



This is a guide for anyone considering reporting abuse, assault, or misconduct to a church, diocese, school, seminary, or organization associated with the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC). For ACC churches, misconduct reports are handled at the level of the diocese. Every diocese has its own bishop and its own misconduct policy. These policies can generally be found on the diocese’s websites - there is [a list of dioceses, bishops, and websites here](#). For Anglican schools, seminaries, and other institutions, check their websites.

These recommendations are not tailored for any specific diocese or institution. They are also not legal advice and no substitute for professional counsel or therapy. If you have recently experienced sexual violence or need immediate assistance, [click here](#).

1. It is noble to consider safeguarding others by making a complaint. However, just as airlines tell you to put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others, we urge you to **prioritize your own safety and capacities**. People have worked and continue to work to make the church safer, but in some times and places, and with certain church leaders, it may not be safe for you to share your story. Whether you report or not is your choice, and you are always free to change your mind later. As the [Restored Voices Collective](#) puts it, “It often takes substantial time and reflection to identify, understand, and process abuse.” There is no shame in waiting as long as it takes for you to be ready and equipped to take action.
2. **Abuse can take many forms.** Most institutions focus on clergy sexual abuse, which is when someone in a ministerial role engages in sexual contact or sexualized behaviour with a congregant. (For more on clergy sexual abuse, see [this resource by the FaithTrust Institute](#).) Abuse by clergy is always an abuse of power, but lay people can also have power in the church and abuse it. Other forms of abuse can include blackmail, coercion, destruction of property, emotional manipulation, grooming, intimidation, intimate partner violence, isolation from family and friends, physical violence, spiritual manipulation, threats, and verbal abuse. Finally, because [abusers often engage in DARVO](#), it is important to remember that setting boundaries to protect yourself and others, calling out bad behaviour, and reporting misconduct are not forms of abuse.

3. If you are considering making a report, having **one or more trusted supporters is essential**. The ideal supporter is someone who you can trust to be devoted to your welfare with no conflicts of interest. A good supporter will not share details of your story without your explicit permission, and they will support your decisions regardless of whether you engage the church or leave it entirely. If you are not sure who can support you, we recommend starting with a trusted friend or professional from a different church or from a non-church background. Unfortunately, having ties to the same church community as a perpetrator can create conflicts of interest for even the most well-intentioned.
4. Another good practice is to **start a diary or journal**. When you have a meeting, phone call, or significant conversation about your experiences, write down the date, location, and people present in a secure notebook or an app on your phone. Notes on content are also helpful, but even just basic logistical details can be an important reference. If you have the capacity to do so, you may want to also write something when you process or remember something significant about your experiences. A good therapist can also help you identify, understand, and process your experiences.
5. Regardless of whether a formal reporting process has started, we recommend that you **never discuss misconduct with any church leaders** (archdeacons, bishops, canon pastors) **or their agents** (consultants, investigators, lawyers, mediators) **without having a trusted supporter present**. If a meeting or phone call is proposed, ask if your supporter can attend and take notes. If they are not available, ask if you can record the meeting. If your requests are refused, do not agree to a conversation. If there are people at a meeting you are not expecting, walk out. If you receive an unsolicited phone call about your case, hang up. It's basic courtesy to plan meetings in advance with all participants informed, and any attempt to surprise you or isolate you from your supporters is a major warning sign.
6. **Your privacy and protection from reprisals is vital**. Before you tell any part of your story to a church leader or their agents, ask them about confidentiality. Some questions you may want to ask: “Will any information I provide be shared with other people? If so, who are these other people, and what promises of confidentiality have they made? Will you take notes during or after our meeting, and can I review them before anyone else sees them? Will you request and receive my explicit permission before sharing anything with the perpetrator? Will an investigation result in a report, and will I receive a copy of the report?” If possible, ask for all of these assurances in writing, and if you or your supporters' questions about your privacy are not answered to your satisfaction, cancel the meeting.

7. **Remember that confidentiality is not symmetrical.** It is always important to protect the privacy of other survivors, and there may be legal reasons to be careful about what you say publicly, but we see no legitimate reason for survivors to be asked to protect church leaders or their agents. In general, a church leader who demands that a survivor keep their actions, decisions, or words secret is abusing their power. Indeed, secrecy and enforced silence are two of the most common ways to protect abusers from facing accountability.
8. **Do not sign contracts, covenants, or any written documents without having plenty of time to review them** with your supporters and ideally a lawyer. Non-disclosure and non-disparagement agreements should be examined with particular caution; you are always free to show such agreements to a lawyer, even if you are told not to. Legal advice can become expensive, but sometimes even just a brief consultation can be invaluable. Ultimately, what you sign is entirely your decision. If you are in any way uncomfortable or feel like you are being pressured to sign something, consider walking away.
9. **Be aware that “independent” investigators and third parties are often not impartial.** As [attorney Boz Tchividjian explains](#), everything depends on the contract, which is determined by whoever is paying the bills. Church leaders often distort investigations to protect themselves, sometimes unintentionally. If a consultant, investigator, or mediator has already been hired, ask for a copy of their contract. If the church is considering hiring an agent or firm, ask if you and your supporters can have input into who is hired and under what conditions. Finally, if a third-party investigator is involved, ask if they will write a report, and if you will receive a copy of it. Ask for this assurance in writing, and if it is not forthcoming, consider walking away.
10. Giving survivors real input into misconduct investigations and processes is a best practice, but most institutions are not ready for this. Still, ask for everything you can. We believe that what makes or breaks church policies is the character of the leaders tasked with implementing them, and especially **their willingness to relinquish control**. According to [theologian Scot McKnight](#), “A Christoform response to allegations is one in which the church surrenders for the good of the other (the Survivor). More often than not power is where it all breaks down: the priest-led church, or anyone making these decisions, doesn’t want to surrender power.” Therefore, how a church leader responds to your requests is an excellent predictor of whether they will seek true justice or just self-protection.



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