

## Why PCI needs to talk about abuse

We believe that **only by talking about abuse and acknowledging its existence, will it encourage people to speak about their own or others' experiences of abuse within our Church.**

**This is important in terms of past and current experiences, as well as giving a strong, clear message for the future, that any form of abuse within our Church is wrong, will not be tolerated, and should not go unaddressed if our Church is aware of it.**

**Creating a healthy culture for our Church is essential if we are to enable victims/survivors to report.**

## PCI's response to abuse within its churches

**When victims do speak about their experience of abuse they should receive the message that they will be heard, believed, accepted, supported in their healing, and that the appropriate action will be taken against the alleged perpetrator.**

PCI wants to aim to have a culture whereby safeguarding of all is in the DNA of our Church and the people who comprise it; a culture that is positive and affirming, compassionate and caring.

We believe that this is our Christian duty, and to not act in this way, would be to fall short of what Christ has asked us to do.

Having worked in the area of abuse (all forms of abuse and exploitation) for many years, and now as head of safeguarding in the Presbyterian Church, since 2019, I want to assure everyone that we take seriously our responsibility to safeguard those in our congregations and organisations.

Look at the example set by our Lord. He did not turn away from those who were suffering. He reached out and befriended them. As a Church, we need to replicate this.

## Contact

If you would like to speak with someone from PCI you can contact the safeguarding department on:

**Tel:** (From NI) 028 9041 7290 / (From Rol) 048 9041 7290

Alternative sources of support are listed below and on the PCI website. [www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)

## Support services

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

#### ADULTS

##### **One in Four**

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

**Tel:** +353 1 662 4070

#### CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

##### **Jigsaw**

[www.jigsaw.ie/mental-health-services-under-18s](http://www.jigsaw.ie/mental-health-services-under-18s)

##### **Childline**

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

##### **The Big House**

[www.thebighouse.org.uk](http://www.thebighouse.org.uk)

**Tel:** +44 7521 431218

### NORTHERN IRELAND

#### ADULTS

##### **Christian Guidelines**

[www.christianguidelines.org/contact](http://www.christianguidelines.org/contact)

**Tel:** (From NI) 028 9146 8846 / (From Rol) 048 9146 8846

#### CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

##### **Lifeline**

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/lifeline](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/lifeline)

**Tel:** 0808 808 8000

##### **Childline**

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)


**Tel:** 0800 1111

##### **The Big House**

[www.thebighouse.org.uk](http://www.thebighouse.org.uk)

**Tel:** +44 7521 431218

# Confronting the challenge of abuse within our Church



# The challenge of abuse

As a Christian Church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) believes that Christ calls us to love, care for, and value everyone.

The gospel imperative of loving our neighbour as ourselves, leads us to respect all as individuals, treating each other with dignity and respect. PCI seeks to reflect Christ's compassion for everyone and to safeguard all those who come into contact with the mission and ministries of our Church, by preventing harm and protecting those at risk.

It is an error to place an equal importance on protecting an abuser and a victim, believing that the abuser's expressed regret for the abuse is sufficient to prevent them from harming others in the future. To act in this way, is not fulfilling our Christian responsibility to protect victims and others who may be vulnerable.

*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be."*

1 Peter 5:2

## Abuse can be present anywhere

**Some may wish to believe that our Church exists in a perfect world where abuse does not exist, but that is untrue.**

Abuse is present throughout our communities and does not stop at the front door of our churches; it is wrong to assume that it does. There have been many enquiries and reviews, over the years, that show evidence of this.<sup>1</sup>

## What do we mean by abuse?

**Abuse can take many forms.**

It can include sexual, physical, emotional/psychological, financial, institutional, spiritual, neglect, discriminatory, modern slavery and domestic abuse.

It can happen to children, young people and adults; to males and females; and can be both contact and non-contact.

Irrespective of the form of abuse, the impact of the experience can destroy lives.

## Barriers to speaking about experiences of abuse

**We recognise that there can be many reasons why victims of any type of abuse may not speak of their experiences, if ever. These include:**

- The abuser may be seen in a positive light by others
- The abuser may be in a position of power
- There may be positive aspects of the abuser, often used as a means to groom, control, and disguise the abusive behaviour
- Victims can be challenged to question their experience and reality of it as abuse
- Normalisation of abuse
- A power imbalance between victim and abuser
- A victim is made to believe that they 'wanted' or 'consented' to the abuse
- Not knowing where to disclose, how, or to whom
- A length of period has lapsed since the abuse
- The victim may believe that they are responsible for the abuse happening
- The victim may feel that they will not be believed by others if they speak out, especially if they think they are the only one

**There can be additional reasons why disclosure of abuse within our Church can be even more difficult. These include:**

- A narrative of protecting the gospel above all else
- A belief that suffering is commendable because Jesus suffered for us
- The abuser is in a leadership position and placed on a pedestal
- Incorrect assumptions that individuals who possess positive giftings and behaviours cannot behave in harmful or abusive ways
- The cultural context of the local community prevents disclosure from within the Church

