Walking together

A training manual for support people in cases of church leader sexual misconduct

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Preface: The importance of the support person

If someone is involved in a sexual misconduct complaint in a church institution or congregation, they are walking a difficult road. How will they navigate it? Who will help them figure out what is going to happen? Is justice possible? Where can healing be found?

Hard experience has shown that both a complainant (the person who was hurt) and the respondent (the person who the complaint is about, and who is responding to the complaint) need support. Many misconduct policies require that they each be assigned a person to help them. This individual can be called a support person, or an advocate. Every complainant and respondent has a right to have someone with them as they walk through this process, even if the policy does not name this. While friends and family can be supportive, a support person fulfills a very specific role.

Support people understand pastoral sexual misconduct. They are volunteers who are trained to guide the complainant or the respondent before, during and after the investigation. They are people who come into the situation from the outside who are compassionate, trained and hopeful.

This manual is a training for this support person role. It is designed to be used in an in-person or on-line training event, but it can be helpful even if you just read it by yourself. It draws on the scholarly research about best practices, and the combined wisdom of people in the Mennonite community who have worked in this area for thirty years. Thank you to those who helped review a draft of this manual, and whose wisdom is reflected in its pages (see Appendix C: Reviewers).

This is a revision and expansion of an earlier manual, *Advocacy: Advocating for Survivors of Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver* by Heather Block, (published in 1996, re-issued in 2000, sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee Canada Women's Concerns. This current manual was commissioned by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

While this manual is written for the specific context of church leader sexual misconduct, it will also be helpful for people who are trying to support anyone in the church who has experienced sexual harm, or who faces sexual harm allegations.

If you are serving as a support person, we hope this manual will guide you on your way, and that justice and healing will come as you and the complainant or the respondent walk together.

Carol Penner

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Part 1

What is sexual misconduct by a church leader?

1. It is an abuse of power

Power resides in the position, not necessarily in the paycheque.

Sexual misconduct is always an abuse of power. When church leaders abuse people in their care, it is sometimes called pastoral or ministerial sexual misconduct. Church leaders have power because of their position in the church. Congregations or denominations recognize that pastors have God-given gifts and they empower them to lead by publicly recognizing those gifts. Pastors have spiritual power because they are often seen as a representative of God. Preachers have the power to interpret the word of God, and administrators have power over the business of their institution. These ministers provide spiritual care for those who are hurting. People become vulnerable with their church leaders about confidential problems, and these leaders have power because of this information. Churches have an understanding that pastors will use the power they have to help, and not hurt, the community.

Other church leadership roles, such as Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, church choir directors, counsellors, teachers, professors, camp counsellors and directors, and administrators also carry power. Church leaders are often commissioned to do their work, whether that is through ordination, licensing or public installation or prayer for their work. They are hired and paid as employees, or they are voted into positions of leadership or appointed as volunteers. Power resides in the position, not necessarily in the paycheque. Volunteer pastors can have power in their communities equal to paid employees, if they are commissioned and sanctioned by the group to serve in that role.

Power differentials between church leaders and those they serve can be compounded by many other factors including physical size, age, gender identity, race, status in the country, disability, sexual orientation, among other factors.

Sexual misconduct happens when someone in a position of power harms someone in their care. They abuse the people they are supposed to be helping, for their own selfish ends. It is a sexualized abuse of power that can cause emotional, spiritual, and physical harm. The term "fiduciary responsibility" is sometimes used to describe the responsibility a church leader has to use their power to help people. A "breach of fiduciary responsibility" means that they have used their power to serve themselves, at the expense of the well-being of others in their care.

While people who commit sexual misconduct have more power than their victims, they sometimes do not feel powerful and most refuse to acknowledge their power.

Key to understanding sexual misconduct is the issue of consent. Meaningful consent to sexual contact cannot happen when there is an imbalance of power. The congregant may be afraid to say no, or they may be convinced that the church leader is working in their best interests, even in the case of sexual misconduct. Church leaders often frame sexual misconduct as a mutual act, telling the congregant that this is an "affair" or a "special relationship." When a church leader sexualizes a pastoral relationship, this is abusive.

Just as in any other professional relationship–such as doctor/patient, client/lawyer, therapist/counsellee, professor/student–the pastor/congregant relationship is unequal, and sexual contact is forbidden. In addition, in the Christian context, the pastor/congregant relationship involves a sacred trust, where the congregation or a church hierarchy conveys power on someone to minister to the larger group. Hurting someone in their care is a violation of that sacred and communal trust.

While people who commit sexual misconduct have more power than their victims, they sometimes do not feel powerful and most refuse to acknowledge their power. In fact they frequently feel inadequate, overworked,

unsupported, ineffective, and powerless (that is, not in control). Therefore, the notion of pastoral power may not be something with which they readily identify. Additionally, within church communities which emphasize the "priesthood of all believers," or the equality of leaders and members, there is less permission to formally recognize power differentials within the church. This inability to identify the power difference is dangerous; when pastors have difficulty acknowledging their power they stand in greater danger of abusing it.

Gender plays a large role in pastoral sexual misconduct. The majority of people who violate these sexual boundaries are men, and the majority of victims are women and children. Power imbalance is easily sexualized or eroticized. Carolyn Holderread Heggen notes that:

> *The imbalance of power between men and women has become eroticized in our culture. Many persons find male power and female powerlessness sexually arousing. In general, men are sexually attracted to females who are younger, smaller, and less powerful than themselves. Women tend to be attracted to males who are older, larger, and more powerful. Male clergy have a great imbalance of power over their congregations, which are often predominately women, therefore, the stage is set for a sexually inappropriate expression of this power differential.*[1]

LGBTQ+ people experience sexual abuse at higher rates than other groups. When victims are abused by leaders of the same sex, there can be an added layer of shame in getting help, because of these prejudices.

There is also prejudice in our society against people who do not experience sexual attraction within traditional male/female binaries. LGBTQ+ people experience sexual abuse at higher rates than other groups. When victims are abused by leaders of the same sex, there can be an added layer of shame in getting help, because of these prejudices.

Vulnerable people are sometimes sexually attracted to people who are caring for them. It is always the responsibility of the church leader, who is the person with the most power, to set appropriate boundaries. This holds true even when the person with less power

makes sexual advances. A person in leadership is in a trusted position and is responsible to make sure that no sexualized behaviour occurs, no matter what the level of provocation or apparent consent. Sexual misconduct can be investigated even if the congregant involved sees themselves as a willing partner, and is not calling it abuse.

The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements of the past several years have brought the issue of sexual harm into the public eye. The role of power in sexual assault and abuse is being openly discussed and acknowledged. There has also been a backlash, where some suggest that women now hold all the power, and that men are now disadvantaged. In fact, the vast majority of men in society who commit sexual misconduct are never held accountable.[2] In our legal system today, the few that do have charges laid against them are usually found not guilty, and rarely face consequences. The feeling that power is being reversed is an overreaction to women having any power at all to stop sexual abuse.[3]

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2. Definitions

The term sexual misconduct describes sexualized behavior by a leader towards someone with less power. It may or may not be criminal in nature. It includes a spectrum of sexualized behaviors: inappropriate words and innuendo, harassment, threats, physical contact including hugs, kisses, touching, intercourse, as well as emotional and spiritual manipulation and coercion. It can range from boundary violations (a youth pastor asking a youth on a date), to sexual harassment (a pastor making sexualized comments with or about a congregant), to sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is any type of unwanted sexual contact where the victim is violated repeatedly by a person who they should be able to trust. When the undesired sexual action occurs only once it is typically called sexual assault. *Any type of sexual activity between an older individual and a minor (under the age of consent) is understood as child sexual abuse, and must be reported to child welfare authorities, as required by law.*

Any sexualized behaviour of a church leader towards a congregant or youth is sexual misconduct regardless of whether there was perceived consent or given consent. It is a breach of fiduciary duty. Similar to therapists and counsellors, church leaders must abide by the professional code of ethics held by their denomination or congregation, which does not tolerate any sexual contact with those whom they are serving.

Pastoral sexual misconduct is:

- a violation of professional ethics
- a misuse of power and authority
- a violation—meaningful consent is lacking

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What about a church leader "dating" in the congregation? If a church leader wants to pursue a romantic connection, they should do this with someone from outside the congregation. Best practices suggest that if they are romantically interested in someone from their congregation, that person should attend another congregation while they are in a dating relationship. It is essential that there not be any secrecy around the existence of this relationship: it should be disclosed to the people supervising the church leader and to the congregation.[4]

3. What is grooming?

When a person with authority in the church uses their power to gain sexual contact with a congregant, this is called grooming. Grooming is advanced manipulation, gradually breaking down someone's defenses, so that sexual abuse can take place without physical force. This can be a long or short process of eroding the boundaries of a congregant.

A relationship where the church leader is grooming someone takes the following patterns, where the leader:

i. makes the potential victims feel special, important and valued.

ii. develops dependence so that the victims feel they need the leader's help and support.

iii. develops a sense within the victims that they are needed by the church leader.

iv. starts to introduce sexualized behaviour in such a way that they may be interpreted as appropriate.

v. engages in sexually abusive behaviour. By the time the abuse reaches this stage, the victim feels trapped. They are dependent upon the church leader, or feel that they are essential to that leader's well-being.

Grooming is advanced manipulation, gradually breaking down someone's defenses, so that sexual abuse can take place without physical force.

Grooming behavior can include:

- arranging to spend extra time with a congregant to meet the leader's own needs.
- hugging a bit too long, increasing the intensity of the hug, a bit longer each time.
- kissing someone (for example, first on the top of the head, then on the cheek, then on the lips).
- going to locations with a congregant with the spaces becoming increasingly more intimate (out for a walk alone together, into a car for a drive, going into their home, then their bedroom).
- asking them intrusive personal questions in the guise of pastoral care ("Tell me about your sex life").
- the leader sharing about their own life (starting with innocuous facts and ending with intrusive knowledge, "I never really loved my wife").
- the leader labelling the relationship as special and private ("I have no one else to share this with").
- flattery that becomes more and more sexually explicit ("You have beautiful hair" becomes eventually "I fantasize about feeling your hair against my naked body").
- normalizing nakedness (from taking off outer clothing, to eventually taking off all clothing).
- bringing refreshments to a private meeting, then eventually bringing alcohol.
- giving personal gifts that have a special meaning.
- increasing the amount of time spent together, from

meeting for coffee, to meeting for long dinners, to going away for the night.

- increasing neediness ("I'd like to see you" eventually becomes "I can't live without your touch").
- spiritualizing the relationship for sexual gratification ("God made you special" becomes "God made you special for me").

Grooming can and often does include asking permission. ("Can I touch you? Can I say this to you?") By asking permission, the pastor subtly manipulates the congregant into thinking that they are in control, or that they are responsible for what happened.

Church leaders who want to violate sexual boundaries can groom numerous people at once, determining who is least likely to resist being abused.

Grooming involves emotional manipulation, where the leader uses privileged information they have because of their role to gain compliance to sexual acts; "Because you were abused as a child, you haven't learned how to express yourself physically, you need this relationship with me." They can also use private information about your sexual identity to coerce you, "I would hate to have to tell your mother about what you shared, but I won't have to if you just let me try something."

Grooming can include spiritual manipulation. While physical force is sometimes used to get compliance, more often the congregant is talked into it, often using spiritualized language; "You are a gift from God for me," "This relationship is holy and good," "God meant us for each other." People who violate sexual boundaries can use spiritual or therapeutic rationalizations to support their behaviour. For example, "You have spoken about difficulty in sexual relationships. Sex is best experienced in an open, trusting relationship. Since we have worked hard at developing such a relationship here, this is the best place to work on improving your ability to respond sexually. I can teach you to love your husband more fully, to be the wife Christ intended you to be."

Church leaders who want to violate sexual boundaries can groom numerous people at once, determining who is least likely to resist being abused. This can happen consciously

or unconsciously.[5] When the leader is charged with misconduct, people who have been groomed can suddenly realize what was happening to them and feel violated, even if sexual boundaries were not crossed; "Why did my pastor want to go for long car rides alone with me?"

Becoming aware of grooming behaviour is an important part of the church's strategy for preventing misconduct.

Grooming can present in different ways, depending on the motive. It can be gifts, money, other items, or services. It can be time spent with someone, under the pretense of supporting them and understanding them. Grooming can be the process of building trust with a victim and others, or it can be the development of the persona they want a victim and others to see. And grooming isn't applied only to a victim; it's quite often used on parents, caretakers, other support people in a victim's life, and people in authority. It's important to keep in mind that an offender will use these grooming techniques to ingratiate themselves to those a victim may disclose to, or to someone in position to follow up on the discloser. In doing so, the offender can create doubt in the victim and their story.[6]

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4. Prevalence and profiles

Any amount of clergy sexual misconduct is a problem. From research that polls pastors, rates of misconduct vary widely, depending on denomination and, of course, the honesty of the people filling out the survey. Results suggest that rates of misconduct are higher than in other professions (for example, doctors, lawyers, social workers). In the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, researchers Mark Chaves and Diana Garland surveyed the average population, not just pastors, and not just churchgoers. From their survey of over 3,500 people they found that between 2 and 4 percent of women have experienced sexual contact from a church leader.[7] Across denominations more than 3% of the women who had

attended a congregation in the past month reported being the object of clergy sexual misconduct at some point in their adult lives.[8]

John Thoburn & Rob Baker, in their book *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention and Oversight* write:

> *Ten to fourteen percent of pastors have sexual contact with someone other than a spouse while in the ministry, over 30% of ministers engage in sexual behaviour they consider inappropriate and over 15% qualify as functionally addicted to internet pornography. Furthermore, when clergy sexual misconduct is discovered in a congregation, seven women, on average have been victimized (by the clergyperson).*[9]

There are no common traits for victims except that the person is, at the time of the abuse, vulnerable in some fashion.

The vast majority of pastoral sexual misconduct is never brought to light. Victims who come forward are often filled with shame and they blame themselves. Malicious complaints (complaints with no basis in fact) are extremely rare. It is far more likely that the victims who do complain are not telling the full extent of the abuse; they may be trying to shield the church leader from the consequences of their worst behaviour.

No one is immune to sexual abuse by a church leader. The victim can be a minor or an adult, married or single, gay or straight, professional or labourer, young or old. There are no common traits for victims except that the person is, at the time of the abuse, vulnerable in some fashion. A person may be vulnerable due to physical size, physical needs (such as a disabled person needing assistance), employment (under someone's supervision), financial needs, or emotional well-being (such as experiencing a grief and needing comfort). A previous history of abuse (either witnessed or experienced) also creates vulnerability as the victim may have learned to be passive, to accept inappropriate behaviour, and to accept responsibility for what was done to them.[10] Survivors often share a deep desire to connect to the spiritual bedrock of their life,

which is why they are turning to a church leader for help.[11]

While any church leader can violate sexual boundaries, there are certain profiles that are common. Men are the most likely gender to engage in pastoral misconduct.

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> *Who is this individual who is a shepherd to his flock and yet offends within his congregational family? He tends to be successful, yet lonely. He is of above-average intelligence, has a charismatic style of interacting with others, and surprisingly his divorce rate is less than half of the general population. Issues of co-dependence are profound for him. He has difficulty setting boundaries in terms of how he uses his time yet feels that he is not respected enough for the work that he does. Feelings of entitlement and resentment plague him and he has to work to keep from taking comments personally that are made within the congregation. He tends to be conflict avoidant and periodically falls into basing his self-esteem on how congregational members view him. He lives with overwhelming fear of abandonment, which manifests itself in being unable to reveal himself openly and honestly to his wife, his Church council, or his congregation, especially in the areas of sexuality. A significant core belief for him is, If you knew me, my urges, my thoughts, my fantasies, my compulsions, you would abandon me; therefore I must keep them secret from you. This dynamic of the secret life perpetuates the shame cycle and keeps him isolated.*[12]

Church leaders who violate sexual boundaries often can have the following characteristics:[13]

- controlling, dominating (often very subtly)
- limited self-awareness
- limited or no awareness of appropriate interpersonal boundaries
- no sense of damage caused by own behaviour

- poor judgement
- willingness to risk everything
- narcissistic
- limited impulse control
- limited understanding of consequences of actions
- motivated by desire for power/control/sex
- sense of entitlement "the rules don't apply to me"
- likely overworked and overwhelmed in other areas of their lives
- they have power but often feel powerless
- they are often charismatic and personable

Church leaders who cross sexual boundaries often cover their tracks by being a "super pastor." They can be kind, loving, and giving to the many people who they do not abuse.

While personal and occupational stress is often cited as a factor in setting the stage for misconduct, these do not explain away misconduct, since many people experience these same stresses and do not sexually abuse people in their care.

Church leaders who cross sexual boundaries often cover their tracks by being a "super pastor." They can be kind, loving, and giving to the many people who they do not abuse. (For example, the legendary Jean Vanier was seen as a living saint by many; a report after his death revealed he had sexually abused multiple women.[14]) This selective excellence allows church leaders to act out with impunity because their victims think no one will believe them if they tell their story. Even if complaints do surface, these pastors have such loyal supporters the complainants may never get justice. Like banks in a financial crisis, they are "too big to fail."

5. Experiences of some survivors

"Victim" is the term used for the person currently experiencing abuse or still entangled in the dynamics of the abuse. "Survivor" is a generally used term to describe the person who has survived abuse, and that is the term that this manual will mostly use. Victims who are laying a complaint are becoming survivors. Past abuse is only one aspect of who these people are, it is not their whole identity. A victim/survivor can tell you what term they feel most comfortable using about themselves.

Even minor boundary violations can have enormous effects on victims, depending on their vulnerability and previous experiences of abuse, as well as how the institution responds when they complain.

Sexual abuse by a church leader has many long-term consequences with a wide range of impacts. For example, the investigation could be about several comments that were hurtful. An isolated sexualized comment can be profoundly unsettling and totally change someone's feeling of safety in the church. A minority of pastoral sexual misconduct complaints are about comments, since it is so onerous to lay a complaint against a church leader. The majority of complaints tend to be about sexual contact. This sexual contact can range from one sexual touch to repeated sexual assaults over several years. The "seriousness" of the offence is not always directly correlated with the impact. Even minor boundary violations can have enormous effects on victims, depending on their vulnerability and previous experiences of abuse, as well as how the institution responds when they complain. The consequences of abuse can be compounded if the congregation in turn disbelieves, ignores or re-victimizes the survivor when they come forward with a complaint.

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Some experiences for survivors of pastoral sexual misconduct are:[15]

- shock, grief, loss
- shattered trust, betrayal and violation
- fear, terror and anxiety
- confusion and self-blame
- anger, rage
- guilt and shame
- trauma, feelings of powerlessness
- disconnection from church and friendship communities
- disconnection from God and religious meaning
- contamination, feeling dirty
- devalued self-identity
- difficulty with intimacy
- physical difficulties with sleep, eating and energy levels
- disruption of family relationships
- addiction issues as they cope with pain
- acting out sexually in unhealthy ways
- mental health hospitalizations, and suicidal thoughts
- further vulnerability to abusive relationships
- major financial loss, inability to work
- feeling forced to move out of the area to find safety

6. Experiences of some who have offended

The person who has violated sexual boundaries can be called an offender, a perpetrator or, if there are multiple victims, a predator. This manual has a preference for the term "person who offended" because it acknowledges that there is more to the person than the wrong they have done.

When allegations of sexual misconduct against a church leader are substantiated, they may experience:[16]

- shame and guilt
- shock and grief
- confusion, fear and anxiety
- anger, rage
- feelings of betrayal (they blame the church for judging them)
- fear of further disclosures
- loss of reputation and credibility
- disruption or loss of relationships with family, the church
- loss or suspension of credentials
- loss of employment, with a need to change careers
- legal liability
- mandated or suggested course of treatment
- possible criminal charges and incarceration (if the victim reports to the police)
- often an outpouring of support from their family and community, who believe they are innocent

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7. The setting for abuse

Sexual misconduct by a church leader does not occur in a vacuum. Offences can be more easily covered up in certain environments. In fact, some people who want to offend are drawn to congregations, or church-run youth centers and camps, where sometimes there is minimal supervision and leadership might be rarely challenged.

Characteristics of a climate where sexual abuse by a church leader is tolerated:[17]

- tendency to cover up unpleasant events or happenings
- silencing those who mention abusive acts
- failure to acknowledge abuse as a power issue
- tendency to "shoot the messenger" of bad news (the one disclosing abuse or their support person)
- vulnerable people are taught to "overlook, forgive and tolerate" boundary violations
- patriarchal attitudes where women are told to submit to men's authority without question
- women feel they are responsible to protect the feelings of men and to heal their wounds
- teaching blind obedience to church leaders
- atmosphere that discourages questions
- men taught to fear emotions, vulnerability, and dependency on others
- men taught to value control
- lack of support, supervision and accountability for leadership
- unrealistic expectations of church leadership personnel
- previously existing divisions and suspicions
- distorted communication, including an understanding that one should not talk about difficult feelings
- isolated or closed system evident in suspicion of connections with or intervention from outsiders
- blurred boundaries or a lack of individuation between members

Offences can be more easily covered up in certain environments. In fact, some people who want to offend are drawn to congregations, or church-run youth centers and camps, where sometimes there is minimal supervision and leadership might be rarely challenged.

- putting leaders on pedestals
- lack of abuse-related policies, or inaccessibility of those policies, with no clear guidelines on where to report abuse

Understanding the climate in which abuse occurs is important for several reasons. It helps us understand how the abuse could continue for such a long time without anyone saying anything. Additionally, it explains why there is often much more support for the person who offended than for the victim. An understanding of the climate helps us recognize that in confronting sexual abuse by church leaders we are also confronting deeply ingrained patterns in the community around it. This helps us prepare for the many levels of resistance we will encounter as we work towards healing and justice. It does not, however, excuse people who offend or allow them to avoid responsibility.

When a church leader violates sexual boundaries, the congregation becomes a secondary victim.

When a church leader violates sexual boundaries, the congregation becomes a secondary victim. Individuals in the church respond differently to the betrayal.

Some common responses in the congregation include:

- confusion, shock and disbelief
- a sense that the pastor has betrayed them
- anger at the victim for coming forward, or the leader for their actions
- polarization and division between those who support the respondent and the complainant
- denial or minimization of the problem
- attempts to keep this misconduct secret
- blaming the victim for the abuse
- anger directed at church leadership
- conflict in the church as next steps are determined
- legal liability
- drain on the system as all energy goes to this problem
- suspicion and loss of confidence in church leadership
- loss of attendance and decrease in financial giving

- loss of credibility in the wider community
- viability of the congregation can be threatened

In order to heal after the betrayal of pastoral sexual misconduct, churches have to resist the temptation to disbelieve or blame the victim, the temptation to prioritize protecting the church's image, and the temptation to sympathize and protect the person who offended from the consequences of their actions. There is always the temptation to spiritualize the problem and offer quick theological solutions to make the problem go away. Forgiveness before repentance is often called "cheap grace."[18]

Forgiveness before repentance is often called "cheap grace."

Larry Graham has described five steps in the congregation's healing process:[19]

1. The *precursor-secret phase* is the time when the abuse is occurring, but no one knows (except the person who is offending, the victims and those the victims may have told). The leader may be well-respected and achieving good things for the congregation. There may be rumours of inappropriate behaviour but nothing is pursued.

2. The *discovery-chaos phase* begins when someone comes forward with allegations of misconduct. The secrecy around the abuse is broken. A formal or informal process is begun: the accused may be confronted, a formal complaint may be made, members of the church hierarchy may be informed. Community members find out about the allegations and feel both personal and congregational confusion.

3. The *awareness-polarization phase* is the time when the situation is made more public. Polarization begins to occur within the congregation. Often this is a time when the accused gives out information for the purpose of damage control, and the victim lives in fear of being named and having their character assassinated. More victims may choose to come forward. Many are not happy with the process, feeling that it is skewed, either in favour of the accused or the complainant.

4. The *recovery-rebuilding phase* occurs when the congregation is ready to start dealing with the other issues affecting its life together. The structures and policies of the church are re-examined to see if there is anything they would like to change in light of the past experience. New leadership is affirmed and a reestablishment of relationships within the community occurs. Confidentiality and secrecy are re-examined and differentiated. However, there continues to be considerable underground pain and conflict.

5. The *resolution-transformation phase* occurs when the church has worked through its pain, has established new structures and reformed the elements of its character which enabled the abuse to continue. This is a time of integration and active prevention of further abuse.

Some congregations never fully recover, and some will close. It is not uncommon for a church to take a decade to recover its vitality.

Congregations heal at different paces, and the choices they make about if and how to investigate, will impact that pace. Some congregations never fully recover, and some will close. It is not uncommon for a church to take a decade to recover its vitality.[20] Tragically, some congregations endure multiple experiences of pastoral sexual misconduct with subsequent pastors because the unhealthy dynamics were not addressed after the first episode of misconduct.

8. Policies and procedures about sexual misconduct

In the last decades, many church institutions have developed policies and procedures regarding clergy or pastor sexual misconduct. Most insurance carriers have required that churches write and use these policies. Generally, the policies of larger denominations are more thorough, while congregationally based churches may have policies that are less formal. If a church has a policy, they are legally required to be following it. Not following their policy opens them up to litigation from complainants or respondents to complaints.

If a church has a policy, they are legally required to be following it.

Many of the first church misconduct policies in the 1980s or 90s only addressed child sexual abuse. Policies today should be more comprehensive and include the possibility of adults being abused.

Building blocks of good policies and procedures are:[21]

- it is clearly written and understandable by the average person
- it is consistent with the values and mission of the faith community it represents
- a number of people are identified who can receive a complaint, usually of different genders, so that the complainant can choose who they are most comfortable with
- a team including people of different genders investigates rather than one person
- the investigators are from outside the congregation, and have no conflict of interest
- the identity of the complainant is kept confidential (restricted to the receiver of the complaint, the support person for the complainant, the respondent, and the investigative team, unless the complainant wants their identity to be known)
- complainants are only interviewed once, by people who are trained in interviewing people who have been sexually harmed

- it is fair to the respondent, offering due process
- there is no gag order restricting the complainant from talking about their experience
- both complainant and respondent have a right to appeal
- it has the capacity to hold people who have offended accountable
- there are timelines for how long each step can take

It is also a commonly accepted best practice that the person accused of misconduct should be placed on administrative leave, with pay and without prejudice, until the end of the investigation, except in the most minor of offences.[22] This provides safety for the victim, and space for the congregation as they cope with the investigation. The respondent to the complaint is always instructed to have no contact with the complainant or their family directly or indirectly in the form of texts, emails, or messages through a third party.[23] This means they are not allowed to participate in the church community in any way while they are suspended.

The respondent to the complaint is always instructed to have no contact with the complainant or their family directly or indirectly in the form of texts, emails, or messages through a third party.[85] This means they are not allowed to participate in the church community in any way while they are suspended.

Consultants with special training from outside the congregation/institution should always be used:

> *It cannot be said enough—abusers are incredibly skilled manipulators. They can demonstrate shock, disbelief, grief, and the full range of emotions with stunning precision. They are also often skilled communicators. They know what language will disarm a pastor or church member, what language will help shift the blame, minimize their conduct, or convince people that nothing has gone wrong. Abusers can wield scripture and theology like a weapon.*
>
> *This is one of the main reasons that turning the information and investigation over to someone who is qualified to do it, is critical. Pastors are simply not trained in evidentiary law, victim-centered investigative techniques or the impact of*

trauma. They are not experts in understanding and identifying abusive patterns, personalities, or grooming techniques.[24]

It is impossible to do a fair investigation using only people from within the congregation, regardless of their skills or training, they are not impartial and are biased for certain outcomes.

9. Healing for survivors

Experience has shown that laying a complaint and walking through an investigation can re-traumatize a survivor of abuse, which is why they are encouraged to have a support person, preferably someone who has training in this area. The support person encourages and guides them through the process.

Healing is often measured in decades, not months. While their needs change, survivors can be involved in healing interventions for a decade or more as they seek to rebuild what was shattered by the abuse.

Healing from sexual misconduct by a church leader can take a long time, depending on how deeply the person is hurt by what happened. This is not directly correlated to what an outsider might see as the "seriousness" of the boundary violation. It can depend on how vulnerable the person was at the time, their own history, the duration of the abuse, and how the institution responded once it was reported.

Healing is often measured in decades, not months. While their needs change, survivors can be involved in healing interventions for a decade or more as they seek to rebuild what was shattered by the abuse. Because pastoral sexual misconduct has secondary victims that include the survivor's parents, spouse or children, the whole family can be on a healing journey that often involves family therapy.[25]

There are a number of models of healing from social science and pastoral ministry writers:

- Lewis Smedes describes the process as involving denial, hurt, hate, and understanding (or acceptance), with possible reconciliation.[26]

- **Elizabeth Kübler-Ross** describes the process of grieving as involving 5 stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.[27]
- **Self-help models** outline stages such as deciding to heal, crisis, remembering, believing, breaking the silence, understanding it was not one's own fault, trusting, grieving, anger, possibly confronting, and resolving.[28]
- **Judith Herman** outlines three stages of recovery from trauma which take place within the context of a healing relationship: safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection.[29]
- **Marie Fortune** has outlined seven steps in justice-making: truth-telling, acknowledging the violation, compassion, protecting the vulnerable, accountability, restitution, and vindication.[30]

Survivors may feel spiritually lost and betrayed by God. They may lose their faith entirely or may grieve the perception of God as protector. They may have an inability to feel safe in church or to trust church leaders again. Healing has a spiritual component.

All of these models assume that healing is not linear, but can take many different routes. The process is more cyclical than straightforward, with individuals repeating different steps in different orders.

Because the abuse occurred within the church context there also needs to be spiritual healing. Survivors may feel spiritually lost and betrayed by God. They may lose their faith entirely or may grieve the perception of God as protector. They may have an inability to feel safe in church or to trust church leaders again. Healing has a spiritual component.

Church misconduct procedures, once adjudication has taken place, usually focus on the employee, or the volunteer church leader, and less attention is given to the survivor of abuse. Survivors may be given money for counselling, but monitoring and regular check-ins usually are reserved for the person who did the harm.[31] This can leave survivors feeling abandoned, and without a home in their healing process, through no fault of their own.

