



The Church of Scotland

Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse Policy 2024

(also known as non-recent abuse)

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Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse (also known as non-recent abuse) (Supplement to Safeguarding Handbook)

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy is about how the Church aims to respond to the needs of survivors of historical abuse. It is underpinned by the Safeguarding Policy Statement and Safeguarding Handbook [see [Safeguarding Service webpages](#) for current version].

See section 10 for definitions and section 9 for a summary flowchart.

- 1.2 The Church will:

- Ensure that survivors are heard, understood, believed and supported
- Provide a sensitive and effective response for survivors who report any type of abuse perpetrated by a Church office bearer or employee (see glossary), in a Church activity, or by a worker or another service user in a social care service provided by CrossReach (Social Care Council), as well as those in a Church context who have experienced abuse in other settings and who have felt able to disclose the abuse,
- Treat all disclosures of historical abuse seriously and respond in an appropriate and timely way
- Make sure that victims, survivors and Church workers know what process and procedures will be followed if someone discloses abuse
- Strive to understand the possible impact of trauma on the person disclosing abuse and the best way to respond to it
- Respond in a way that prevents further trauma to the person concerned
- Create a healthy safeguarding culture- one of listening, respect, openness and transparency to encourage an environment where people feel safe to disclose abuse
- Ensure that disclosures of alleged criminal activity and/or current risk of significant harm to the victim or survivor, child or adult, is shared appropriately with police or other public authorities

2. Church of Scotland Theology of Safeguarding

- 2.1 Jesus had a very clear message about the most vulnerable people. It is a theme which is replicated throughout the whole Bible, with God portrayed in the 121st Psalm as the *'keeper'* of Israel. This Hebrew word can be translated as Safeguard, which is God's need and wish for the Church, not only that we are safe, but we all work for the safety of all people. That is affirmed in the theological idea of Salvation.

- 2.2 In both the Greek and the Latin version of the word, the root of the word is safekeeping. The theological imperative of God is the safety of his children. Jesus continues this theme in St Matthew 18, when he places a child in the midst of the disciples when they ask him: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" His reply is revolutionary when he says: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 18: 3-5). The power of the Jesus' imagery shows us the strength of his teaching about the most vulnerable in our midst. Yet again, Jesus gives us the example that worldly power is not the most important thing in his world, and that Christians are called to replicate that radical hospitality and celebrate Christ's Incarnation, by the love we have for the most vulnerable in our midst.

- 2.3 There are other examples in the Gospels of Jesus holding up the poor and vulnerable elderly as examples of great faith, as in the story of the widow, who brings her gift to the Temple. He holds her up as an example of humility and generosity. Jesus teaches that, in the Kingdom, people are judged by what is in their hearts and how they put their faith into action, rather than the learned, like the Pharisees who know the Law, but fail to put it into practice. Theologically, the Church of Scotland is committed to promoting environments where everyone is free from the risk of harm and abuse. This stems from the Gospel imperative that Jesus loves everyone, particularly those who are the least, the last and the lost in society, and wishes everyone to be safe and cared for, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- 2.4 The other side of this coin is that we know there are some people who worship in our congregations, or who might wish to work for the Church, who present a risk of harm and abuse to vulnerable people. For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven Report 2009, is the Church of Scotland's understanding of our theological attitude to Forgiveness, and how we support and manage people who pose a risk to vulnerable people. At its heart is an understanding that people who survive abuse should be cared for and not be placed in a situation, where the hurt they have experienced can be perpetuated, even inadvertently, by our actions. This means that in discipleship terms, someone who has abused can no longer be allowed to be in a place of leadership within the Church and they must be accountable for their continued discipleship journey.
- 2.5 Forgiveness can only be given by the survivor. The "institution" of the Church does not have the right to forgive an individual on behalf of anyone who has been abused. It may be that someone who has been abused may not be able to forgive the person who has abused them, and the Church should never make anyone feel obliged to forgive the kind of abuse they may have suffered. The Church should rightly leave that great responsibility and right to God. It is also important to remember that forgiveness is not about forgetting. Jesus still had the scars on his body after the resurrection and everyone lives with their own scars. People who survive abuse have hidden scars, and the Church should ensure that, as an institution, we do not add to their scars.
- 2.6 The person who poses a risk of harm and abuse and wishes to continue to worship within the Church of Scotland is required, as part of their discipleship journey, to recognise they are under the authority of God. They, like everyone who seeks to live out their discipleship, must try to acknowledge what they have done and how they have done it, and seek to find ways to amend their behaviour and to repent of their sin. This acknowledgement may only be to God, but it is hoped that with the support of the local congregation, and by bible study, prayer and reflection with the Minister and others, they might find a way to live with what they have done and to live safely.
- 2.7 Safeguarding is at the heart of God's will for everyone and while it is sometimes challenging to incorporate its requirements into the life of the congregation, its foundations assure us that God's love requires us to place the most vulnerable at the heart of what we do and who we are. This ensures that in the Body of Christ, we encourage everyone to live fully, radically and in God's love and safekeeping.

