



People with Disability Australia

Advocate Toolkit

Supporting people with disability affected
by the Royal Commission into Institutional
Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

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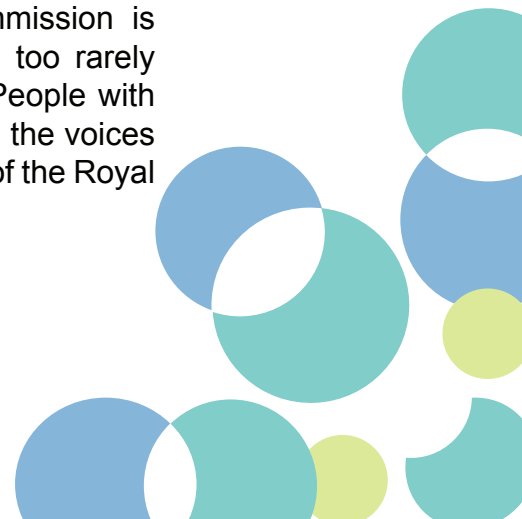
We would like to acknowledge the work of Adults Surviving Child Abuse and Yarrow Place, which informed the development of this Toolkit.

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People with Disability Australia (PWDA) has put together this Advocate Toolkit to assist those who are advocating for or supporting a person with disability who is affected by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse (the Royal Commission).

The Toolkit is made up of two parts. The first part provides an overview of the Royal Commission processes, detailing each step, and highlighting the elements that might be especially significant for a person with disability. The second part focuses on the emotional impacts of trauma and vicarious trauma, assisting those supporting or advocating for people with disability to navigate this complex terrain.

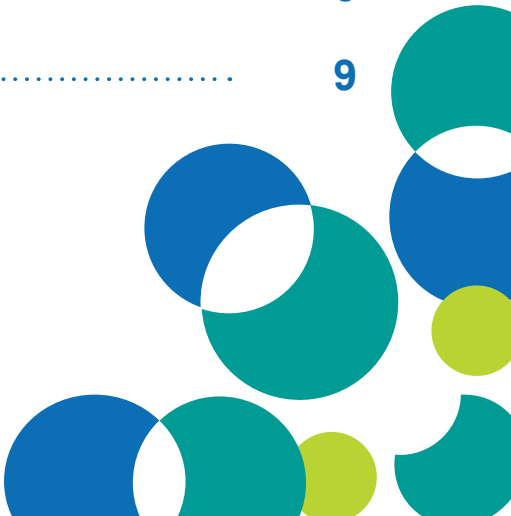
The Advocate Toolkit draws on our individual advocates' experiences in advocating for people with disability who are participating in the Royal Commission. It is also informed by contemporary expertise in trauma-informed support. It will supplement the existing expertise and care of formal and informal advocates and supporters across Australia to support people with disability who have been affected by child sexual abuse in an institutional setting. The Royal Commission is uniquely designed to ensure that those who have too rarely been heard have the chance to share their story. People with Disability Australia hopes that this Toolkit will enable the voices of people with disability to become a significant part of the Royal Commission.



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1

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) was established at the end of 2012.

It was created to examine child sexual abuse in institutions and to look into how and why it occurs. The Royal Commission does this by considering ways in which institutions have failed to protect children, and how they have responded to reports of child sex abuse.

Ultimately, the Royal Commission is interested in how to change institutions to prevent future child sex abuse. The failures of institutions must be recognised to establish better policies and practices for the future. To do this, systemic issues that can lead to the inappropriate response of institutions to child sex abuse must be addressed. This may include changes to policy and legislation, as well as administrative or structural reforms.

What is an institution?


These can include:

In its work, the Royal Commission addresses the sexual abuse of children within a wide range of institutions.

These institutions can be mainstream, such as:

- Schools
- Sports Clubs
- Religious Organisations
- Out-of-home Care
- Government Agencies

However, the Royal Commission is also interested in the different types of institutions that children with disability often experience.

- 
- » Residential institutions
 - » Boarding houses
 - » Group homes
 - » Day centres
 - » Recreation programs
 - » Special schools, boarding schools and school buses
 - » Respite care services
 - » Hospitals
 - » Mental health facilities
 - » Juvenile justice facilities
 - » Disability services

About PWDA's Disability Support for the Royal Commission Project

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. We are a cross-disability organisation, and represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability. PWDA's primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability.

We have been funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services to support people with disability affected by the Royal Commission, and to support the work of the Royal Commission. PWDA are able to help children, young people and adults with disability to participate in the Royal Commission.

We do this in a few key ways, including:

- » Providing individual advocacy support to people with disability
- » Presenting training sessions on sexual assault
- » Considering systemic barriers and policy issues that should be addressed by the Royal Commission
- » Conducting research into how to make children's services safer for children with disability

Please visit our website for more information about PWDA's Disability Support for the Royal Commission Project:

<http://rcsupport.pwd.org.au>

Who can come forward?

People who have experienced child sexual abuse in institutions can come forward to contact the Royal Commission. These people can tell their story and give details about their experiences in institutions.

If the person you're supporting/advocating for has not directly experienced institutional child sexual abuse, they can still provide information to the Royal Commission. For instance, if they witnessed other children with disability being sexually abused in institutions, they can still tell the Royal Commission about it.