The needs of survivors on their healing journey varies from person to person, but can include the following:

- to be listened to, sometimes over and over again
- to be believed
- to not be judged for their behaviour, ways of coping, attitudes and questions
- to be reassured that the abuse was not their responsibility
- validation of their emotions, reactions and responses
- to be befriended by someone willing to walk with them
- to experience a sense of justice, which may include an apology and restoration from the institution where the harm happened
- to be in charge of their own lives, and to make decisions
- sometimes they may want to connect with other people who have been harmed by the same church leader

If there are multiple survivors of the same person who offended, they all may have different needs, even if the abuse was similar. It is important to ask the survivor what they need, and not make assumptions.

10. Accountability and healing for those who have offended

Experience has shown that being the subject of a complaint of sexual misconduct can be very upsetting for respondents. That is why they are encouraged to have a support person to help them through the investigative process. People who have committed sexual misconduct are not a uniform group; their offences are different, as are their motivations and histories. The offences can sometimes be relatively minor, such as inappropriate comments. They more commonly involve sexual acts, not because minor offences are rare or unimportant, but because the complaint process is usually so rigorous it discourages complaints.

The offences can sometimes be relatively minor, such as inappropriate comments. They more commonly involve sexual acts, not because minor offences are rare or unimportant, but because the complaint process is usually so rigorous it discourages complaints.

The institution where the person who offended volunteers or is employed may *hold them accountable* by removing them from their position and issuing consequences. However, for healing to happen, the person who offended must *take accountability themselves*:

> True accountability is not only apologizing, understanding the impact your actions have caused on yourself and others, making amends or reparations to the harmed parties; but most importantly, true accountability is changing your behavior so that the harm, violence, abuse does not happen again.[32]

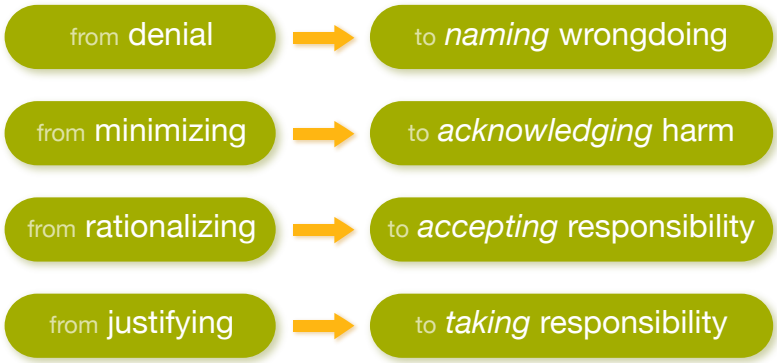
The church leader might be feeling intense emotions because they were caught, they are in a tight spot and so much is on the line, but that is different than feeling badly for the person they hurt.

Healing might begin with remorse or feeling badly, but it does not end there. Some churches are taken in by the remorseful tears of the pastor. The church leader might be feeling intense emotions because they were caught, they are in a tight spot and so much is on the line, but that is different than feeling badly for the person they hurt. In Christian organizations, the theological term repentance is often used.

Repentance involves:

- acknowledging the full extent of one's actions (including admitting to abuse against other victims that did not come forward)
- feeling the effects of one's actions, including empathy for the pain of the victim(s)
- taking full responsibility for both the actions and the effects
- some form of restitution or paying back what has been taken
- taking steps to ensure that further offences do not occur.

Taking responsibility graphic[33]



Taking responsibility for the harm of sexual misconduct is neither simple nor quick. The process takes years, not months, of concentrated effort, and almost always will involve extensive professional counselling.

It is very human to try to avoid taking responsibility for the harm that we have done. Taking responsibility for the harm of sexual misconduct is neither simple nor quick. The process takes years, not months, of concentrated effort, and almost always will involve extensive professional counselling. The person's motivation, background and psychological makeup will affect how long this will take and if it is likely.

Marie Fortune describes people who have committed pastoral sexual misconduct as fitting on a continuum between two categories: "wanderers" and "predators". The wanderer "wanders" across boundaries while the person with predatory behaviour is sociopathic (lacking conscience) and preys upon the victim(s). They have different prognoses for treatment. She observes that the prognosis for wanderers is fair to good if they are highly motivated to change. She reports that people with predatory behavior have a poor to fair prognosis even if highly motivated.[34] Most people who have offended will portray themselves as innocent, or as a wanderer because they do not want to admit the full extent of their offences, and they want to avoid consequences. Support people do not have the expertise or the information with which to judge someone accused of misconduct, their job is simply to support them through this process.

There are multiple components to recovery that include behavioral relapse prevention, resolution of core issues including building healthy esteem and resiliency, and

working to develop healthy relationship competencies.[35] Appropriate therapy contexts can include group therapy and support groups, as well as individual, marriage and family therapy.

Misconduct that involved minors or multiple victims often requires an initial residential treatment program followed by intensive therapy. Professional assessment, not just the church leader's own view of themselves, will determine the treatment program to address sexual addiction, sexual compulsivity, or opportunistic sexual boundary violations.

The good thing is that the church leader does not embark on this healing journey alone. The institution usually provides ongoing support. Church misconduct procedures, once they have adjudicated a case, usually focus on the employee, with monitoring, reporting and check-ins.[36]

11. Timeframes for complaints

Most misconduct policies have guidelines for how long a complaint should take to process, with limits for how many days or weeks happen between steps in the procedure. That said, if the case is complicated and there are numerous victims to interview, or if the complaint is received just before a holiday, this timeline is often extended.

A note about timelines for laying complaints. It is very common for complaints to take years or decades to surface. Someone abused as a child may only find the strength and courage to name what happened to them in mid-life. Adult victims have often been groomed to accept sexual contact from a pastoral leader. Survivors can blame themselves for a long time, minimize what happened, or still hold on to the illusion of a mutual relationship. Sometimes the survivor has been threatened with harm if they tell, or the person who offended says that they will kill themselves if the story gets out. Sometimes the survivor waits to tell until the person who offended is no longer in a position of power or has even died.

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Once a survivor realizes they are abused, there are many obstacles to reporting. Policies can be difficult to find or make it too hard to lay a complaint. If they do report, there are too many stories of congregations rallying around the person who did the harm, and blaming and shunning the complainant. Survivors have a realistic and well-founded fear that if they bring a complaint, they will be persecuted and lose their church community.

When pain about abuse is buried, it does not get better. It hovers in the background or foreground of a person's life, waiting for a chance to get out. When the story resurfaces, the pain is real and fresh: there is no expiration date on this pain.[37] Until truth and justice happen, the pain does not simply fade away. There is no "statute of limitations" on complaints about pastoral misconduct. Revealing that someone was abusive, even after their death, can provide justice for the complainant, and offer hope to other victims who are sitting with difficult stories.

Survivors have a realistic and well-founded fear that if they bring a complaint, they will be persecuted and lose their church community.

Churches should never ask, "Why did it take you so long to report?" Instead, they should ask, "Why did we make it so hard for people to come forward with complaints? How can we create a climate where survivors feel safe to report?"

12. Legal action and the justice system

Historically, the moral or ethical obligations of caring for the weakest and most vulnerable have not been enough of a motivating factor for the church to take misconduct seriously. In the past, allegations of abuse often resulted in the conference or denomination quickly forgiving the person who offended and moving them to another congregation. As this did not address the deeper issues, the person who offended would continue to abuse in their new congregations. In some instances, this continued up until the church faced secular lawsuits and there were financial ramifications for protecting people who offended.

Secular organizations have been quicker than the church in recognizing the damaging effects of professional sexual abuse. Both congregations and individual leaders within

the church are liable for damages resulting from sexual misconduct.

Church leaders can face criminal charges for sexual assault. People in the church should not in any way pressure victims to refrain from reporting crimes. The courts can be an effective way to stop someone from re-offending. *Whenever sexual misconduct has occurred with a minor, this must be reported to the police or child protective services.*

In Canada, there is no statute of limitations for sexual crimes. The Supreme Court of Canada has made it clear that lawsuits can be brought many years after the events occurred and that the range of damages can cover not only general damages for pain and suffering but also punitive damages, costs of past and future psychiatric care, loss of future income resulting from depression or psychiatric impairment, and out of pocket expenses.

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In some part of the United States, pastoral sexual misconduct is a crime. Some American states have provisions for "delayed discovery", to allow for adults who remember abuse to file a police report. Speaking with terminology in the United States legal system, crimes with adult congregants can range from misdemeanours such as public indecency to lewd acts, all the way to felony crimes such as aggravated sexual assault. The state decides whether to pursue criminal charges, according to whether they think they have enough evidence for a successful prosecution. The survivor would be a witness in the state's case.[38]

Churches should also not pressure adult survivors of abuse to go to the police. There are many reasons why it is difficult for survivors of sexual assault to report to secular authorities. The legal process can be retraumatizing, whether through the police deciding not to lay charges, or the person who offended being given a minimal sentence or even being acquitted. Trials take years, and not everyone is willing to undertake that with such a slim chance of justice happening. The church needs to address

sexual misconduct, and cannot say, "If you were hurt, go to the police, we don't want to deal with it."

Pastoral sexual misconduct can also result in civil liability. Most survivors of pastoral sexual misconduct do not begin their quest for justice in civil litigation, but they pursue this when they have been treated badly by the church institution. Survivors who have pursued legal action have done more than anyone else to force churches to create good policies and protect vulnerable people. It is tragic that the stories of innocent people being hurt have not motivated the church to change as much as fear of losing money.[39]

Most survivors of pastoral sexual misconduct do not begin their quest for justice in civil litigation, but they pursue this when they have been treated badly by the church institution.

Researchers Dewhirst and Littrell outline the history of civil suits about pastors who have committed sexual misconduct.[40] The cases hinge on fiduciary duty for people in their care. Suits for monetary damages have been aimed at supervisory bodies at the denominational level as well as at local congregations and pastors themselves. Most of the cases they describe involve sexual misconduct that happened in the context of pastoral counselling.

Civil litigation about pastoral sexual misconduct has been very successful. Catholic churches in the United States have paid out almost three *billion* dollars to victims who have sued them in civil suits.[41] Numerous churches and religious organizations have had to file for bankruptcy to cover damages to survivors.

Suits have also been brought against denominations for organizational negligence and breaching their own fiduciary duties if they fail to adequately investigate allegations of their employee's misconduct, or do not take timely action to warn those who are in harm's way or minimize the risk of harm likely to be caused by an employee suspected of having committed misconduct. This may involve negligent hiring, negligent supervision or negligent retention of an employee who then causes harm to innocent third parties. If the victim is also an employee of the church, legislation about sexual harassment of employees and hostile work environments also comes into play.

Often the church is afraid to intervene out of fear that the accused may sue for slander. While these fears are understandable, they are statistically unlikely to occur.[42] Offenders are generally so deeply committed to keeping the secret they are reluctant to use a public court. Additionally, such suits are unlikely to succeed. Courts often hesitate to challenge a church's internal procedures, provided that these procedures are fair, have been adopted by the institution, and are followed carefully.

Churches are well served to talk to lawyers about their legal responsibilities, however their Christian moral duty and their values should determine their actions. Lawyers often do not want churches to apologize to victims, out of fear that a subsequent lawsuit will result in damages. However, when vulnerable people are hurt under the church's watch, it is the morally right thing to apologize publicly.[43]

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Part 2

Supporting a complainant

a) General information

Experience has shown that the complaint process can at times be retraumatizing for the survivor. They may be discounted, blamed, humiliated, and revictimized as a result of breaking the silence.

1. Role description of a support person in this context

A support person, or advocate, helps a survivor of pastoral sexual misconduct by walking alongside them on their journey. The support person is an objective person who is trained in the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct. Their goal is to empower the survivor. This can mean assisting them to navigate a denominational or conference complaint process.

When survivors have the courage to speak about their experiences it is critical that they receive support. Experience has shown that the complaint process can at times be retraumatizing for the survivor. They may be discounted, blamed, humiliated, and revictimized as a result of breaking the silence. They may be afraid to confront a powerful individual who has hurt them or they may be intimidated by an institutional complaint process. They need a compassionate person who supports and hears them. They need someone trained about misconduct to actively promote justice for them.

Many denominational misconduct policies and procedures require that a support person be offered to a complainant. While friends and family can be supportive, a support person who is not connected to the survivor, and who is trained in the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, is very important. Even if the policy does not specify that there be a support person, a survivor can find one themselves.

This manual has been developed in order to train support people to serve in these roles. A list of duties of a support person follows after the section on Qualifications.

2. Qualifications

The role of support person is best met by someone with:

- knowledge of the dynamics and effects of sexual misconduct by a church leader
- experience walking through the adjudication of a sexual misconduct complaint, and/or a mentor to guide them
- a compassionate and supportive presence
- good listening, problem-solving and communication skills
- skills to handle conflict comfortably
- a clear sense of boundaries
- a good connection to their own feelings and ability to process them
- the same gender as the survivor
- willingness to give time to this, generally months to several years
- race and culture may also factor in

Many people can and should be supportive, but the support person role should be held by someone who is trained in this area and can be more objective.

It is strongly recommended that a support person be someone outside of the environment of the survivor. That means the official support person should not be a close friend, counsellor, pastor or family member, to avoid conflicts of interest or dual roles. Many people can and should be supportive, but the support person role should be held by someone who is trained in this area and can be more objective. The support person can *never* be an employee of the institution or denomination, since that would be a conflict of interest.[44]

Most family members and friends are well-meaning, but they may have difficulty being "survivor-centered" because they may think they know what is best for their

loved one. They also rarely have training in the area of sexual misconduct by a church leader. Many survivors have indicated that the only people they could find to be a support person for them were friends or spouses. While a previous friendship may mean the support person makes more time available and may be more emotionally sensitive, there are drawbacks. As a friend becomes a support person the relationship may become more professional, and the survivor loses an important friendship. The support person needs to give up the mutuality of the friendship for a time, as the support is focused on the survivor. It may be difficult later to regain that equilibrium.

The support person should not be from the same congregation if the misconduct took place in that congregation.

For the same reasons, a survivor's spouse should not be the support person. If one's spouse is serving as advocate, the marriage may become too focused on this one issue. Emotional attachments can cloud judgement. Additionally, the end of an investigation will also put a strain on the relationship as the primary focus leaves.

A survivor of abuse needs support in many areas, and their spouse or friends will be part of a wider support network that is very important. They are just not the right choice to be the person to walk them through a misconduct complaint process.

A survivor's pastor or counsellor may know too much information about them, and their professional role puts them in a caregiver position, which can make it difficult for the survivor to disagree with them. The support person helps the survivor look at options but empowers them to make their own decision. Additionally, being a support person can require a lot of time and energy, and if the survivor's pastor tries to fill this role, this could be resented by other people in the congregation. Additionally, the pastor may also experience a conflict because of their ties to the denomination or their colleague who is accused. In confronting the denomination with the survivor, pastors may jeopardize their professional position.

The support person should not be from the same congregation if the misconduct took place in that congregation. Misconduct often polarizes a church, and the support person is likely to be caught in that. Their personal connections may be jeopardized, which could cloud their judgement. If the support person is a Christian, they need the stability of their own faith community to support them in their work. The advocate should not have to fear losing their own faith community because they are supporting the victim.

The support person should not be connected in any way to the person who offended or their family. That includes being a friend or acquaintance, a co-worker, or colleague, or with historical connections (for example, they went to school together). In some small denominations, having a support person from a different denomination is ideal.

Survivors of sexual misconduct by a church leader may wish to serve as a support person for others. It is recommended that they take on this role with caution, ensuring that their own issues are resolved, and in the distant past. Serving as an advocate cannot be an attempt to vicariously seek justice.

The support person is a volunteer. They may put so much time into this role, they think someone should be compensating them, but accepting money from the church body would create a conflict of interest. However, some institutions will compensate for expenses, such as mileage. Also, as soon as a support person is paid for services, there are insurance liabilities.

Survivors of sexual misconduct by a church leader may wish to serve as a support person for others. It is recommended that they take on this role with caution, ensuring that their own issues are resolved, and in the distant past. Serving as an advocate cannot be an attempt to vicariously seek justice. They may have a great deal of empathy for the complainant, but the survivor's responses to the situation or the church's responses can easily trigger one's own unresolved (or partially resolved) issues. It is difficult to be "survivor directed" when the survivor's wishes fly in the face of one's own painful experiences.

3. Being careful about boundaries

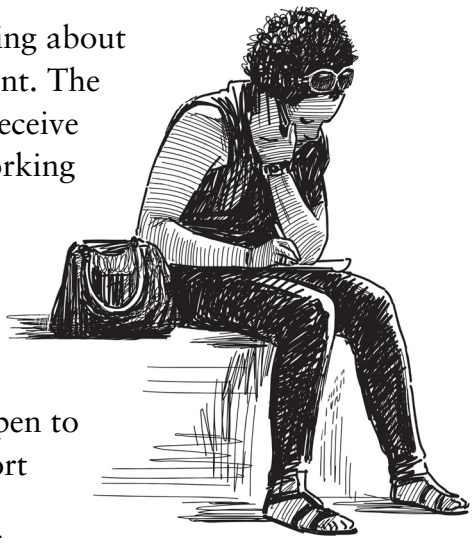
Communicating about boundaries is important for the support person and the survivor. What can each person expect in this relationship? What will make them comfortable or uncomfortable, safe or unsafe, empowered or disempowered?

Keep in mind that pastoral misconduct is a violation of boundaries. People whose boundaries have been violated can have a hard time setting their own boundaries or respecting the boundaries of others. As a support person, you are modelling appropriate boundary setting for them. Naming boundaries may feel rigid or unnatural, but for the survivor, being clear about what to expect or not expect from the support person, can be an important part of regaining control over their own life.

Naming boundaries may feel rigid or unnatural, but for the survivor, being clear about what to expect or not expect from the support person, can be an important part of regaining control over their own life.

Some common areas of boundary setting in this relationship include:

- *role:* Explain the role of the support person. While it will be friendly, it is not a mutual relationship, you will not be looking to the survivor to support you or share in your life. The survivor needs to know what you can do for them. Outline what you can offer.
- *time/communication:* Talking about communications is important. The survivor may not want to receive communications during working hours because she may find the topic upsetting. Some survivors may desire frequent connection and it's important to be clear about how often you are open to being contacted. The support person can clarify the best means of communication, for example, email rather than unscheduled telephone calls. Let the survivor know how quickly you will respond ("I always respond to emails within 24 hours").



- *duration:* Assure the survivor that, to the best of your abilities, you will see the process through to the end. However, in order to avoid false expectations, it is often useful to set up semi-annual evaluation times. If, for some reason, you need to withdraw from your role, discuss this decision with the survivor, preferably giving them a month's notice, and help to find a replacement.
- *confidentiality:* The survivor needs to hear that what is talked about with the support person is in confidence. The support person will not communicate this with others, with a few exceptions that involve physical safety (see the section on "Keeping confidences").
- *spiritual matters:* The survivor has suffered a major spiritual trauma as a result of the misconduct of the church leader. The support person is not a spiritual caregiver, or stand-in for a pastor, so it is not appropriate to pray, share biblical stories, or offer observations about theological topics. You can listen to their sharing, but you are not in a caregiving role, and you can suggest they turn to a pastor (or another trusted spiritual guide) for help with spiritual matters.
- *physical contact:* It is always important to ask permission of people before you initiate physical contact, but this is even more vital with survivors, whose boundaries have been violated by a church leader. The support person can assure the survivor they will not physically touch them, unless requested (such as placing a comforting hand on the shoulder, or a brief hug).
- *support:* It is recommended that every support person have someone they can rely on who has served in a role like this, in order to get advice and debrief the situation. You should tell the survivor who this person is, to make sure that there is no conflict of interest. You can assure the survivor that you will not be revealing their identity, but getting advice about best practices, and receiving emotional support for your own supportive role.

A primary effect of the abuse is a loss of trust. The survivor may not be able to trust you quickly or completely. Assure them that this is OK, reminding them that trust is something that someone earns.

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Setting good boundaries at the beginning can avoid uncomfortable situations later. For example, you may begin with fairly open boundaries ("Feel free to phone anytime, day or night, as often as you need") but then it becomes unmanageable, and you resent how much time this is taking, and you want to pull back. Survivors may experience this as rejection. It is healthier to begin with clear boundaries, indicating that these can be revisited as the situation changes.

Setting good boundaries at the beginning can avoid uncomfortable situations later.

Sometimes the needs are quite different in the earlier stages of the process before other supports are in place. The weeks of an investigation are always intense, where you need to be communicating quite frequently.

4. Understanding power dynamics of church leader sexual misconduct

Survivors of sexual misconduct by a church leader have suffered an injustice. While each survivor's journey is different, some survivors choose to confront the person who hurt them through the institutions that employ them. This may be a part of their healing process, a move towards returning responsibility to the person who hurt them, holding them publicly accountable for the harm, receiving restitution for the damages caused, or protecting other potential victims. Any or all of the above reasons are valid and important.

Some institutions are very professional and follow their policies scrupulously, treating everyone in the complaint process with care and respect. However, institutions may not always respond in a way that will help the survivor heal because they can be protective of their own interests.

Hard experience has shown that institutions can sometimes:

- ignore, disbelieve or vilify the victim
- not take the misconduct seriously
- use investigative teams that are biased, or do a shoddy job
- issue minimal rather than suitable consequences for the person who offended
- offer ill-conceived mediation processes that are not safe for survivors
- offer more support to the person who offended than to the complainant
- demand that the survivor not talk publicly about the misconduct
- offer shallow and damaging theological platitudes rather than justice

Pastoral misconduct expert Patricia Liberty refers to her work with sexual misconduct in church organizations as chilling, because of "institutional evil," where the church protects itself and the person who offended at the expense of the victim.[45] Hopefully these abusive practices are changing, but justice is not always served. It is important that you warn the survivors that there may be unforeseen costs to making the complaint.

If the survivor is complaining about an influential leader in the congregation they attend, one of the likely costs of filing a complaint is that they may feel pushed out of that community. Even if they keep their identity entirely confidential, they may find that the community rallies around the accused and vilifies the complainant.

If the survivor is complaining about an influential leader in the congregation they attend, one of the likely costs of filing a complaint is that they may feel pushed out of that community. Even if they keep their identity entirely confidential, they may find that the community rallies around the accused and vilifies the complainant. The abuse will likely generate conflict in the church. Having a very low profile is probably the best way through this, or attending another church for a time, although survivors may worry that leaving at this exact time might make people suspect they are the complainant. However, usually some people stop attending a church that is dealing with pastoral sexual misconduct, so their absence may not be particularly conspicuous.

While many keep their identity as the complainant confidential, some survivors prefer to have everything out in the open, and they want to tell everyone what happened to them. This is their choice, although it's good to warn them that not everyone is going to be supportive.

The person who is accused of misconduct is often a powerful force in the congregation. They may reach out to the person they have hurt, even if they have been explicitly instructed not to do this. They can do this overtly (through phone calls, email, text messages), or covertly by repeatedly driving by the survivor's house, reaching out to the survivor's friends, or frequenting places where they know they might bump into the survivor. The person who has offended wants to be in control, and manipulating the survivor is part of that control process. Alerting the survivor to these possibilities is important. The survivor may ask you as the support person to contact the denominational office if this behavior happens. If the survivor feels unsafe, they should be encouraged to contact the police to report harassment.[46]

The person who has offended wants to be in control, and manipulating the survivor is part of that control process. Alerting the survivor to these possibilities is important.

Not all churches are entirely professional in following their misconduct policies, and they can make mistakes in the adjudication process that are painful to the respondent, or the complainant. These mistakes can be made by employees of the denomination and people who are serving in volunteer roles. For example, timelines between steps in the process might not be followed, or something is left out that should have been done. One of the worst mistakes is revealing the identity of the complainant to people in the community. Even if confidentiality is assured, it cannot be guaranteed. It is totally appropriate to call the church to high standards, and register a protest when policies are not followed. Churches should inform the complainant beforehand who exactly will know about the complaint and their identity.

5. Being survivor-centered

A support person should try to be survivor-centered. This means that the support person does not take over or make decisions for the survivor, but rather empowers the survivor to make their own decisions. The survivor should be the person who does the most talking, not the support person. The support person helps the survivor consider options and then the survivor determines the plan of action. The support person assists in fulfilling it. Survivors are the ones who face the consequences of their actions, so they should be in charge of those actions. Encouraging survivors to respond in a way that is not comfortable to them could jeopardize their healing.

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Prior to any action, together the survivor and support person should consider the pros and cons. If a support person is uncomfortable with a survivor's decision, they should think carefully about the reasons for discomfort. If the hesitation has to do with personal reasons, these should be worked out with an outside party (the support person's own support person). If the conflict relates to a value clash with the survivor, this can be discussed as well. Together, the support person and survivor should be able to discuss the possible consequences of certain actions. Together you may come up with results or reasons that the other has not considered. In the end, the survivor's wishes should be followed.

If even after all the discussion, the support person is extremely uncomfortable with something, they should explain to the survivor why, and tell them that they cannot accompany them on this specific action. This does not mean withdrawing overall support, but just support for a certain action. If they are still planning to proceed, they should be encouraged to get someone else to accompany them that they can trust. For example, a survivor might decide to meet privately with the person who offended. This is very risky and might expose the survivor to further abuse. As a support person you do not have to accompany them into a situation that you think is unsafe.

6. Trauma-informed support[47]

You may be working with someone who is traumatized by pastoral misconduct. You can encourage them to reach out for professional support to work through this trauma. But you can, as a support person, be aware of the dynamics of trauma. **Appendix B: Resources** has good websites and books that you can access.

You may be working with someone who is traumatized by pastoral misconduct. You can encourage them to reach out for professional support to work through this trauma. But you can, as a support person, be aware of the dynamics of trauma.

Some core trauma-informed principles for you to follow in your supporting are:[48]

- *acknowledgement:* trauma is pervasive and is affecting their life.
- *safety:* helping survivors feel safe through this process.
- *trust:* invest in building trust by explaining "what, why and how" at every stage in the process.
- *choice:* the survivor knows they have real and voluntary choices to direct the process.
- *control:* as much control as possible should be in the hands of the survivor.
- *compassion:* you are showing empathy with the survivor.
- *strengths-based:* you are building on the existing strengths of the survivor, not pointing out what they do not have.

Sexual abuse can be traumatizing in many different ways:[49]

Physical

- Altered stress response (traumatized)
- Mental health challenges (PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc.)
- Injuries

Emotional

- Shame ("I am not worthy")
- Fear ("I am not safe")
- Distrust ("I can't trust anyone")
- Confusion

Behavioral

- Maladaptive coping (substance abuse, self-harm, suicidal ideations)
- Trauma avoidance
- Difficulty with relationships

Worldview

- "Why me?"
- "What would life be like if this had not happened?"
- "The world is a dangerous place"

7. Importance of self-care for the support person

Walking with a survivor can be a very difficult job. As a support person you will hear painful stories which may bring up issues from your own life. You may also be scapegoated by the congregation or the denomination. Stress is a very real part of this role and so self-care is very important. If you are not actively renewing your own energy sources, you will rapidly run out of energy. You may show signs of secondary victimization or "vicarious traumatization," which means that you feel symptoms similar to those of the survivor.

If you are not actively renewing your own energy sources, you will rapidly run out of energy. You may show signs of secondary victimization or "vicarious traumatization," which means that you feel symptoms similar to those of the survivor.

Self-care practices include:

- proper diet, exercise and sleep
- maintaining good relationships
- not letting the case take over your life
- having proper boundaries and space from the survivor
- paying attention to your spiritual life
- doing things that are life-giving and fun
- being kind to yourself if you make mistakes
- arranging peer support or supervision for your work

Peer support or supervision is important for the health of the support person. You are accompanying someone through an emotionally difficult process, and it can become incredibly convoluted and complicated. Having someone to debrief with and seek advice from, is essential. You do not have to invent the wheel; you can learn from the experiences of others.

Supervision or peer support is a way to ensure that the best practices are being followed. It is also a place for you to work out your own boundaries, feelings and responses. Supervision or peer support can provide feedback, encouragement, and lessen the feeling of isolation.

Locating a supervisor or peer support may feel like a daunting task. Your denominational office might know other people who have served in this role, or you could

contact Mennonite Central Committee's Abuse Response and Prevention network, that sponsored the writing of this manual. This support should be brought in early in the process. They can help you assess if you are prepared for the role and identify boundary issues. They can help by discussing difficult decisions, brainstorming options, and rehearsing responses. The focus of the supervisor's attention is the support person's feelings and actions and how they are playing out their role.

b) Duties of the support person in this context

1. Listening compassionately and offering reassurance

Assure the survivor that you believe them, they are not alone and that what happened to them is not their fault or responsibility.

Listen to the survivor as they tell you their experiences and feelings, treating the story with respect.

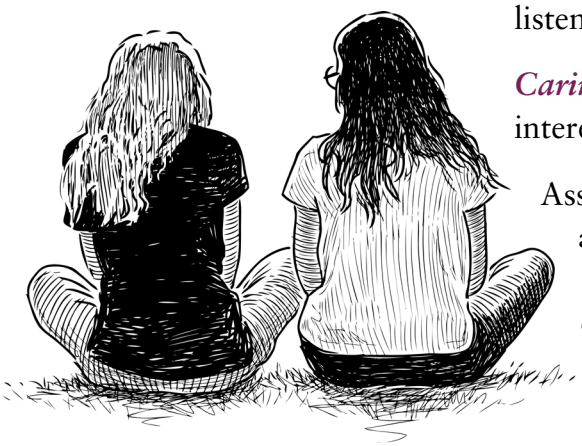
Listening well means:[50]

Attention: You notice both the emotion and the content conveyed by the speaker. You are not thinking about what to say next.

Withholding judgement: While you are listening, you put aside thoughts of what the person "should" or "must" do, who is right, or what you would have done in that situation.

Openness: Your face and posture show that you are listening. You make eye contact.

Caring: You are aware of the speaker as a person and are interested in their concerns.



Assure the survivor that you believe them, they are not alone and that what happened to them is not their fault or responsibility. Unfortunately others have had experiences somewhat like theirs.

