

Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn  
Guiding Principles for Healing and Support



"We are not living an era of change but a change of era." Pope Francis



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*They are called to be present in secular society—in towns and houses but the message is the same. They are to offer peace and to ‘heal the sick’ and to preach, ‘the kingdom of God has come near.’ (Luke 10:9)*

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## Preamble

The Gospel makes present the call of the twelve apostles. Luke recounts how Jesus “called the twelve together,” gave them power and authority “and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Luke 9: 1-2). The Apostles and their successors, the Archbishops, have the triple responsibility of preaching and teaching, sanctifying and healing, governing and leading. Their mission has a particular *ecclesial* focus.

Luke also recounts the call of the seventy-two (Luke 10: 1-12,). Jesus appointed the disciples to go before him to every place that he himself was to visit. They are to go “two by two.” Like the “twelve,” the “seventy-two” share intimately in the mission of Jesus. They are called to be present in *secular* society – in towns and houses – but the message is the same. They are to offer peace and to “heal the sick” and to preach, “the kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:9).

The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn shares intimately in the mission of Jesus Christ, who has “handed over” the work of evangelisation – the proclamation of the “good news” – to the Church. Humanity is created in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) and Jesus restores and heals this image in his Paschal Mystery – his passion, death, resurrection and ascension.

The Archdiocese, in its work of proclaiming the dignity of children and vulnerable peoples, of providing personal and theological formation for Church personnel and of bringing justice and mercy to victims of abuse through expert investigations and pastoral care, shares intimately in the Archbishop’s Office of Evangelisation. As with the “twelve” and the “seventy-two,” child protection has both an *ecclesial* and *secular* focus.

Now, in continuing to follow the example of the Lord, “the Church also, in all its actions, makes clear the dignity and value of every human person, especially those most vulnerable”. (*Integrity in Ministry*, p.1) This commitment of the Church applies in a special way to children and young people:

... [S]pecial attention must be devoted to children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights... By fostering and exercising a tender and strong concern for every child that comes into this world, the Church fulfils a fundamental mission: for she is called upon to reveal and put forward anew in history the example and the commandment of Christ the Lord, who placed the child at the heart of the Kingdom of God: ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven’. (*Familiaris Consortio* §26)

When their dignity and safety are abused, the Church has an obligation to stand on the side of children and young people. John Paul II, when addressing the Archbishops of Oceania in 2001, made clear that the scandal of sexual abuse perpetrated by Church personnel “has caused great suffering and spiritual harm to the victims” and is a “profound contradiction of the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ”. (*Ecclesia in Oceania* §49)

In his homily at a special Mass to which he invited victims of child sexual abuse perpetrated by Church personnel, Pope Francis said:

“I know that these wounds are a source of deep and often unrelenting emotional and spiritual pain, and even despair”. He went on to add “... the courage that you and others have shown by speaking up, by telling the truth, was a service of love, since for us it shed light on a terrible darkness in the life of the Church. There is no place in the Church’s ministry for those who commit these abuses, and I commit myself not to tolerate harm done to a minor by any individual, whether a cleric or not. All Archbishops must carry out their pastoral ministry with the

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utmost care in order to help foster the protection of minors, and they will be held accountable”. (*Homily, 7 July 2014*)

And in condemning all forms of abuse, the Archbishops of Australia have committed themselves to “seeking open and just procedures to respond to complaints in this area, and is unequivocally committed to compassionate and effective care for the victims, their families, the whole community and the offenders themselves”. (*Ecclesia in Oceania §49*)

## HEALING AND SUPPORT

Healing and Support provides a supportive response to those who have been affected by sexual abuse perpetrated by those employed or in the service of the Archdiocese. This involves working with those who were abused as a child or adult, their partners, parents, siblings or children. Healing and Support is a section of the Institute for Professional Standards and Safeguarding (IPSS) in the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn that acts as the person’s advocate both within the Archdiocese and in the wider community, “walking with the person” and being there for the part of their journey they choose to share.

Every situation is unique, assumptions cannot be made about where a person might be at on their journey or about their feelings regarding what has happened to them, the offender or the church. Each person comes to need Healing and Support at a different stage and as such the support offered needs to be tailored to meet their unique and individual needs whilst accepting that their wishes may fluctuate from time to time. The individual is supported to make their own choices and decisions about the direction they wish to take and how much involvement or participation they want from the Healing and Support.

Recovery from childhood trauma can take a long time and is often never complete. It is necessary to have access to services that are open ended, where no time limit is imposed and where the support to those affected by child sexual abuse continues for as long as necessary. Healing and Support offers an ‘open ended’ model of support that is there for as long as the person wants it. Because the support offered to individuals is unique and will differ from person to person Healing and Support presents as being “atypical” from traditional services. The Archdiocese supports an absence of prescribed boundaries or expectations for Healing and Support’s work with persons affected by abuse.

