

Reporting Your Safeguarding Concern to RLSS

The ethos of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is rooted in compassion, respect, and a deep commitment to supporting those who have experienced abuse within Religious contexts. We engage with individuals in a way that prioritises empathy and care, ensuring they are kept informed at every stage of how their case is being progressed.

We will always explain how we can offer guidance and support, while being clear about the boundaries of confidentiality. In situations where there may be an ongoing risk to others, RLSS may need to share information - only on a strictly need-to-know basis - to help protect others from harm.

We are also legally required to report abuse to the appropriate statutory agencies. However, this can often be done without disclosing the personal details of the individual making the safeguarding disclosure, unless there is a safeguarding imperative to do so.

From the outset, RLSS takes an honest and transparent approach. We will clearly outline the options available, including any care and support we can offer. Our aim is to build a relationship of trust, empowering individuals to make informed choices that feel right for them - based on facts, sound advice, and a commitment to their wellbeing.

When making contact with a person disclosing clerical abuse, RLSS will first ask whether they have a preference for the gender of the safeguarding officer they wish to engage with, and how that engagement should take place - by phone, online, email, or another method.

- Once contact is established with an RLSS safeguarding officer, a basic account of what has occurred can be obtained. If the disclosure indicates a crime, RLSS will refer the matter to the police. If the concern does not constitute a crime but requires the attention of social services, RLSS will make that referral. These referrals can often be made while maintaining the anonymity of the person affected.
- RLSS will also consider any ongoing or existing risk factors when making statutory referrals.
- Once a disclosure has been received and its contents reviewed, the available options will be explained. The individual can then decide which pathway they wish to follow. There are three main pathways available:
 - Engagement with the criminal justice system or statutory agencies
 - Pursuing a case through the civil courts, which may require the services of a solicitor
 - Investigation by RLSS (this can only proceed if there is no active police investigation)

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- A key question we ask is how the individual would like their case to be resolved. We recognise that each person is unique and may have different needs and preferences.
- Where appropriate and with consent, RLSS may refer individuals to specialist support or therapeutic services, such as First Light.
- RLSS will also seek to establish whether the abuse has been previously reported.
- We aim to agree a schedule for contact and updates, and we will make every effort to adhere to that agreement.
- An RLSS safeguarding investigation will typically involve contacting the senior leadership of the relevant Religious Life Group (RLG) and informing them of the concerns raised. We will ensure that appropriate risk management measures are put in place regarding the person accused of causing harm, taking into account the nature and seriousness of the concern. These measures will usually remain in place throughout the investigation.
- Once the RLSS investigation is complete, a report containing our findings and recommendations is produced.
- The conclusions of the investigation report are shared with the individual who made the disclosure, along with an explanation of the implications for all parties involved.
- It is important to note that RLSS is not a statutory agency. We can advise and make recommendations to RLGs, but we do not have the authority to direct or compel. In the vast majority of cases, RLGs comply with our recommendations and cooperate fully with the investigation process.
- Although RLSS cannot become involved in civil compensation claims, we can signpost individuals to specialist solicitors who offer the necessary expertise.
- As a result of our engagement with RLGs, individuals have received apologies that are specific and focused on the harm experienced. Where appropriate and requested, RLGs may also provide funding for specialist counselling.
- We welcome feedback from those we support and are always seeking opportunities to learn and improve the service we provide.