If you are a staff or ex-staff member, or have some other association with an institution, and know that child sexual abuse occurred in that setting, you can also provide information to the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission has far-reaching powers meaning that they can make arrangements which can protect your confidentiality.

PWDA can help to ensure that whistleblowers and witnesses are protected when telling these stories.

Contact PWDA on (02) 9370 3100 or pwd@pwd.org.au to make arrangements which will maintain your confidentiality when sharing your story with the Royal Commission.

The processes of the Royal Commission

Deciding to participate in the Royal Commission

It is important that you are aware of the Royal Commission and the work that it is doing. You are an important part of ensuring that everyone in the disability sector knows about the Royal Commission and is aware of the supports available if they have a story that is relevant to the Royal Commission's work.

Be aware that the person you're currently supporting/advocating for may be interested in the Royal Commission, may feel affected by its work, or may want to participate in its processes. PWDA encourages you to tell the person you're supporting/advocating for that the Royal Commission is going on, and that it may be of interest to them.



Image: The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The first important step is helping the person you're supporting/advocating for decide whether they want to participate in the Royal Commission. This is their own decision to make, yet they may need support in determining what they would like to get out of the experience, and how to best achieve this.

The person you're supporting/advocating for may like to consider the following questions:

- » **What are the potential benefits of engaging with the Royal Commission?**
- » **What are the potential negatives of engaging with the Royal Commission?**
- » **Does the abuse I experienced fit within what the Royal Commission is looking into?**

In supporting someone to decide whether to participate in the Royal Commission, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

- » What can be done to increase the benefits for the person I'm supporting/advocating for?
- » What can be done to minimise or eliminate any negative experiences for the person I'm supporting/advocating for?
- » What does the person I'm supporting/advocating for want to get out of participating in the Royal Commission?
- » How would the person I'm supporting/advocating for like to participate in the Royal Commission?
- » What information do I need to make this process as easy as possible for the person I'm supporting/advocating for?
- » How can I help the person I'm supporting/advocating for feel safe and supported through the Royal Commission?
- » Does anyone else need to be involved in supporting the person through this process? (E.g. counsellor, friend, partner, family member, psychiatrist, speech pathologist, police, child protection agency, lawyer etc.)

In deciding whether to engage with the Royal Commission, it is useful to have an understanding of the process and different options available.

It is important to remember that the Royal Commission is not a criminal court, and participating in its processes will not and cannot result in the conviction of the perpetrator of abuse. Although the Royal Commission may describe their story as a 'case,' it is important that the person you're supporting/advocating for understands that this is not a criminal matter. However, the Royal Commission does make referrals to the police when appropriate or necessary.

Advocates are obliged by mandatory reporting principles to report to the authorities any current situations where a child may be at risk of harm. This may be important to highlight and discuss with a new client.

The person you're supporting/advocating for may need to manage their expectations about the outcomes of participating in the Royal Commission. Having a clear idea of what the Royal Commission is capable of doing and what the likely outcomes are for the person you're supporting/advocating for may help manage these expectations.

The questions on pages 5 and 6 are intended to give you and the person you're supporting/advocating for a clearer understanding of what to expect from the Royal Commission. Discussing these questions with the person you're supporting/advocating for is a good way to ensure that you are both on the same page regarding the expected and desired outcomes of participating in the Royal Commission.

Alternatively, this discussion may lead to the realisation that the person you're supporting/advocating for would like to pursue a different type of redress. For more information about other options for redress, see page 24.

Although the Royal Commission is not a criminal court, the person you're supporting/advocating for may still be concerned about how their participation may influence any current legal cases regarding their experiences of abuse.

For these kinds of legal queries, the Royal Commission established knowmore, an independent and free legal advice service, available specifically to people engaging with the Royal Commission.

If the person you're supporting/advocating for wants any legal advice or information, knowmore can be contacted on 1800 605 762.

Additionally, the Royal Commission does not adhere to a statute of limitations. This means that it will hear stories of institutional child sex abuse that may have occurred many decades ago.

To assist with the decision to participate in the Royal Commission, this guide provides information about written submissions (page 17), recorded interviews (page 18), private sessions (pages 19-20), and public and private hearings (pages 21-23).

Additionally, information about the services available to assist people affected by the Royal Commission can be found at <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>.

Before contacting the Royal Commission

Prior to making initial contact, the Royal Commission advises individuals interested in participating to prepare their contact details and basic information about the institution and events in question. This can be a useful step towards preparing for further engagement with the Royal Commission.

There are a lot of details to remember when giving information to the Royal Commission, so basic information can be a useful place to start, such as:

1. What happened
2. The name of the institution
3. Location
4. Timeframe
5. Name of the perpetrator, if known

Don't be put off if the person you're supporting/advocating for can only remember some of the details. This is to be expected, and the Royal Commission are happy to hear as much of the story as the person can recall. All information provided is fed into databases which helps the Royal Commission get the best possible picture.



When giving information or making statements to the Royal Commission, it is possible to remain anonymous, if that is what the person you're supporting/advocating for wants. It is also acceptable to give information on behalf of, or about, someone else. As an advocate, you can call or write to the Royal Commission on behalf of the person you're supporting/advocating for.