The brief of Healing and Support is not to investigate or to “test” allegations but simply to welcome, support and accept, at face value, the person who presents. Some of the people who have and are working with Healing and Support have not fully disclosed their abuse and are unlikely to ever make a formal statement to Police or Church authorities. Consequently, their abuse is never likely to be investigated. The offer of support is not conditional on proof of the abuse beyond the word of the client.

When or if a person affected by abuse wishes to make a statement or bring a claim against the Archdiocese or other Church entity, Healing and Support facilitates their client’s choice and continues to support the person during this time and after the completion of the investigation regardless of outcome. Where a person successfully obtains a financial settlement from the



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Archdiocese there is an expectation that person will fund their own third party treatment costs, however ongoing support from Healing and Support remains free of charge and open ended. The information that is shared with Healing and Support is confidential and classified as privileged in that other parts of IPSS or the wider Archdiocese is unable to access clients’ information without their permission.

### **VICTIM AND SURVIVOR NEEDS AND UNMET NEEDS**

The philosophy of Healing and Support is expressed in its practice. Most individuals come to Healing and Support in times of crisis – just before, during or immediately after disclosure. Some individuals remain in regular frequent contact for many years. Others may contact Healing and Support on an irregular basis, especially if they feel that they are doing well. The need for contact may be as simple as the need for reassurance that the support is still there, if needed. Others may discontinue contact after a particular, stressful process, e.g. criminal Court or achieving the settlement of a claim for damages. Persons affected by abuse or their family members have made contact with Healing and Support some years after the last contact when other life challenges trigger some acute distress or emotional crisis.

Consistency and stability of Healing and Support personnel is an important factor in being able to support individuals ‘reconnecting’ with the service as and when they feel it necessary. There remains a significant level of undeserved shame, guilt and embarrassment surrounding childhood sexual abuse, when a person first contacts Healing and Support they often choose to meet in a neutral setting or at their home. Individuals may have kept their abuse secret from their own families. The idea of disclosing their abuse requires extraordinary courage and meeting with others or joining a group at that stage may be abhorrent to them. It is important to be encouraging and supportive but also accepting of the individual’s pace and their readiness. Individuals need to be ready and feeling comfortable with how widely they share their story as well as when and where they do so.

Given the average delay in disclosing child sexual abuse, a large proportion of the people accessing Healing and Support are mature aged. Consequently, it is advantageous to have services that reach out and are able to visit people in their own homes or area as opposed to requiring individuals in need to travel to the services’ locations. Alternatively, individuals may need assistance such as transport or financial assistance in accessing more formal counselling appointments.

Child sexual abuse has a ripple effect that can last for many years and affect those close to the individual who was abused. Disclosing abuse may provide some sense of relief for the individuals who suffered the abuse, but it may also initiate a crisis for other family members and loved ones who had been unaware of their loved one’s personal trauma.

Other family members and loved ones may require assistance in dealing with their own reactions, learning strategies to cope. Assisting family members and other supporters often means increasing their capacities and further enabling them to continue to provide support to those directly affected, which consequently enhances their recovery. To provide an effective holistic

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support service, it is imperative that the service offers support to those indirectly affected including parents, siblings, children and partners. This support may include facilitation of counselling, linking people into groups or one on one interaction with someone from a similar situation.

For many individuals, having their experiences of childhood sexual abuse validated by the institution in which the abuse occurred, is vital in shifting feelings of responsibility and shame. Healing and Support is an ongoing, practical validation to many who have been abused. Equally for some, accepting support from a part of the institution that has been responsible for a person's abuse is unacceptable. In these circumstances Healing and Support has facilitated referrals to and payment of counselling without having personal contact with the individual. For others the church has been an integral part of their life and they want to maintain some connection. For those who have become alienated from their church community, being part of a network or group can assist in partly compensating for their lost community.

### **Arranging Counselling**

Healing and Support staff offer supported and targeted referrals to psychologists/counsellors who are registered with a professional body such as the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, are current members of the Australian Psychological Society or are approved by the Victims Services.

Healing and Support staff offer individuals a choice of having a referral made on their behalf and/or making the initial appointment for them with their consent. Where there are options Healing and Support explores with the individual their preferences for a male or a female practitioner, preference of location (for example, many individuals prefer to see someone outside of the area in which they live) and the therapeutic milieu used by the psychologist/counsellor. Healing and Support staff contact the individual after their first session to ascertain if they felt comfortable with the choice of practitioner and would be willing to make subsequent appointments. If this is not the case, Healing and Support offer to refer the individual to another practitioner.