2.8 Apologies

Apologising for historical abuse can be challenging, particularly when the perpetrators of the abuse have died or are no longer part of the church. Aspects of apologies are referred to throughout the Bible. There are many examples in book of Acts of how people can be held responsible for sins they may not have directly carried out; Peter charges the “[m]en of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (v. 14) with crucifying Jesus (v. 23, 36). To be sure, they did this by the hands of lawless men...” (v. 23), however as they had been present, they bore some responsibility for Jesus’s death.

2.9 Receiving an apology can be therapeutic for a survivor and can support their healing. We must reflect on what the Bible tells us and how we can make apologies that are meaningful. The following should be considered:

- *Recognition: I acknowledge what happened, and I see the negative effects of those sins of omission or commission.*
- *Remorse: I feel terrible for what has happened.*
- *Renunciation: I reject what has taken place in the past and repudiate those beliefs, words, thoughts, or actions.*
- *Repentance: I have sinned against God and will turn away from this evil and strive after greater obedience to God’s law in my life.*

(DeYoung, 2018)

3. Types of Abuse experienced in faith communities and the impact of abuse

- 3.1 Abuse can happen anywhere and can be perpetrated by anyone. Abuse within faith communities may include sexual, physical, emotional/psychological, domestic and spiritual abuse, financial or material abuse and neglect.
- 3.2 Survivors of abuse have shared their experiences, highlighting common themes about how abuse occurs within these communities and how their voices are heard or not.
- 3.3 The needs of survivors of abuse vary greatly depending on individual circumstances. They may or may not experience trauma as a result of life events. Many types of experience can lead to psychological trauma, including but not limited to, interpersonal violence, chronic or repetitive experiences such as child abuse and neglect. Experiencing trauma may shape how people respond to a particular situation or event and can have a wide range of adverse outcomes, including poorer mental and physical health, economic and social outcomes, and religious/spiritual impacts.
- 3.4 Their needs can change over time and be triggered at different points in their lifetime or be lifelong.
- 3.5 Whilst the majority of the population has been, directly or indirectly, exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, it is important to note that no two people experience harmful events in the same way. Some people are resilient and able to ‘bounce back’ without experiencing the same impact as their neighbour while other people may develop damaging coping skills e.g. problematic substance use.

- 3.6 Survivors might need practical support about how to report abuse and access appropriate medical help, advocacy support and therapeutic support such as counselling and psychotherapy.
- 3.7 For those with a safeguarding role in the Church (it's everyone's job), being aware of the impact of abuse on survivors and the connection between abuse and trauma, can help us provide an effective and timely response when needed.

4. Barriers and Challenges to Disclosing Abuse in Faith Communities

- The trust people have in religious leaders, which both creates opportunities for abuse and makes it less likely that survivors will be believed if they accuse a religious community leader
- The difficulty people have in thinking that someone of their own faith would abuse another member of that same faith, tied with the desire not to damage the reputation of the faith group by exposing such individuals
- An attitude of welcome and inclusion, which makes religious communities susceptible to people who wish to enter them in order to abuse. This can be tied up with issues of forgiveness and second chances
- Blurred boundaries between adults and children, for example on pilgrimages and other trips
- Reliance, especially at the level of individual congregations, on volunteers to handle safeguarding issues; volunteers who will have varying degrees of knowledge and confidence, and who can easily walk away if not properly supported
- A concern for organisational reputation, stemming at least in part from the status of religious groups as morally good organisations. This status is threatened by abuse within the organisation, and appears to be a consideration in the repeated covering up of potential scandals in a number of faith groups.
- Community organisations/charities, faith groups – especially smaller ones – may have limited resources to devote to safeguarding
- Many lack a culture of safe recruitment, supervision, human resources and other management structures which can lead to accountability and transparency
- Tension between religious laws and customs and statutory requirements
- How to best use limited resources (SCIE)