Contacting the Royal Commission

Once the person you're supporting/advocating for has decided to contact the Royal Commission, contacting them via phone call, email or mail is the next step.

Phone : 1800 099 340

Email : contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

or : registerinterest@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Mail : GPO Box 5283
Sydney NSW 2001

It is important to note that contacting the Royal Commission does not mean that the person has to continue with the entire process. Calling the Royal Commission to discuss their experiences of institutional child sex abuse can be the extent of their engagement, if they so choose.

The Royal Commission has databases to collect a range of information about child sexual abuse. This means that any information that the person you're supporting/advocating for tells the Royal Commission will automatically be included in this database, and deemed useful.

Even if they can't remember all of the details, the information that they do provide may help fill in the gaps of other people's stories of abuse. This can help the Royal Commission build an overall picture of abuse. See pages 14 and 15 for more information about what happens to the stories and experiences that are told to the Royal Commission.



If the person you're supporting/advocating for wishes to continue with the process, this initial contact officially registers their interest in sharing their story with the Royal Commission. At this stage, the whole story of abuse does not need to be recounted.

The Royal Commission only requires enough information to determine whether the experiences of the individual fit within the Terms of Reference that outline what the Royal Commission can examine.

This initial contact can be used to inform the Royal Commission that the person wishing to engage with the Royal Commission is a person with disability. Providing this information straight away can make it easier to access necessary support services further on in the process. For instance, interpreters, communication support workers and speaking aids can be provided by the Royal Commission.

Furthermore, there are many agencies that are able to arrange additional assistance, if required.

Additionally, be sure to inform them if you are acting, writing or speaking on behalf of the person you are supporting/advocating for.

There are a range of organisations available to assist people who are affected by the work of the Royal Commission.

Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia can provide 24/7 counselling, on 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732). Additionally, they provide counselling specifically for people affected by the Royal Commission on 1800 211 028.

For further information about support services available to people affected by the Royal Commission, see <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>.

Discussing options with the Royal Commission

After registering their interest to participate, the Royal Commission will contact the person you're supporting/advocating for, or contact you directly as their advocate. Keep in mind that it can take the Royal Commission quite a while to get back in contact, due to the sheer number of people registering their interest in getting involved. At this stage, the person you're supporting/advocating for will be informed whether or not they fulfil the Terms of Reference, and whether their engagement with the Royal Commission will be able to continue.

If the experiences of the person you're supporting/advocating for are excluded by the Terms of Reference, their involvement with the Royal Commission is deemed to be over. However, this does not mean that they will not continue to be affected by the work of the Royal Commission. As such, the Royal Commission will provide them with a referral to counselling or support services.

On the other hand, if this contact confirms that the experiences of the person you're supporting/advocating for are included within the Terms of Reference, the next step is determining how the person's experiences will be shared.

Options may include:

- » **Written submission (page 17),**
- » **Recorded interview (page 18),**
- » **Private session (pages 19-20) and**
- » **Public or private hearing (pages 21-23), but this will depend partly on the Royal Commission's work**

For instance, even though most people are aware of the public hearings, the vast majority of people are not asked to contribute to a public hearing. Public hearings are only held where the Royal Commission has identified a public interest. Additionally, if the person you're advocating for would like to tell their story artistically, they can also participate in the Royal Commission through poetry, art or other means.

The personal and environmental safety, and the support and communication needs of the person you're supporting/advocating for are important to consider when determining which is the best option. Irrespective of which option is chosen, ensuring that the person you're supporting/advocating for feels secure and comfortable enough to tell their story, is essential.

It may be helpful to ask the person you're advocating for the following questions when preparing to participate in the Royal Commission.

- » How do you feel you can best communicate your story?
- » Do you want to tell your story in person?
- » Where would you be most comfortable telling your story?
- » What support would you like before and after telling your story?
- » Do you have culturally specific support or access requirements?
- » Would you feel more comfortable telling your story to a man or a woman?
- » Who would you like to be with you when you tell your story?
- » (If attending in person,) What kind of transport would you feel most comfortable taking to the Royal Commission?
- » What would be the best time of day for you to tell your story?



The Royal Commission is trying to accommodate the needs of everyone wanting to engage in its processes. It is able to provide a lot of assistance, including emotional, legal and financial supports to ensure that people are able to tell their stories.

The Royal Commission has a YouTube channel that can help give a sense of what participating in the Royal Commission will be like. These are available at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWARUzi3Lc6XxTrOUKo_ibQ?feature=watch.

What will happen to my story?

It is important to understand the difference between providing the Royal Commission with information, and with formal evidence. The Royal Commission is unique, as specific legislation was passed to allow it to perform private sessions. Having this as another option means that people can participate in a private manner.

However, the information provided in written statements, interviews and private sessions is not admissible as formal evidence in the Royal Commission. These statements are still used, and are a very important contribution to the work of the Royal Commission in considering how to prevent the sexual abuse of children.

It is important that the person you're supporting/advocating for is aware that the Royal Commission takes every story of abuse seriously, and uses them to inform their ongoing work, recommendations and reports. Their stories do matter.

In some instances, though, people who have participated in the Royal Commission have been disappointed by the process, believing that telling their stories has not resulted in any tangible results.

