



2.2A GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORT PERSON

Every complainant who has an allegation against church personnel should be offered access to an appropriate Support Person (appointed by the Bishop) as part of the case management process. The role of the Support Person is to ensure that the complainant is appropriately supported throughout the process of disclosure and potentially after. If the complainant is a child, then support will be offered to the child and to their parent(s)/carer(s).

The role of the Support Person is to:

- Keep the complainant informed of the process and progress of the case (where there is a criminal investigation this responsibility may be fulfilled by the PSNI/ Gardaí, and if the Gateway Team/Tusla are involved they may also fulfil this role).
- Ensure that pastoral care and support is provided to the complainant and their family if they wish.
- Help the complainant identify and access counselling and support.
- Keep a record of any meetings or contact they have with the complainant, and pass on relevant information to the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel, as appropriate.

The Support Person is not a counsellor for the complainant and should not act in that role.

The Support Person does not manage the case file and will not have access to it.

It is the prerogative of the complainant whether they wish to accept the assistance of a Support Person. If a complainant chooses not to accept a Support Person that is offered by the Diocese, the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel should consider how the support needs and communication with the complainant are met.

The frequency of contact/meetings should be dictated by the complainant, but the Support Person needs to initiate contact at least once a year during the case management process, unless the complainant states that they do not want any further contact. This is to ensure that the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel continues to make every effort to offer a supportive and pastoral response to complainants.

Records should be retained and stored in the diocesan office as part of the case file. The following should be used as a guide to information that must be recorded:

- The date and time the meetings took place,
- Any relevant child safeguarding issues that have arisen,
- If the complainant has knowledge of a crime,
- If the complainant is suffering from a mental health condition or is suicidal. If the person is at risk of harming themselves this should be dealt with as an emergency requiring immediate action,
- Any requests for support or representations that the complainant wishes to make to the Bishop.



Regular meetings between the Support Person and the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel should be held to enable the Panel to keep up to date with the needs and requests of the complainant, and to advise the Bishop of any requests for support. These meetings should incorporate any requests for supervision, in order to allow the Support Person to receive feedback on their role.

Training for Support People will be provided by the RCB Safeguarding Team and should form part of the training strategy written by the Diocesan Support Team (**Guidance 1.5C**).