5. Importance of Trauma Informed Co-production

- 5.1 The voices of Survivors should be heard in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way. This means seeing survivors as a valuable resource, and reaching out to engage with them in safeguarding improvement work, for example through co-producing policies and procedures, training and safeguarding education. However, in our aim to be a trauma informed organisation, we must ensure engagement does not re-traumatise survivors of abuse. Reflecting this, the Church of Scotland Survivor Group has been assisted in its work by a number of different people with lived experience and representative organisations. We thank them for their time and commitment to ensuring this policy was well-informed.

6. Our commitment to survivors of abuse within the Church of Scotland:

- 6.1 Many survivors and survivor groups tell us they need
- To be heard
 - To be listened to

- To be believed and not judged
- To receive caring and empathetic support from professionals and others

6.2 This policy aims to meet these needs through the implementation of this policy and the supporting procedures detailed below.

7. Procedure

7.1 This procedure provides a framework for responding to reports of historical abuse. It should be read alongside the flowchart on page 9

I. Disclosure

The process starts with a report of historical abuse by a survivor, or other person, about the harmful conduct by a person as defined in 1.2 above. The disclosure may relate to any organised activity or service-provision in the Church or in a current, or past, CrossReach service or in a context outwith the Church (flowchart, step 1).

It is important not to give the person disclosing the information the promise of confidentiality. The Church has a duty of care and responsibility to contribute to the protection of individuals and the public in general. While their information will be treated with sensitivity, it may be necessary to pass this on to statutory bodies including the Police and Social Work Services. However, reassurance can be given that information will only be shared on this basis and only those who need to know, will be told.

II. Safeguarding procedure

Historical abuse should be referred to the Safeguarding Service using the established safeguarding procedure for all reported harm (flowchart step 2).

III. Initial Risk Assessment

The Safeguarding Service will do a risk assessment (flowchart step 3) using the disclosed information to determine if there is a current risk and if the information disclosed needs to be shared with the police or other statutory bodies immediately (flowchart step 4). Sometimes the survivor may be at risk of on-going harm or another child or adult may currently be at risk of significant harm and this should be acted on.

If this is not the case, the Safeguarding Service will support the collation of basic information about what happened, where, when and who was involved. This is about establishing the context of the alleged abuse, NOT investigating the allegation. The police, or other statutory bodies, will take the lead role in any investigation (flowchart step 3a).

Appropriate senior staff in the Church Offices and/or CrossReach will be advised about the disclosure.

IV. Reported crime and/or current risk of harm?

When a disclosure suggests that a crime has been committed, the Church's standard practice will be to share this information with the relevant Police service (flowchart step 4). The initial risk assessment will be used to determine when Police are informed – see (III) above.

- Sharing information with the police

If the survivor wishes to inform Police themselves, they will be encouraged and supported to do so.

The Church has a duty to contribute to public protection. If a survivor does not want to, or is not able to do this, the relevant Church department or The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will share this information.

However, the survivor retains control – they do not have to speak with the Police unless they want to. It is highly unlikely that the Police will contact the survivor when it is known that they do not want this to happen. It is the role of Police to decide what to do with the information e.g. note it for information or investigate.

V. Being Heard

“The greatest thing you can give a survivor is acknowledgement, not sympathy but acknowledgement” (1)

The survivor will have the opportunity to be heard if they wish through contact with the Safeguarding Service. The Safeguarding Service will work with the survivor to ensure appropriate opportunities to be heard are identified. Contact with the Safeguarding Service can be a face-to-face meeting, or the survivor may prefer to communicate via email, letter, telephone or video call (flowchart step 5).