It is likely that the outcomes of the Royal Commission will be implemented over several years to make children safer. This is why managing expectations about what the Royal Commission can and will do is so important.

Private sessions (pages 19-20) and interviews (page 18) will be recorded, and possibly transcribed. However, any information disclosed in these sessions, or by written submission, is confidential. If the Royal Commission chooses to use any of this information in a public hearing, identity markers will be removed to maintain confidentiality. The Royal Commission can also use de-identified versions of these statements, and the information they include, in its reports and recommendations.

Alternatively, after providing the Royal Commission with information about their experiences of abuse, the person you're supporting/advocating for may be asked if their story could be used as formal evidence. If they do not want to participate in this way, the person you're supporting/advocating for can refuse. However, if they decide to participate in this manner, they will then be called as a witness in a public hearing.

Public hearings (pages 21-22), and the much rarer private hearings (page 23), are the only way to present information and stories as formal evidence. However, public hearings do not focus on individual stories, but rather on case studies of public interest, as determined by the Royal Commission.



It is important to remember that the person you are supporting/advocating for will only be asked to give evidence at a hearing if they agree to do so. Special arrangements can be made for providing evidence at either public or private hearings.

Getting ready to tell your story

The Royal Commission Practice Guidelines, documents 1 and 3 in particular (<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/practice-guidelines>), can be helpful when considering questions to prepare for when providing a statement or information.

Another useful resource is the 'Guide to sharing your story with the Royal Commission', available at <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/documents/written-account-form>.



The Royal Commission is interested in the response of institutions, so what happened after the abuse is very important.

The response of the institution or its representatives, including what they did or didn't do, are key details. This can also include whether the institution encouraged, or discouraged, the individual to report the abuse, and what support (if any) they provided afterwards.

The Royal Commission is also interested in the effects that child sex abuse has on people's lives. If the person you're supporting/advocating for feels comfortable discussing how their experiences of abuse have influenced their life, they can talk about this when telling their story.

When considering these questions, it is worthwhile reflecting on what the person you're supporting/advocating for hopes to get out of their participation with the Royal Commission. As some of the processes can be quite lengthy, it can help to keep this aim in mind to maintain focus.

Options for telling your story

Written submissions

The Royal Commission Practice Guidelines 3 may help the person you're supporting/advocating for write about their experiences. This can be found at <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/practice-guidelines>.

Another useful resource is <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/documents/written-account-form>.

Written submissions are letters or emails that detail the experiences of abuse of the person you are supporting/advocating for. These statements can be anonymous, although the Royal Commission prefers that the statement highlights this decision. Alternatively, the identity of the person making the statement can be provided, but kept confidential. The person should indicate that this is their wish.

There are no strict format or length requirements for written submissions. Provided they are legible, written statements can be handwritten. The Royal Commission staff, or advocacy groups and support services, are able to assist in the writing of statements.

As an advocate, you can also assist the person you're supporting/advocating for to write this submission.

Written submissions should be sent to the Royal Commission via email or mail at the following addresses:

Email : contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au
Mail : GPO Box 5283
Sydney NSW 2001

The Royal Commission will then send a letter or email to confirm that they have received the written statement.

After this, the Royal Commission may decide that the information provided in written statements should be made public, at which time the person you're supporting/advocating for will be contacted again. If they do not want their statement to be disclosed, the Royal Commission will respect this decision.

Recorded interviews

Recorded interviews are performed over the phone or in person with Royal Commission officers. After it is decided that the person you're supporting/advocating for will participate via interview, the type and possible venue of the interview will be determined.

The Royal Commission offers phone interviews for people who would prefer that way of telling their story, and for easier access for those living in remote areas. However, the Royal Commission aims to facilitate individual circumstances, so ensure that the chosen option is the one that will best suit the person you're supporting/advocating for.

For instance, face-to-face interviews can be performed at the person's home, a hotel, the Royal Commission office, or a range of other settings. Consideration is made to provide the optimal environment for the person to be able to tell their story. People who are in hospital, a nursing home, prison or other places of detention can also have their interview organised where they are.

Interviews generally take about an hour, and are recorded and transcribed. The transcripts are then given to a Commissioner to read, and will inform the work of the Royal Commission.



However, information provided in interviews will not be presented as evidence before the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission may ask the person you're supporting/advocating for to participate as a witness at a public hearing. They can decline this offer, and cease their involvement after the interview.

See pages 14, 15 and 24 for more information about what happens to information after people tell their stories, and pages 21-22 for more information about public hearings.

Private sessions

Private sessions are face-to-face, informal and confidential opportunities for people to share their experiences of abuse with a Commissioner. The presence of the Commissioner is what makes a private session different to a face-to-face interview.

As an advocate providing support, you are allowed to attend the private session if the person you are supporting would like you there. The session is usually limited to the person who experienced abuse, their support person, a Commissioner and a Royal Commission officer.

After determining that a private session would be the best option, the Royal Commission will send the person you're supporting/advocating for a confirmation letter or email. This confirmation will include the time, date and location of the session, as well as information about transport or parking options for ease of access. Private sessions generally occur in hotels, or at the Royal Commission in Sydney. They are not performed in people's homes.

