

Salesian Pastoral Support Program
For Victims of Sexual Abuse and Boundary Violations
Salesians of Don Bosco West
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The Salesians of Don Bosco recognize that sexual misconduct by its members has devastating consequences for victims and their families. We are aware of the effects of this tragic behavior and have developed a steadfast commitment to helping those affected. This brochure is intended to provide you basic information about (1) how the Salesians of Don Bosco define child sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships, (2) what its procedures are for responding to complaints of sexual abuse or sexually inappropriate behavior, and (3) to whom those subjected to sexual misconduct can turn for help.

Child Sexual Abuse: A Definition

Sexual abuse is any unwanted touch or verbal harassment of a sexual nature that is directed to a child or adolescent less than 18 years of age. Abusive behaviors can lie on a continuum from sexual looks and innuendo on the one end, to rubbing backs, legs and other body parts, all the way to touching genitals and intercourse or sodomy. Generally the more extreme or obvious physical forms of sexual abuse are the easiest to identify (the touching of genitals and intercourse/sodomy). But sexual abuse can occur in more subtle forms. This is sometimes referred to in the field as grooming; a precursor to the more obvious forms of sexual assault. These more subtle forms include sexual comments, touching of non-genital areas and exposing a child to pornography or the sexual behaviors of others. Many adults question whether sexual experiences from the past were in fact were ***sexual abuse***. They are frequently looking back many years, even decades, and therefore their memory may not be completely clear. Another reason for this confusion, however, is that many perpetrators use their power, rationalization and language skills to manipulate and convince their victims not to listen to their own sense of right and wrong. If you have any concern about whether or

not you were a victim of sexual abuse, our ***Mental Health Advisor*** can help you figure that out.

The Mental Health Advisor

To ensure that we handle each instance promptly, thoroughly, and compassionately, the Salesians of Don Bosco have hired a *Mental Health Advisor (MHA)* who is skilled in the area of child sexual abuse. The *Mental Health Advisor* is a licensed mental health professional who will listen to, understand, and offer help, including referral for appropriate psychological counseling to those affected by Salesian member misconduct. The *Mental Health Advisor* may be the person whom you will talk to upon your first contact with the Salesians of Don Bosco. The *Mental Health Advisor* is a consultant, rather than an employee, so he will call you from his/her private office, rather than from the Salesian offices. The *Mental Health Advisor* does not provide mental health services or therapy to victims of sexual abuse; instead, the *Mental Health Advisor* will help facilitate counseling or therapy services for you in your community. The person you see for actual therapy is completely your choice. However, the *Mental Health Advisor* will talk with you about your experiences initially and explain to you the Salesians of Don Bosco's response to victims of sexual abuse. If you prefer to speak with the Provincial (the head of the Salesian Western Province) about your experiences, the *Mental Health Advisor* can arrange that for you. The *Mental Health Advisor* is your liaison to the Salesians of Don Bosco West, so if you have any questions, please feel free to contact him.

The Reporting Process

What happens once you decide you were a victim of sexual abuse by a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco or you are wondering if you were a victim of sexual abuse? You can contact the Salesians of Don Bosco by letter, telephone or fax explaining your situation. The Salesians of Don Bosco West will respond to all allegations of sexual misconduct with great care.

The *Mental Health Advisor* will contact you by telephone to discuss your mental health needs. If you desire, the *Mental Health Advisor* will help you find a counselor in your

area that specializes in working with victims of sexual abuse. The Salesians of Don Bosco will pay for those services (up to \$10,000.00). Some individuals who were victims of sexual abuse contact the Salesians of Don Bosco requesting a monetary settlement for their pain and suffering and/or medical expenses they incurred as a result of those abusive experiences. Unfortunately, the *Salesian Pastoral Assistance Program* is not the appropriate mechanism for resolving legal matters. You would need to contact an attorney to resolve any claim of damages.

What happens to the person who abused me?

If the person who perpetrated the abuse is still a member of the Salesian congregation, the Provincial will remove the member from public ministry until the *Review Board*, which is charged with the responsibility of determining the credibility of the accusation, resolves the matter. Removing the accused member from public ministry helps to protect other children from potential victimization. If the Review Board finds the accusation credible, the member will be formally restricted (not permitted to be involved in public ministry; not be allowed to function publicly as a priest or a deacon, including public celebration of the sacraments; may not wear clerical or distinctive religious attire publicly or use ecclesiastical titles in public communications.) and places the individual on an safety plan (risk reduction strategies) that that is monitored monthly (or more often if necessary) and reviewed each year by the Review Board.

