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## **Clergy who are victims of Domestic Abuse**

If the partner of an ordained person, or an ordained person, discloses abuse, they must be treated in exactly the same way as any other victim. (See Responding to Victims/Survivors of abuse). Clergy and clergy spouses must have the same access to support and resources as others who are experiencing domestic abuse.

If a member of the clergy or clergy partner who lives in church housing has decided to leave the relationship, they are likely to need alternative housing. Every Diocesan Bishop is advised to appoint a Bishop’s Visitor for the victim/survivor of abuse, be they a member of the clergy or clergy spouse (see below). They may also consider appointing someone to offer pastoral support to an alleged perpetrator if they are a member of the clergy.

Clergy may see marital breakdown as a failure of their ordination vows and therefore be particularly vulnerable to staying in abusive relationships for many years. In such situations, Dioceses should not put fear of scandal above the safety of vulnerable people. Clergy should expect to be believed by their Bishop when disclosing abuse, and supported should they wish to separate or divorce. An assessment should also be made of the likely risk to any children.

At a most basic level, the survivor and family should be offered all reasonable steps to keep safe should they separate from the perpetrator (for example changing locks on the clergy housing). Clergy who are survivors should not be threatened with losing their post or housing in the event of divorce as this could create intolerable stress for the family and lead to people staying in dangerous situations. In such cases, the Church is compounding the abuse and colluding with the perpetrator. Counselling should be made available if requested for the survivor and any children.

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### **1** **Bishops’ Visitors**

The role of a visitor is to:

* Support the victim/survivor of abuse be they a member of the clergy or clergy spouse at the time of the breakdown of the marriage, and for as long as possible after, as the victim/spouse needs;
* Listen to, give information and represent the needs of the victim/survivor in the subsequent church and statutory enquiries, and help them think about next steps;
* Identify with the victim/survivor any additional pastoral needs e.g. therapeutic or other needs they have, and suggest how these may be best met, seeking advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) as required, including recommendations for payment of any required counselling;
* Record meetings or contact they have with the victim/survivor and passing on relevant information to the DSA as appropriate.

The visitor has a duty to disclose so as not to affect any investigation; it is important to recognise and to acknowledge that where others may still be at risk statutory agencies may need to be informed.

Both male and female visitors need to be available to accommodate individual needs and choice.

The frequency of contact between the visitor and the survivor needs to be agreed and under constant review in liaison with the survivor, the Bishop and the DSA. While in some cases it might be right for the visitor to remain in contact, there are also times when the individual should be referred to another person for counselling or other therapeutic care. The frequency and time limit of these sessions should be agreed between the survivor, Bishop and DSA. The question of whether the visitor also remains in touch will require careful thought, consultation and agreement with the Bishop and DSA. At all times it needs to be clear who is responsible for what.

#### Experience and Skills

The key attributes of the visitor will be:

* + Ability to listen;
  + Ability to manage sensitive and difficult information;
  + Ability to identify when a person may require more specialist support;
  + Capacity to understand issues of confidentiality;
  + Awareness and experience of supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse;
  + Awareness of how the Church works.

#### 2 Training

The visitors will need domestic abuse training and should attend the Diocesan run Church of England Specialist (S3) Module “Domestic Abuse”.

GKJ/DSA Taken from the Church of England Guidance:  **Responding Well to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Practice Guidance March 2017**