



Safe Spaces Briefing Paper

Background

As you may be aware, for the past year, Victim Support (VS) has been running the contract to manage the flagship project: Safe Spaces, a joint Anglican and Catholic Church project to provide a vital support service for survivors of church-related abuse.

Although the churches have funded the service, it is run independently by the charity Victim Support, who are one of the leading charities providing specialist support to survivors of abuse in England and Wales. We work towards a world where people can feel safe in church and where abusers are held accountable for their actions.

Service

Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal and safe space for anyone who has been abused through their relationship with Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

Safe Spaces comprises a team of trained support advocates who have undergone specialist training in supporting survivors of sexual violence (ISVAs). They have also received additional specific training in how the churches respond to abuse cases, the way in which faith and church-related settings have been used to carry out abuse, and the particular issues affecting people who have had or still have, a relationship with the church.

The project is a national service providing remote support through our helpline, live chat service and website. Remote support is provided for as long as the survivor

needs. This can be advocating for the survivor, giving them support, providing information (including information on church and police procedures), understanding individual needs and jointly working on individual support plans. If face-to-face support is also required, contact and referrals will be made with appropriate local organisations depending on need.

Eligibility

Safe Spaces is for anyone who feels they have experienced abuse related to the Church of England, Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

By 'church related', this may include:

- Abuse by a church officer. A church officer is any person, ordained or lay, paid or voluntary, who holds a role in the church.
- Abuse that is linked to participating in a church-led activity or group.

The service is for people who live in **England and Wales**. If someone lives outside of England and Wales, but suffered abuse by a Church Officer from the Church of England, Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales, we will endeavour to provide support but this may be limited due to the support available outside of England and Wales.

It is for people **aged 18 or over, but the abuse can have happened at any time in the past**. If support is required for someone younger, we will endeavour to find appropriate local support.

Survivors **do not have to have reported the incident** to the Church authorities or the Police in order to access support.

You do not need to be a **current active member** of the church in order to access support.

It is for people who've experienced **any kind of abuse** – this includes (but is not limited to) sexual violence, inappropriate sexual behaviour, physical abuse, financial abuse or exploitation, psychological abuse (including spiritual abuse), domestic abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour.

Service Start Date

The Safe Spaces service started on 29th September 2020, with a soft launch within the churches and through our website. We sent information out to yourselves in September 2020 and are now wanting to remind both statutory and voluntary organisations across the country of this project and how to refer into us.

If you are working with survivors of church-related abuse who you believe would benefit from this specialist service, please do not hesitate to contact us as below.

Opening Hours

Our dedicated Safe Spaces team are available through our helpline and live chat service between Monday–Saturday 10am-6pm, apart from Thursdays when the service is open 12-8pm.

Safe and Secure Referrals

Safe Spaces aims to reduce re-traumatisation at every stage of support, as such we will ask for details of the survivor, their personal circumstances, any related support needs, and the nature of the abuse. We ask for these extensive details to reduce the requirement for the survivor to repeat their experience, and to ensure that we make safe and appropriate contact, matching specific skills-sets of our Advocates whenever possible.

As an overview you will be asked for:

- Survivor's personal and contact details – including safe contact arrangements and language requirements.
- Offence details – including any current or anticipated Police or Church reporting.
- Offender details, where known.
- Any significant factors in the case which will affect support – for example children in the household, concerns with regards to mental well-being, domestic abuse.

Safe Spaces can receive referrals by completing our secure, on-line web referral form, where survivors can self-refer requesting further contact, or agencies can refer on the survivors behalf, **with their consent**.

Our team will make contact within 48 hours of reviewing a referral (72 hours at weekends).

Contact Details

You can contact the Safe Spaces team using a variety of methods, according to the needs and preferences of survivors:

Website – with secure web referral form www.SafeSpacesEnglandandWales.org.uk

Phone - 0300 303 1056 (a voicemail facility is available outside of opening times)

Email - safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk

LiveChat - via our website www.SafeSpacesEnglandandWales.org.uk