The locations in which private sessions are held are not disclosed to the media to ensure safety and privacy. Additionally, they typically have multiple exits to maintain anonymity. Upon arriving for the private session, a Royal Commission officer will show you, and the person you're supporting/advocating for to the room, and introduce the Commissioner. There will not be any representatives from the institution in question present at the private session. It is designed to be as safe a space as possible.

Preparing for private sessions can be helpful to ensure that personal experiences can be expressed within the designated time of an hour. Providing a written submission prior to a private session can help the Commissioner prepare any questions that they may want to ask. However, this time limit isn't strict or always enforced.

In the private session, the person you're supporting/advocating for might be asked questions, but they do not have to answer them if they are unable, or unwilling, to do so. Efforts will be made to ensure the comfort of the person telling their story.

We have heard feedback from people who have told their stories in a private session. They have told us that even though they went over their allocated time, they were not rushed at all. Instead, the Commissioner continued to listen to their story until they had said all they wanted to say.

However, if the person you're supporting/advocating for does feel rushed or pressured during their private session, please ensure the Commissioner is made aware of this. They will do their best to accommodate and support the person telling their story.



Image: The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

People telling us about their experiences in private sessions have also mentioned that they felt supported and believed. During the private sessions, they did not feel judged by the Commissioner or the Royal Commission officer. For some, this has been an affirming and healing process.

After the private session, a counsellor will be available to talk to. They will inform the person you are supporting/advocating for about common emotions that are experienced after engaging in private sessions, and will tell them about support services available to them.

Keep in mind that you may also experience a range of emotions after sitting in on the session, or speaking on behalf of the person who had experienced the abuse. See part two of the Toolkit for more information about this.

The counsellor will make a follow up call to the person a week later to check in with them. They will also receive a card thanking them for their attendance. Often, the private session is the end of their engagement with the Royal Commission.

Public hearings

Public hearings are open to the public and media, and are live-streamed on the Royal Commission website. These hearings are formal proceedings that are overseen by Commissioners. In public hearings, witnesses give evidence and answer questions asked of them by lawyers and the Commissioners. The Royal Commission employs witness support staff to help witnesses anticipate what to expect.

Witnesses may be asked to provide evidence verbally, or via written statement. In public hearings, the witnesses must speak for themselves. However, the Royal Commission ensures that witnesses are supported, and will be able to make special arrangements for these individuals if required.

These special arrangements can include:

- » **Making statements in a separate room**
- » **Making written statements to ensure anonymity and protection from the individuals or institutions in question**
- » **Practicing questions beforehand, to ensure that the witness is as comfortable as possible in participating**
- » **A range of other strategies to ensure the safety and comfort of the witness**

Public hearings usually occur at the Royal Commission offices in Sydney, or in appropriate locations around Australia. This location has security screening processes in place, including a metal detector. Upon entering, everyone is required to go through this security check to protect the safety of those attending the Royal Commission.



Image: The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Within the public hearing room, there are certain customs with which the public must comply. For instance, when entering and exiting the hearing room, if you are able to, you are required to pause and bow your head slightly towards the Australian coat of arms above the Commissioners' seats.

The Commissioners sit at the front of the room, on top of a slightly elevated platform. When the Commissioners enter, you will be advised to 'all rise', and, if you're able to stand, remain standing until each Commissioner has entered and sat down, or until the Presiding Commissioner asks everyone to be seated.

While in the public hearing room, you should remain quiet at all times. As a witness, if given the opportunity to address the Commissioners, the Chair of the Commission should be referred to as 'Your Honour', while the other Commissioners can be referred to as 'Commissioner'. The number of Commissioners present at each public hearing can vary.

Private hearings

Private hearings are very similar to public hearings, except that they are closed to the public and media. In these, Commissioners hear formal evidence from people who have experienced child sexual abuse.



Private hearings are usually held in hotel rooms, or at the Royal Commission offices. These hearings allow witnesses to remain anonymous while still formally participating in the Royal Commission. However, private hearings are quite uncommon.

Both private sessions and private hearings allow stories to be heard without the potential re-traumatising effects of giving evidence publicly. However, recounting the story in any setting can be very distressing, and the person you are advocating for should take advantage of the support services associated with the Royal Commission.

See <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services> for more information about support services.

Where to from here?

The person you're supporting/advocating for may decide that they do not want to go further than telling their story to the Royal Commission. Having their voice heard and believed may have been all they wanted from this process. The person you're supporting/advocating for may feel a sense of relief resulting from telling their story, having others believe and support them throughout this process. By engaging in the work of the Royal Commission, they have contributed to an important process.

However, if the person you're supporting/advocating for decides that they would like to take things further, there are a number of options available to them. This can include reporting their abuse to the police, seeking redress or compensation from the institution at which the abuse occurred, or seeing a counsellor for ongoing support. Other avenues for redress may result in formal justice, and the perpetrator of abuse being charged. However, they bring with them their own challenges.

Regardless of whether the person you're supporting/advocating for takes things further, it is important to remember that there is no set 'successful' response to sexual assault. Compensation or a conviction does not guarantee that the person who has been abused will feel differently about their experiences.

Dealing with sexual abuse can be quite a lengthy and traumatic process that is experienced differently by everyone. The person you're supporting/advocating for may need your ongoing support and assistance in dealing with their experiences.