Allow the survivor to exhibit rage and anguish, and refrain from being judgmental or impatient. At times, this anger may be turned upon you, as you are likely the safest and most accessible person to turn against. It is important to try to avoid being defensive or hurt while in

the survivor's presence. This does not mean accepting hurtful behaviour, but rather addressing it and exploring the underlying feelings.

Respect the survivor's feelings towards the person who abused them: they often have strong positive as well as negative feelings towards that person, and therefore feel very confused. It is important to remind survivors that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the church leader.

There may be long periods of waiting between steps in a complaint process; check on the survivor periodically and listen to how they are doing. The survivor may feel especially alone or discouraged at those times, second-guessing their choices or being anxious about outcomes. They may also be reluctant to contact you, worried they are bothering you. Take initiative and make contact.

Many survivors hold back the worst things done to them, because they are afraid to name them out loud.

Expect to hear the same story over and over. Survivors need to tell their stories many times. As they come to trust you further, some new elements of the story may emerge; never assume that you have heard everything. Many survivors hold back the worst things done to them, because they are afraid to name them out loud. Survivors will tell their stories differently as they come to make sense of these experiences.

Offer encouragement:

- "You are surviving, you are courageous, you can get through this."
- "I am here to help, here are the supports you have…"
- "You are feeling alone but you are not alone, I am here with you."
- "Other people have healed from this and you can too."

While you listen and encourage, be clear that you are not a therapist. Remind the survivor to access other supports and bring up issues with their counsellor. At the same time, be aware if you see suicidal tendencies. Do not be afraid to get help if you worry they will harm themselves. (see **Appendix A: Responding to Suicidal Thoughts**)

2. Keeping confidences

Survivors need to know that what they share with you is confidential, and that you will not share it with other people. Assure the survivor that you will keep what is discussed between you confidential, indicating any exceptions. Be aware that while you are bound by the confines of confidentiality, the survivor is not.

Maintaining confidentiality is ensuring that the survivor's identity or story is not shared with anybody without the survivor's permission. Confidentiality and secrecy are often confused. Confidentiality is a privacy which encourages maintenance of trust and security; it answers the questions "Who must know? Who is part of the problem? Who is part of the solution?" Conversely, secrecy is keeping a problem hidden, concealed from persons who need to know. Secrecy contributes to the continuation of abuse.

For survivors who have kept something secret for years or decades, finally telling the story breaks the power of the abuse, while at the same time stirring up many confusing emotions and much pain.

The survivor may decide to share their story publicly. They have a right to do this. The person who hurt them may want them to maintain this secret and may pressure them to do this. For survivors who have kept something secret for years or decades, finally telling the story breaks the power of the abuse, while at the same time stirring up many confusing emotions and much pain. Even if the survivor is choosing to tell their story to some people, it is not your story to share, unless the survivor has given you specific permission to share it.

If people know you are a support person in a certain situation, sometimes people contact you to inquire about the survivor. Do not talk about how the survivor is doing because it is not anyone's business. Sometimes people will reach out to you to pass on a letter of support. This may be helpful but be sure to read the letter before forwarding it, to make sure it does not subtly or blatantly blame the victim. Ask the survivor whether they are ready to read something like this; you could hold onto it until they are ready.

The two exceptions to maintaining confidentiality are if a victim is a minor (in which case you must report the

situation to child welfare authorities) or if someone's physical wellbeing is in jeopardy. For example, if the survivor phones you indicating that they are about to take their own life, reaching out for help is essential (see **Appendix A: Responding to Suicidal Thoughts**).

3. Assisting survivor to locate additional supports

While the role of the support person is very important, you cannot provide all the help that a survivor of pastoral sexual misconduct may need.

Survivors often say they need the following things:[51]

- answers
- recognition of the wrong
- safety
- restitution and repair
- to find significance or meaning from the tragedy of the misconduct
- prevention of future harm to others
- connectedness and belonging

Identify supports that the survivor has in place. This may include family, friends, a therapist, a pastor, a lawyer, a sexual assault center, a spiritual director, a massage therapist or a doctor.

Some of these may be addressed in the process of the investigation, but some will not. The survivor will need more help than you can offer.

Identify supports that the survivor has in place. This may include family, friends, a therapist, a pastor, a lawyer, a sexual assault center, a spiritual director, a massage therapist or a doctor. If there are supports missing suggest where the survivor can look to find help. Local sexual assault hotlines can be helpful for immediate assistance. There may be a victim assistance fund that can be of help.

If the survivor cannot afford counselling, you may want to advocate on their behalf with the denomination where they are laying the complaint. Most church institutions will offer to pay for counselling for the survivor and their family.[52] Previous counselling expenses may be covered if there are receipts. Getting financial help for counselling

is important because healing takes years not months and can be a significant financial drain on the family of the survivor.

The survivor may have significant spiritual questions. The church leader who hurt them may have used the Bible, talk about God or prayer as a part of their abusive behavior, so it is not something you should ever introduce into your interactions with the survivor. You don't yet know how spirituality has been used to harm them, so don't assume it will be helpful. They may want a spiritual guide to help them: it should not be you. Their last spiritual guide betrayed them; you don't want to confuse the survivor about the support person role.

You don't yet know how spirituality has been used to harm them, so don't assume it will be helpful. They may want a spiritual guide to help them: it should not be you. Their last spiritual guide betrayed them; you don't want to confuse the survivor about the support person role.

4. Find, evaluate and explain institutional policies

If the survivor you are supporting does not already have a copy, one of your first jobs is to locate the appropriate policy. This is best done by the support person and not the survivor, as a way of maintaining confidentiality about the survivor's identity. Check websites, or call the church or denominational office and request a policy.

If the denomination has assigned you to be a support person for a potential complainant, they should have already provided the survivor with the misconduct policy and procedures document.

Most policies will include the following steps:

i. Deciding to act on harm done. Sexual misconduct by a church leader occurs. The survivor decides to complain to the institution. They contact the institution and should receive a copy of the misconduct policy. Often at this point they are assigned a support person to walk them through the process. *If the victim is a child, local child protection authorities are contacted immediately and allowed to conduct the investigation.* Any church investigation is suspended until that investigation or court proceeding is completed. In this case, churches will need to relieve an employee or volunteer of their duties pending the outcome.

ii. **An informal process.** Some policies give the option of either a formal or an informal response. An informal response may involve a member of the abuse response team informing the church leader that allegations have been made, and possibly exploring rehabilitative options. It may also involve a survivor confronting the person who offended with the assistance of a facilitator. Some survivors request an informal process because they hope to confront the person who hurt them with the least amount of upset to either of their lives.

Generally, take great caution about agreeing to any informal process because:

- it may place the survivor in great emotional or physical danger.
- there may be other victims and keeping the misconduct private deprives them of the opportunity to add their voice to the complaint and seek help.
- often there are minimal consequences from an informal process.
- it may give the person who offended the chance to destroy evidence before an official investigation is launched.
- often the initial complaint does not give the full extent of the church leader's abusive actions, and so more vulnerable people may be at risk.
- it generally does not allow for a permanent record of the misconduct to be retained.
- if the informal process is followed by a formal process, the survivor may need to tell their story to different committees of people.
- the church often does not hire trained restorative justice practitioners who initiate the hard preparatory work necessary for mediation.
- people chosen to chair informal processes often know both parties, and cannot be unbiased.

An informal response may involve a member of the abuse response team informing the church leader that allegations have been made, and possibly exploring rehabilitative options.

- *the informal response is never an option if a minor is involved.*

The informal process may be an option for some types of sexual misconduct (like an inappropriate comment), where there was a single violation and not a repeated pattern of behavior, if the complainant is comfortable with this.

Sometimes the person who offended really wants to meet to offer an apology. If sexual abuse has happened this is usually not a good idea until much further along in the process, since a deep sense of repentance about what they've done and how they've hurt someone will likely only happen through extensive therapy.[53]

Advocacy is focused on getting official bodies to respond to and hear the needs of those who have been injured—not 'speaking for' but intervening on behalf of those who have spoken but are not being heard.

– An advocate

iii. **Letter of complaint** If the survivor decides to enter the formal complaint process, a written, signed letter of complaint is required, which indicates who harmed them, and the harm that was done. This letter is received by the institution. Some institutions summarize the complaint and forward it to the person who offended (called the respondent), others give the complaint letter to the respondent. In any case, the survivor should be informed when this is going to happen. The respondent is instructed not to contact the victim, and they too are offered a support person. The identity of the complainant is kept strictly confidential, and the respondent is not allowed to share it with anyone. Because there can be a strong negative backlash to victims, keeping the identity of the complainant confidential is a best practice.

In rare cases, the complainant may want their identity withheld from the respondent for safety reasons, in which case the institution may agree to anonymize their complaint for the respondent, while receiving a fuller, more detailed letter from the complainant.

iv. **Responding to the complaint.** The respondent is required to write back to the institution, responding to the allegations in the complaint; the letter is often received at an initial interview with the institution. If

the respondent fully acknowledges that all the actions happened, an investigation may not proceed, but the institution will issue consequences.

If the respondent is denying some or all of the allegations, at this point the institution decides whether an investigation is warranted based on the policy and the statements that are given. Many policies indicate a timeline between the initial complaint and the decision to investigate. The institution should inform the complainant and respondent about their decision to investigate, and what the investigation will involve.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the church leader may be put on an administrative leave, with pay and without prejudice, until the investigation is concluded. Some policies require the congregation to be informed at this point that their leader is being investigated, and any other victims are encouraged to come forward. The leadership team and the denominational office are always informed of the investigation, there should never be secret investigations.[54]

The investigative team should include at least one person from outside the conference or denomination, and someone trained in sexual abuse by church leaders.

v. **The investigation.** An investigative team is appointed. The investigative team should include at least one person from outside the conference or denomination, and someone trained in sexual abuse by church leaders. This trained person should take the lead in interviewing the complainant. Both the complainant and the respondent should be given an opportunity to object to the names of the investigators if there is a conflict of interest. Conflict of interest includes people who are connected in positive or negative ways including relatives, former colleagues or congregants. Not declaring these conflicts of interest could jeopardize the whole proceeding.

The investigation is generally a time of gathering information. The support person should be allowed to attend any meetings with the complainant. The complainant should only have to tell their story once,

to an investigator trained in dealing with survivors of abuse.[55] The complainant or support person have the right to ask what kind of training the investigators have. Best practices are that the complainant and the respondent do not face each other in this investigation. This is not a legal trial so it is not required and the complainant can request to not meet the person who hurt them. The complainant presents any evidence they have about the complaint, indicating if there are corroborating witnesses who would have relevant information. The same is done for the respondent.

If the investigative team wants to ask anything off the record, remember that these questions do not have to be answered. It is within the survivor's rights to insist that all questions and answers be on the record. The survivor should know beforehand what information will be forwarded to the respondent and what they will receive from the respondent's testimony. It is appropriate for both parties to know beforehand if the investigation will be recorded in some way, and who will have access to these records.

If the investigative team wants to ask anything off the record, remember that these questions do not have to be answered.

vi. **The findings.** The validity of the complaint is determined by the adjudicating body. This may be the investigative team, or it may be a separate committee who reads the report of the investigative team. The complainant and respondent are informed of the findings, and an appeal process is outlined to both, with timelines of when an appeal needs to be received.

If the complaint is found to be without merit, and the complainant does not appeal, most policies include a means of publicly exonerating the respondent, if the investigation had been publicly announced.

This adjudication is about professional credentials. The adjudicators are looking for a balance of probabilities and whether it was likely that the abuse happened, not the "beyond the shadow of a doubt" standard applied in a court of law.[56] It is in the best interest of the organization not to have employees or volunteers

who were likely to have abused someone, because they have an interest in protecting vulnerable people in the church. However, many organizations err on the side of the employee because they are protective of their leaders, and they may be afraid of wrongful dismissal suits.

vii. **The appeal.** Usually there is a short timeline where either the complainant or the respondent can appeal the process. An appeal usually does not mean re-investigating the complaint or doing interviews again, unless new evidence has come forward. An appeal usually means that a new group of people will review the findings of the investigation, and review whether the original judgement was fair. The appeal will either uphold or overturn the initial decision.

viii. **Discipline.** Most policies have a range of options open to the institution on how to respond to a finding that misconduct occurred.[57]

A *reprimand or warning* can be issued, to signal that the church leader showed poor judgment that resulted in some actions that caused harm. This action might be chosen for something like inappropriate comments, if the church leader has shown remorse and is apologetic in the investigation. There may be other consequences such as mandated training about boundaries or gender violence. Usually notice of this discipline would be put in an employee's permanent personnel file.

The next level is *suspension*. This means that the employee or volunteer is removed from their position, and/or their credentials are suspended. This happens for misconduct that involves sexual abuse, has escalated, or involves numerous breaches of professional responsibility. This option is taken if the church leader acknowledges the misconduct, takes responsibility, and is willing to seek the mandated treatment. A suspension of credentials should always be put in an employee's permanent personnel file.

It is in the best interest of the organization not to have employees or volunteers who were likely to have abused someone, because they have an interest in protecting vulnerable people in the church. However, many organizations err on the side of the employee because they are protective of their leaders, and they may be afraid of wrongful dismissal suits.

The final level is termination of employment and removal of credentials (licensing or ordination). This happens whenever a minor is involved, or there has been a repeated breach of professional ethics or numerous people have been hurt. Removing credentials means a public announcement, so that the wider church knows the church leader is no longer accredited.

The survivor has the right to know the consequences that the person who harmed them is facing. There should be no secret deals about consequences. Although they are not ever given details or reports about the therapy, the survivor should be informed when suspensions are lifted.

Some investigating committees try to issue a gag order, attempting to hold the survivor to indefinite confidentiality. The survivor should never agree to this as it is their story, and sharing it may be part of their healing journey.

Some investigating committees try to issue a gag order, attempting to hold the survivor to indefinite confidentiality. The survivor should never agree to this as it is their story, and sharing it may be part of their healing journey. Enforced secrecy only benefits the person who offended and not the survivor or other potential victims. The identity of the survivor should remain perpetually confidential unless they themselves decide to make it public.

ix. **Restitution.** Some policies hold out hope for restorative justice or reconciliation by encouraging the person who offended to offer restitution to the person they harmed. There may be an option of pursuing mediation or reconciliation between the church leader and the person they harmed, or the church leader and the congregation in which they ministered. The survivor should not feel pressured to participate; it may be that they still feel unsafe in the presence of the person who hurt them. It may be very painful for the survivor if the church pursues mediation and reconciles with the person who offended when this has not happened with the survivor.

After examining the policy, you can explain to the survivor what the advantages of this policy are compared to other policies. Pay particular attention to who will be interviewing the survivor, and how often and in whose presence they will be interviewed. Any policy that allows the person who offended to have a lawyer present without providing a lawyer for the survivor is dangerous.

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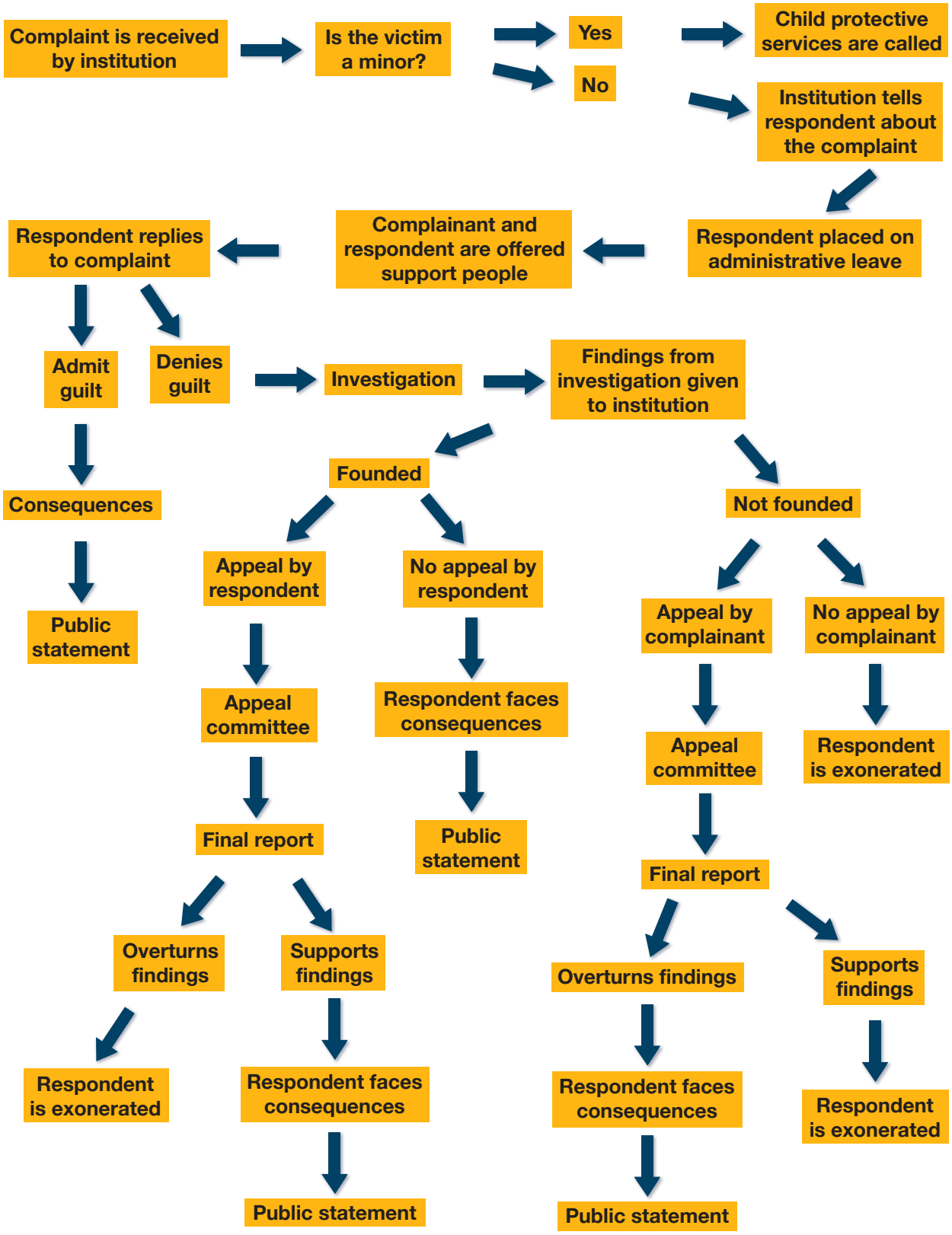
Common steps in a misconduct investigation



5. Help brainstorm and evaluate options

There are many ways for the survivor to respond to sexual misconduct by a church leader. Brainstorming and evaluating these options will help the survivor feel more in control of the situation. Evaluating which responses are the most important to the survivor is important, as is discussing the possible consequences of the responses.

An understanding of problem-solving processes will be helpful when working as an advocate. Often people get stuck when faced with a large complex problem. This section will outline a problem-solving method which should clarify decision-making and hopefully be empowering.

There is a benefit to placing an easily attainable goal first. This increases the chances of success in meeting one's goals, giving energy and strength to pursue the next.

Step 1

Outline the situation that needs changing in as much detail as possible.

In situations of sexual misconduct by a church leader, name the abuse and the consequences of the abuse.

Step 2

Determine what the survivor wants to accomplish (goals). Another way to phrase this step may be: "What do you need in order to experience some healing from the abuse?" "What would this look like?" Brainstorm many goals, they do not have to be in any particular order. Examples of goals could be: having the person who hurt them removed from office, or having counselling expenses reimbursed, or getting a public apology from the church.

Step 3

Evaluate and prioritize goals based on importance and attainability. The order in which survivors prioritize their goals will differ from person to person, since they are the only ones who can determine their importance. However, a support person can play an important role in evaluating the attainability of goals. There is a benefit to placing an

easily attainable goal first. This increases the chances of success in meeting one's goals, giving energy and strength to pursue the next. Goals can shift and change over time as the process unfolds and healing happens; priorities will need to re-evaluated.

Step 4

Determine all possible means of meeting one's goals. A survivor may feel that they have only two choices: do nothing or pursue a lawsuit. One of the support person's tasks is to help identify all possible actions. At this point in the process, you want to brainstorm all possible actions without evaluating them.

As you consider the goals you are choosing, ask "What would it take for this to feel doable?" "What are you willing to do to bring about this goal?" or "Who would need to come alongside you for this goal to be reached?"

Step 5

Determine which action feels most suited to the first goal. "What do you think you need first?" At this point, take the first goal and determine how best to meet it with the range of options.

Step 6

After choosing a first action, determine the steps involved in following through, and who will do them. It is often helpful to determine a backup plan in case the original plan does not work. As you consider the goals you are choosing, ask "What would it take for this to feel doable?" "What are you willing to do to bring about this goal?" or "Who would need to come alongside you for this goal to be reached?"

Step 7

Next time you meet, evaluate results of first action: should actions be altered, continued or discontinued?

Step 8

When ready to work on the next goal, repeat steps three to seven. The survivor's goals may change as time goes along.

Wheel of options

Note that at any time a survivor may decide to do nothing, which may be frustrating to the support person. It is important to be survivor-driven: the support person's own needs should be met elsewhere.

One option that survivors often discuss is whether to go public with their allegation, and let their identity be known. Doing this can be empowering, as it can break the chain of secrecy forged by the person who abused them. It can help them name publicly that they are not ashamed, and they are laying blame where it belongs. These are all good things.

At the same time, usually there is an incredibly strong backlash against the survivor of abuse. The survivor probably cannot imagine how bad this can get and what it can feel like. Some people in the congregation will likely support them, but this will likely be a minority, and there will be people who will take it as their mission to destroy the credibility or resolve of the survivor in order to protect the church leader. This can include shunning, harassing behaviour, character assassination, dredging up misdeeds from the survivor's past, pressuring family members, and sending hurtful communications.

Some people in the congregation will likely support them, but this will likely be a minority, and there will be people who will take it as their mission to destroy the credibility or resolve of the survivor in order to protect the church leader. This can include shunning, harassing behaviour, character assassination, dredging up misdeeds from the survivor's past, pressuring family members, and sending hurtful communications.

Survivors who reveal their identity to the congregation rarely feel comfortable staying in that congregation because of this common negativity towards them. Good institutional misconduct policies usually have clauses that protect the identity of the complainant and are the result of hard-won lobbying by advocates who saw too many survivors re-victimized. If a survivor truly wants to make their identity known, you may want to encourage them to find an alternative community in which to worship and find support.

6. Help survivor write a complaint letter

In some cases, as a support person you enter the process after a complaint letter has been submitted. Sometimes, you come in before a letter is written. Writing a complaint letter can be a daunting task for a survivor. It is emotionally difficult to put a traumatic experience into paragraphs. As a support person, you can help by explaining the purpose of a complaint letter. You can listen to them and write a draft of the letter that they can edit, or they can write the letter and you can edit it.

The purpose of the letter of complaint is to trigger an investigation. It is not intended to be a complete outline of the abuse. The survivor may feel that this is their chance to tell the whole story, but this is actually not what this letter should do. It is a letter which opens a door into a process where they can tell the whole story in person to the investigators.

The purpose of the letter of complaint is to trigger an investigation. It is not intended to be a complete outline of the abuse. The survivor may feel that this is their chance to tell the whole story, but this is actually not what this letter should do. It is a letter which opens a door into a process where they can tell the whole story in person to the investigators.

The letter of complaint needs to include:

1. the name and contact information for the complainant (the contact information will not be shared with the respondent)
2. the name of the person who did the harm
3. the position that the person in the church held, and the survivor's relation to them (Pastor/congregant, choir director/choir member)
4. the nature and frequency of the misconduct ("They said sexual remarks to me on three separate occasions." "They initiated an intimate relationship with me that included sexual contact on dozens of occasions over a three-year period.")
5. the exact or approximate dates of the misconduct ("the first week of June 2011" or "on various occasions in 2013 and 2014")
6. if you have the policy, and it is easy to follow, a reference to the policy and the list of types of misconduct that this falls into will be helpful, but it is not essential

7. a request for an investigation
8. whether this was reported formally or informally to anyone before
9. the goals of the complainant ("I want the pastor to receive training about sexual harassment, so this doesn't happen to anyone else." "I am writing this complaint with the goal of removing the pastor from his position, and to have my extensive counselling expenses reimbursed.")
10. If you have heard via the grapevine that the respondent has hurt other people, you could also mention this, but of course you should not name names without permission.

Sometimes the survivor has very good reasons to not want the person who hurt them to know who is complaining. For example, the church leader may have privileged information that the survivor fears they will broadcast ("She had an abortion when she was a teenager") or they fear physical harm ("He threatened to kill me if I told anyone").

A letter of complaint is sometimes shared directly with the respondent to the complaint, or it is summarized for them. Sometimes the survivor has very good reasons to not want the person who hurt them to know who is complaining. For example, the church leader may have privileged information that the survivor fears they will broadcast ("She had an abortion when she was a teenager") or they fear physical harm ("He threatened to kill me if I told anyone"). The survivor can request to meet with denominational officials to talk about how the complaint can go forward anonymously, disguising some of the identifying details. The police could be contacted if physical harm has been threatened, to get a restraining order.

If the survivor's identity needs to be concealed from the respondent, you can check with the institution before sending the letter, to see whether this is possible. Once this agreed on, make sure you emphasize this in bold in the letter, so that it is always remembered. You can tell them that if the complaint cannot be anonymized, the survivor does not want to continue with the investigation. Anonymizing a complaint may or may not be effective, depending on how many people the respondent has abused. Some policies may not allow for survivor anonymity. The respondent has the right to a fair process,

and to know the nature of the charges against them (not just, "You did something sexually inappropriate with a congregant in 2011.")

In some congregations that do not have policies, a complaint can sometimes disappear. Conclude your letter asking for a return letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint. If you suspect that this church is not going to take this complaint seriously, you may want to send the letter of complaint by registered mail, to the congregation and the denomination, so that you have documentation that the letter was received.

7. Assist with documentation

Conclude your letter asking for a return letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint. If you suspect that this church is not going to take this complaint seriously, you may want to send the letter of complaint by registered mail, to the congregation and the denomination, so that you have documentation that the letter was received.

While the complaint letter outlines in broad strokes what happened, it is a good idea for the survivor to write down the specifics of the abuse for their own records. If they are uncomfortable doing that, you can write it down as they dictate.

Some survivors have buried some aspects of the abuse deep in their memory because it is too painful. Talking to the support person may jog their memory.

Things that should be documented:

- how the relationship began ("After a church council meeting, he pulled me into the office").
- specific comments or rationalizations the church leader used ("This is God's will for us").
- whether the church leader introduced drugs or alcohol into their meetings.
- the specific actions of the church leader ("He touched my knee, and then knelt on the ground and put his head in my lap").
- the times and dates, to the best of the survivor's memory. Some survivors have a very hazy memory of dates, but they remember the event with crystal clarity. Helping them to think about the setting, and events that took place either before or after might help them place the event in time.

The support person should also document their own meetings with the survivor and encourage the survivor to do the same. Your notes should be brief and objective, rather than your own personal views, feelings or interpretations. Eventually you will both have a file with dated copies of letters (including the initial letter of complaint and the letter from the institution acknowledging it was received), emails that were sent and received, as well as dated notes about phone calls, and what was discussed. The primary purpose of notes is to enhance one's own effectiveness; they may also be needed as background evidence of events and dates. If the church decides to follow an informal process, they may destroy the complaint letter and deny its seriousness later, or the survivor may eventually pursue civil litigation. Remember that if this situation goes to court your notes could be subpoenaed.

Your notes should be brief and objective, rather than your own personal views, feelings or interpretations.

Most complaints will hopefully be investigated promptly, but if the institution refuses to investigate, they might be re-opened at a much later date. These records should not be thrown away, as they may be useful decades down the road. For example, a 1990s investigation exonerated the respondent, but was re-opened in 2019 when the survivors returned to try and find justice. Documentation from the initial complaint was very illuminating for current investigators.

Notes should of course be kept in a secure place where others will not have access to it, and do not advertise their existence.

8. Educate others in the system about pastoral sexual misconduct

In more hierarchically organized churches, there may be people in the system who specialize in dealing with sexual misconduct complaints. However, some congregations process these complaints internally. As the support person, you may know the most about the subject. You can share resources with them.

If a minor is involved, child protective services always must be called. If the abuse happened to a child in church programs, the church should make the call when they become aware of the abuse, even if the victim is now an adult. They do not have to name the victim, but only that they have received a complaint about someone who was abusive to a minor.

The support person may need to remind the church institution about the absolute confidentiality of the survivor's identity. This should be included in a church's policy, but for churches without policies, you should not assume that this will be the case.

The support person may need to tell the institution about potential conflicts of interest, for example, the complaint being adjudicated by colleagues and friends of the respondent. People who adjudicate the complaint should have no family, social or ties in any way to the respondent. For well-connected respondents, this may mean bringing in committee members from another denomination.

Investigative committees should not be made up of all men. This might be problematic in some patriarchal churches, where women are not allowed to have leadership roles. Advocating for gender justice is something you can do as a support person; you can tell the institution that it is disproportionately disadvantaging the survivor because she will feel uncomfortable talking about sexual misconduct in a room with all men, while the respondent feels powerful and supported by being in a room with people like him. Similarly, if the abuse included a person

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who is from a cultural minority, it will be important to have at least one member of the committee be Black, indigenous or a person of colour.

The support person may need to encourage the institution to be timely in their response to emails or telephone calls, reminding them of their policies, and how agonizing this process is for the survivor. You may need to remind the institution to not contact survivor directly, if that survivor wants to work through you. Beyond speaking with the direct investigators, the survivor can avoid direct contact with the church institution if they wish, and have all correspondence go through the support person or advocate. The institution should respect the survivor's wishes.

Ahead of time, you could encourage the institution to hire the services of a professional, and you could offer some agencies that have such expertise, if you know of any. The denomination may not welcome your suggestions.