VI. Responding to survivors’ needs

Being heard is the first step in responding to survivors’ needs. Survivors will be supported to share any needs they have identified with the Safeguarding Service. The Church will consider these, and where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, make a response. These may include one or more of the following: being heard and listened to; provision of on-going pastoral care; professional counselling; police investigation; meeting with a senior representative of the Church; access to the survivor’s records from the time of the reported abuse; being put in contact with specialist voluntary organisations for supporting survivors.

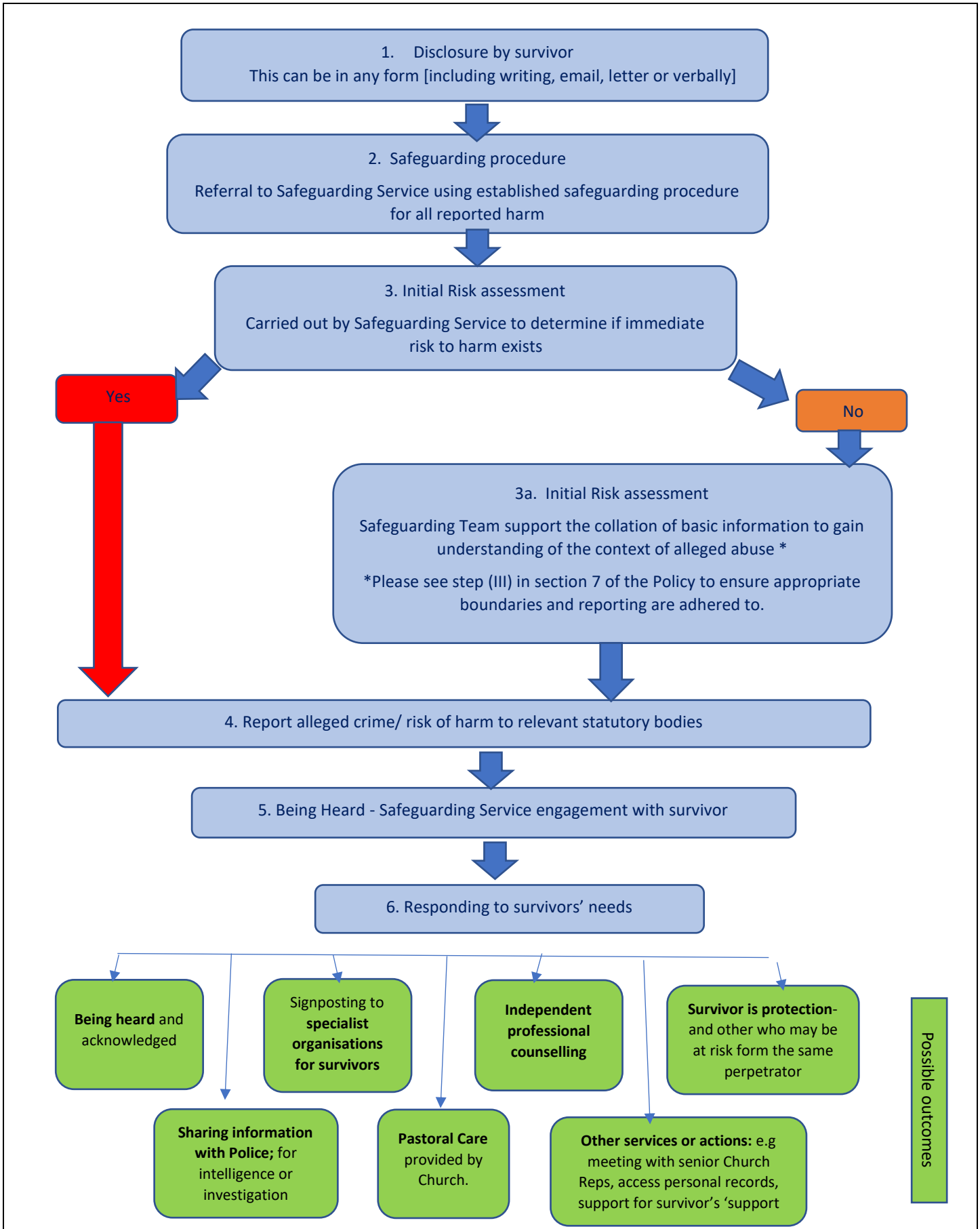
(1) Quote from a survivor on the front cover of the Scottish Government report into historical abuse, Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum, Tom Shaw, February 2011.

