

After sexual harm involving a trusted person, those directly affected, those around them, and everyone within a community may experience a range of reactions which are entirely normal and likely to fade.

You may notice:

- A deep sense of betrayal
- Shock and Disbelief: "This can't be true"
- Not wanting to be reminded of the event
- Emotional numbing, shame and silence
- Fatigue, tiredness & restlessness
- Anxiety, anger, sadness, or grief
- Change of outlook on life
- Increased need for information
- Fear about community safety

What can you do to help yourself

You may find some of the following helpful in managing distress after the event.

- Be gentle with yourself, your reactions are understandable.
- Limit exposure to distressing news or conversations.
- Spend time with people who feel safe and supportive
- Do things that usually bring comfort or calm
- Try to structure your day to provide some routine and purpose.
- Try simple grounding breathing techniques, there are many online if you have access.
- Start your day by writing down 3 things you feel grateful for.
- Take regular exercise indoors or outdoors if it feels safe.
- Seek support if things feel overwhelming or are not improving

Additional Support is Available

If you continue to experience distress, seeking support such as psychological first aid can be a helpful first step.

FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES DIAL 999

Diocesan Office

Call **0141 847 6130** and ask for Marianne

GP Practice

Contact your GP or NHS 24 Mental Health Hub:

Call **111** anytime (24/7) to speak with a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner

Distress Brief Intervention

Through a **111** call, you can be offered non-clinical support service for people in emotional pain.

Breathing Space

Call **0800 83 85 87** for a free, confidential listening service.

If this has brought up difficult feelings or memories for you, you are not alone, and support is available.

Rape Crisis Helpline 08088 01 03 02

Abused Men in Scotland 03300 949 395

Victim Support Scotland 0800 160 1985

Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor 07939 486290



Supporting People and Communities Affected by Sexual Harm

You may find this leaflet helpful if you are connected to a community affected by sexual harm, even if the harm did not happen to you directly.



Epione
Training and Consultancy

About This Leaflet

This leaflet has been produced by the Diocese of Paisley in partnership with Epione Consultants, a specialist organisation offering dedicated support for anyone affected by the issues discussed.

This leaflet offers guidance on how people may feel sexual harm occurs within the community.

People can experience a range of emotional and physical responses. What feels distressing for one person may not feel the same for another.

It is important to recognise your own reactions and understand that they are valid. Support is available.

At times, these responses may feel intense, confusing, or unfamiliar. With the right support, they can become more manageable over time.

Thinking About Our Family

Children can be affected by sexual harm in the community, even if they have not experienced it directly.

They may feel confused, frightened, or unsettled. These are natural responses.

You may notice:

- Increased worry, fear, or clinginess (seeking safety)
- Changes in sleep, including nightmares (difficulty settling)
- Difficulty concentrating (feeling overwhelmed)
- Becoming quieter or more withdrawn (reduced connection)
- Becoming more irritable or easily upset (heightened distress)
- Avoiding certain people, places, or conversations (trying to feel safe)
- Physical complaints such as headaches or stomach aches (stress responses)

Children benefit from feeling safe, supported, and connected. Calm, consistent care and reassurance can help them feel more settled over time.

How To Support A Child

- Keep routines consistent
- Offer reassurance and safety
- Let them talk at their own pace
- Listen calmly and believe them
- Seek support if needed

A Word On Impact And Loss

When sexual harm occurs in a community, it can be deeply distressing — even if you were not directly involved.

You may experience a range of emotions, such as shock, anger, sadness, confusion, or disbelief. For some, there may also be a sense of loss, loss of trust, safety, or connection within the community.

These reactions are understandable. People respond in different ways, and there is no right or wrong way to feel.

It can help to talk to someone you trust.

You do not have to manage this alone.

Ways To Express How You Are Feeling

- Write down your thoughts or try journalling (at your own pace)
- Use art, music, or creative activities (non-verbal expression)
- Spend time in safe, familiar places (sense of safety)
- Move your body gently (e.g. walking) (release tension)
- Stay connected and share how you feel with supportive people (reduce isolation)
- Allow yourself to feel — there is no right or wrong way (validation)