

## **Protection for Staff and Psychotherapists**

The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provides protection to the designated person making a report of child abuse “reasonably and in good faith”. This legislation provides protection from civil liability and penalization by employers. Towards Healing staff and contracted psychotherapists should share their information with the Child Protection Officer who will take responsibility as the designated person to make the report to the Statutory Authorities.

## Appendix

### ***Live Case***

Alleged abuser (see below) who is alive and has access to children.

### ***Alleged Abuser***

A person(s) who has subjected a child (under 18) to behaviour for his/her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others

## Definitions of Abuse

**Neglect** “An omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to, and affection from adults, or medical care.”

**Emotional Abuse** “When a child’s need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met”. “Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a care-giver and a child”

**Sexual Abuse** “When a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others”

**Physical Abuse** “Any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child”

## Reference Documents

The following documents are available for downloading:-

Children First Act 2015

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf>

Department of Health & Children’s National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children – Children First

<http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/ChildrenFirst.pdf>

National Board for Safeguarding Children’s document Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016

[www.safeguarding.ie](http://www.safeguarding.ie)

### **Towards Healing Child Protection**

Child Protection Officer

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