As a support person, you can inquire about the training of the people who are doing the investigation. Being a pastor is not sufficient training to conduct a sexual misconduct interview. Ahead of time, you could encourage the institution to hire the services of a professional, and you could offer some agencies that have such expertise, if you know of any. The denomination may not welcome your suggestions. If they are following an informal process, they may not want to involve outsiders. They may want to avoid spending any money on this investigation.

If the investigators are not trained and do not have awareness of the needs of survivors, the complainant may be asked inappropriate or blaming questions (for example, "What were you wearing?" or "Why didn't you say no when he asked you to meet him at the hotel?") As a support person you can interject and point out that the question is laying blame or responsibility on the victim. Advise the survivor not to answer inappropriate questions. You might want to reframe the question for the interviewer, "It would be more sensitive of you to reframe the question as "How did he persuade you to meet him at the hotel?" Your comments may or may not be well received.

If the survivor is being treated badly in the investigation, you can ask for a break, discuss the situation with the survivor, who can choose to walk out of an investigation. Or later after the entire adjudication is completed, you can ask the survivor whether they are comfortable with you sending feedback to the denomination about the process. It is best not to give negative feedback to the denomination until the whole case is adjudicated and the appeals are finished, unless the process is so unsafe that the survivor can't participate.

Some denominations try to maintain secrecy about findings from sexual misconduct investigations. It is a widely accepted best practice that pastoral sexual misconduct be revealed to the congregation, and to the denomination. This is not about punishing the person who offended, but it is about alerting possible previous victims, and protecting future victims. The support person may need to direct the church to resources about this if this is not their practice.

If the institution does not thank the survivor for coming forward, you may need to remind them how helpful it is to the institution that the survivor is bring the complaint forward, because they are protecting future victims from harm, and thus benefitting the institution.

As a support person, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with abuse policies in your denomination or related denominations, so you can compare them. Some denominational policies are heavily weighted against the survivor, and for the person who has offended. For example, a policy sometimes requires the survivor to go through an informal process and then a formal process that involves telling their story to different committees of people. The survivor's support person can draw attention to this unfairness.

If the institution does not thank the survivor for coming forward, you may need to remind them how helpful it is to the institution that the survivor is bring the complaint forward, because they are protecting future victims from harm, and thus benefitting the institution.

9. Attend meetings during investigation/ appeal

The support person should prepare the survivor for what may happen at each stage of the process. If you don't know, you can inquire from the institution as to the setting and format of meetings, who will be present, how information will be recorded, and whether the records will be shared, kept or destroyed after the investigation. It is very helpful to talk to your peer support to get their insights.

As you move along in the process, go over possible actions, rehearse responses, and encourage the survivor to decide on alternate options. Be realistic about what may happen but also remain optimistic. Some survivors might want to rehearse possible questions that might be asked, but for others it might only make them more anxious. Remind them that they are the expert on what happened to them, and they are simply speaking what they know to be true.

Be realistic about what may happen but also remain optimistic. Some survivors might want to rehearse possible questions that might be asked, but for others it might only make them more anxious.

Meetings like this where so much is at stake are extremely emotional. Our memories don't work well when we are in an agitated state, so taking notes at meetings for the person you are supporting is important. Debrief with them either immediately after the meeting, or if they are too tired, the next day. Summarize the main points to make sure they heard what was said. You can ask what their impressions of the meeting were and clarify any points they may have misheard. You can also debrief the emotions they felt at the time and now.

As a support person you are mostly silent during meetings unless you are asking a question of clarification about process, or intervening because an inappropriate question was asked. If you see the survivor is upset, you can advocate for them by asking for a break. A bathroom break where they can cry privately for a moment, or a glass of water or a snack, can help the survivor get through a difficult meeting.

If you talk to the investigators when the survivor is not in the room, when the survivor returns to the room, you should summarize the conversation. You want to make sure the survivor knows you are not talking about them behind their back but are advocating in a specific way.

If people attend a meeting who you did not expect to see (for example, if the wife of the person who hurt the survivor is in the room), you can refuse to attend the meeting. The survivor should not be hijacked into anything for which they are not prepared.

10. Communicate on behalf of the survivor (if requested)

If you talk to the investigators when the survivor is not in the room, when the survivor returns to the room, you should summarize the conversation. You want to make sure the survivor knows you are not talking about them behind their back but are advocating in a specific way.

Sometimes the person you are supporting may decide they do not want to communicate directly with the institution that is conducting the investigation. There are a variety of reasons for this scenario. They may feel fragile, they may fear the institution, or have anxiety that they will say the wrong thing. Or the institution may have a history of saying inappropriate or hurtful things to victims. The survivor will need to meet in person with an investigative committee, but other communication can all be handled through you as the support person. The survivor should send a letter indicating your specific role, and they should provide your contact information.

Some institutions will not respect the survivor's wishes in this regard. The survivor does not have to open letters or emails that come from the institution, they can save those for you to open. If they receive a phone call, they can tell the person to contact them through the support person, and then hang up.

The survivor may ask you to attend meetings on their behalf. The institution may also ask you to represent a survivor's interests at a meeting. For example, a congregation might have a meeting to determine how to reach out to the respondent when the complaint is founded. They may invite you to serve in an advocacy role for the survivor's interest, and to advise to tell the congregation how to respond to the survivor.

Communicating assertively is important for the support person. If you understand the principals of assertive communication, you will be able to help the survivor communicate clearly, perhaps even by roleplaying or by rehearsing conversations. Assertive communication will also assist you in maintaining your own boundaries and communicating with denominational representatives or the investigative team.

There are four recognized types of communication: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and assertive.

If you understand the principals of assertive communication, you will be able to help the survivor communicate clearly, perhaps even by roleplaying or by rehearsing conversations.

- *passive response:* say nothing as a way of avoiding conflict, and keep real feelings hidden. It may involve agreeing with someone rather than expressing a point of view or feelings about that point of view. This response allows others to take advantage. Passive responses may lead to feeling nervous, irritated, insignificant and angry at ourselves for inaction.
- *aggressive response:* exploding angrily at another person, blaming someone else for our situation or taking out our pent-up anger. When responding aggressively, we feel embarrassed, angry, foolish, self-conscious and out of control.
- *passive-aggressive response:* involves smiling pleasantly while "stabbing in the back," appearing to be supportive while putting the other person down, sabotaging the efforts of others but not admitting it, or being dishonest about our feelings, pretending to care when we do not. When responding passive-aggressively, we feel depressed, confused, frustrated and angry, but appear enthusiastic, controlled and loving.
- *assertive response:* expressing how we feel, what we need, or what we believe without putting down another person or violating their dignity and personal rights. When responding assertively we are communicating clearly. However, in some situations, no matter how well you communicate, the institution may not listen well.

The support person should aim for assertive responses.

The following questions will help you form an assertive response:

- What are your rights in this situation? What do you need? List these things.
- How do you feel?
- What would you like to say? Think through your message and its wording.
- What is stopping you from saying what you want to say? For example, fear or nervousness.
- What would be the consequences of being assertive? What would be the consequences of not being assertive?

Merely deciding to respond assertively is not enough. Many of us have not been taught how to respond assertively and so it does not come naturally.

Merely deciding to respond assertively is not enough. Many of us have not been taught how to respond assertively and so it does not come naturally. The following list of hints and skills will assist you in formulating your message. If you need further assistance, a number of organizations offer assertiveness trainings:

- **Use "I-statements,"** that is, state what you need and how you feel, rather than what the other person needs or feels. Example, the support person might say, "We need to be told two days in advance about meetings so we have time to prepare," rather than, "You are always on the pastor's side!"
- **Body language is important.** Use good eye contact, keep your voice level and even (not too loud or soft), ensure that your gestures are appropriate, and your body posture upright.
- **When saying "No," use the formula: Position–Reason–Understanding.** This formula allows you to state your position clearly while still expressing care for the other person. Instead of saying "This isn't fair, and we aren't going to play along with these games!" you can say, "We will not meet with the offender (P) because it puts

the survivor in an unsafe position (R). I know you think this will help solve the problem, but it will only make things worse (U)."

- **When requesting something or asserting your right, use the formula: Problem–Request–Clarification.** So instead of saying, "You are treating the survivor like dirt, this is so unfair!" You could say, "I had understood that we would hear the results of the investigation within a week, and it has already been two weeks (P). We would like a response this week (R). Can you explain the delay to us (C)?"

Finally, in your role as support person, never have off-the-record meetings with the denomination that are secret from the survivor. They may try to contact you and ask that this be kept "confidential." They may be trying to play you off against the survivor, "You are being reasonable, but the survivor is out of control." Never apologize for the survivor's emotions or reactions, which are a valid response to the trauma they have experienced. If the denomination contacts you and asks for a confidential meeting, tell the survivor about it. The survivor needs to trust that you are being transparent with them and are working in their best interests—this is of the utmost importance.

Never apologize for the survivor's emotions or reactions, which are a valid response to the trauma they have experienced.

11. Convene meetings with other survivors of the same person who offended

Sometimes survivors of the same abuser find each other through chance or word of mouth. Hearing each other's stories can be a healing experience. It can help a survivor let go of the guilt or shame that they were duped by the church leader.

Sometimes additional victims are found when an institution announces that there is an investigation happening. The victims may not know each other, and the institution may want to help them by planning a meeting where they have the option to meet each other.

While some survivor meetings are filled with support and understanding, there can also be conflict. Some survivors may still feel strongly protective of the person who offended, while others are angry and demanding justice.

It is never appropriate for the institution to run a meeting like this, or even be present at the meeting. This meeting should be for the survivors and their healing journey. They may at a future point decide they want to meet as a group with a representative of the institution, but the first meeting should be about the victims and their needs, and not the institution's needs.

As a support person for a survivor, you may be asked to convene this meeting. You may handle the logistics for this (the institution who knows the contact info for the victims can send them an email with your contact information), but it is best if you ask the denomination to pay for a trained facilitator who can help the survivors determine what they hope to get out of the meeting and lay out rules about confidentiality.

While some survivor meetings are filled with support and understanding, there can also be conflict. Some survivors may still feel strongly protective of the person who offended, while others are angry and demanding justice. If the survivors have a goal of writing a statement to the congregation, for example, they may have a very difficult time writing something with which everyone can agree.

Some people may be worried that survivors getting together will in some way warp their testimony and allow them to conspire against the person who hurt them. The disciplinary hearing of a church body is not a court of law, and survivors have a right to seek support where they can find it.

Note: If there is any chance that the survivors will be pursuing a civil or criminal suit against the person who offended, they should definitely not convene a meeting like this, or communicate to share their stories.

12. Being a support person for more than one survivor

Some people may be worried that survivors getting together will in some way warp their testimony and allow them to conspire against the person who hurt them. The disciplinary hearing of a church body is not a court of law, and survivors have a right to seek support where they can find it.

Once you have agreed to be a support person for a survivor, it may be that another survivor also abused by that same person surfaces, and you are asked to be a support person for a number of people.

This is not twice as much work since you are working with the same church, on the same case, with the same policy. However, each survivor of abuse can and often will have different reactions and goals. You need to decide if you have the energy to put into this. Be honest if you are already stretched, and it is OK to request that another support person be found.

It is important not to assume that the second survivor feels the same way as the one you already know. They may have anger instead of fear, they may want to pursue civil litigation instead of a church process. You may want to agree to be their support person only after an initial exploratory conversation to see whether the goals of the survivors match up.

If you are being a support person to several survivors, you could meet with them all as a group rather than individually. Ask the person you are already supporting whether they are open to including another survivor in your meetings. They may have history with this other person, and do not want them included. There can also be complex feelings between survivors, and even jealousy,

especially if they each thought they were having a "special" relationship with the church leader. Some survivors have a hard time believing other complainants because the person who offended convinced them of the uniqueness of their connection.

Remember, even when the goals of survivors are the same, they may have very different reactions to meetings, to communications and to findings. You will need to be careful when the survivors are all together that everyone has a chance to speak, and that one person does not dominate the discussion.

There can be complicated dynamics if one survivor decides to go public, revealing their identity as a complainant, while the rest continue to be anonymous. A lot of anger and negative emotions from the community may be focussed on the person whose identity is known. This can lead to resentment, that one person is carrying the whole load of the resentment, and it is not being shared. The survivor who is "out" may pressure other survivors to do the same. As a support person, you can remind them that they can each make their own decisions.

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13. Long-term follow-up

Most support people are assigned with the assumption that you will walk someone through an investigation, and then you will be finished. However, it is usual for this to be a much longer-term relationship, although with much less intensity as time goes by.

After the investigation closes, the survivor is still at the beginning of their healing journey, and there may be other goals they want to pursue with your help. Even if they have met all their goals, as a support person you should still be checking in on them in coming months to see how they are and if they have the support they need.

Survivor's goals can change quite dramatically over the months. Initial concern about the person who hurt them often reflects the survivor's long pattern of putting others first. As survivors get in touch with their own pain, their

anger and rage often surface, and this is a sign that they are, perhaps for the first-time, exercising healthy self-interest.[58]

Survivors can face a rocky road spiritually. As a support person, you can invite the survivor to reflect on the impact of the abuse and whether they want or need to find a new church community to support them. Some try to stay in the congregation where the hurt happened. It often takes a congregation over a year to process sexual misconduct by a church leader. This can be excruciating for the survivor, particularly since there often is a continued outpouring of support for the person who offended and their family. Sometimes a congregation really wants to bring the pastor back for a formal good-bye and thank you for their service, and this can be extremely painful for survivors.

It often takes a congregation over a year to process sexual misconduct by a church leader. This can be excruciating for the survivor, particularly since there often is a continued outpouring of support for the person who offended and their family.

Other survivors look for homes in new congregations, but have difficulty trusting church leaders, or feeling safe. And some survivors can no longer find a home in the church but must leave to find safety and healing. They may have a deep desire for spirituality but need to work that out in different forms.[59] You are not a spiritual guide for the survivor, but you can encourage them to reach out to people who can serve this role, if they feel ready for that.

Being a support person over a long period of time allows for opportunities to reflect. At the six-month or one-year anniversary of starting as a support person, you can take the time to reflect with the survivor. You can ask them to think back to the first meeting, and then reflect on where things are now:

- **What have we gone through together?**
- **What is the biggest gain?**
- **What was the hardest part or lowest point?**
- **What was the biggest surprise?**
- **What have you learned about yourself?**
- **What are your hopes for the next period of time?**

It can be helpful for you as the support person to jot down "wins" as they happen so that when you reflect together on the journey, or when the survivor is feeling like things are not happening, it will jog your memory.

You can encourage them by sharing your own observations about the strength the survivor has shown. Celebrate the courage they had to do certain things, and what has been accomplished. Also lament disappointments and things that did not go as you hoped. There may be new goals that can be added. For example, once the investigation is over, the survivor may want to provide feedback to the institution on their process to make it safer for subsequent complainants.

It can be helpful for you as the support person to jot down "wins" as they happen so that when you reflect together on the journey, or when the survivor is feeling like things are not happening, it will jog your memory.

Depending on the consequences for the person who offended, there may be developments about which the survivor wants to be informed. For example, two years down the road the survivor will want to know if the church leader's suspension will be lifted. The institution should inform the survivor when this is happening. While the survivor might have a great interest in reading reports from the therapist of the person who offended, this is private and will never be shared with the survivor. The institution may share some general progress that they feel has been accomplished by the person who offended.

Many years down the road, the person who offended may have left ministry. People who leave ministry often end up in other caring professions where they might have caregiving roles. There may be concerns that the record of pastoral misconduct has been forgotten and the current employer does not know about it. The survivor may want you to contact the denomination to ask about the status of the former employee. Once a pastor gives up credentials, the denominational office may have little or no contact, and no supervisory role with this person. It may be the local congregation that is trying to be an accountability group. The survivor could ask you to contact the congregation of the person who offended, with their concerns about the risks that the former church leader poses to vulnerable people in their new place of employment.

14. What a support person does not do

Fall into the role of being a rescuer: As a support person, the survivor may want to view you as someone who can save or rescue them. Identify and help the survivor find additional supports so they are not relying solely on you. Don't view yourself as a rescuer. Never say, "We will win this!" You do not know what the outcome will be. Church processes are not always logical, and some policies allow the results of the investigation to be overturned without any explanation. Do not promise anything that is beyond your power to provide.

Don't view yourself as a rescuer. Never say, "We will win this!" You do not know what the outcome will be. Church processes are not always logical, and some policies allow the results of the investigation to be overturned without any explanation. Do not promise anything that is beyond your power to provide.

Fall into the trap of being idolized: The survivor may say, "I don't know what I would do without you, you are incredible!" While it is great to be appreciated, the goal is to empower the survivor. You can say, "None of this would be happening without your courage to come forward. I am just coming alongside you in your important stand."

Make assumptions about the survivor: Do not assume you know what a survivor is feeling or experiencing. For example, you may come out of a meeting with the institution that you think went very badly, and you are very angry. It would be easy to say, "Well that was a train wreck of a meeting, you must be devastated." Instead, you can ask, "How do you think that went? How do you feel about it?" The survivor may actually be feeling pretty good about the meeting. If you then say, "Can't you see how they walked all over you?" it can undermine the confidence of the survivor to understand how their boundaries are still being violated. It is better not to share your own feelings, but instead you can raise concerns, "I am glad that you feel good about the meeting, there were some very positive things that happened. I am also concerned that they did not give you very much time to speak."

Take the place of legal counsel: Many church disciplinary policies do not encourage or require legal counsel. But if the person who offended has a lawyer, and that lawyer is going to be allowed to cross examine the survivor, you should encourage the survivor to get legal advice. One of the goals

of the survivor may be taking the person who hurt them to court; do not venture opinions on legal matters.

Stand in for a counsellor: Talking about the misconduct can be an intense experience for the survivor, as is walking through an investigation. You may witness emotional outbursts. You can be sympathetic, but your job is not to help the survivor deal with deep emotional scars. You are there to walk with them through a church process; their counsellor or therapist can help them with the deep problems they face.

Be angry if the survivor withdraws their complaint: Sometimes a survivor wants to lay a complaint, but for various reasons they decide not to move forward on it. They may feel too fragile and overwhelmed, or they may suddenly worry about the effects on the leader who hurt them. Survivors often have deep protective feelings about the person who hurt them, and these may cycle around to the point that they decide to withdraw the complaint. As a support person who is survivor centered, you follow their lead.

You can be sympathetic, but your job is not to help the survivor deal with deep emotional scars. You are there to walk with them through a church process; their counsellor or therapist can help them with the deep problems they face.

Take on dual roles: After you start working as a support person, the denomination may want you to help them with something, for example, serving as a consultant or educational resource at a conference. This will establish a separate dual role between you and the conference, which could be at odds with your role as a support person; care should be taken. The survivor may want you to do or say something very demanding, which you think is pretty unreasonable, and you may be worried how that might reflect on you, and whether the conference will still want you to speak at their educational event. Another dual role might be advocating for the survivor and helping the congregation work through their own issues about the abuse.

C) Challenges

1. The first meeting

As in any interpersonal setting, the first meeting between the support person and survivor often sets the tone for the remainder of the relationship. This meeting offers an important opportunity to develop trust and open communication. Choose a location where the survivor will feel comfortable. This may be a public place, or it may be her home, and it usually is not a church building.

Here are some things that you could cover in the first meeting or two:

Choose a location where the survivor will feel comfortable. This may be a public place, or it may be her home, and it usually is not a church building.

i. **General introductions**, where you get to know each other, and make sure that there are no conflicts of interest. If you find something, you may need to excuse yourself, for example, if you find out that the partner of the person who offended is a co-worker, or you are friends with the survivor's sister.

ii. **Explain the role of the support person**, telling the survivor how you have been trained, and whether you will have peer support in this role, and what that means.

iii. **Identify supports that the survivor has in place.** These may include family, friends, therapists, a lawyer, spiritual director, or doctor. If there are supports missing, suggest that the survivor locate such support and where they can do that.

iv. **Negotiate boundaries.** An important arena to discuss in this respect is communication: "Where and when are you comfortable being contacted?"

v. **Discuss confidentiality** and assure the survivor that you will keep what is discussed between you confidential, indicating any exceptions.

vi. **Listen to the survivor's story.** You can assure them that they may not feel comfortable telling you the whole story because you just met. While later it will

be important to obtain clarity on the details of what happened, in the first meeting concentrate on the survivor's feelings, needs and hurts. People who are traumatized may tell their story in a very disjointed and haphazard way, and it would be intrusive to try and get them to give you a linear account. You will be hearing this story many more times in the coming months. Remember that the survivor might not be remembering everything at this point, or they may be holding back parts of the story that are too painful to share. Survivors might also downplay what happened in the initial conversation to protect the person who caused harm

vii. **Reassure them.** Their emotional reaction to the events are understandable. Pastoral misconduct can be traumatizing. Survivors may feel ashamed they feel so violated by something that did not escalate to something more violent. Or they may feel numb, and are not showing emotions about very violent things that happened to them. Their emotions are their emotions, and are valid.

viii. **Have a preliminary discussion of goals** and indicate that you will talk about this next time.

Do not tell the survivor that you do not believe their story, as that will undermine their confidence in themselves.

If on reflection after the meeting you find that you do not or cannot believe the story of abuse that the survivor has told, then you are not the appropriate person to be their support person. You can apologize and say that you cannot serve as their support person after all, and that you can you help them find someone else. Do not tell the survivor that you do not believe their story, as that will undermine their confidence in themselves. You can say that you are removing yourself from this case for personal reasons that you would rather not discuss, but that you wish them well. Help the survivor find another support person.

Keep in mind when someone comes to see you to talk about abuse, they are attempting to tell you something they most want to forget. They are afraid of what happened, of the person who did it, of you and your reactions, as well as of remembering and speaking out loud. They are afraid of what you will think of them. They feel overwhelmed. Keep your voice quiet and slow. Do not make sudden movements. If they look fine, that does not mean they are fine. Your main task is to listen well. They will not tell an ordered story. Most abuse/rape stories come out fragmented and disordered…. You are giving them a safe space to tell a frightening and often shame-ridden story at their pace…. Let them know that what they're doing is courageous and is the right thing to do. They are speaking truth and dragging darkness into the light. Abuse silences victims and renders them powerless. Listening makes room for their voice and restores dignity.[60]

One of the most important things taken from a victim is their ability to choose, so ask questions designed to give the victim a voice and the ability to control the situation. Even simple questions, like whether they would like the door opened or closed, someone else in the room, or not, can help the survivor feel more secure.[61]

One of the most important things taken from a victim is their ability to choose, so ask questions designed to give the victim a voice and the ability to control the situation. Even simple questions, like whether they would like the door opened or closed, someone else in the room, or not, can help the survivor feel more secure.

2. When the complaint is historical (distant past) or the person who offended is deceased

The #MeToo movement has raised awareness about sexual assault and power differentials. People who were abused in the church long ago are beginning to realize that what happened to them was wrong, and some are beginning to seek justice. At the same time, churches have been more diligent in creating and following sexual misconduct policies, so the church environment has become more open to receiving complaints and more trustworthy in protecting the confidential identity of complainants.

People who were abused in the church long ago are beginning to realize that what happened to them was wrong, and some are beginning to seek justice.

It can take years and decades for some survivors to feel safe enough or confident enough to pursue a complaint. Sometimes that safety comes from the person who offended not holding a public office in the church (they are now retired or have left the ministry) or have died (and no longer can follow through on threats they may have uttered).

Some denominations have processed numerous historical or posthumous complaints, while other denominations may not have faced this before. Not every church misconduct policy specifically addresses posthumous complaints, and so the regular policy is followed with the family of the deceased representing the interests of the deceased respondent.

As the survivor's support person, you may have to educate the institution about the importance of investigating historical complaints. Institutions have a fiduciary duty to understand the harm done by their employees and volunteers, even if it happened long ago. There may still be victims of the abuse who are suffering in silence.

It will be important for you to help the survivor be clear about their goals in their letter of complaint. For example, they may want an apology from the institution, or money to help cover counselling costs, or that a picture of the person who offended be removed from the church fellowship hall.

There are significant challenges to investigating a case that is decades old or when the respondent is deceased. The survivor may have a very good memory, but some details may have faded. The important thing will be finding corroborating testimony for the survivor's case and providing a fair process for the accused.

The pain of pastoral sexual misconduct remains fresh until justice is found; pursuing historical complaints can be an avenue of healing.

3. When the complaint was adjudicated unjustly long ago

Survivors who had their cases adjudicated long ago and feel that they were treated badly and did not receive justice, are increasingly resubmitting their complaints.

Church institutions have been on a steep learning curve with regard to sexual misconduct. The last decades have seen new and improved policies, and a greater dedication to following them.

The downside of this is that churches look back at how they handled complaints several decades ago, and they realize that they made mistakes. People were victimized by church processes that were unfair.

Survivors who had their cases adjudicated long ago and feel that they were treated badly and did not receive justice, are increasingly resubmitting their complaints. They are appealing an unjust process or finding through new policies and procedures.

If you are a support person for someone in this situation, it will be important when you write the letter of complaint to be clear what you are asking of the institution. Are you asking for a new investigation, or are you asking for an apology for how they treated the survivor, or some other goal?

It will be important for the survivor to document as much as they possibly can about the previous investigation. Hopefully the institution will have records, but some churches may have destroyed or misplaced the file, particularly if an informal process was followed.

4. Gender, race and sexual orientation

In our society, race, gender and sexual orientation can affect the power a person has in the community. Anyone can commit sexual misconduct, and anyone can be a victim of sexual misconduct. Race, gender and sexual orientation can factor into misconduct because of the power of the parties involved.

Statistically, the majority of people who violate sexual boundaries in the church are male. Similarly, the majority of victims are women and children of all genders. Gender minorities (trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people) are at a higher risk of being victims of sexual abuse and harassment, and face prejudice when reporting abuse. Men can also be victims of abuse, and women can commit sexual misconduct.

If the survivor you are supporting is a person of colour, it could be that they have less social power in the church, and if their identity is discovered, their story may not hold as much weight. This is compounded if the survivor is disabled, or a new immigrant. Sometimes people who offend choose to abuse people on the margins because they have less supports and few will believe them if they make accusations.

In many churches, white people hold the positions of power, while Black, indigenous and people of colour often hold less power in the congregation. If the person who offended is white, they can draw on the power of the white community to defend him. If the survivor you are supporting is a person of colour, it could be that they have less social power in the church, and if their identity is discovered, their story may not hold as much weight. This is compounded if the survivor is disabled, or a new immigrant. Sometimes people who offend choose to abuse people on the margins because they have less supports and few will believe them if they make accusations.

As a support person, you should be sensitive to race and gender dynamics at play. This is especially the case if you are of a different race than the survivor. Ask the person you are supporting about their church. Are women allowed to hold leadership positions, or are they relegated to subordinate positions? How much power do people of colour have in the church?

The support person should bring this race and gender awareness into the official complaint process, advocating for race and gender representation on investigating committees. It is not fair for a female survivor to have to

explain sexual acts done to them to a committee of men, nor should a person of colour have to tell their story to a panel of white people.

The man who offended may have chosen male victims. Male survivors can have difficulty coming forward because of cultural norms about what it means to be a man: being a victim can be seen as unmanly. This is compounded by negative stereotypes about homosexual behaviour since the victims may or may not be gay. Or they may fear that they will be "outed" if their identity as a complainant becomes known, or they may fear that the church is homophobic and will blame them as a tempter of the pastor.

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Women pastors are more likely to be the subject of sexual harassment, than to cross sexual boundaries with others. You may be supporting a person who is an employee in the church who has been harassed in their workplace by congregants or senior employees. In this case government legislation about workplace safety may be applicable, and you may want to encourage them to consult a lawyer who specializes in workplace harassment.

Every victim deserves support and a fair hearing. As a support person, paying attention to power will be important. You can ask the survivor how they feel their gender, race or sexual orientation impacted the abuse, or how the abuse will be adjudicated.

5. When the survivor's partner wants to sit in

As a general rule, you should only be meeting with the survivor. The survivor has different needs than their partner or spouse, and you may not understand the dynamics of that relationship. The survivor can be overshadowed by the needs and emotions of their partner. The partner may have a keen desire for justice and may be pressuring the survivor to lay a complaint. There may be a time to include the spouse in a meeting, but you should always have time alone to assess what it is the survivor wants. You can ask them directly, "Do you think you and your spouse have different goals in this process? Do you feel pressured to follow the goals they have?"

The spouse of a survivor is greatly impacted by the abuse and by the process. They could do with their own support person, or a supportive group that is walking with the couple together. You can tell the spouse that your main concern is for the survivor, and in order to empower them, it is best if you meet alone.

The spouse of a survivor is greatly impacted by the abuse and by the process. They could do with their own support person, or a supportive group that is walking with the couple together. You can tell the spouse that your main concern is for the survivor, and in order to empower them, it is best if you meet alone. You can summarize the meetings and give notes to the survivor to share with the spouse, so they are informed about what was discussed. The survivor may feel too tired to tell their spouse about the meeting, so you could do that for them, if asked. Check in with the survivor whether there is anything they don't want shared with their partner.

6. When the person who offended is very powerful

The powerfulness of the person who offended is one of the main reasons complainants are afraid to come forward. The leader exercised power to abuse the victim, and that same power is at force keeping the victim silent. People who cross sexual boundaries with multiple people often hide their abuse by being a super competent leader. They may hold the highest positions in the church, they may win awards for exemplary teaching, they may be the most faithful person in a congregation, revered in the community.

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When the complaint is filed, the leader may draw on the social capital they have to get the complaint dismissed, or to have the proceedings kept secret. They may try to influence who is on the investigative committee or have "informal" conversations with people in power. If the complaint is founded, they may do everything they can to have the consequences mitigated. This could include having powerful people advocate on their behalf. This is often couched in religious language of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The powerful person may exert pressure on the victim, communicating with them when they have been forbidden to do so. They may threaten to divulge personal information, or they may pressure family members to have the survivor withdraw the complaint. Because churches can be very family oriented, the battle lines may be drawn between the family of the accused and anyone who supports the complaint process. It is not uncommon for the integrity of the victims to be publicly challenged in the church press through Letters to the Editor of church newspapers.