Healing and Support maintains a list of counsellors that have received positive feedback is continually updated. Healing and Support also facilitates yoga, mindfulness, group therapy and retreats in addition to individual counselling.

### **Practical Assistance**

Healing and Support offers practical assistance to individuals affected by child sexual abuse and their family members. Incapacity to maintain steady employment often produces financial hardship. Healing and Support has advocated to the Archdiocese for provision of financial assistance for household bills or seeks assistance from Government and non-government agencies for vouchers to assist payment of bills. At other times Healing and Support also advocates on behalf of family members for assistance which will help them support a person who has been abused.

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Healing and Support have at times arranged and paid for mental health assessments of individuals to assist their treating medical practitioners to prescribe medication or to assist their Centrelink claims for disability pension. Healing and Support may also assist individuals by writing letters and statements of support for example to Family and Criminal Courts.

## **Support during Court Proceedings**

Healing and Support offers individuals support for those pursuing their rights for justice. Healing and Support may receive referrals from NSW or ACT Police, usually shortly after the individual has reported their abuse. As such Healing and Support may be involved from the beginning to the end of the criminal justice process from investigation to sentencing (if a guilty verdict is given).

## **Assistance with Spirituality**

Healing and Support also endeavours to assist individuals who have concerns about loss of spirituality. Spirituality is based on an individual’s needs and support can range from arranging meetings with the Bishop or a priest as requested; accessing resources (books and articles) on spiritual healing; organising a pastoral care worker to meet with support groups Healing and Support run to explore how abuse of their partner, child or sibling has impacted on their faith and/or spiritual being; arranging phone contact for a person who feels the need to “pray” with someone and facilitating attending spiritual retreats. For example,

## **Symbolic Gestures**

On occasions Healing and Support may receive requests to undertake particular actions which have special symbolic significance to an individual affected by abuse. Usually the requests relate to giving away or burning something that the offender gave them as a child (for example a prayer book or rosary beads), to burn the collection of documents or media articles the person may have collected about their abuser in a ceremony that they plan or to have certain concrete structures destroyed which may have once accommodated their abuser.

## **GEOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS**

Healing and Support is a small service and is limited in its capacity to physically provide outreach to those who have made contact from outside the Archdiocese. Healing and Support was originally envisaged to provide services to those who were sexually abused as children and still reside within the geographical boundaries of the Archdiocese. However, some of those who were abused have relocated. Contact has been made with a large number of people who now live in other states and this contact usually takes place via electronic media (phone calls, texts and emails). On occasions Healing and Support staff have travelled across NSW or interstate to meet with people, support them through particular processes or arranged for a person to travel to the Archdiocese to make contact or to meet with others with a shared past. For those living interstate appropriate counselling services are sourced and referrals made as well identification of other local resources including support groups.

Within this geographic location there exist some rural areas. Outreach services are offered to people from Healing and Support and where and when appropriate people in rural areas are linked in to one another. In rural areas people may need to travel to larger centres to access

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counselling and at times this may need to be supported by meeting travel and/or accommodation costs as well as counselling.

## **SERVICE SYSTEM ISSUES**

Healing and Support avoids using the terms “victim” or “survivor” as experience tells us that some people do not like to be identified as one or the other or to be defined by what has happened to them. As one person said

*"Healing is a journey – a process, not an event."*

Some people say that at times they feel like a “survivor” whilst they can still at other times feel like a “victim”. The process is a journey. Healing and Support uses the term “those affected by childhood sexual abuse both directly or indirectly” which is usually shortened by “those affected by abuse.”

Counselling for those affected by child sexual abuse is a specialised area which requires therapists to be aware of the possibility of re-traumatising an individual affected and to be adequately trained in this area. Significant issues may arise if services, whether therapeutic or advocacy are provided by persons who are ill-prepared or unaware of how to work with those who have experienced child sexual abuse. Healing and Support staff should be trained and follow Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery (ASCA, 2012) and believe that personnel providing direct services to people affected by abuse should have appropriate tertiary qualifications, supervision appropriate for the seniority and experience of the staff member and application of ASCA practice guidelines or equivalent trauma informed practice.

## **EVIDENCE AND PROMISING PRACTICES**

Healing and Support provides services in a manner and for a duration determined by the person affected by abuse. This ‘open ended’ support may be regular or irregular with new contact at times being initiated by other life events. There are no restraints or conditions placed on the level of support which is offered; there is no pre-requisite testing of facts, the person is taken at their word. A person’s support is managed by way of interagency collaboration and collegiate relationships with a range of other professionals.



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