8. Summary

- 8.1 The Church will be receptive to the needs of survivors and will give them an opportunity to be heard. The policy and procedure provide a structure and process for this to happen. The measures of success will be the outcomes for survivors.
- 8.2 The Safeguarding Committee will regularly monitor and review this policy and procedure.

9. Flowchart

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10. Glossary

Adults at risk

As defined in the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007: a person who is unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, is at risk of harm, and, because they are affected by disability, mental ill health, physical or learning disabilities, is more vulnerable to harm than a person not so affected.

Child

A child is a person under the age of 18 years old.

Church

All Church of Scotland congregations and Presbyteries world-wide, General Assembly Standing Committees, statutory corporations,, Church-provided social care services past and present, and any service provided by Church office bearers/employees.

Church office bearer and employee

An office bearer is (a) any person occupying a voluntary post or office in a congregation or Presbytery and (b) a Minister, Deacon, Reader, Candidate or Probationer of the Church of Scotland. An employee is a paid member of staff e.g. paid youth worker, pastoral care visitor, or paid staff working with 'adults at risk' in a congregation, staff in CrossReach services etc.

Disclosure or reporting

This is when an adult, or a young person, speaks about abuse they experienced in their childhood. The disclosure may relate to an individual's experience in the family home, community or while in foster, residential or other social care setting.

Historical abuse, also known as non-recent abuse

This means adults reporting abuse that occurred when they were children. Historical abuse includes neglect, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse which took place before the survivor was 18 years old; and that has been reported by the survivor a significant time after the event. For more about what is meant by harm/abuse [see Safeguarding Handbook](#). The term historical abuse is a misnomer: the effects of abuse are current, not past, for survivors. Similarly, the offences may be 'historic' but reported criminality from the past needs to be investigated in the present which makes such cases current.

Perpetrators of abuse and historical abuse

The Church of Scotland historical abuse policy and procedure primarily relates to people who allege/report abuse by Church office bearers/employees and not to a person who discloses abuse by others whether or not this took place in a Church context. For the Church this means any current or former employee, office bearer, Church member or volunteer in any current, or former, congregation, Church organisation or CrossReach service. For CrossReach, and some activities in congregations, the alleged perpetrators could also be other children or adults at risk using the service.

However, this policy will also support survivors whose perpetrator of abuse had no connection to the Church, but have felt able to disclose their abuse to someone within the Church.

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Statutory Body

This is Police Scotland, local authority social work services, health services or regulatory organisations (Care Inspectorate, Scottish Social Services Council).

Survivor

This is the preferred term for the person affected by historical abuse. A survivor is usually an adult but may also be an older child or an 'adult at risk'. The survivor's 'supportive family members', spouses and partners are also indirectly affected by that same abuse.

11. Supporting Documents

Anne-Marie McAlinden: [Politics of apology](#) Cambridge University Press, 2021

Church of Scotland: [Theology of Safeguarding](#), Church of Scotland, online, nd

Dr Godfred Boahen & David Worlock: [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#), The Church of England, 2021

Eloise K. Thomas et al: [Clergy Apologies Following Abuse: What Makes A Difference?](#), ResearchGate, 2008

Jasvinder Sangera CBE: ["Don't Panic – Be Pastoral"](#), Independent Safeguarding Board, 2022

Kevin DeYoung: [Toward a Theology of Apology](#), The Gospel Coalition, online, 2018

Pete Singer: [Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church](#), The Theological Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology and Wartburg Theological Seminary Vol.51 No.1, 2024

Scottish Government & NHS Education for Scotland: [Trauma Informed Practice Toolkit, The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2021](#)

Scottish Government: [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – Updated 2023](#), The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2023

Stephen Winter et al.: [The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State and Faith Based Care: A Preliminary Review](#), The Royal Commission, Wellington, 2018

The Church of Scotland: [The Safeguarding Act](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2009

The Mission and Discipleship Council and The Safeguarding Committee: [For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven](#), Church of Scotland, 2009

The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Act Guidance](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018

The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Handbook](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018 updated 2023

Tom Shaw: [Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum](#), Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2011