The Salesian Review Board

The *Review Board* consists of members of the community skilled in the area of child abuse, who will investigate all accusations of sexual maltreatment by Salesians of Don Bosco. The *Review Board* collects all the necessary information that will help them determine whether or not an accusation is credible. This includes, but is not limited to: a statement by the victim, investigator interview of the victim and alleged perpetrator, a response by the member to the accusation, psychological evaluation and polygraph of the alleged perpetrator, court documents, past accusations, witness interviews, etc. The possible findings of the *Review Board* are 1) ***Credible***, 2) ***Not Credible*** or 3) ***Unable to Determine***. A ***Credible*** finding means that based on the information

provided, the *Review Board* determined that there is a strong likelihood that the events described by the victim occurred. It is not the same as guilty finding in a court of law, but an indication that the *Review Board* generally believes that the alleged events took place. A **Not Credible** finding means that after reviewing all the available information, the *Review Board* did not believe the events took place as stated. An **Unable to Determine** finding does not necessarily mean that the *Review Board* didn't believe the victim, it just may mean there was not enough information provided to come to a **Credible** or **Not Credible** conclusion. This lack of information may include, but not be limited to, the lack of a victim interview by investigator, a deceased or otherwise unavailable perpetrator, an invalid polygraph or lack of details or memory by the victim. The *Review Board* does everything it can do to make a determination in each and every case.

What about if the perpetrator is deceased or no longer a Salesian?

That doesn't necessarily mean that the *Review Board* cannot reach a "Credible" determination. In fact, by means of a thorough interview with the victim, as well as other documents, and prior complaints against the member, the *Review Board* has found many accusations "*Credible*." Don't forget, an "*Unable to Determine*" finding does not mean that the *Review Board* didn't believe you; it just means that there wasn't enough information for them to reach a decision. In many cases, the Provincial still approves the continuation of the therapy services the victim was receiving. If the perpetrator is working within another religious organization, the *Review Board* will notify that organization in an effort to protect other children.

Investigator Interview

An important part of the investigation and determination process is the victim's personal statement and investigator interview. You will be asked to participate in the process by writing to the *Review Board* about your experience and/or agreeing to meet with an investigator skilled in interviewing victims of child sexual abuse. It is purely optional whether or not you participate in this process. However, if you refuse to be interviewed, and the *Review Board* finds your accusation *Not Credible*, you will not

receive further mental health services. If the *Review Board* finds the accusation, *Unable to Determine*, the Provincial will decide whether or not mental health services will continue. Whether or not the victim agreed to be interviewed by the board investigator will be a factor in this decision. Although it may seem a bit daunting to talk with an investigator, and participate in the *Review Board* investigation process, many victims have expressed that they found the Review Board's determination validating and that was ultimately very helpful in their healing process.

The Review Board Outcome

What happens if my accusation is determined by the *Review Board* to be “*Credible?*”

You will receive a letter or phone call (which ever you prefer) from the Provincial informing you of the Review Board's decision. The Provincial will offer to meet with you in person. If you have already started receiving counseling services, that will continue until you have reached the monetary limit described above.

What happens if my accusation is determined by the *Review Board* to be “*Not Credible?*”

You will receive a letter or phone call (which ever you prefer) from the Provincial informing you of the Review Board's decision. If you have already started receiving counseling services, you will be given a short period of time (2-4 session) to bring your work with the therapist to a conclusion.

What happens if my accusation is determined by the *Review Board* to be “*Unable to Determine?*”

You will receive a letter or phone call (which ever you prefer) from the Provincial informing you of the Review Board's decision. If you have already started receiving counseling services, the Provincial will make a decision about whether or not the counseling services will continue. If the decision is to stop the counseling services, you will be given a short period of time (2-4 sessions) to bring your work with the therapist to

a conclusion.

Prevention

The Salesians of Don Bosco -West realize that coming forward and talking about your experiences takes a great deal of strength and courage. In addition to establishing procedures for responding to sexual abuse, the Salesians of Don Bosco West have undertaken a series of measures to prevent future incidents of abuse. These include requiring all new members seminarians and novices to submit to an in-depth psychological and psycho-sexual evaluation before they enter formation (the formal training process to becoming a Salesian), as well as a provision for continuing education programs for members about issues of sexuality and personal conduct.

Conclusion

It is our firm belief that religious must maintain appropriate boundaries with laypersons in order to preserve the integrity of the ministerial relationship. Moreover, we call upon those with knowledge of a member's inappropriate behavior, whether past or present, to come forward with this information so that innocent victims may be spared from further harm. In short, we ask everyone to join with us to protect the safety of children, women, and men, and with firm determination, to promote healing where there is pain.