For some individuals, their journey may involve further engaging with their sexuality. See part two for more information on how supporters and advocates can assist with this process. If the person you're supporting/advocating for would like to explore this part of themselves, there are a number of resources they can draw on. The support services provided on pages 41-42 can assist in the development of positive sexuality.

For more trauma related supports see the Royal Commission website: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>.

2

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE THROUGH THE ROYAL COMMISSION



Introduction

The following information will assist you in your role as a supporter or advocate for a person with disability who is participating in the Royal Commission. We recommend that you read this whole guide before embarking on this journey.

The information in this section includes information that is presented in a number of PWDA training sessions. These include sessions such as 'Responding to Sexual Assault', 'Sexuality and Respectful Relationships' and 'Supporting Respectful Relationships for Children and Adults with Disability'. More information about PWDA's Royal Commission training can be found at <http://rcsupport.pwd.org.au/training/>.

If you need further support, there are many options available. You are entitled to access any of the services listed on the Royal Commission website: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>.

You can also contact PWDA for advice, information and referrals, or to request an advocate to step in. Email pwd@pwd.org.au, or call **(02) 9370 3100** for support.

For debriefing and counselling for yourself or the person you're supporting/advocating for, contact **Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia on 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or 1800 211 028.**

Supporting someone through the Royal Commission is a significant task, as your assistance can influence the experiences of the person you're supporting/advocating for.

Remember that although you play an important role, the Royal Commission process is focused on the person you're advocating for. It is their opportunity to participate and tell their story on their terms.



The following questions may help you make sure that you are letting the person you're advocating for get what they want from their Royal Commission experience. This is their own journey, and you should support them regardless of what they decide to do.

- » What does the person I'm supporting/advocating for hope to achieve by engaging with the Royal Commission?
- » What are my concerns about engaging with the Royal Commission?
- » What are my own reasons for wanting to be a support person or advocate?
- » How can I prevent my concerns from negatively influencing the experience of the person I'm supporting/advocating for?
- » What does the person I'm supporting/advocating for want?
- » What strategies will I use to take care of myself throughout the process?

A note on trauma

Before deciding to participate in the Royal Commission, it is important to note that trauma may influence this experience.

The Royal Commission can stir up traumatic memories and a wide range of coping strategies, including:

- » **Emotional outbursts**
- » **Fits of anger**
- » **Heightened sensitivity**
- » **Confusion**
- » **Withdrawal**
- » **Feelings of isolation**

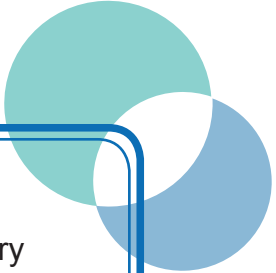
It is important to remember that the reactions of the person you're supporting/advocating for are not aimed at you or your actions. However, it is not appropriate to overlook these reactions completely. Acknowledging their responses, and clarifying that you understand why they are responding in that manner, can help maintain trust and communication in an incredibly difficult situation.



It can be very challenging for people to talk about their experiences of child sex abuse. In many ways, traumatic experiences and memories often continue to influence current responses and relationships. As such, your respect, support and understanding are vital elements throughout their engagement with the Royal Commission.

However, while supporting the person you're advocating for, you may feel confronted or disturbed by what they are telling you, or by how angry, upset or emotional they are. This is a common, legitimate response to hearing traumatic information.

The following statements may help you deal with trauma responses:

- 
- » 'I understand that talking about this experience is very hard.'
 - » 'I understand that you are angry/frustrated, and you have every right to be. Please try to calm down, so we can talk about this properly.'
 - » 'I hear that you are upset, and I'm trying my best to listen so I can understand what you need. But it is hard for me to listen to you when you are this upset/angry/frustrated.'
 - » 'In order to help you, I need to feel safe, calm and respected. The way you're speaking to me makes me feel upset and unsafe. When I feel like this I cannot help you.'
 - » 'Do you feel like I've understood what you've said to me?'
 - » 'How can I help you to feel safe and calm?'
 - » 'I can see that this is upsetting you. What can I do to help?'
 - » 'I want to take this really seriously. Are you happy to talk about this now, or would you be more comfortable chatting about it later?'
 - » 'I'm glad you have told me about this. Let's make time to sit down and chat about it.'
 - » 'I can see that this is making you very emotional. Would you like to talk about this later when you're feeling a bit better?'

Questions adapted from an Adults Surviving Child Abuse trauma-informed practice training package (see www.asca.org.au)

Vicarious trauma

Throughout the process, you will be exposed to personal stories of traumatic abuse. The term 'vicarious trauma' is often used to describe the responses of people who are engaging with traumatic information, stories and experiences. It is completely normal to experience vicarious trauma.

Some of the experiences discussed by the Royal Commission may raise issues for you, or remind you of previous trauma. Advocating for someone engaging with the Royal Commission can be quite stressful.