If the complaint is against a powerful person who is deceased, the family of that person may do everything in their power to have the complaint kept secret, and the reputation of their loved one preserved. Even if they believe the deceased church leader was guilty, the church

may privilege the family of the deceased and their desire for privacy over survivors and their desire for justice. As a support person, you need to be aware of these dynamics, and how challenging it is to lay a complaint against a very powerful person.

It may be a big challenge for the church to adjudicate a case like this, because the deceased church leader's influence is so widespread. As a support person, you can advocate for having people on the investigative team who are unconnected to the deceased and the denomination.

7. When the survivor is protective of the person who offended

Even when a survivor decides to file a complaint, ambivalent feelings of respect and love, anger and hatred can be present. Because some survivors are so protective of the person who harmed them, they may not be fully transparent about how they were harmed. They may be holding back the worst stories because they don't want the church leader to get in worse trouble.

Many survivors of abuse are groomed to accept sexual behaviour. Part of the grooming process is becoming emotionally intimate and dependent, and there can be deep admiration and even idolization of the church leader. Even after the sexual abuse ends, the survivor may have stayed "friends" with the person who abused them, and value that relationship.

At some point, the light turns on for the survivor and they begin to think about the imbalance of power, and whether or not the relationship really was mutual. They may get in touch with feelings of powerlessness and anger, they may realize they were strung along with a story about being "special", especially if they find there were numerous "special" people in the life of the person who hurt them.

Even when a survivor decides to file a complaint, ambivalent feelings of respect and love, anger and hatred can be present. Because some survivors are so protective of the person who harmed them, they may not be fully transparent about how they were harmed. They may be holding back the worst stories because they don't want the church leader to get in worse trouble.[62]

The survivor may be concerned that the person who offended not suffer severe consequences. For example, the survivor may only want an apology, and for the person to get help, they don't want them to lose their job. If a person

has crossed sexual boundaries with people in their care, the institution is in charge of consequences, and the survivor will not be in control of that. The survivor's wishes may be taken into account, but there are professional consequences for violating sexual boundaries.

As a support person, you may find it very difficult to hear the survivor express sympathy for the person who betrayed them, but it is not appropriate for you to try to convince the survivor not to feel something. The survivor feels what they feel; these feelings may change as they discuss this with a qualified counsellor. You can be clear that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the church leader.

As a support person, you may find it very difficult to hear the survivor express sympathy for the person who betrayed them, but it is not appropriate for you to try to convince the survivor not to feel something.

As a support person, you may find that you have a great deal of anger for the person who offended. You should keep your feelings to yourself or share them with your peer support. You should not overwhelm the survivor with your intense emotions. It can be confusing for the survivor if you have stronger emotions than they do. They can feel mistrustful of you or judge themselves for having the "wrong reaction."

What you can do is remark that feeling protective of the person who harmed them is a common experience for survivors. You can also observe that for some survivors those feelings can gradually change over time.

8. When the institution is uncooperative

While there have been enormous strides regarding awareness of sexual misconduct in the past decades, there are pockets of the church that are mired in earlier mindsets. Some congregations, especially those that are independent and do not have a denominational affiliation, may not even have a sexual misconduct policy. They may employ people who are called by God but have received no training about boundaries.

When considering the options for the survivor, it's important to do some research to see whether the institution you are dealing with has ever adjudicated sexual misconduct cases. As much as possible, try to find out what happened in those situations and whether there were consequences if someone was found guilty of misconduct. Ask how the survivor was treated in the process, and whether there was any retaliation, such as asking the survivor to leave the church, or social shunning. Research like this is not straightforward because some denominations are extremely secretive about pastoral misconduct, and try to cover it up.

While there have been enormous strides regarding awareness of sexual misconduct in the past decades, there are pockets of the church that are mired in earlier mindsets.

This informal institutional history can inform goal-setting. In some churches there is little probability of a complaint being upheld, and a bigger risk of revictimization by an unjust and insensitive investigation.

Institutions can and have responded in the following ways:

- ignoring a complaint completely, and throwing it in the garbage
- broadcasting the name of the complainant, and discounting their story
- forbidding the complainant from talking about the abuse in the congregation (gag order)
- villainizing the complainant and their support person
- not stopping the respondent from contacting the survivor
- bringing pressure on friends and family of the survivor to get them to retract their complaint

- offering a mediation or restorative justice process that is unsafe for the survivor
- putting theological pressure on the survivor to meet with the accused and forgive them
- investigators blaming the survivor in their questioning
- accepting the excuses of the accused that it was the survivor who tempted him
- calling the abuse a mutual "affair" or "indiscretion"
- exonerating the respondent because it was "he said/she said" and they want to give the respondent the benefit of the doubt
- finding the leader guilty but not giving any significant consequences because they are sorry
- not telling the complainant that there were previous complaints against the person who hurt them that the institution previously ignored
- not telling the survivor that there are currently other complaints being investigated, and other survivors
- allowing the person who offended to have a lawyer present but not paying for a lawyer for the survivor
- hiring professional agencies that specialize in public relations, often resulting in the survivor being silenced and the person who offended maintaining their position

It is important for you as a support person to read about sexual misconduct in the church, so that you are not naïve about what can happen. It is better to be very modest about what can realistically be hoped for from an institution, instead of building up hopes for justice, only to have them cut down later.

This may seem like an incredible list, however they are all examples from stories that have happened in church institutions. It is important for you as a support person to read about sexual misconduct in the church, so that you are not naïve about what can happen. It is better to be very modest about what can realistically be hoped for from an institution, instead of building up hopes for justice, only to have them cut down later. That said, some institutions are acting in good faith, and are doing the best they can for the survivor.

9. When the survivor is scapegoated

When someone lays a complaint, they often have a deep belief in the goodness of the church. They expect that the church will hear the truth and act on it. If the process is flawed and favours the church leader at the expense of the survivor, this can be deeply hurtful. In fact, complainants who are treated badly by the church often say that the betrayal of the church was a greater hurt than the original abuse itself.

There are risks as well as advantages to laying a complaint. As a support person, you should be paying attention to how the survivor is being treated, and at some point, you may advise them that you do not have confidence that they will get a fair hearing in this context. You can tell them that you fear they may be scapegoated. It may be wisest to stop co-operating in a process that is re-victimizing the survivor.

...complainants who are treated badly by the church often say that the betrayal of the church was a greater hurt than the original abuse itself.

Scapegoating is a term used to describe the way an institution gangs up and blames the complainant (and sometimes their support person), for any number of reasons in any number of ways. Survivors who have complained about sexual misconduct have often been scapegoated by the church.

Here are just a few examples:

- they are called "radical feminists" who are trying to destroy the reputation of a good man because they hate men.
- the complainant is portrayed as a dupe who is under the influence of a vengeful support person who wants to destroy the institution.
- the complainant is described as mentally ill and incompetent.
- the complainant is told they are going to hell because they won't forgive the person who hurt them.
- the complainant is accused of being in love with the pastor and tempting him.

- by pursuing civil litigation, the complainant is trying to destroy the church and they are described as money-grubbing

In any sexual misconduct case, there may be people in the church who support the complainant, while some support the respondent: this can cause conflict in the church. When churches are torn apart by this conflict, the survivor can be blamed for this too.

10. When "mediation" goes wrong

Some misconduct policies attempt to avoid a formal investigation by having a mediation or restorative justice process that brings together the person who was harmed and the person who caused the harm with the help of a facilitator.

Restorative justice, when properly practiced, never minimizes harm and never helps people who have offended avoid consequences. Restorative justice forefronts the needs of victims.

These processes have often proven to be very harmful for the victim and have allowed church leaders to avoid consequences. This is not necessarily a reflection on mediation or conflict resolution processes. The church co-opts these terms and does not use properly trained facilitators who pay attention to safety and unequal power dynamics between the two parties. Restorative justice, when properly practiced, never minimizes harm and never helps people who have offended avoid consequences. Restorative justice forefronts the needs of victims. Face-to-face encounters are not appropriate when the person who offended is not taking responsibility for their actions.[63]

Mediation and restorative justice involve significant preparation with both parties before a meeting. There needs to be clear goal setting, and the practitioner must be trauma informed.[64] However, most churches use mediation as an informal process they hope will quickly resolve the problem, instead of following the more formal route of an investigation. Informal church processes often follow a simplistic and naïve interpretation of Matthew 18:16-20. Because pastoral sexual misconduct is predicated on power imbalances, these meetings are almost always dangerous for the survivor of abuse.

Some mediations result in a stalemate. The person who was harmed tells their story, and the person who harmed them says that it did not happen, or has a different narrative (for example, it was a mutual relationship). The mediator doesn't make any attempt to figure out what really happened, instead the focus is on what will happen in the future.[65]

Often mediation precedes a formal process, and the survivor of abuse is so retraumatized by being in the presence of the person who hurt them, that they are too intimidated to file a formal complaint. The abuse is never put "on the record" and the person who did the misconduct faces no consequences and is denied the opportunity to get help with problems that are likely deeply rooted. More people may be harmed by this person because they were not mandated to get help.

Often mediation precedes a formal process, and the survivor of abuse is so retraumatized by being in the presence of the person who hurt them, that they are too intimidated to file a formal complaint.

However, the survivor needs to choose the process that works best for them. They are not responsible for the person who hurt them, or any subsequent people that might get hurt.

11. When you aren't getting along with the person you are supporting

Being a support person involves creating a relationship of trust. You may find that the person you are trying to support does not trust you. They may question your motives, thinking that you are allied with the institution. They may be suspicious of you because you do not care for the person who hurt them. They may ignore your advice and fail to inform you about what is happening in the case.

In this situation, the support person/survivor relationship is dysfunctional, and it is important to have a frank conversation. Do they really want a support person? If they do, is there a way to make this work, or would they like to try a new support person? The denomination may have a list of other trained support people.

Sometimes an institution does not value your role, or they mistrust you completely. It may be that things have become so antagonistic between you and the institution that the survivor might be better served by a new support person.

This is where having peer support can help. You can explain the relationship to them, and where you think it went wrong. It will be important for you to process your feelings about this, so that you can end this relationship well and take on a new support person role with someone else without bringing a lot of baggage with you.

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Part 3

Supporting a respondent

a) General information

Sexual misconduct allegations may jeopardize the respondent's career, marriage, and relationships with colleagues, family, friends and the community.

1. Role description of a support person in this context

A support person walks alongside someone walking a very difficult journey. For the person facing misconduct allegations (called the respondent) this is profoundly unsettling. Sexual misconduct allegations may jeopardize the respondent's career, marriage, and relationships with colleagues, family, friends and the community.

Congregations and church denominations should be committed to fair employment practices and providing safe environments for everyone. When complaints are received about misconduct, it is in everyone's best interests that institutions have good policies, that are carefully followed. Respondents to sexual misconduct allegations deserve due process and the right to tell their story before impartial adjudicators.

Many church processes require that the respondent be assigned a support person, just as the complainant has a support person. Every respondent has the right to have someone with them, even if the policy does not name this. While friends and family can be supportive, a support person who is not connected to the respondent or the situation, and who is trained in the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, is very important.

As a support person, your role is to help the respondent navigate the investigation and adjudication of the complaint, helping them think about their options, preparing them for next steps in the process, and

encouraging them to make wise choices. When policies are explained carefully and support is provided for making wise choices, better outcomes can be expected.

As a support person, *you are not there to decide what really happened*. You do not have access to both sides of the story; only the adjudicators in the case have that. By refusing to make a judgement, you are being clear about your role. You are not the adjudicator. You do not need to know what happened to be an effective support person.

If people who sexually abuse others could be identified publicly by how they come across to others, it would be a simple matter for us to stop sexual abuse. However, absolutely ordinary and seemingly wonderful people commit sexual abuse. We cannot trust our own judgement on this, and we do not have to in this role. Adjudicators will hear the whole story, interview all the parties, and make a decision. As a support person, you should have the opportunity to read the letter of complaint along with the respondent, but you are not interviewing anyone. You reserve judgement until adjudication (and appeal), and then you work with that outcome.

People who are treated with respect and kindness are more likely to acknowledge the offence, than if they are treated with hostility or impatience or outrage.

The vast majority of people accused of pastoral sexual misconduct have violated boundaries, and most of them initially deny anything happened, claim they are being falsely accused, or greatly minimize their actions. Even when someone has acted in ways that have hurt others, and is denying it, we do not treat them with disrespect. People who are treated with respect and kindness are more likely to acknowledge the offence, than if they are treated with hostility or impatience or outrage. A small percentage of people are being falsely accused.

Walking with someone going through a misconduct investigation usually involves helping them take accountability for their own actions. It's a balancing act, that means holding the serious harm that was done while treating the person with respect, and not demonizing them.[66]

Why would you volunteer to support a church leader who may have offended sexually against a congregant? People

who have served in this role do so because they believe that everyone deserves support. Some people support a person who has been accused of sexual misconduct because they are their friend, and they believe they are being accused unjustly. If this describes you, please read the following section on "Qualifications" to understand the challenges you may face. Training for the role of support person is essential.

This manual has been developed in order to train support people to serve in this role. A list of duties of a support person follows after the section on Qualifications.

2. Qualifications

People who have served in this role do so because they believe that everyone deserves support.

Supporting someone who is charged with misconduct and encouraging them to take responsibility for their actions is hard work.

The role of support person is best met by someone with:

- knowledge of the dynamics and effects of sexual misconduct by a church leader
- experience walking through the adjudication of a sexual misconduct complaint, or with peer support from someone who has that experience
- a compassionate and supportive presence
- good listening, problem-solving and communication skills
- skills to handle conflict comfortably
- good boundaries
- a good connection to their own feelings and ability to process them
- usually the same gender as the respondent
- race and culture that fits with the respondent
- time to devote to a process that will take at least several months, and sometimes several years
- a commitment to supporting people whether they are guilty or innocent

It is strongly recommended that a support person be someone outside of the environment of the situation. The support person can **never** be an employee of the institution or denomination, since that would be a conflict of interest.[67] The official support person should not be a close friend, counsellor, pastor or family member, to avoid conflicts of interest or dual roles. Many people can and should be supportive, but the support person role should be held by a neutral person who is trained in this area.

If you are a family member or friend, you are well-meaning, but you may have difficulty serving in this role because you want to believe that the respondent is innocent. If the respondent turns out to be guilty, especially after you have upheld their innocence, there can be great personal loss. If at some point you become disillusioned or angry with the respondent (for example if it is revealed that they were lying or only telling partial truths), your strong emotions about this personal betrayal may jeopardize your ability to be a competent support person.

A neutral support person is more objective and less emotionally swayed. A support person who is not a close friend can have less at stake in challenging someone making unwise choices.

When a friend or family member becomes a support person, the relationship may become more professional. The support person needs to give up the mutuality of the friendship for a time, as the support is focused on the respondent. It may be difficult later to regain that equilibrium. Additionally, the end of an investigation will also put a strain on the relationship as the primary focus leaves.

Support people sometimes have to level with a person who has offended and say some difficult things: this may be hard for you if you are a family or friend. A neutral support person is more objective and less emotionally swayed. A support person who is not a close friend can have less at stake in challenging someone making unwise choices.

It is usually not appropriate for a pastor to serve in the role of a support person for another pastor. Pastoral sexual misconduct happens because of unequal power

dynamics between the church leader and the victim. If the church leader enlists another church leader to be a support person to go with them to meetings, it is adding even further inequality to the equation. For the same reason, the support person should not be any high-profile person who has a public presence in the denomination. Choosing a high-profile person to be a support person can be a misguided way of trying to gain power in the situation. It can seem a good idea to have powerful people aligned with the respondent, however this is unfair to the victim.

The support person should not be someone who has been accused of pastoral sexual misconduct themselves, either as a pastor or a leader in the church. Someone who has had this experience and has taken responsibility for their actions might be a helpful person in the larger circle of support, but in the support person role they might have difficulty separating their own issues and opinions from that of the respondent.

Choosing a high-profile person to be a support person can be a misguided way of trying to gain power in the situation. It can seem a good idea to have powerful people aligned with the respondent, however this is unfair to the victim.

The support person for the respondent should not be a lawyer, unless the victim also has access to a lawyer as a support person. Many denominations, including most Anabaptist denominations, do not involve lawyers in the adjudication of professional misconduct. To include a lawyer, even if the lawyer is just a friend, can skew the dynamics in the investigation with one person having more power than the other.

The support person should not be from the same congregation where the church leader serves. This puts the support person in a dual role, where they are supporting a respondent who is their own church leader. Misconduct often polarizes a church, and the support person is likely to be caught in that.

The support person for the respondent should not be connected in any way to the complainant or their family. That includes being a friend or extended family, a co-worker, colleague, or with historical connections. This has to do with power. For example, if the respondent takes the complainant's brother-in-law as a support person, it is

a power move to show that even the complainant's own family is choosing to support the respondent. In some small denominations, having a support person from a different denomination is ideal, since this can avoid dual relationships and conflicts of interest.

The support person is a volunteer. They may put so much time into this role, they think someone should be compensating them, but accepting money from the church body would create a conflict of interest. Also, as soon as a support person is paid for services, there are insurance liabilities. However, some institutions will compensate for expenses, such as mileage.

3. Being careful about boundaries

Communicating about boundaries is important for the support person and the respondent.

While it will be friendly, it is not a mutual relationship; you will not be looking to the respondent to support you or share in your life.

Some common areas of boundary setting in this relationship include:

- *Role:* explain the role of the support person. While it will be friendly, it is not a mutual relationship; you will not be looking to the respondent to support you or share in your life. The respondent needs to know what you can do. Outline what you can offer.
- *Time:* Let the person you are supporting know how much time you can give them (for example, "I can meet with you once a week for 90 minutes for the next two months"). Talking about the timing of communications is also important ("I can be reached by email and text message. I will respond within 24 hours"). Let them know if you prefer phone calls to be scheduled.
- *Duration of the role:* Ideally, you will be able to walk with the respondent through the adjudication of the complaint, an appeal (if there is one), and the aftermath where they are working with some consequences: this can take months or several years. However, in order to avoid false expectations, it is often useful to set up semi-annual evaluation times. If, for some reason, you need to withdraw from your role,

discuss this decision, preferably giving the respondent a month's notice, and help to find a replacement. If you are planning to be away on extensive holidays, (for example, spending two months in Florida each year), let them know ahead of time. You may think that this situation will be settled long before you will leave the country, but cases have a way of expanding.

- *Confidentiality:* The respondent needs to know that the support person will not talk about them with other people or share their thoughts and feelings. However, the person you are supporting needs to know that you will encourage them to tell the truth and will not keep secrets about harm done to others. Participating in secrets about sexual misconduct is not part of your duties as a support person.

Setting good boundaries at the beginning can avoid uncomfortable situations later.

- *Spiritual matters:* The support person is not a spiritual caregiver or stand-in for a pastor, so it is not appropriate to pray, share biblical stories, or offer observations about theological topics. The respondent may express remorse and ask you whether you can forgive them. You can listen to their sharing, but you are not in a caregiving role, and you can suggest they turn to a pastor, or another trusted spiritual guide, for help with spiritual matters. Church leaders who have abused people in their care have sometimes used religious language to manipulate others; taking this out of the equation makes the relationship clearer.
- *Support:* it is recommended that every support person have someone they can rely on who has served in a role like this, in order to get advice and debrief the situation. You should tell the respondent who this person is, to make sure that there is no conflict of interest. You can assure the respondent that you will not be revealing their identity as you get this support, but will be getting advice about best practices, and receiving emotional help for your own supportive role.

Setting good boundaries at the beginning can avoid uncomfortable situations later. For example, you may

begin with fairly open boundaries ("feel free to phone anytime, day or night, as often as you need") but if the person you are supporting calls you too often, this may become so unmanageable that you resent how much time this is taking. It is healthier to begin with clear boundaries, indicating these can be revisited.

Having some flexibility on some boundaries as the situation changes is important. Sometimes the needs are quite different in the earlier stages of the process before other supports are in place. There are also intense times, for example the weeks of an investigation, where you need to be communicating more frequently.

4. Understanding power dynamics of church leader sexual misconduct

The person accused of sexual misconduct may feel like the process is weighted against them, or that complainants have all the power: those feelings are real, but they are not rooted in fact.

Respondents to complaints are relatively powerful in church systems, particularly in connection to the person who is laying the complaint (review the sections in this manual **I. 1. It is an abuse of power, I. 3. What is grooming,** and **I. 4. Prevalence and profiles**). Their position as a church leader gives them power, usually in addition to other factors like gender, education, or social connections. Sexual misconduct by a church leader is first and foremost an abuse of power.

Historically, church leaders have often not been held accountable for abusive practices. More recently most professional organizations, including churches, have developed policies to protect vulnerable people from being hurt. The person accused of sexual misconduct may feel like the process is weighted against them, or that complainants have all the power: those feelings are real, but they are not rooted in fact.

Today the vast majority of people who commit sexual misconduct in the church are never charged, and for those who have complaints laid against them, many churches still are unfair in their practices, weighing investigations heavily in favour of the respondent. Pastoral misconduct expert Patricia Liberty refers to the chilling nature of her work, which brings her so often in contact with what

she refers to as "institutional evil" where the institution protects the person who offended and the church at the expense of the victim.[68] Organizations that support victims are calling on institutions to show moral courage, and act for justice and healing.[69]

The large majority of people accused of sexual misconduct have crossed boundaries, and most of them initially deny there is problem, claim they are being falsely accused, or greatly minimize what happened. It is a natural human trait to try to avoid taking responsibility for harm that we do. Many church leaders who abuse others find many rationalizations for their behavior. They can claim their remarks or actions were not sexual in nature but were only interpreted that way. Against all facts and their training, they may have convinced themselves that they were entering into a mutual sexual relationship with a congregant.

Many church leaders who abuse others find many rationalizations for their behavior. They can claim their remarks or actions were not sexual in nature but were only interpreted that way. Against all facts and their training, they may have convinced themselves that they were entering into a mutual sexual relationship with a congregant.

As a support person, you are there to explain the process. Your role is to encourage them to trust the process to bring out the truth. If they are being wrongfully accused, that will be revealed, and if they are guilty, that will also be revealed. People who violate sexual boundaries in their professional relationships are used to being in control. They decide who to hurt, and how often they hurt them. They are used to getting away with this and may have gotten away with this for decades. When a complaint is filed and they are being held to account, they may desperately want to control the process.

When people are in trouble, we naturally call on friends to help us. However, the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct show a different side to these actions. Church leaders who have abused people in their care have used their power not only to hurt others, but also to cover up their tracks and silence the victim. When respondents attempt to use their power to influence the adjudication process, this can be a continuation of manipulative behaviour that hurts their victims. For example, they might try to talk to the investigative team off the record to influence them or rally powerful people to lobby for

them at an institutional level. If they are found guilty of misconduct, it is common for them to attack the complainant or the process, and get others to join them as they do this. As a support person, you can point out how their actions may impact the complainant and be perceived by the adjudicators.

Not all churches are entirely professional in following their misconduct policies, and they can make painful mistakes in the adjudication process. These mistakes can be made by employees of the denomination and people who are serving in volunteer roles. For example, timelines between steps in the process might not be followed, or something is left out that should have been done. It is totally appropriate to call the church to high standards, and register a protest when policies are not followed.

Most church processes are weighted in favour of the respondent, and if mistakes are made in adjudication, they almost always favour the respondent.

5. Understanding the reality of people who have sexually offended

An important part of your role is to be a compassionate presence during a difficult time. The person you are supporting needs someone to listen to their story and their fears and anxieties about what might happen.

If the person is claiming their complete innocence, it is possible that you are advocating for one of the rare situations where someone is being falsely accused. In this situation, you will hear their story of being wrongly accused, and their wonderings about why they were targeted. People who are wrongly accused are often eager to talk to authorities in order to clear their name because they have nothing to hide. They may have anxiety about how the process is affecting them. They may be suspended from their job without prejudice; however, they worry their reputation is being tarnished. Their family and friends may be anxious for them. As a support person you listen carefully, and acknowledge their feelings, and assure them that you will help them walk through the process. Most church processes are weighted in favour of the respondent, and if mistakes are made in adjudication, they almost always favour the respondent.

However, it is far more likely that the person responding to a complaint of sexual misconduct has done something inappropriate, since malicious complaints are rare. You cannot know whether someone is guilty or innocent of the charges—that is why there is an investigation.

Your role is to walk with the respondent, regardless of what they may or may not have done. You can be a compassionate presence for someone even if they are totally denying the charges, and you suspect that they are not being truthful with themselves or with you. People who violate sexual boundaries may be in denial themselves about their actions and are just beginning the long road of viewing their own history more realistically. You can encourage them to tell their story in new, hopefully more honest ways.

Your role is to walk with the respondent, regardless of what they may or may not have done. You can be a compassionate presence for someone even if they are totally denying the charges, and you suspect that they are not being truthful with themselves or with you.

You may suspect that the person you are supporting is guilty, and you may become frustrated at their lack of accountability for their own actions, or their elaborate rationalizations. You may feel thrown off-guard by their behaviour, or you may notice that you are feeling outraged by their denial. It's important to take care of yourself, and your emotions. Denial can be the first step on the road to accountability, if people are supported and encouraged to walk that road.

When the person you are supporting admits that the complaint against them is founded, they also need someone to listen compassionately to their story of how this happened. They will have the same worries about how this will affect their career, those they love and the church community. They may want to take responsibility for how they have hurt someone.

Being charged with pastoral sexual misconduct is a pivotal moment in someone's life. Guiding the respondent through an investigation and being compassionate and respectful is going to make a big difference. This is a time where new, more truthful self-understandings are possible. You can encourage them to see that there are choices to be made

and encourage them to make wise ones. You can reassure them that you will be their support person no matter what they did or didn't do.

6. Importance of self-care for the support person

Walking with a respondent can be a very difficult job. As a support person, you will hear painful stories which may bring up issues from your own life. Stress is a very real part of this role, and so self-care is very important. If you are not actively renewing your own energy sources, you will rapidly get burnt out.

Peer support is important for the health of the support person. You are accompanying someone through an emotionally difficult process, and it can become incredibly convoluted and complicated. It is essential to have someone to debrief with and ask for advice.

Self-care practices include:

- proper diet, exercise and sleep
- maintaining good relationships
- having proper boundaries and space from the case
- paying attention to your spiritual life
- doing things that are life-giving and fun
- being kind to yourself if you make mistakes
- arranging peer support for your work

Peer support is important for the health of the support person. You are accompanying someone through an emotionally difficult process, and it can become incredibly convoluted and complicated. It is essential to have someone to debrief with and ask for advice. You do not have to invent the wheel; you can learn from the experiences of others. Peer support is a way to ensure that the best practices are being followed. It is also a place for you to discuss your own boundaries, feelings and responses. You can get feedback and encouragement, and it will lessen your feeling of isolation.

Locating peer support may feel like a daunting task. Your denominational office might know other people who have served in this role, or you could contact Mennonite Central Committees Abuse Response and Prevention Network that sponsored this manual. This support should be brought in early in the process. They

can help you assess if you are prepared for the role and identify boundary issues. They can help by discussing difficult decisions, brainstorming options, and rehearsing responses.

Pastors who have committed sexual misconduct with congregants are often very good at getting people to like them and to identify with them. Pay attention to your own emotions. Are you drawn to the respondent, and are you eager to have them vindicated? Or do you emotionally identify with the victim and feel growing resentment that the respondent is downplaying the abuse? Or are you feeling frustrated and outraged at their continual denial of guilt? Emotions are what they are; the important thing is to see them, name them, and not be carried away by them. Having somewhere to talk about these emotions will help you be the best support person you can be.

Emotions are what they are; the important thing is to see them, name them, and not be carried away by them.

b) Duties of the support person in this context

1. Listening compassionately and offering reassurance of your role

As a support person you are walking with someone in a period of crisis. They are facing an investigation where their future seems to be on the line; they may risk the loss of their employment, the termination or curtailing of their career, and a public announcement that could damage their reputation and important relationships. In some cases, it may even threaten their marriage. It is not surprising that people who are facing pastoral misconduct complaints are commonly extremely anxious. Listening well is going to help them feel heard and alleviate anxiety.

Listening well means:[70]

- **Attention:** You notice both the emotion and the content conveyed by the speaker. You are not thinking about what to say next.

- **Withholding judgement:** While you are listening, you put aside thoughts of what the person "should" or "must" do, who is right, or what you would have done in that situation.
- **Openness:** Your face and posture show that you are listening. You make eye-contact.
- **Caring:** You are aware of the speaker as a person and are interested in their concerns.

You can listen to their questions, fears, and concerns about the process, or how they might be treated. Everyone wants to be treated fairly, and you can assure the person you believe they should and will be treated fairly. If the person you are supporting has done nothing wrong, this is exactly what the investigation will find.

A support person can be a calm, non-anxious presence. You do not get worked up and express emotions, even if you feel that the person you are supporting wants you to feel these things.

For the majority of support people reading this, you are walking with someone who is being confronted with big mistakes that they made, that they may not be ready to face. These mistakes might have taken place in the distant past, and they had practically forgotten about them. Or they may be more recent mistakes. Your role as a support person is to listen to them tell their story, usually multiple times. The story may stay static, and sound similar each time, or gradually new details or realizations start to emerge.

People who violate sexual boundaries often have many rationalizations about why the rules do not apply to them, and why the wrong things they are doing, are not wrong for them. Now that they are facing an investigation, they are being forced to look at their rationalizations, and they fear that these will not hold water with the investigators. Rather than facing their own part in their troubles, sometimes respondents look around for someone to blame.

You may need to listen to anger at the process, at the institution and at the complainant. They may even be angry with you. This is natural, and you need not agree with someone to be compassionate and say, "This is a very difficult time for you. You are expressing a lot of anger, and

I understand that there is a lot at stake for you here." A support person can be a calm, non-anxious presence. You do not get worked up and express emotions, even if you feel that the person you are supporting wants you to feel these things.

Hopefully, the respondent has a counsellor or therapist to process their deep emotions and fears. Some people who are facing an investigation into sexual misconduct can feel so distraught that they consider ending their life. Be aware of suicidal tendencies, you may need to seek help for the person you are supporting (See **Appendix A: Responding to Suicidal Thoughts**).

You can gently remind them that facing the truth about their actions could also be a healing opportunity, where they can grow in new healthier ways.