You might feel:

- » Emotionally exhausted
- » Numb
- » Estranged from others
- » Unable to empathise
- » Guilty
- » Depressed
- » Completely hopeless
- » Withdrawn
- » Hypersensitive
- » Overwhelmed
- » Incompetent



You might experience:

- » Heightened anxiety
- » Outbursts of anger/irritability
- » Difficulties sleeping
- » Trauma imagery
- » Difficulties concentrating
- » Thoughts of self-harm
- » Aversion to certain locations or people
- » Bystander guilt
- » Nightmares

Being told about experiences of child sex abuse can also lead you to question your fundamental beliefs and sense of self. For instance, you may begin to question pre-existing ideas about the world, yourself, and your beliefs or spirituality.

Dealing with these feelings when they arise can assist in preventing vicarious trauma from progressing into more severe responses.



It is important to be self-aware when dealing with these kinds of traumatic issues, including knowing your limits and identifying any possible triggers. Taking your feelings and experiences into account, and monitoring any changes in response to certain topics or occurrences can help support your own wellbeing.

PWDA individual advocates are available to support you in your advocacy role, but are also able to take over if you feel unable to continue. It can be necessary to hand formal advocacy responsibilities over to someone who is equipped to deal with the issues. If this is the case, and you no longer feel able to perform an advocacy role, it is still possible for you to maintain a supportive role.

Self care

Your health, safety and wellbeing are fundamentally important. Engaging in self care activities to support your own wellbeing helps to ensure that you are dealing with advocacy-related trauma.

Reflecting on any particularly traumatic experiences or information can help to reduce vicarious trauma. For instance, if there is a certain issue that you are having problems dealing with, the following three questions may help you:

1. What issue or problem from your day is sticking with you?
2. How are you feeling about it?
3. What are you going to do to take care of yourself?

Self care can involve:

- Exercise
- Eating regularly
- Going for a walk outside
- Stretching
- Doing fun physical activities such as sport
- Taking a day trip
- Going to a museum
- Doing something creative
- Writing in a journal
- Reading a book
- Taking up a new hobby
- Making time for self reflection
- Meditating
- Spending time with friends
- Sharing your feelings with a trusted confidant

Self care can also involve going to see a counsellor. Remember the support services listed on the Royal Commission website are available to you as well.

Responding to disclosure

If the person you're supporting/advocating for discloses their experience of abuse to you, it is important to respond in an appropriate and supportive manner. In many instances, the person telling you about their abuse may not have told anyone about their experiences before. Alternatively, they may have told someone who was unsupportive or disbelieving of their experience of abuse. In either case, they need to feel safe, supported and believed at this time.

There are four key messages that are important to communicate to someone when they disclose to you:

1. 'I believe you'
2. 'This matters a lot'
3. 'This should not have happened to you'
4. 'You are not responsible for the abuse'

The following is a list of some initial responses you may find useful:

- 'I'm glad you told me.'
- 'What you told me is important. Do you feel OK about telling me?'
- 'I'm sorry that this happened to you.'
- 'Sometimes we think it's our fault. It's never the kid's/victim's fault.'
- 'I believe what you told me.'
- 'This is not your fault. You are not to blame. He did the wrong thing.'
- 'What can I do to help you feel safe here?'
- 'Let's talk about what we need to do now.'
- 'There are some people whose job it is to help with this problem. You can talk to them if you like, and I am happy to come with you.'

Adapted from PWDA responding to sexual assault training module. For more information about PWDA's training, see <http://pwd.org.au/what-we-do/training-services.html>.

Myths about sexuality, sexual abuse and people with disability

Myths and common attitudes towards sexuality, sexual abuse and people with disability can have an unconscious effect on people. These myths can influence how we, and others, live our lives, how we deal with roles and expectations, and how we relate to others. Myths can come from a range of sources, such as family, friends, co-workers, school, the media, church, community groups, and other institutions.

Myths about sexuality are common in everyday society. Quite a narrow range of sexual behaviours and activities are considered 'normal', as determined by societal beliefs, culture and religion. People who fall outside the definition of 'normal' sexuality or sexual behaviour are often seen as deviant.

However, sexuality is complex and can be continually negotiated throughout one's lifetime. This is true for people without disability, and people with disability alike.

Myths about sexuality and sexual abuse in particular can lead to serious problems for individuals experiencing sexual abuse. Most myths about sexual abuse and people with disability tend to shift responsibility for the sexual abuse from the perpetrator to the person who was or is being abused.

Shifting the blame in this way relies on two contrasting myths. People with disability are either positioned as asexual, childlike, unattractive, innocent and incapable of consenting to sexual activity, or deviant, highly sexed and unable to control their sexuality. These myths and attitudes are untrue, yet are often used by perpetrators of abuse to deny and justify their actions.

Myths combine with pre-existing barriers faced by people with disability – such as a lack of education, lack of support, limited choices, segregation, gender-based discrimination, heterosexism, poverty and limited social circles – to seriously and negatively influence the lives of people with disability.

For instance, myths about people with disability are often invoked to justify the lack of sex education provided to them. It is thought that if people with disability don't have information about sexual activities, they will not engage in these behaviours. This flawed logic means that people with disability don't always have access to important information that could help them recognise abuse.

Myths around sexual abuse can also make justice more inaccessible for people with disability. For example, believing that people with disability are unreliable witnesses can make these individuals feel isolated, unsupported and reluctant to report their experiences. In this way, myths can also deprive people with disability of their sense of worth or dignity, by denying them the power or control to tell their story.