As a support person, you can reassure the respondent that they are not alone, that you are there for the duration, regardless of the outcome of the investigation. You want to help them get through this. Other people have walked through misconduct investigations, and they can too.

If the allegations are founded even after appeal, and there is a public announcement, you can remind them that almost always in cases like this, they will receive a lot of support from the community. If they lose their employment, there will be challenges, but they can get through this as well. You can gently remind them that facing the truth about their actions could also be a healing opportunity, where they can grow in new healthier ways.

Even after the investigation has found them guilty, the respondent may still be in the denial phase of their journey. People who have committed sexual misconduct can react like people who are addicted to alcohol; it can take a long time to admit that you are an alcoholic. People who have offended may still really want to believe that what they did was not "that bad." They may still be holding onto an idea the relationship was mutual and good. They may not have begun to realize how they harmed the complainant and the congregation. Be patient with the person you are supporting and listen compassionately.

2. Encouraging truth-telling

We are mostly hardwired to trust each other, and when someone tells us something, especially if that person is a church leader, we are very inclined to believe them. However, you cannot tell whether someone is telling the truth: even the most skilled of police detectives, who deal regularly with pathological liars, cannot reliably tell whether someone is telling the truth.

Some people responding to sexual misconduct complaints know they did something, but they are still outwardly denying it, hoping they can bluff their way through this problem. Other people may genuinely feel they are innocent, because they don't feel they were committing sexual misconduct. They may be unaware of their own power, and how they harassed someone. Or against all facts and training, they believe they engaged in some sort of mutual "affair," ignoring the power differentials between themselves and other people in the congregation. They may say that the complainant seduced them, so they are not at fault, but are in fact the victim.

At some point, you can remind them that the behaviour is at issue, not what was going on in their head at the time. The adjudication is about, "Did the behaviour happen," not "What did you think the behaviour meant?" Impact is more important than intent.

The support person role is not simply to be an echo chamber for the respondent. The person you are supporting will likely have elaborate ways to explain their behaviour, and why they are not at fault, or why what happened was not so bad. You can listen compassionately, but not to the point of believing the rationalizations ("She came onto to me." "I called her 'babe' but that in no way was a sexual term to me, she just took it that way"). At some point, you can remind them that the behaviour is at issue, not what was going on in their head at the time. The adjudication is about, "Did the behaviour happen," not "What did you think the behaviour meant?" Impact is more important than intent.

As a support person who understands the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, you know that the entire responsibility for sexual activity between a pastor and a congregant lies with the pastor. There are no mitigating circumstances. The congregant could not consent, and the

pastor used their power to gain access. This is certainly the way professional investigations will view the matter.

If the respondent is admitting that something happened, pay attention to the story they are telling. Sometimes they may speak vaguely about an event, "…and the rest is history," or "this led to that." With specific questions you can ask them about the facts of what happened, not to be voyeuristic or to take on the role of the investigator, but to help the person who has offended put the sexual acts that happened into words. They will certainly have to do this in front of the adjudicators.

As respondents tell their story to you over weeks and months, you may see that they are starting to take some responsibility. From saying that nothing happened, to admitting that there was some contact, shows that some light is being shed on the situation in their mind. Realizations can be tentative at first, but hopefully through time and therapy, they can understand what they did.

Telling them that, "In most cases like this, respondents come to tell the story of their misconduct differently as they understand it more," gives them permission to change their story.

However, some people guilty of sexual misconduct do not admit guilt. As a support person, you are not responsible for whether they take responsibility, and you should not be overconfident in your ability to overcome anyone's rationalizations about sexual abuse. This is a matter for their counsellor or therapist who is trained to do this.

Some respondents may feel that people will only support them if they are innocent of these serious charges; you can assure them that your role is to support them whether or not they did something wrong. Telling them that, "In most cases like this, respondents come to tell the story of their misconduct differently as they understand it more," gives them permission to change their story. And stepping out of the "believe, not believe" axis, you can remind them that you are here to help them through this process regardless.

That said, it is important to remind the respondent that they should be totally truthful in the investigation. Consequences for their behavior will be more severe later if they are found to be lying, or omitting information, or covering up something in this investigation. Encourage

them to be courageous, and to admit what they've done, and express remorse for the harm they've done to others.

There is also a time to confront the person whom you are supporting. If you see the person whom you are supporting acting in ways that continue to harm the victim, it is very important that you call them out on this behaviour and explain why you are doing that.

> *It's been my experience that abusive individuals are more self-aware than we give them credit for. It's not that they're unaware that their behavior has crossed the line of what's acceptable or legal, the problem is that they justify it. They have a million reasons why they are not responsible. They are expert blame-shifters, liars, minimizers, and excuse makers. This is hard for us as Christian people helpers to see this.*[71]

3. Holding confidences but not secrets

The person you are supporting should be confident that what they tell you is held in confidence. You should not share with others how the respondent (or person who offended, depending how far along you are in the process) is doing. Sometimes denominational representatives or just curious people might ask you, "Are they taking responsibility for what they've done?" You can respond by saying, "I encourage you to talk to him yourself, I cannot share anything about our conversations."

Sometimes denominational representatives or just curious people might ask you, "Are they taking responsibility for what they've done?" You can respond by saying, "I encourage you to talk to him yourself, I cannot share anything about our conversations."

An exception to confidentiality is if you hear information that a minor was harmed, in which case you have a responsibility to contact child protection services (this includes possession of pornography that features minors). If you hear about adults who have been harmed or are in danger of being harmed, you should strongly encourage the person you are supporting to name this person to the investigating committee. If they will not do this, you have the freedom to do this. As a support person, you are not bound by patient/client privilege, or pastor/congregant confidentiality. You need to act to help the

most vulnerable, and you may feel you need to inform the adjudicators that there are more victims. It is not part of your duties as a support person to keep secrets about harm that was done.

The person you are supporting may want to tell you something, but they want to make you agree to keep it secret and not tell anyone. Tell them that they should talk about absolutely confidential matters with their counsellor, and you do not have that role. Encourage them to be truthful with investigators, because that is going to be the best and wisest option for them.

4. Assisting respondent to locate additional supports

The person you are supporting may want to tell you something, but they want to make you agree to keep it secret and not tell anyone. Tell them that they should talk about absolutely confidential matters with their counsellor, and you do not have that role.

While the role of the support person is very important, you cannot provide all the help that a respondent may need. Identify supports they have in place. This may include family, friends, a therapist, a pastor, a lawyer, a spiritual director, a massage therapist or doctor. If there are supports missing suggest where the respondent can look to find help. Respondents may initially say they are doing fine, but as they come to terms with misconduct, face consequences and realize how they have hurt people, they will need mental health supports.

If a respondent is an employee of the organization where they offended, they likely have access to some sort of counselling support fund. If not, you may need to advocate to get them help. If the complaint is founded, most church institutions will offer to pay for counselling for their employee, particularly if they are now unemployed and can no longer afford it.

5. Evaluate and explain misconduct policies

If the person you are supporting is an employee, they should already know that there is a misconduct policy. Volunteers may be less familiar with misconduct policies.

Most policies will include the following steps:

i. **A complaint surfaces.** A complaint about misconduct is brought to the institution. *If the victim is a child, local child protection authorities are contacted immediately because it is their responsibility to investigate.* Any church investigation is suspended until the findings of these investigations are announced.

ii. **An informal process.** Some policies give the option of either a formal or an informal response. An informal response may involve a member of the abuse response team informing the church leader that allegations have been made, and possibly exploring rehabilitative options before a formal written complaint is received. This informal process may involve a complainant confronting the person they are complaining about with the assistance of a facilitator.

You should advise the person you are supporting that if there are other instances of abuse, it is best to be forthcoming.

The person you are supporting may very well want an informal process as this may be a way of not putting the misconduct "on the record." They may want to sincerely apologize for something they've done, or they may feel they did nothing wrong, and want a chance to convince the complainant about that. Or they may feel this is all a misunderstanding.

An informal process does not encourage the person you are supporting to be forthcoming about other misconduct that might have happened, since they want to have the informal process, and multiple victims always implies a more formal route. You should advise the person you are supporting that if there are other instances of abuse, it is best to be forthcoming. If the church leader goes through an informal process, and then another victim comes forward, the institution will

be much less accommodating in their judgements, since the church leader was not honest with them.

Informal processes are often unsafe for survivors of abuse because the church often does not hire trained restorative justice practitioners who initiate the hard preparatory work for mediation. It may be an option for sexual misconduct where there was a single violation (like an inappropriate comment), and not a repeated pattern of behavior. However, the majority of misconduct complaints are about the latter.

If the church leader has committed misconduct they may see this mediation as a step to reinstatement rather than a deep grappling with their own actions that harmed another. Meetings between a person who has offended and their victim may never be safe for the victim. They have more potential to be beneficial if they happen much further down the road once the church leader has been in therapy for some time.[72]

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iii. **A formal complaint is filed.** The complainant may decide to file a signed formal letter of complaint with the church or institution. It will state the name of the person who harmed them, and how they were harmed. This letter, or a summary of the allegation will then be forwarded to the church leader, either in person or sometimes by registered mail. The church leader (who is now called "the respondent") will likely need to acknowledge receipt of this letter. The respondent is instructed not to contact the victim in any way, directly or indirectly. It is extremely important that they follow this directive. The identity of the complainant is perpetually confidential, unless the complainant themselves decides to go public with their story. A support person is usually assigned to the respondent at this point.

In some denominations it is also standard procedure when notifying a respondent about the complaint, to immediately confiscate all church technology such as smartphones, desktops and laptops from the

respondent, making sure they no longer have remote access by changing passwords. This step prevents the respondent from altering or deleting any information relevant to the case.[73]

iv. **Responding to the complaint.** The respondent is required to compose a written response to the complaint, which is then often received at an initial interview. If the respondent acknowledges that the actions happened, the investigation may not proceed, but the institution will issue consequences. It is always in the best interests of the respondent to be up-front and honest in this letter, and to not cover up other misconduct. Partial confessions and withholding important information will, in the long-run, be detrimental to their status.

Partial confessions and withholding important information will, in the long-run, be detrimental to their status.

If the respondent is denying some or all of the charges in the complaint, at this point the institution decides whether an investigation is warranted based on the policy and the statements that are given. Many policies indicate a time-line between the initial complaint and the decision to investigate.

v. **Administrative leave.** Depending on the nature of the allegation, the church leader may be put on an administrative leave, with pay and without prejudice, until the investigation is concluded. This is standard, unless the misconduct is very minor. Some policies require the congregation to be informed at this point that their leader is being investigated, and any other victims are encouraged to come forward. But the leadership team and the denominational office are always informed of the investigation; there should never be secret investigations.[74]

The respondent may be very upset about the congregation being informed about this investigation. You can explain that a similar dynamic is found when a parent is suspected of abusing a child: it is standard for child protective services to interview other vulnerable children in the care of the parent accused

of abuse. Similarly, some church institutions want to see if there are other victims who want to testify in this investigation. The institution does not want to hold another investigation in two months if more allegations surface. If the person you are supporting is truly innocent, no one else will come forward. If the complaint is unfounded, their church will be told that they are innocent of the charge.

It will also be hard for the respondent because they and their family will be asked not to attend the congregation at all during this time. Not only are they to step down from worship leading and preaching, they are not to make pastoral calls, or have any contact whatsoever with congregational members, even for funerals, weddings and social events.[75] The congregation needs space from the person who (potentially) offended, but more importantly, the victim is prioritized as needing the congregation as a safe space.

The congregation needs space from the person who (potentially) offended, but more importantly, the victim is prioritized as needing the congregation as a safe space.

vi. **The investigation.** An investigative team is appointed. The investigative team should include at least one person from outside the conference or denomination, and someone trained in sexual abuse by church leaders. Both the respondent and complainant should be given an opportunity to object to the names of the investigators if there is a conflict of interest. Conflict of interest includes people who are connected in positive or negative ways, including relatives, former colleagues or congregants, or people with whom they went to school. Not declaring these conflicts of interest could jeopardize the whole proceeding.

The investigation is generally a time of gathering information. The support person should be allowed to attend any meetings with the respondent. Best practices are that the complainant and the respondent do not face each other in this investigation.

If the respondent has any evidence that would disprove the complaint, they will want to make the

investigative team aware of it. Anything showing that the complainant initiated the contact, or seemed to be a willing participant, are immaterial, and need not be submitted, since it was always the church leader's responsibility to maintain sexual boundaries. Similarly, showing that the complainant was on good terms with the respondent even after the abuse occurred does not disprove the abuse, since victims are groomed to have a special relationship with the leader.

It is appropriate for the respondent or the complainant to ask beforehand if the investigation will be taped and who will have access to the notes or transcripts.

Some respondents would like to have character witnesses who attest to their integrity, to declare that they would not lie about misconduct. This is generally not allowed, since all church leaders are assumed to have high moral character, and the investigation is only about the facts of the complaint.

Anything showing that the complainant initiated the contact, or seemed to be a willing participant, are immaterial, and need not be submitted, since it was always the church leader's responsibility to maintain sexual boundaries.

vii. **The findings.** The validity of the complaint is determined by the adjudicating body. This may be the investigative team, or it may be a separate committee who reads the report from the investigative team. The complainant and respondent are informed of the findings. An appeal process is outlined to both the complainant and the respondent, with timelines of when an appeal needs to be received.

If the complaint is found to be without merit, and the complainant does not appeal, most policies include a means of publicly exonerating the respondent if a public announcement of the complaint was made. If the investigation was publicly announced, the respondent has the right to have their innocence publicly declared.

viii. **The appeal.** Usually there is a short timeline where either the complainant or the respondent can appeal the process. An appeal usually does not mean re-investigating the complaint, or doing interviews again, unless new evidence has come forward. An appeal

usually means that a new group of people will review the findings of the investigation, and review whether the initial assessment was valid. The appeal will either uphold or overturn the initial decision.

If the allegations of misconduct are founded even after appeal, the respondent may feel that not enough evidence was given to substantiate the claims against them. They may feel that they have not been given due process.

Professional misconduct investigations are much less formal than a court of law. This adjudication is about professional credentials. The adjudicators are looking for a balance of probabilities and whether it was likely that the abuse happened, not the "beyond the shadow of a doubt" standard applied in a court of law.[76] It is in the best interests of the organization not to have employees or volunteers who are likely to have abused someone in order to protect vulnerable people in the church. However in actuality, most organizations err on the side of the employee, because they are afraid of wrongful dismissal suits.

The adjudicators are looking for a balance of probabilities and whether it was likely that the abuse happened, not the "beyond the shadow of a doubt" standard applied in a court of law.

While a person who has offended does have a right to an appeal, fighting the findings can be a form of denial, and signals to the people who were hurt that what happened to them did not happen, or is not important. It certainly does not signal remorse, repentance, and accountability. That said, there may be circumstances where the consequences are too severe, and the person you are supporting would like a second opinion as to whether those consequences are entirely appropriate. There is a lot at stake, including financially, for the person you are supporting.

ix. **Discipline.** Most policies have a range of options open to the institution on how to respond to misconduct:[77]

A reprimand or a warning can be issued, to signal that the church leader showed poor judgement that resulted in some actions that caused harm. A reprimand or warning might be chosen for inappropriate comments.

This option is taken if the church leader has shown remorse and is apologetic in the investigation. There may be other consequences such as mandated training about boundaries or gender violence. Usually notice of this discipline would be put in an employee's permanent personnel file.

The next level may be *suspension*. This means that the employee or volunteer is removed from their position, and/or their credentials are suspended. This happens for misconduct that involved sexual abuse, actions that have escalated, or involved numerous breaches of professional responsibility. This option is taken if the church leader acknowledges their misconduct, takes responsibility and is willing to seek the mandated treatment. There is usually a timeframe for when the suspension will be reconsidered. Lifting a suspension is almost never automatic, but dependent on the treatment pursued. The institution often pays for the treatment, which may include an assessment (that frequently includes a residential program), and intensive therapy. The institution often interviews the church leader at the end of the treatment period and commissions another professional assessment to determine whether the church leader is truly ready for service. A suspension of credentials should always be put in an employee's permanent personnel file.

Removing credentials means a public announcement, so that the public knows the church leader is no longer accredited. The scope of the announcement reflects the range of the church leader's ministry and is equal to the announcement of the credentials being initially given...

The highest level response is *termination of employment and removal of credentials*, such as licensing or ordination. This happens whenever a minor has been hurt or there has been a repeated breach of professional ethics and/or numerous people have been hurt. Removing credentials means a public announcement, so that the public knows the church leader is no longer accredited. The scope of the announcement reflects the range of the church leader's ministry and is equal to the announcement of the credentials

being initially given (for example, if ordinations are published in the church newspaper, then removal of credentials would also be in that newspaper). The purpose is not shaming, but to prevent the church leader possibly using their reputation to harm vulnerable people. Because this is dismissal from employment with cause, there is usually no severance.

x. **Restitution.** Some policies hold out hope for restorative justice or reconciliation by encouraging the church leader to offer restitution to the person they harmed. There may be an option of pursuing mediation between the church leader and the person they harmed, or the church leader and the congregation in which they ministered. This is usually entirely optional, no one can be forced into this. The person who was harmed may have no interest in meeting with the person who harmed them.

You can encourage them to think about their moral obligation as a church leader to tell the truth, even if it is at great personal cost.

After examining the policy, you can explain to the respondent what the advantages of this policy are compared to other policies. Some policies allow for the person who offended to have a lawyer present, and if this is allowed, they should certainly do this, since so much is at stake. However, their lawyer will certainly be counselling them to deny any responsibility. You can encourage them to think about their moral obligation as a church leader to tell the truth, even if it is at great personal cost.

6. Help respondent write a letter of response

The main purpose of the letter of response is to let the adjudicating body know where the respondent stands in relation to the complaint. The respondent has three options: to agree that they committed the misconduct, to disagree and say that they did not commit the misconduct, or to say that some of the complaint is true and some is not.

If misconduct has happened, hopefully the respondent is remorseful and would like to issue an apology, or some sort of restitution; this should be clearly conveyed in the letter. If they committed a portion of the misconduct described in the complaint, they can be remorseful about what they are taking accountability for and indicate that they wish to apologize. They can also indicate that they would welcome an investigation so they can present their case as to what happened and what didn't happen.

In this letter of response, the respondent should not talk about the mutuality of the sexual experience, or that the complainant initiated the contact. That is immaterial, as the responsibility to maintain sexual boundaries always lies with the church leader.

This letter is not a place to provide pages of detailed responses to the complaint, giving mitigating reasons and qualifying statements. That can happen in the investigation. The letter of response should be at most a couple of pages to state some basic positions. If the respondent feels they are innocent of any of the actions listed in the complaint, they will want an investigation so they can clear their name. In this letter of response, the respondent should not talk about the mutuality of the sexual experience, or that the complainant initiated the contact. That is immaterial, as the responsibility to maintain sexual boundaries always lies with the church leader.

7. Help respondent brainstorm and evaluate options

The person you are supporting is in a difficult position and is likely feeling very stressed. They may feel cornered and powerless. They actually have a spectrum of options available to them and brainstorming with them about their various options can help them feel in control. You can ask them about their goals and help them rank the actions they want to pursue. Below are some commonly pursued goals, arranged into two groups: healthy and unhealthy options.

Encourage them to make choices that will benefit them, and not hurt the complainant. It is very common to want to pursue some of the unhealthy options, however you can talk about why certain options are not healthy in this situation. You can talk about the risks and dangers to themselves, to the person they hurt, and to the community. As a support person, you are not in control of the options that the respondent chooses:

The person you are supporting is in a difficult position and is likely feeling very stressed. They may feel cornered and powerless. They actually have a spectrum of options available to them and brainstorming with them about their various options can help them feel in control.

Healthy options:

- stopping harmful behaviours
- self-care: taking time to exercise, eat well, sleep and do fun activities
- spend time with friends where you do not talk about this misconduct case
- gather a small group of friends to meet regularly to provide emotional support
- seeing a counsellor to process feelings
- pursue education about pastoral sexual misconduct
- take time to think
- journaling for self-reflection
- appeal findings of the investigation, if they feel they were not fairly treated
- accept the results of the investigation and follow all recommendations
- find a support group for people who have committed professional sexual misconduct

- consider how they could offer to right wrongs (pay for counselling, or make donation to denomination that is paying those costs)
- ask for an accountability group that would meet regularly to talk about issues
- talk to a lawyer about rights in this process
- seek a restorative justice process if it is offered by the policy
- if you seek to attend a different congregation for support, be frank with leadership about the allegations you are facing

Unhealthy options:

- trying to contact or meet complainants, directly or indirectly
- pressuring complainants to withdraw the complaint
- quitting or resigning position in hopes of avoiding an investigation
- threatening legal action to try to stop the investigation
- refusing counselling because nothing is wrong
- choosing a counsellor with no training in this area, instead of the recommended counsellors
- after the findings, rejecting some of the recommendations of the institution
- getting influential friends to lobby to reduce consequences, or sway public opinion
- continuing to claim innocence in order to maintain reputation, even though guilty
- blaming the complainant for the abuse
- writing on social media about the complainant or the process, or getting family members to do this
- sharing the name of the victim and saying negative things about them
- suggesting that consequences for misconduct are at odds with Christian theology

- talking publicly about wanting forgiveness, instead of about repentance and accountability
- blaming victims or the institution for refusing to forgive
- pursuing reinstatement to the exact former position
- trying to attend congregation where victims attend
- suing the victim or the church for slander or wrongful dismissal, even though guilty of the misconduct

You can explain how each of these unhealthy options may be perceived by complainants and their families, and by the congregation and wider denomination. If the person you are supporting chooses unhealthy goals, you can encourage them to put these options further down on their priority list, to give them more time for reflection before pursuing them. As a support person, you do not have to participate in helping them pursue unhealthy options; it is not part of your role to do things that you think will harm others.

If the person you are supporting chooses unhealthy goals, you can encourage them to put these options further down on their priority list, to give them more time for reflection before pursuing them.

It is never appropriate to threaten legal action before a complaint is investigated, since it is within the rights of the institution to investigate its employees and volunteers. Wrongful convictions are extremely rare, since the church often errs on the side of the employee. If the person you are supporting feels they have truly done nothing wrong and have lost their employment unjustly, then they may want to pursue legal action. However, as long as the church followed its policy, it is unlikely that a lawsuit will be effective.

8. Assist with documentation

While the response letter outlines in broad strokes what happened, it is a good idea for the respondent to write down the specifics of the misconduct as they remember it. It is also a good idea to document each meeting you have with the respondent, and any contact with denominational officials. You should also encourage the respondent to document everything. You will eventually each have a file with dated copies of letters, emails that were sent and received, as well as dated notes about phone calls, and what was discussed.

The primary purpose of notes is to enhance one's own effectiveness; they may also be needed as background evidence of events and dates. Remember that if this situation goes to court your notes could be subpoenaed. Your notes should be objective, and not contain your opinions or feelings.

Remember that if this situation goes to court your notes could be subpoenaed. Your notes should be objective, and not contain your opinions or feelings.

These records should not be thrown away, as they may be useful even decades down the road. Most complaints will hopefully be investigated promptly, but sometimes institutions do not follow through with an investigation, and then open up the case several years later. For example, a case from the 1990s that was investigated in a shallow way was re-opened in 2019 when the survivors returned to try and find justice. Documentation from the initial complaint can be very illuminating for current investigators. Documentation should of course be kept in a secure place where others will not have access to them; do not advertise their existence.

9. Educate others in the system about pastoral sexual misconduct

In more hierarchically organized churches, there may be people in the system who specialize in dealing with sexual misconduct complaints. However some congregations process these complaints internally, and this may be the first complaint they are facing. Sometimes the support people for the respondent or the complainant, who have training and have walked through other cases, may be the people who know the most about the subject.

The support person may need to encourage the institution to be timely in their response to emails or telephone calls, reminding them of their policies, and how agonizing this process is for the respondent.

The support person may need to encourage the institution to be timely in their response to emails or telephone calls, reminding them of their policies, and how agonizing this process is for the respondent.

As a support person, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with abuse policies in your denomination or related denominations, so you can compare them. Some denominational policies are heavily weighted for the respondent. The respondent may be reassured by this. For example, a policy that requires the complainant to go through an informal process and then a formal process advantages the respondent.

10. Attend meetings during investigation/appeal

The support person should prepare the respondent for what may happen at each stage of the process. If you don't know, you can inquire from the institution as to the setting and format of meetings, who will be present, how they will be recorded, and whether the records will be shared, kept or destroyed after the investigation. It is very helpful to talk to your own peer support person who has served in this role in a different case, to get their insights.

As you move along in the process, go over possible actions, rehearse responses, and encourage the respondent to be honest. Be realistic about what may happen but also remain optimistic.

Some respondents might want to rehearse possible questions that might be asked, while for others this would only make them more anxious. Remind them the committee is simply wanting to know what happened, and it is to their advantage to be totally honest, even if the facts paint them in a negative light.

Meetings like this where so much is at stake are extremely emotional. Our memories don't work well when we are in an agitated state, so accompanying the person you are supporting to meetings and taking notes is important. Debrief the meeting with them afterwards and summarize the main points of the meeting to make sure that they heard what was being said. You can ask them what their impressions of the meeting were and clarify any points they may have misheard. You can also debrief the emotions they felt at the time and now.

Encourage them to avoid blaming language, and to speak with "I statements" taking responsibility for what they did.

During meetings, as a support person you are mostly silent, unless you are asking a question of clarification about process. If you see the respondent is upset, you can advocate for them by asking for a break. Getting a bathroom break, so they can have a moment to regroup, can help them get through a difficult meeting.

11. Help respondent/person who offended with communications

Most church leaders are very confident about their ability to communicate. However, in a situation where they are being accused of misconduct, they may need some coaching on how to speak to adjudicators. Encourage them to avoid blaming language, and to speak with "I statements" taking responsibility for what they did. You may want to rehearse how they will tell their story to the investigators. It is a natural human tendency to deflect blame, or to make their actions sound less harmful by using minimizing words (see below): you can point out if you see them doing this. Being truthful, and not making excuses for behaviour is the best approach.

After the allegations of misconduct are substantiated, as a general rule the respondent should avoid making

public statements. They are very early on in their process of accountability, and anything they write or say is likely going to be self-serving or minimize their actions. Their statements can consciously or unconsciously implicate the survivor in the abuse or blame them for it. If suspension or removal of credentials is being published somewhere, the media may contact the church leader to make a public statement: they need not reply. It is also not a good idea to send a form letter to family and friends telling their side of the story, as this is a type of public statement that circulates informally, and in most cases, someone will forward it to the victim.

If suspension or removal of credentials is being published somewhere, the media may contact the church leader to make a public statement: they need not reply. It is also not a good idea to send a form letter to family and friends telling their side of the story, as this is a type of public statement that circulates informally, and in most cases, someone will forward it to the victim.

Often the person you are supporting welcomes the media opportunity to "set the record straight" by issuing a statement. People who have offended usually want to control the narrative, just as they controlled the narrative during the abuse. As a support person, you can read the public statement they want to make and warn them of hurtful phrasing, as well as pointing out what is missing (for example, an admission of guilt for harming for someone).

Sometimes the person who offended wants to apologize to the victims. This is a good sign, but a letter of apology should be something they work on with a therapist. The first weeks and months after the adjudication of the complaint is too soon to be issuing an apology letter.

Leaders who committed sexual misconduct should avoid these mistakes in public statements (or apologies):

- *Statements should never use the word "if."* For example, "If I hurt you, I am sorry." This investigation found that hurt happened. Pastoral misconduct is terribly damaging, there is no "if" involved.
- *Talking about a "relationship" with the victim.* The word "relationship" implies mutuality and should be avoided, as should the pronoun "we" ("we fell in love.") Similarly, calling something an "affair" implies a mutual relationship, which this was not. The church leader holds the responsibility for whatever

happened and should name that clearly. Encourage "I statements" such as: "I was the pastor and I did this…."

- *Using minimizing words.* Words like "indiscretion," "mistake," or "error in judgement" minimize the harm that was done. It is best for the actions to be referred to as "sexual misconduct" or "abusive actions".
- *Rationalizations or speaking for the victim.* It is best not to talk about the church leader's motivation because it was immaterial. It will be seen as self-serving, and an attempt to paint the person who offended in a better light. For example, "I didn't mean to hurt anyone" or "it was never my intention for this to happen." Instead, encourage, "I should have known better…" or "I hurt the people I should have been caring for." Similarly, "We both made mistakes," is unacceptable because it is putting words in the complainant's mouth and deflects blame onto them.

It is best not to talk about the church leader's motivation because it was immaterial. It will be seen as self-serving, and an attempt to paint the person who offended in a better light.

- *Asking for forgiveness.* Church leaders who offended should not be asking their victims for forgiveness, since as the spiritual leader, their power and control over the person they hurt can make this sound like a demand. Instead, they should be expressing remorse and repentance, using definite statements. Instead of the vague, "You were hurt by something I may have inadvertently done," they should be encouraged to say, "My actions hurt you. It was my fault, and I am sorry." Forgiveness is something that may or may not be an outcome down the road: it is more likely to happen if public statements express repentance.
- *Words without actions.* People who offended may want to apologize, however their actions speak louder than the words. If the apology is accompanied by attempts to regain their position, it can seem like the apology is self-serving. However, if the apology is accompanied by accepting the consequences of their behaviour, it will be more genuine. For example, an apology could include this statement, "I need to seek treatment

before any talk of returning to active duty as a pastor. I will be entering an intensive counselling regimen to examine my actions and motivations. My intent is to truly understand the harm I did so I can prevent it ever happening again."

- *Not taking full responsibility for all victims.* Carefully crafted statements that dodge responsibility are harmful. People who have offended can be very good at technically avoiding lies without telling the full truth. Public statements that imply there is only one victim when in reality there are more, will in the long run work against the church leader. If their statement makes it sound like this was an isolated event with only one person, they will face worse consequences in a subsequent investigation.

Commonly, people who have offended are not interested in communicating with the people they hurt. They are interested in communicating to the larger church about their own pain.

- *Talking about their own pain, not the pain they caused.* If public statements contain more about the pain of the person who offended, than remorse for the people they hurt, this is a mistake. Commonly, people who have offended are not interested in communicating with the people they hurt. They are interested in communicating to the larger church about their own pain. They want to talk about how they have been unfairly treated, about their major contributions to the church, about their gifts for ministry, about how the church needs their gifts, and their demands for timelines for return to active duty. They want to talk about the injustice of their credentials being removed. While they may see these public comments as directed at the church, they are read by the people they hurt, and deeply offend them. They communicate a message that "my pain is more important than your pain."

Public statements can be a subtle or not so subtle undermining of the authority of the church. By questioning consequences publicly, the person who offended is trying to manipulate the church by bringing pressure upon it by their supporters. Reinstatement may indeed not be off the table, but this is something that can be discussed privately

with the denomination. People who have offended have the tendency to want to control the process, and public comments usually serve this function.

As a support person, you can discourage public statements. If the church leader is set on issuing a public statement, you do not have to be involved in anything that you think is going to be harmful to victims. Some support people may see this as the place where they need to part ways with the person they are supporting. Other support people can accept this as another stage in the process where the person who offended is acting out instead of taking responsibility for how they are continuing to hurt the victims of their abuse.

The person who offended has for months, years or decades, convinced themselves that what they did was not wrong, or if it was wrong, it was a minor problem. They may attribute blame to the person they abused.

You also may need help in your own communication skills to speak assertively. See the section on **2 b) # 10. Communicate on behalf of survivor (if requested)**

12. Encourage respondent to take responsibility if they are guilty

You will find that this is one of the most challenging aspects of being a support person. The person who offended has for months, years or decades, convinced themselves that what they did was not wrong, or if it was wrong, it was a minor problem. They may attribute blame to the person they abused. There is incredible power in the mental dynamic that avoids responsibility.

It's not part of your role as a support person to overcome that avoidance of responsibility, even though you would like to see that happen. It is likely going to take years of counselling for that to happen. Most people found guilty of sexual abuse initially minimize or deflect blame for what they did, such as:

"They misinterpreted what I said or misinterpreted my actions." Sexual harassment and abuse are not about intention; rather, what is at issue is how the survivor received them in the context, and how a reasonable person would view the situation (the adjudicators).

"It was only touching." They may think that because there was no sexual penetration and only oral sex, that it was not truly abusive. Any sexual contact between a church leader and a congregant is extremely damaging.

"They approached me." They may lay the blame on the congregant instead of on themselves.

"Everybody knows they are sexually promiscuous/ dishonest/mentally ill." They may disparage the victim and their story, as a way of deflecting blame.

"It happened because my wife withheld sex." They blame someone else for their own actions. Sexual abuse is not primarily about sex, it is about power and control.

Church leaders who are guilty of misconduct may have difficulty accepting their identity as someone who has committed sexual violence.

"My job was so stressful, I finally cracked under pressure, and acted out." Many pastors experience stress and do not sexually harm their congregants. This church leader made the choice to hurt others.

When you hear the person whom you are supporting avoiding responsibility, it is appropriate to share your observations with them. You can point out; "By saying xyz…it sounds like you are laying the blame on someone other than yourself." You can remind them that the adjudicators will be looking for signs of repentance and remorse, and blaming others for one's own actions is the opposite of that.

Tone is crucial. Rather than taking an accusing or hostile tone, as a support person you can share your views in a friendly and honest way, "In my view, this is what I'm hearing from you. I know that many people in your situation do the same thing. You are in a hard place, but taking responsibility is the best course of action for you now. I am confident that you can take full responsibility for your actions."

Church leaders who are guilty of misconduct may have difficulty accepting their identity as someone who has committed sexual violence. They may cycle through stages of grief as they become accustomed to the change

in self-image, the loss of their job, their reputation or relationships. As a support person you can observe this, knowing this is all part of the process. You cannot rush or shame people into this new identity as someone who caused sexual harm. Treating them consistently, telling them that you see hope for them regardless of what they've done, will be the best approach.[78]

13. Responding to consequences of misconduct

If the person you are supporting is found to have caused sexual harm it may mean their credentials are suspended and they are suddenly unemployed. This has financial implications for their whole family; some denominations might offer financial support until they can find some other employment. There is also the very real loss of esteem they feel in the community. There may be deep feelings of shame, or anger at the process.

This ban from the congregation will include the spouse and children, and this can seem very unfair. However, the presence of the hurting spouse and children in the congregation will make it exponentially harder for the church to process the boundary crossing. The spouse and children are secondary victims of the abuse; this is a consequence the person you are supporting will have to face.

They will be given a list of recommendations of what to do in order to lift the suspension. This could involve assessment and counselling, restitution to the victim, staying away from the congregation they were attending, and a continued ban on contacting the victim or their families. This ban from the congregation will include the spouse and children, and this can seem very unfair. However, the presence of the hurting spouse and children in the congregation will make it exponentially harder for the church to process the boundary crossing. The spouse and children are secondary victims of the abuse; this is a consequence the person you are supporting will have to face.

For sexual abuse, and especially if there are multiple victims, intensive in-person treatment assessments are often recommended. Usually, the denomination will pay for this. Intensive therapy is recommended, usually with therapists who have a specialty in treating professional sexual misconduct. The denomination may require reports from therapists and will want another independent assessment before credentials be reinstated. Churches

generally do not want the therapist who regularly sees the church leader to give a report, since that therapist has a vested interest in a therapeutic outcome. The church leader will be required to sign release forms so that the institution and the treating therapists can share information with each other.[79]

It is a very human response to refuse to accept responsibility for your own actions, particularly if the consequences of your own actions are very difficult. Some people continue in denial that they harmed anyone, because they fear that no one will care for them if they admit they sexually offended. As a support person, you can continually reassure the person you are supporting that you will walk with them, regardless of whether they are innocent or guilty. Most church communities are very compassionate towards leaders who have committed sexual misconduct.

Some people continue in denial that they harmed anyone, because they fear that no one will care for them if they admit they sexually offended. As a support person, you can continually reassure the person you are supporting that you will walk with them, regardless of whether they are innocent or guilty.

Resistance to pursuing hard therapeutic work is a sign that the church leader is avoiding their serious problems. Any communication from the church leader that minimizes or deflects blame for the misconduct may lead the denomination to believe that the suspension should be continued, or even that the credentials should be permanently revoked.

In the following year, as the person you are supporting is in therapy, it will be important to check in on them at least once a month to see how they are doing. Some churches create a support group for a pastor and their family during this time. These groups are most effective if they are comprised of people outside the congregation. However, often people within the congregation want to be part of a support group, and the pastor and their family want these people to support them. It is extremely important that the support group is also an accountability group. Reading this manual may help them. The purpose of this group should not be to talk about how unfairly the church leader has been treated, but rather to help support them as they face the consequences of their own actions. Knowing that people are walking with them on this rocky road is very

important. However, people who cross sexual boundaries are very good at manipulating people, and it is easy for a support group to become an echo chamber talking about the pain of the leader, while never addressing the pain they caused others. Naming this group a "Support and Accountability Group" might help them to be clear about their role.

Some people who have caused sexual harm reject having any consequences for their actions. The person you are supporting may feel that actions against them have been punitive, and that they are being punished. They may object to this, saying, "Isn't the church about forgiveness?" You can remind the church leader that the consequences are entirely put in place for healing.

The person you are supporting may feel that actions against them have been punitive, and that they are being punished. They may object to this, saying, "Isn't the church about forgiveness?" You can remind the church leader that the consequences are entirely put in place for healing.

- **Public apologies from the institution saying the abuse happened help the victims.**
- **Naming who committed the offences helps other victims who might be suffering in silence.**
- **Removal from active service gives the church leader time to address serious issues.**
- **Staying away from the congregation allows it time to heal, and makes it a safe space for the victim(s).**

You can remind the person you are supporting that the institution is actually investing a lot of money in them by paying for their therapy. Generally, church leaders accused of misconduct receive huge amounts of support from the congregation, even after they have been found guilty of misconduct. This support often comes in the form of denying that the abuse happened, or minimizing it, regardless of the outcome of the investigation. The person you are supporting may rally and feel that popular opinion is more important than the adjudicators' findings. You can remind them that moving forward, they need to take the findings of the investigation seriously and follow their recommendations closely.

In some denominations re-instatement after sexual misconduct is rare, since this helps survivors feel safer; no amount of therapy can guarantee that there will be no

re-offence. If there is a re-offence, the institution could be held legally liable. Insurance companies don't want institutions to take risks by re-instating people who have engaged in behaviours that harmed people.[80]

A support person is essential and helps someone by encouraging them as they look for new opportunities for employment, and as they live with the consequences of their own actions, finding new healthier ways of interacting with others.

14. Long-term follow-up

Being a support person over a long period of time allows for opportunities to reflect. At the six-month or one-year anniversary of starting as a support person, you can take the time to reflect with the person you are supporting.

A support person is essential and helps someone by encouraging them as they look for new opportunities for employment, and as they live with the consequences of their own actions, finding new healthier ways of interacting with others.

- What have we gone through together in this process?
- What is the biggest gain?
- What has been the hardest part or lowest point?
- What was the biggest surprise?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What are your hopes for the next period of time?

You can encourage them by sharing your own observations about the movement you've seen along the journey to take accountability. There are things that can be celebrated. Also acknowledge the difficulties and low points faced.

Most support people are assigned with the assumption that you will walk someone through an investigation, and then you will be finished. However, it is usual for this to be a much longer-term caring relationship, although with much less intensity as time goes by.

The person you are supporting will need help after the investigation closes. If the investigation ruled that the allegations of sexual misconduct were founded, they may be in mandated counselling, or be working at a different job. Check in monthly to see how they are doing, and if they have the support they need. Encourage them to

consider that the hard work of therapy is worthwhile. If there have been public statements about the misconduct, you could ask them how they feel about that.

In the coming months there may be questions related to their relationship to the congregation. It often takes a congregation over a year to process sexual misconduct by a church leader. This can be hard for the person who offended because they miss the congregation, but being apart is important so that the congregation can do their own healing. They may not have had a chance to say a formal good-bye, which can be very painful for the congregation and the leader. The congregation may, at some point, invite the church leader to facilitated meetings, and you might be invited to accompany the church leader as a support person. Often there is a continued outpouring of informal support from the congregation for the person who offended and their family, even if formal ties are broken.

It often takes a congregation over a year to process sexual misconduct by a church leader.

You might accompany the person you are supporting to meetings about lifting their suspension, or permanently revoking their credentials. The ex-church leader may now have to move into another career path. People who leave ministry often end up in other caring professions where they might have caregiving roles. If you are checking in, you could ask the person you are supporting whether their current employer is aware of the misconduct. This will likely be a hard conversation. However, survivors of abuse sometimes confront current employers with the history of their employee's former misconduct. It's better that the employer hears it from the new employee themselves.

As a support person, you walk with someone through a very intense and difficult part of their life, it could be that they do not want to hear from you again after the investigation is over. It is entirely up to the person you are supporting as to whether this relationship continues.

15. What a support person does not do

You cannot change someone. It is important to keep your role description in mind, and realize that while it is an important role, you are not capable of bringing about major change in the mindset of the person you are supporting. If they have hurt people sexually, they require intensive therapy to work through that. You can't rescue someone from entrenched unhealthy patterns of behaviour.

It is not part of the support person's role to rally supporters. The person you are supporting may have been the best pastor in the world and could have hundreds of character witnesses, but this misconduct case is about harm that was done to the complainant. The investigation is not about balancing the large amount of good done with the small amount of harm. Many people who cross sexual boundaries make up for this by being an exemplary pastor to everyone except the few people they have hurt. Character witnesses are immaterial.

...while it is an important role, you are not capable of bringing about major change in the mindset of the person you are supporting. If they have hurt people sexually, they require intensive therapy to work through that. You can't rescue someone from entrenched unhealthy patterns of behaviour.

You are not a spiritual confidante. The person who offended may try to spiritualize your conversation by talking to you about forgiveness, and whether God can forgive them. Encourage them to direct spiritual questions to a spiritual caregiver. Note that pastors who have violated sexual boundaries with congregants have used spiritual language to do that, and this can be a way of garnering sympathy; "Look at my spiritual pain, I am so repentant." They may be very repentant, but their relationship with God is not your concern. This may be a conflict for you if you are, in fact, a pastor. But you are not their pastor, you are not there to take care of them like you would a congregant. You are a support person through a church process. Similarly, they may ask you to pray for them, as a way of showing they want you to take care of them. You are not their spiritual caregiver, and it is best to stay clear of anything that would confuse your role.

c) Challenges

1. The first meeting

As in any interpersonal setting, the first meeting between the support person and the respondent often sets the tone for the remainder of the relationship. This meeting is an important opportunity to develop trust and open communication.

Here are some things that you could cover in the first meeting or two:

i. **General introductions,** where you get to know each other, and make sure that there are no conflicts of interest with either the complainant or the respondent.

ii. **Explain the role of the support person,** telling the respondent how you have been trained, and whether you will have peer support in this role, and what that means.

iii. **Identify supports that the respondent has in place.** These may include family, friends, therapists, a lawyer, spiritual director, or doctor. If there are supports missing, suggest that they locate such support.

iv. **Negotiate boundaries.** An important arena to discuss in this respect is communication. Where and when are you each comfortable being contacted?

v. **Discuss confidentiality** and assure the respondent that you will keep what is discussed between you confidential, indicating any exceptions.

vi. **Listen to the respondent's story.** Usually this will be the story of the complaint being filed against them and their feelings. It may involve them telling their version of the events listed in the complaint, although that could wait until a subsequent meeting. The respondent might be carefully gauging your reaction to their story, to see how honest they can be with you. They may be wondering if you will reject them, if they admit they did something wrong. Or they may be fully denying that they did anything wrong.

...the first meeting between the support person and the respondent often sets the tone for the remainder of the relationship. This meeting is an important opportunity to develop trust and open communication.

vii. **Have a preliminary discussion of goals** and indicate that you will talk about this next time.

viii. **Walking the respondent through the misconduct policy is a good idea,** but this could happen at a second meeting.

2. When the complaint is historical (distant past) or the respondent is deceased

For the dynamics of historical complaints read the section **II. c) #2. When the complaint is historical (distant past) or person who offended is deceased.** A church leader can be very upset to hear that a historical complaint is coming up from decades earlier. They may have put what happened out of their mind, or they may have even totally forgotten about it. They may ask, "Isn't there a statute of limitations on complaining about things like this?" There is no expiry date on the pain people experienced, and the church is responsible to investigate harm done by its leaders and volunteers, even if it is in the past.[81] There are significant challenges to investigating a case that is decades old. The important thing will be finding corroborating testimony for the complainant or respondent's case and providing a fair process for both parties.

There is no expiry date on the pain people experienced, and the church is responsible to investigate harm done by its leaders and volunteers, even if it is in the past.

The person you are supporting may make vague references to the more permissive culture of earlier decades, but this is false. It has never been acceptable for church leaders to have sexual contact with the people in their church. They may claim that they were secretly "dating" someone, however consent is always an issue when there is an unequal power dynamic. The fact that the relationship was "secret" calls into question how consensual it was. They may call what happened an "affair", however even decades ago, professional ethics forbade relationships like that, especially because of the power differential between church leader and congregant.

Many church misconduct policies do not specifically address how to proceed if a respondent is deceased. Usually, the regular misconduct policy is used, with

the family as the stand-in for the accused. As a support person, you may be supporting the whole family, or sometimes just the spouse of the deceased church leader. It is difficult to support everyone in a family system, particularly if they have different views about the abuse, or about the investigation. The family may be torn between wanting to preserve the reputation of their loved-one and wanting to know the truth. They may also have heard rumours that something inappropriate happened, but they don't have information. They may also view the problem as infidelity, and not abuse of power. They may protest vehemently that it is unfair to charge someone when they are no longer there to defend themselves.

The family may be torn between wanting to preserve the reputation of their loved-one and wanting to know the truth.

These posthumous complaints have at times been squashed because the deceased leader's family protests and because church officials feel it would be too big a burden to place on them. However, it is not the complainant who is causing these burdens, it is the deceased person's legacy that is harming their own family. Protecting the family of the person who offended is not a good reason to prevent a complainant from getting justice and reaching out to other people who may have been harmed.

In this type of complaint where the respondent is deceased, it is rare to make the investigation public, since there is no immediate danger for anyone. If the complaint is founded, then there is a public announcement. The support person may have to help educate the family about the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, and the ethical standards of the profession. This will be a painful time for them, since the remaining family bears the brunt of the social impact; they are secondary victims of the abuse.

3. When the respondent really wants you to believe they are innocent

The person you are supporting may want to establish a connection with you by convincing you that they are being falsely accused. They may ask you direct questions about this, "Do you believe me?" You can respond by saying, "It's not my job in this role as a support person to judge you in any way. I am here to support you regardless of whether you did or didn't do something. I am here to help you navigate the process. I will help you consider your options and think about your goals."

If they press you, and want you to take sides, believing either them or the complainant, you can say, "A large majority of people accused of pastoral sexual misconduct have crossed sexual boundaries. Most respondents initially completely deny the charges, or minimize them, and later come to admit some guilt. And there is a small minority of times where the complaint is malicious, and the respondent is entirely innocent. I am not qualified to make any judgements about this case, I am here to support you, no matter what you did or didn't do."

It is natural for you to feel sympathy for them, but because you understand the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, you are not going to be drawn into the believe/not believe dichotomy.

Of course, as a support person for the respondent, you are hearing only one side of the story, and are naturally drawn in by the person with whom you are spending so much time. It is natural for you to feel sympathy for them, but because you understand the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct, you are not going to be drawn into the believe/not believe dichotomy.

The person you are supporting may feel that they need a support person who believes everything they say. You can explain again about your role: "If you want someone to agree with everything you say, there are many people who can do that for you; if you want someone who can navigate this investigation with you, then I can help you."

4. Relating to the family of the respondent

In cases where pastoral sexual misconduct has happened, the spouse and children of the church leader who offended are secondary victims. They are greatly impacted by the abuse. Some spouses disbelieve victims, insisting that the complaint is malicious. While the respondent to the complaint has been instructed to not say anything about the complainant, sometimes the spouse spreads stories about them in the congregation. They do this out of a sense of loyalty and to protect their spouse. By fiercely maintaining their spouse's innocence, they feel they are fighting for their marriage, because to admit that the abuse took place, would mean facing the reality that their spouse is both a) unfaithful, and b) someone who has committed sexual abuse. It also can have devastating financial implications, including loss of employment, health benefits, a pension, or even, in some cases, a parsonage. Sometimes a spouse suspects that abuse took place, but they may still loyally stand by their partner.

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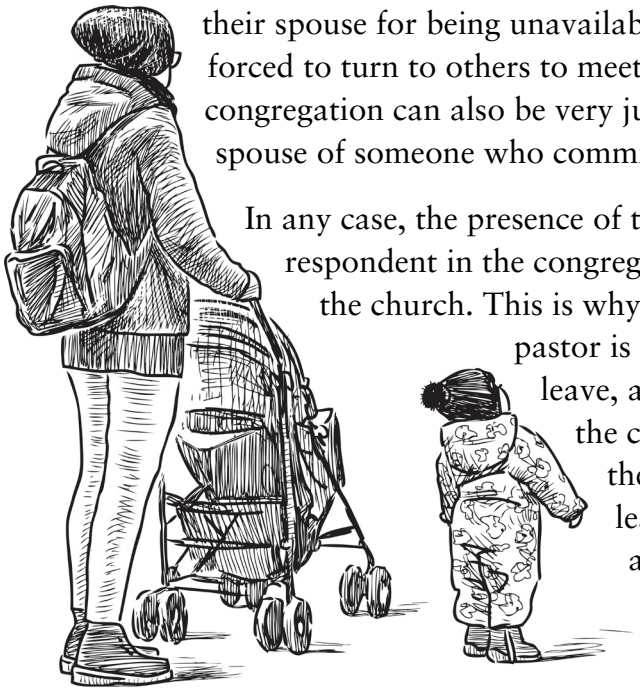
Some spouses will reject the findings of the investigation and declare that the whole process was a sham, calling it a "witch hunt". However, in some situations, the church leader scapegoats their unhappy marriage. They blame their spouse for being unavailable and claim they were forced to turn to others to meet their sexual needs.[82] The congregation can also be very judgemental about the spouse of someone who commits sexual misconduct.



In any case, the presence of the family of the respondent in the congregation can further polarize the church. This is why in most cases, when a pastor is put on administrative leave, and told not to attend the congregation for a time, the family of the church leader is also asked to take a leave from the church's worship and social life. This is excruciatingly

hard for the family, but it is in the best interests of the victim and the congregation.[83] As a support person, you may need to talk to the church leader, to make sure they are not encouraging their spouse to say and do things that are harmful to the victim.

Sometimes the person you are supporting wants to always include their spouse in their meetings with you. This is a very bad idea. It is not because the spouse does not deserve support, but because they need a different type of support. You can encourage them to find that. The church leader may feel the need to keep up appearances of innocence in front of their spouse, while you are encouraging them to be more truthful. It's difficult to admit to both professional misconduct and infidelity in the same conversation, so it's better to have your conversations alone without the spouse present. Further, the church leader and the spouse may be having very different emotional reactions to the same events, and as a support person, you need to focus on the church leader.

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5. When the complaint appears to be malicious

As you take on the role of support person for someone accused of misconduct, you may hear things about this case that lead you to believe the complaint is malicious. Keep in mind that each of the factors that might lead you to think a complaint is malicious, might precisely indicate why the person was actually abused.[84]

i. *The complainant may have a history of mental health issues and could appear unstable.* However, people who have experienced pastoral sexual abuse often do suffer from depression and suicidal thoughts, they do often struggle with deep rage and anger because they were wronged. Also, church leaders who abuse sometimes prey upon people who are unstable precisely because the victim's stories will be discounted.

ii. *The complainant accuses others of abuse as well.* Yet people whose sexual boundaries have been violated are often preyed upon by church leaders who know they are vulnerable.

iii. *The complainant has a dual troubled relationship with the respondent.* Some church leaders choose to abuse people with whom they have a dual role precisely because they think this dual role will protect them from the abuse being reported (for example, abusing a congregant who is also the wife of a nephew).

iv. *The respondent being such an exemplary leader that the accusations are unthinkable.* People who violate sexual boundaries can overcompensate for their abuse by being a model leader in other areas.

Remember that your role does not require you to make any judgements, but instead requires you to guide people through the investigative process.

Always keep in mind that you are only hearing one side of the story, the side that the respondent wants you to hear. Remember that your role does not require you to make any judgements, but instead requires you to guide people through the investigative process. You can ask yourself, "Is my belief in this person's innocence guiding the way I am helping them through this investigation? If they are guilty, but I think they are innocent, am I doing a disservice to them in not asking them difficult questions?"

That said, malicious complaints sometimes do happen. It is very difficult to be the respondent to a malicious complaint. It is important to trust the institution that it will investigate and find that the complaint is groundless. The church leader may be angry at the complainant and upset that their reputation in the community might be marred by this process. The complainant is worthy of compassion, even if they are misguided or confused. You can look at the policy and if it is, like many policies, actually weighted in favour of respondents, this may reassure the person you are supporting.

6. When the person you are supporting decides not to co-operate with investigation

Some people who are charged with misconduct receive a support person, and at some point during the preparation for the investigation, they decide not to co-operate any further. If the respondent is a volunteer, they may simply walk away, or refuse to be involved. This may mean that they are no longer welcome in the church where they were volunteering. If the respondent is an employee, they resign and immediately leave their place of employment. Employers have the legal right to hold their employees to account and enforce misconduct policies by holding investigations; but they cannot force them to participate if they are no longer employees.

It used to be common if someone was charged with misconduct, they could resign and avoid an investigation. However, in most churches, this is no longer the case.

It used to be common if someone was charged with misconduct, they could resign and avoid an investigation. However, in most churches, this is no longer the case. The church needs to know the facts in order to offer support to the victim, and they need to investigate to see if other people were harmed. This is part of their due diligence as an institution.

The person you are supporting might think they will preserve their reputation if they refuse to participate, however this is misguided because in most cases today, an investigation into the misconduct is going to be held regardless of their participation. Even if the respondent is dead, an investigation can still proceed. So, it is in the respondent's best interests to participate and have their say. It will be part of their permanent employee record that they refused to participate in disciplinary hearings about misconduct allegations.

Another way the person you are supporting can refuse to co-operate is by simply saying they have no memories of anything with which they are charged. This may be a technical way of not saying lies, however, silence can be very self-serving. As a support person, you can encourage them to tell the truth about what happened. Saying they

don't remember anything at all looks very suspicious. But the church leader will make choices, and you have no control over what those choices are.

7. When the person you are supporting feels they are the victim

Even if the church leader admits that misconduct occurred, most respondents have the natural human tendency to dwell on how this affects them, rather than how this affects the person they have harmed. Do not be surprised if the person you are supporting is more upset about the public revelation about the misconduct, than they are about the fact that they harmed people. This is a common reaction from people who have violated sexual boundaries. It is a profoundly self-centred approach to the situation, the same approach that allowed them to harm others, without concern for their well-being.

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The respondent may blame their own pain on the victim, or the church. "Why are they doing this to me?" they wonder. You can remind them that this whole process is about consequences of their own behaviour. They may have escaped these consequences for years or decades, but now they do have to face them. That is a hard thing, when they thought they would face no consequences.

Some people who have sexually harmed others frame it as a "sexual addiction." They paint themselves as an unwilling victim of a terrible compulsion that has taken over their life. It is important for them to work with a therapist to diagnose their pathologies, however as a professional, it was their responsibility not to harm people in their care.

As a support person, you should not encourage a person who has sexually harmed others to see themselves as the victim in this story. You can acknowledge they may feel like they are the victim in the story, however, you can remind them, in a tactful way, that the investigation is actually about the harm they did to others. The victims in the story are the people who were sexually abused, not the person who is charged with sexual abuse. You

could ask them, "How might looking at the story from the perspective of the complainants change your point of view?" The investigative team will certainly be looking for some signs of whether the respondent has empathy for the person they harmed.

It might also be helpful to discuss the distinction between consequences and punishment. Having one's credentials removed may feel punitive, but when one betrays the trust of the church by sexually abusing someone in your care, the institution must prioritize the possible danger to vulnerable people, over the right of an individual to a career.

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In some cases, the person you are supporting was, in fact, a victim of sexual abuse themselves at a much earlier time. It will be important for them to work on this with their therapist, to explore how their own victimization wounded them, and how it is related to their own abusive actions. Being a victim of sexual violence does not explain or excuse away the harm that the church leader has done. Most victims of sexual violence do not abuse others. This is a painful part of their life story, but it does not excuse the behaviour.

8. When the person you are supporting acts in unhealthy ways

Church institutions always demand that the respondent not approach or contact the victim(s) in any way, directly or indirectly through third parties. If you hear that the person you are supporting is pursuing this course of action, it is important that you challenge them. In spite of their deep feelings to the contrary, no good can come from them contacting the complainant.

There can be a variety of motivations for contacting the victim:

- they feel they are "in love" with the person they hurt, and they miss them.
- they may be so self-centred they believe that what is good for themselves, will be good for the complainant.
- they may think they can short circuit the investigative process by getting the complainant to retract their complaint.
- they want to apologize or seek forgiveness.

Remind the person you are supporting that first and foremost they must submit to the directives of the institution that explicitly told them not to contact the victim. If they cannot follow the rules, the adjudicators will take this as a sign that they are out of control.

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It is commonplace for pastors who have caused sexual harm to denigrate or disparage the people who complained against them. They can do this privately or publicly.

This can include claims that the complainant is:

- trying to destroy my career (when in fact, the church leader themselves violated boundaries that caused this investigation).
- trying to destroy the reputation of our congregation (when in fact complainants are holding the church to their own professional standards, and the leader harmed the church by abusing a congregant).

- motivated by revenge and is not Christian, because good Christians should forgive sins (when Jesus himself called religious leaders to account for hurting vulnerable people).

Any negative judgements from the respondent about the motivations or character of the complainants often gets back to those complainants and hurts them deeply. As a support person you can encourage the church leader not to say anything negative about the complainants. You can, of course, not control what they say. You can tell them that the adjudicators will think it very unprofessional for them to be berating the complainants.

The suggestion is that since they only hurt one, or a few people, and helped so many others, the abuse does not matter quite so much. This is the type of thinking that leads to abusive behaviour.

Church leaders who have caused sexual harm sometimes ask for leniency in terms of consequences by holding up their own accomplishments in ministry. The suggestion is that since they only hurt one, or a few people, and helped so many others, the abuse does not matter quite so much. This is the type of thinking that leads to abusive behaviour. The fact that the elementary school teacher is exemplary to 1,000 students is immaterial to the one student they sexually abused. Professionals are called to consistency, not good behaviour on a balance scale, where you only have to help more people than you hurt. A plea for leniency on the basis of good behaviour can be interpreted by the complainants to mean that their pain and suffering is not important in the larger scheme of the good that was done.

As a support person, you can encourage the church leader to not do things that hurt the complainants, but in the end, they will make their own choices. You do not have to accompany them or facilitate any actions that you think will hurt the victim. You need to explain to the church leader why you cannot help them with this certain action; for example, against all counsel, the church leader may have contacted the complainant and persuaded them to have a meeting, and they invite you to come and be a witness. You should not accompany them to any meeting that you think is unsafe, and, in fact, you should notify the

institution that the person you are supporting is breaking the rules and doing something unsafe.

The person you are supporting may decide to pursue litigation because they are claiming innocence and want to clear their name. Or the church leader may admit some guilt, but they want to sue because this was a "private matter," or an "indiscretion" and their rights were violated by making this public to the congregation. Everyone has a right to pursue legal action if they feel they were harmed, and consulting with a lawyer is within their rights.

As a neutral support person, you can remind the person you are supporting that public announcements are not undertaken for shaming or punishment but for protection of victims. Just as ordination and installation of new leaders happens publicly, so too, when someone is removed from office because of misconduct this has to be done publicly. Because so many people found guilty of pastoral misconduct have violated numerous people's sexual boundaries, this is a best practice, so that other victims can come forward for support.

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Litigation against denominations for defamation is rarely successful when credentials are removed because of sexual misconduct. Professional organizations have a right to investigate their members, and as long as they followed their policy, there is little chance of damages being awarded in a lawsuit. Even though you are designated as a "support person" by the denomination, you do not have to serve in that role if legal action is pursued.

9. When you are not getting along with the person you are supporting

One of the difficulties that can arise is that the person you are supporting may have convinced you that they are innocent. Because they were so likable, and their pastoral record was so stellar, you did believe them, and started treating this as a case of a malicious complaint. But something happened and now you doubt their innocence. Perhaps you read the victim impact statements, and saw the church leader's reaction to them, or perhaps something they said made you question their innocence. You may be feeling very disillusioned and are not sure if you can continue as a support person, because you feel duped.

Some church leaders who cross sexual boundaries are very self-absorbed and have difficulty listening to the opinions of others.

Some church leaders who cross sexual boundaries are very self-absorbed and have difficulty listening to the opinions of others. These are issues they could work on in counselling, but as a support person, it can be helpful to you to identify troublesome behaviour:

- they look at the situation only from their own point of view
- they feel the rules should not apply to them
- they react very negatively to criticism
- they always blame the other person, and refuse to take responsibility
- they blame others for their emotions
- they have a difficult time identifying with anyone else's pain
- they only listen to their own opinions

As a support person, it can be difficult to offer options if the person you are supporting refuses to listen to anything but their own opinions.

You may also have differences of opinion about actions; the person you are supporting is reaching out to the victims when they have been expressly told not to do this. Or perhaps they are making public statements that are hurtful to victims. Perhaps you cannot in good conscience

help someone who you feel is so dangerous to the community.

Think about the support person role description and remember the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct. The church leader is hopefully on a journey to acceptance that they hurt someone, and you can play a role in that. The replacement support person might be manipulated just as easily as you were; the fact that now you are seeing more clearly better equips you to be supportive. If you find this person difficult, the next person likely will as well. Everyone deserves someone to walk with them. If you simply cannot continue because you are burnt out, give the church leader some notice, and help them to find another support person.

The church leader is hopefully on a journey to acceptance that they hurt someone, and you can play a role in that. The replacement support person might be manipulated just as easily as you were; the fact that now you are seeing more clearly better equips you to be supportive.

Or it can be that the church leader themselves no longer trusts you and you feel they are not open to talking to you. Perhaps you have pushed them too hard on something, or maybe there is just a clash of personalities. In this case, it is also good to help them find a support person that is a better fit.

Support person roles do not always end amicably, but it is important to be clear about the termination of the relationship. The notes you have taken belong to you, they are your notes, and you should keep them. You can share a copy of them with the person you were supporting, if requested.

Part 4

A training path

This training is designed to be six 90-minute sessions, and be led by a trained facilitator:

Session 1

Introductions and outline of the training.

Self-examination

As an advocate, you are your own greatest tool. We will begin each session with some questions for reflection in small groups:

- What are my feelings and beliefs around sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver?
- What draws me to this work? What is my motivation for advocating?
- Why do I believe this work is important?

In this training, you will not learn everything you need to know. But you will learn how helpful it is to discuss things with others. Hopefully this will highlight the importance of peer support or supervision for continual learning.

Discussing the manual

As preparation for this session, the trainee will have read:
Part I: What is sexual misconduct by a church leader?

- What did this section of the manual tell you that you already knew?
- What would you say was your biggest learning from this section?

The impacts of pastoral sexual misconduct[86]

The leader asks people to take a blank piece of paper and gives them 3 minutes to list the following things:

1. their favourite hymn
2. their favourite piece of scripture
3. a religious holiday they love
4. a part of a worship service they enjoy
5. a sacred space

Then the leader says:
Imagine you are a victim of pastoral sexual misconduct.

1. Your favourite hymn is the one your abuser hummed to you while they abused you.
   (and then invite everyone to cross that off their list.)
2. Your favourite scripture is the one he quoted to you when you were upset and conflicted about what was happening about the abuse.
   (It holds little comfort now, so cross that off the list.)
3. You talked to this leader about why this was your favourite holiday, but when that season came, the sex became more intense and at times violent.
   (The season now holds pain for you, and you dread its return this year, so cross that off your list.)
4. During that part of worship, he would make eyes at you from the pulpit. You thought everyone noticed but apparently they did not.
   (You felt naked during worship, cross that off your list.)
5. That sacred space, you told him about it, and later he asked to have sex with you there.
   (It no longer feels sacred for you. Cross it off your list.)

Debrief this exercise

- Does this help you understand how deeply violated some survivors of pastoral misconduct feel?
- What other religious and spiritual losses might survivors experience?
- How do church leaders use their spiritual power to twist religious meaning for victims?

For those who are new to the topic of pastoral sexual misconduct, a further resource with fictional case studies is: Sacred Trust: Fostering Safe Spaces in Congregations.

Closing check-in

- How was today's session for you?
- Can you name a significant learning?

Homework

Read **Part II a) General Information** and **Part III a) General Information.**

Session 2

Self-examination

- What kind of power do I have?
- Can you think of a time where someone used their power to hurt you? (You will not be required to share the experience.)
- How did you feel in that experience?
- If someone helped to empower you, how did that feel?

Debriefing the sections of the manual

Part II a) General Information
Part III a) General Information

- If you had to explain to someone in your own words what a support person does, how would you explain it in the context of helping a complainant? in the context of helping a respondent?
- What did you learn about being a support person that surprised you?

Look at **Part II a) #2. Qualifications** and **Part III a) #2. Qualifications**

- Where do you think you are strong?
- Where do you think you need more training?

Case study

In each of the coming four weeks, we will be examining a fictional case study in order to explore both the role of support person, and the dynamics of pastoral sexual misconduct. Depending on the size of the training group, this may be done in smaller groups. Read the case study out loud in your group:

Case study 1: Elaine and Brianna

Elaine was a support person and had been working with Brianna for around a month. Brianna had contacted her denominational office saying that she wanted to file a sexual misconduct complaint about a pastor. It had taken Brianna two years to get up the courage to call the office, and it had taken her three years before that to realize that what happened to her was not a consensual relationship with her pastor, but an abuse of power.

During this past month, Elaine had several meetings with Brianna. The first one was very intense, as Brianna described what happened to her, and how she felt about it. Elaine always found these first meetings to be very tiring: she scheduled it first-thing on a Saturday, as she didn't think she wanted to have such a heavy meeting on a weeknight.

In the following meetings Elaine helped Brianna to think about what outcomes she wanted. Brianna looked at the goals she had brainstormed with Elaine. "I think the most important one for me is that he get help for his problems. And my bringing this complaint could help him with that."

Working on an actual letter was agonizing. Elaine assured Brianna she didn't have to include a lot of specific details. She needed to broadly describe the nature of the abuse and how long it had lasted. Over three days, they worked on a draft of the letter, sending it back and forth by email.

The day after they agreed on a final draft, Brianna sent an email to Elaine. "I've been up all night with a panic attack. I simply cannot send that letter. I can't do this to him. I think it's a bad idea to go through with this…I won't do it."

Elaine was upset and frustrated after getting this email from Brianna. She had worked very hard supporting Brianna. She blamed herself. Had she pushed too hard? Had the letter been too explicit for Brianna to feel comfortable with it? She sat down to journal for a few minutes and realized that she was also angry at the pastor who had hurt Brianna, and she wanted him held

accountable. The only way this would happen is if Brianna sent that letter.

Elaine went for a walk before she emailed Brianna back. Coming back into the house, she was in a better frame of mind, and had re-centered herself. She was advocating for Brianna; Brianna's feelings and comfort came first.

Elaine wrote Brianna back saying: "I support your decision not to send the letter. We can get together to talk about it, if you like, or we can take a break from meeting. We can keep a draft of the letter in a secure place, so if you decide you want to send it, we won't have to do the hard work of writing it again. This letter is something you could talk about with your counsellor. Thinking about this complaint has brought up a lot of hard emotions for you."

Six months later, Brianna emailed Elaine, "Can we meet? I think I'm ready to send that letter of complaint now."

Questions for discussion

- Where do you see Elaine making wise choices as a support person?
- What do you think Elaine's biggest challenge as a support person was?
- How might this story have played out differently, if Elaine had made different choices?

Role-play

In today and in the three following sessions we will have a section of role-playing after the case study. The facilitator will always take the role of the complainant. If the person role-playing the support person wants a break or is not sure which way to take the conversation, they can raise their hand, and someone else can take over.

Role-play the conversation that Elaine and Brianna have after Brianna says she wants to withdraw the complaint. The facilitator takes the role of Brianna.

Debrief the role-play

- What was happening emotionally in this conversation?
- What was at stake in the support person/complainant role?
- Do you have any other observations about this case study?

Closing check-in

- How was today's session for you?
- Can you name a significant learning?

Homework

Read **Part II b) Duties of a support person in this context**

Session 3

Self-examination

- What strengths do I bring to the role or support person?
- What might my areas of challenge be?
- Do I think this experience will trigger any of my own experiences of violation or victimization? If so, how will I deal with my issues? (this is not a place to share those experiences, but to talk about where to get support)

Debriefing the section of the manual

Read **Part II b) Duties for a support person in this context.**

- Is there a part of this section of the manual that you already knew, or which makes perfect sense to you?
- Is there a part that is counter-intuitive, or surprising?
- Walk through the section from **Part II b) #4 Find, evaluate and explain institutional policies.**
- What would stop a potential complainant from seeking out a policy?
- Is there anything about the process that surprises you?

Case study 2: Greg and Kelvin

Greg is a support person for Kelvin in his complaint against Bob, his church choir director. Kelvin was a teenager in junior choir, and Bob was the conductor. The sexual abuse didn't start until Kelvin was in the senior choir, shortly after he turned 18. The abuse lasted for a couple of years. It was only when Kelvin was in teacher's college that he realized how Bob had groomed him for years, using his position of trust to eventually sexualize the relationship.

Greg and Kelvin worked to draft a complaint letter to the church board. In the letter they specified how important

confidentiality was for the survivor. It was a momentous day when Greg delivered the letter to the church for Kelvin. The church board responded immediately by temporarily suspending Bob from his position. No one in the church knew why Bob had stepped away from the choir for "personal reasons."

The following week was horrible for Kelvin because Bob kept trying to phone him. Kelvin blocked his number. Bob even showed up at Kelvin's house, but Kelvin saw his car and did not answer the door. Kelvin went to a baseball game with some friends, and one of them handed him an envelope, "I ran into Bob this afternoon, and he asked me to give you this." Kelvin gave the letter to his support person to read. Greg said they could throw the letter away; they had no obligation to read it. But Kelvin wanted Greg to outline what it said. "He wants you to withdraw the complaint," Greg summarized.

Bob's contact attempts were really bothering Kelvin. Greg said, "Bob has been told by the church leadership that he should not be in contact with you. Do you want me to contact the church to tell them Bob is not following their instructions?" Greg also talked about other options. Kelvin could talk to the police if he felt unsafe.

"What's the hardest part about this?" Greg asked.

"I just feel unsafe in my own town," Kelvin said. "I am scared everywhere I go that I'll see him." Part of the problem was that Kelvin's church was no longer a safe place either. "I was in the foyer before the service, and Bob's wife just glared at me. I was so upset, I left before the service began. But if I stop going to church, how do I explain that to my friends?"

Greg helped Kelvin brainstorm other ways he could find support, and how he might explain an absence from church. "There are a lot of feelings going on here," Greg said, "It's natural for people in your position to be going through this, but it's very hard." Greg encouraged Kelvin to talk about this with his counsellor.

Questions for discussion

- What impact is Bob the choir director having on Kelvin?
- What is Greg's main concern in this case study?
- Do you notice your own emotions as you read this story?
- How would you feel if you were Greg in this story?

Role-play

Role-play a conversation where Greg asks Kelvin about the grooming process that happened to him with Bob. In this role-play the facilitator of the training will play the role of Kelvin, and (trigger warning) part of the discussion will include some specific sexual acts of abuse. In the role-play Kelvin will partly blame himself for what happened.

- What did it feel like for you to be listening to this role-play?
- How did it feel for the person(s) taking on the Greg role?
- Did you notice tension in your own body as the conversation became more intense?
- How was this for people listening to the role-play?
- What purpose does it serve for Greg to ask Kelvin about the grooming process?

Closing check-in

- How was today's session for you?
- Can you name a significant learning?

Homework

Read **Part Three b) Duties of a support person in this context.**

Session 4

Self-evaluation

- What do I need to feel rewarded in this volunteer work?
- How will I find nourishment and renew my energy?
- How do I respond when it seems others need me? Is it gratifying? Do I resent their neediness?

Debriefing the section of the manual

Read **Part III b) Duties of a support person in this context**

Case study 3: Rob and Pastor Mike

Rob was asked to be a support person for Pastor Mike, who was being investigated for professional sexual misconduct. Mike had originally wanted a friend, who was pastor of the biggest church in their city, to be his support person, but the denomination had encouraged him to meet Rob, who had experience as a support person. The denominational office had said, "Having a really well-known pastor as your support person isn't fair to the complainant because of the power imbalance between you, your support person, and her."

At their first meeting, Rob had a very favourable impression of Pastor Mike. He seemed very sincere, caring, and genuinely puzzled how this complaint could have arisen. "Yes, I've spent time with her, she has been going through some difficult times. I've just tried to help. I'm sorry she is misinterpreting my concern for her. I feel bad for her." As Rob asked more questions, he noticed how often Mike was emphasizing how well connected he was, and all the people who would vouch for his character. As Rob was leaving, Mike said, "Thanks so much for listening, now you know how difficult this is for me. My reputation is very important to me, I can't believe someone would do this to me. Confidentially, that person who laid

the complaint? She's mentally ill, she was hospitalized for a suicide attempt when she was fifteen. This is probably just another call for help."

Rob felt conflicted after their first meeting. He genuinely liked Mike and was inclined to believe him because he seemed so sincere. He noticed during the meeting that he even started to feel sorry for Mike who was unjustly accused. However, Rob knew from experience that anyone can be an abuser, even people who seem genuinely caring. He also knew from his training that most complaints about pastoral sexual misconduct are founded.

It also felt off to him, how often Mike talked about all his supporters. And his final words where he shared confidential information about the complainant was a red flag. Mike was trying to sow doubt about the complainant. Rob knew he would have to talk to Mike, reminding him that any confidential information he had about the complainant must not be shared with anyone.

Rob knew that he did not know the whole story. His job was to talk with Mike and support him, but it meant holding his narrative carefully, knowing that it could change in the coming weeks and months as the investigation unfolded.

Discussion

- Rob is being drawn into the role of judge in this case, how do you think he can avoid this trap?
- What is at stake if he does judge?
- What do you think is going on in Pastor Mike's mind in this case study?

Role-play

Have a conversation where Rob challenges Pastor Mike about why he shared about the mental health of the complainant. The facilitator of the training will play the role of Pastor Mike. This role-play will happen twice. The first time through, Pastor Mike will be apologetic about sharing that, and seem receptive to the idea that he shouldn't have shared that fact. In the second time through, Pastor Mike is going to go on the offensive, and talk about how he is under attack and that he is being treated unfairly by an unstable person.

Debrief the role-play

- Did you notice how your body felt as you went through this conversation?
- How did your body feel in the first conversation compared to the second?
- How might each conversation change how you feel about Pastor Mike?
- What if inside, Pastor Mike was having the same thoughts both times, but reading you, decided to react differently because he gauged which approach would work best with you?
- For those who took the role of Rob, what emotions were you experiencing?
- Do you feel you were effective in this conversation?

Closing check-in

- How was today's session for you?
- Can you name a significant learning?

Homework

Read **Part II c) Challenges**

Session 5

Self-evaluation

- What social or family support do I have as I take on volunteer work like this?
- How will I find peer support?
- How will friends/family react to me doing this work?
- Am I experiencing any major life transitions or crises?
- What is happening in other parts of my life that might hamper my effectiveness as a support person?

Debriefing the section of the manual

Part II c) Challenges

As you read this section, it might feel overwhelming, however remember that not everything will go wrong every time. This section was written to help you be realistic about what might happen, so you can look at possibilities with the person you are supporting.

- For those of you familiar with pastoral misconduct stories, have you seen any challenges like these play out?
- Which challenge was the most surprising to you?

Case study 4: Beryl, Diane and Pastor Alex's Family

Beryl is a support person for Diane who was abused by associate pastor Alex Smith twenty years earlier. At the time of the abuse, Diane went to the church council chairperson with her complaint. He had set up a mediation process which had been a negative experience for her. She had felt very uncomfortable being in the mediation session with Alex and the mediator, even though they each had a support person. Pastor Alex's support person was his wife, Rita. Diane brought along a girlfriend.

At that meeting, Pastor Alex had said, "I take full responsibility for my part in this, and I apologize for my weakness and my unfaithfulness to my dear wife Rita." The "Christian mediator," a pastor from a neighbouring church with no mediation training, allowed Rita to speak next.

"This affair has been devastating for me and the kids, especially our son with cerebral palsy. I am praying for a renewal of our marriage." She ended by saying, "I will forgive you, Diane, if you apologize for tempting Alex." Confused and upset, Diane went along with what they wanted her to do. The mediator concluded the meeting with a prayer, asking God to help everyone to forgive each other.

Since Pastor Alex had apologized, the only consequences the church council chair suggested was that Pastor Alex go for marriage counselling, which was part of his employee benefit plan. The church did not offer to pay for counselling for Diane.

Twenty years later, as churches did more education about pastoral sexual misconduct, Diane revisited what had happened, and was growing more and more angry. Now she felt more hurt by the church that had revictimized her, than by the original abuse. "They let me be blamed at that meeting, and they did nothing to help me," she explained to Beryl. "And then I heard that Pastor Alex had died of a heart attack!" In the obituary Beryl read that memorial donations should go to the "Pastor Alex Smith Scholarship" at a local Bible college. Some of Beryl's encounters with Pastor Alex had been in her dorm room when she was a student at that Bible college when Pastor Alex paid a "pastoral visit."

Beryl helped Diane to think about her options. After some research, Beryl was able to tell Diane that there had been a denominational misconduct policy at the time, which had since been updated. Diane had not originally even been told about the existence of that policy. Diane and Beryl discussed the risks and advantages of laying a complaint now.

With Beryl's help, Diane drafted a complaint letter to the denomination requesting that the complaint be re-opened. "I hope the church will learn that they can't treat people this way," Diane wrote. "They should be following their own policies." She outlined her four goals; to receive an apology from the church, to be compensated for her extensive counselling costs, that a proper investigation be done about Pastor Alex's misconduct, and that the scholarship be renamed.

Beryl advised Diane to send two identical letters by registered mail cc'ed to both the denomination and the church council chair…she didn't want the complaint to disappear this time. Because the church had acted so unprofessionally in its previous handling of the case, only Beryl's name as support person appeared on the letter, with Diane's identity protected.

When the denominational complaint intake person phoned Beryl, he expressed surprise to receive a complaint about a recently deceased pastor. But he agreed to get back to her as he figured out how to proceed. Two days later, on the church's Facebook page, Pastor Alex's wife Rita posted, "Thank you to all who are pouring out their tributes to my late husband, I can see how his witness lives on. I want to warn you that an unstable person is making ridiculous allegations about my husband, about things they say happened in the distant past. Let's stand together and resist this muckraking and focus on the mission of the church, together. That is what Alex would have wanted."

When Diane saw this, she called Beryl in tears. Beryl immediately called the denominational staff person, who apologized for the post, saying, "We did assign a support person to Alex's widow, Rita, when we forwarded her the letter. I don't know what happened. Do you still want to go through with this complaint?"

Discussion

- Describe the careful advice Beryl gave Diane about laying a complaint this time.
- Normally, a complainant would be told when the respondent (or their representative in this case where he is deceased) would be receiving the complaint. Would knowing that have made any difference to Diane and Beryl?
- How complicit do you think the church official is in the "church blog" event?
- As a support person for the survivor, how might this inform your actions going forward?
- What do you think the chances are of Diane being successful in this complaint in this denomination?
- Do you think this case is more or less complicated now that Pastor Alex is deceased?

Role-play

Beryl and Diane are meeting to debrief after the "church blog" fiasco. The facilitator of the training will take the role of the very upset Diane. Before you begin the conversation, brainstorm with the group what Beryl's goals might be for this conversation.

For a second role-play, the facilitator will play the role of Pastor Alex's widow, Rita, who is meeting with her support person for the first time, a few days after she wrote the church blog. One of the goals of the meeting is to inform Rita that she should not be publicly commenting on this case.

Debrief the role-plays

- What have you learned by seeing two role-plays, with two support people, on opposite sides of a pastoral misconduct case?
- For the person roleplaying Beryl, how did conducting a role-play with a very upset complainant impact you?
- As the support person talking to Rita, what was the dynamic going into the conversation, knowing that she had already acted inappropriately?
- What difference do you think that made in having a good first meeting and establishing rapport?

Closing check-in

- How was today's session for you?
- Can you name a significant learning?

Homework

Part III c) Challenges

Session 6

Self-evaluation

- How do I cope when people do not take my good advice?
- How do I deal with disappointment or rejection?
- What might being a support person in a misconduct case cost me?

Debriefing the section of the manual

Part III c) Challenges

This section can feel overwhelming, however remember that not everything will go wrong every time. This section was written to help you be realistic about what might happen, so you can look at possibilities with the person you are supporting.

For those of you familiar with pastoral misconduct stories, have you seen any challenges like these play out?

A common theme in many of these challenges is the respondent's denial that they are guilty. How do you think you would cope with that? How does viewing this as a journey on the road to self-discovery change your perspective?

Working with policies exercise

Divide into two groups: each group will look at a different policy. Have each person in the small group take one or two of the following building blocks of a good policy and skim the policy to see if they are there:

Things to look for:

- it is clearly written and understandable by the average person
- it is consistent with the values and mission of the faith community it represents

- a person is identified who receives the complaint
- the identity of the complainant is kept strictly confidential
- complainants are only interviewed once, by a trained investigator
- it is fair to the respondent, offering due process
- both complainant and respondent have a right to appeal
- it has the capacity to hold people who have offended accountable
- there are timelines for how long each step can take
- the respondent is put on administrative leave during the investigation

Here is an example of a policy that could be used, but you might choose policies that come from the denominational tradition of the people in the training (as long as they are not too long).

https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/24549/SM_Document.pdf (pp. 1-17)

When they have spent 30 minutes in groups, debrief this exercise, having each group explain to the other group about their policy:

- Reading from the perspective of respondent, what concerns you? what gives you hope?
- Reading from the perspective of complainant, what concerns you? what gives you hope?

Being able to read and assess policies is very important. This is a good thing to work on with a mentor or peer support.

Closing check-in

- How are you feeling about this training? What do you still need to learn?
- How will having a mentor or peer support help you as you undertake the role of support person?

Appendix A

Responding to suicidal thoughts

Survivors of sexual abuse by a church leader often experience times of depression as a result of the abuse. While confronting the person who harmed you may be empowering, there will likely be times when the whole experience is so overwhelming that the survivor feels they cannot continue.

Respondents to complaints of sexual misconduct can feel desperate and alone as they are forced to address their past, and especially as they think that others will find out. The whole experience can be so overwhelming, they consider ending their life.

A support person should be aware of the signs of suicidal ideation and have a basic understanding of how to respond. The first list below will help assess the lethality of suicidal desire, the second gives some guidelines on how to respond. Most communities have a suicide crisis line. Referral to this resource will help share the responsibility.

Assessment of lethality

When persons express a desire to kill themselves or appear to be suicidal, it is important to determine the seriousness of their desire. While all threats of suicide should be taken seriously, the following list of variables will assist you in determining how urgently assistance is needed.

General/history

If persons have any of the following characteristics, they are generally considered as being in a more serious situation and should therefore be considered a higher risk:

- gender: women attempt suicide, although men use more lethal means and complete it more often
- a history of previous psychiatric or serious medical problems
- alone at the moment or living alone
- previous suicide attempts
- experienced a recent significant loss; (for example, death, divorce, illness, job loss, abuse disclosure)
- experienced a suicide in their family or social network (this gives a sense of permission)

Plan/means for suicide

- Check to find out what their suicide plan is and if they have the means to meet it. Try to find out if they have planned how, when or where they would take their life by suicide, and if they have thought about the possibility of being found. Generally, the more detailed and thought out the plan is, the more serious the situation.
- What means has the person chosen? How long will it take for this means to harm or kill the individual? The more lethal the means, the more serious the situation. A continuum of lethality, with the last being most lethal is: slashing, overdosing, carbon monoxide, jumping from a height, hanging, motor vehicle collision, firearms.
- How available are the means? The more accessible the means, the more dangerous the situation, particularly with individuals who are very impulsive in their behaviour and decisions.

Fantasy regarding the suicide

- How does this person envision or fantasize their suicide?
- What is the person expecting to accomplish by suiciding? Primary or secondary gain? The more primary the anticipated results the more lethal the situation. For example, is the person attempting to gain something for themselves like "peace of mind," "atonement," or are they trying to manipulate the decision/behaviour of someone else?
- How do they think others will react to their action?
- How do they view their death?
- Again, the more involved and detailed the fantasy is, the more they have obviously thought about their plans and therefore the more likely they are to make the attempt.

Timing

As the timing of the plan becomes more immediate, the situation becomes more urgent. The timing ranges from plans in progress, to immediate (tonight or tomorrow) and to the future. If it is further in the future, assess when and what will be the turning point for the process to begin.

Drugs and alcohol involvement

The use of drugs or alcohol in a suicide attempt complicate the situation. They can make the situation more serious because they:

- reduce the individual's ability to be rational and reduce the individual's inhibitions.
- increase the possibility for accidents, because of errors in judgement (time, amount of drugs ingested, etc.)

The person may also pass out and suffocate on their own vomit. A person may intend to use the attempt to communicate their feelings of hopelessness and desperation. The use of alcohol and drugs may result in completing suicide even if the person did not mean to go through with it.

Suggestions for working with the suicidal person

The following suggestions will help you in working or intervening with someone who is suicidal:

- **Take the person's suicidal ideation seriously.** It is important not to discount or rationalize, thus missing their cry for help.
- **Be candid and direct in dealing with the situation.** Do not be afraid to discuss their intent, plans, method, timing.
- **Present yourself as stable and positive** in order to help bring stability and control to the person. Fear can immobilize you as a listener and as a helper.
- **Be yourself.** Take the risk of being personal.
- **Do not challenge or criticize their plans, feelings or who they are.** This may spur the person to activity. For some, talking about the suicidal desire is their last means of trying to communicate their desperation and pain.
- **Avoid moralizing.** Suicide is not a moral issue for the suicidal person; rather, it is the result of emotional stress and should be treated as such.
- **Normalize the person's feelings without discounting them:** Assure them that they are not "abnormal," alone, or "crazy."
- **Maintain personal contact** while assessing and intervening in the situation.
- **Help to establish clarity of the problem and explore alternatives and options which lead to hope,** dealing with the apparent hopelessness. Align yourself with the person's desire to live. (We will assume that in some way they wish to live.)
- **Assess and mobilize latent skills or resources available to them,** including significant others, current or past helpers, new referrals (counsellor, suicide crisis line) to reduce alienation and aloneness, and to create adaptive change.

- **Contract with persons that they will not hurt themselves for a certain amount of time.** This buys time and gives control and responsibility to the person. Do not pressure them to agree to a longer time than they are able to agree to.
- **You may also make a contract for other tasks** (for example, contacting the local crisis line), again turning over a maximum amount of responsibility to the person.
- **If a suicide plan is in progress try to reverse it or "buy time."** For example, try getting them to unload a loaded gun, flush pills away, induce vomiting, or try to keep the person walking if they have overdosed. Phone the police or local crisis mobilization team.
- **Be sensitive in meshing short- and long-term goals.** Short-term goals: survival, safety, security NOW at the expense of personal autonomy and responsibility. Long-term goals: turning responsibility over to them for decisions.
- **Know and refer to counselling agencies** and other appropriate resources for on-going help.
- **Remember that suicidal persons have high potential for turning others away from themselves.**
    - They may do so:
        - merely by what they are planning or talking of doing.
        - through intense feelings of anger depression, hopelessness.
        - through various acting out behaviours.
        - because of limited abilities to communicate, the threat or attempt of suicide might be their last or only mode of communication.

Appendix B

Resources

Web based resources:

Mennonite Central Committee Abuse Response and Prevention

Sacred Trust: Fostering Safe Space in Congregations by Carol Penner

FaithTrust Institute

Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver by Heather Block

Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused On-lineTraining Program

Books and articles:

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Appendix C

Reviewers of the manual

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Endnotes

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[4] Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 131-134.

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[10] Adapted from Eileen Schmitz, *Staying in Bounds: Straight Talk on Boundaries for Effective Ministry*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2010), 148.

[11] Patricia Liberty, "Victims/Survivors: The Healing Journey," in *When a Congregation is Betrayed*, 75.

[12] Thoburn & Baker, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention and Oversight*, (Arizona: Gentle Path Press, 2011), 84-85.

[13] Adapted from Marie M. Fortune, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook* (FaithTrust Institute, 2009), 23-24.

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[15] Liberty, "What's Ahead for the Victim?" in *When a Congregation is Betrayed*, 187-190.

[16] See "Abuse by a Church Leader," in Mark Yantzi, *Sexual Offending and Restoration*, (Waterloo: Herald Press, 1998), 81-96.

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[18] Marie Fortune & James Poling, "Calling to Accountability: The Church's Response to Abusers," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, edited by Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 451-63.

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[20] Matthew Linden, "Managing Situations That Might Never Be Good," *When a Congregation is Betrayed*, 172.

[21] Adapted from John D. Vogelsang, "From Denial to Hope: A Systemic Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse" *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 32, No. 3 (Fall 1993), 205-206.

[22] Liberty, "What's Ahead for the Wider Church?" *When a Congregation is Betrayed*, 191.

[23] Glenndy Sculley, "Judicatory Leaders: A Resource for Healing," *When a Congregation is Betrayed*, 103.

[24] Rachel Denhollander, in *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*, 161.

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