This interaction between myths and barriers can deny the rights of people with disability to be parents, to have intimate relationships and to take care of their sexual and reproductive health.

Myths

1. People with disability are asexual and innocent
2. Women provoke sexual assault by the way they dress or act
3. If they didn't scream or fight back it couldn't have been non-consensual
4. People with disability are grateful for any sexual attention, including sexual assault
5. Men are always able to defend themselves from any kind of attack
6. People with disability are unable to control their sexuality
7. People with disability are not responsible for their actions
8. People with disability are not desirable, so anyone who wants to have sex with a person with disability is definitely a perpetrator or pervert
9. People with disability don't feel sexual, and if they do, they are perverts

Adapted from PWDA Responding to Sexual Assault NSW participant Manual, which cites: Yarrow Place Rape And Sexual Assault Service
<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/yarrowplace/files/>

Sexual and human rights of people with disability

When deciding whether or not to participate in the Royal Commission, the person you're advocating for might want some information about their sexual and human rights. PWDA offers training packages for people with disability, which discuss the rights, responsibilities and needs of people with disability.

If the person you're supporting/advocating for would like to participate in this training session, more information can be found on our website (<http://pwd.org.au/what-we-do/training-services.html>).

People with disability have the same rights and freedoms as people without disability. Alongside a range of other human rights, people with disability have a right to positive sexual lives and relationships. People with disability have the right to express and explore their sexual values and attitudes, and to engage in intimate relationships. They also have the right to receive accessible information, resources and support related to their sexual rights.

People with disability have the right to explore their sexuality without being abused or exploited. This includes working and living in safe environments, and having accessible information about appropriate relationships. International, national and state legislation outlines that everyone has the right to be free from abuse. Specific legislation and documents also protect the rights of people with disability.

For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD) highlights the universality of human rights, and the right of people with disability to be free from abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. The CRPD also addresses the need to eliminate discrimination based on disability. This involves dispelling stereotypes, myths and false beliefs about people with disability.

Positive sexuality

Everyone has the right to enjoy sexuality and the pleasures it can bring. Sex can mean a lot of different things to different people: for some, it is all about emotional intimacy; for others, it might be about purely physical intimacy; for some, it's simply about exploring bodies and pleasures. Sex might be with others, and it might be alone.

For a lot of people with disability, developing a positive sense of sexuality can take time, because there aren't many public role models who present people with disability as sexual beings with the capacity to give and receive pleasure.

People with disability may have had a lot of support from people who treat them as if they don't get to decide what is done with their own bodies. As a result, people with disability may not feel like their bodies are their own, to do with as they want. In addition, they may have learnt, over time, that their bodies don't work properly, which can alienate them from their own bodies and pleasures.

This may be even more complex after experiencing sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a betrayal of trust, and it is common to have negative feelings around intimate or sexual behaviours and activities.

People who have been abused may isolate or distance themselves from others, in an attempt to avoid feeling vulnerable again. They might also experience disturbing images or flashbacks while contemplating or engaging in sexual activities, which may lead people to avoid sex altogether.

Positive sexuality involves recognising and acknowledging past abuse, and how it influences our experiences of sexuality.

Positive sexuality is also about redefining sex and intimate behaviours, giving them new meanings that are separate from past experiences of abuse. This can involve learning or relearning how to touch, and be sexually intimate, in appropriate and pleasurable ways. Sexual and romantic partners, family, friends, counsellors, sex surrogates, sex workers and other supporters may be able to assist the person who has been abused throughout this process.

The process of changing feelings characterised by sexual abuse, to feelings of positive sexuality can be long and difficult. Nonetheless, it is important to replace abusive ideas about sex with attitudes about positive sex, characterised by safety, consent and respect.

Supporting the development of positive sexuality

As a supporter or advocate, you can be important in supporting the development of positive sexuality, helping to reinforce the sense that people with disability are in charge of what happens with their own bodies, and are entitled to experiencing pleasure.

Respecting and even encouraging the person you're supporting/advocating for to explore their sexuality may help make this process easier for them to navigate because you become an active voice helping them to speak back to the myths that desexualise people with disability.

In some instances, your personal values might not align with those held by the person you're supporting/advocating for. However, you should respect the sexuality of the person you're supporting/advocating for, and their sexual choices and behaviours.



Positive sexuality and consent

Developing a clear idea of consent and how to express it is vital for everyone. Consent is expressed and negotiated in a lot of different contexts, many of which arise quite regularly. For this reason, it is important to establish a personal understanding of consent, and to feel comfortable expressing, withholding and negotiating it. This takes practice.

Consent cannot be assumed in any circumstances. Just because something has happened before does not mean that the person will always consent to the activity. Additionally, the absence of a no is not consent. In many instances, someone may not be able to verbally express their desires. For this reason, it is also important to pay attention to body language, as this can provide indicators about how people are feeling.

Regardless of the context or setting, it is important that the person you're supporting/advocating for can make other people aware of their wants and needs. This may include in their relationship with you as a family member, friend, supporter or carer. You might also be able to help them learn how to exercise bodily autonomy and negotiate consent.

Some of this can be very simple: it can start by asking consent before doing anything with or to their body, whether while helping someone to bathe, or to get dressed, or to position themselves in a room. This helps people with disability to:

- » **Realise that their body is their own**
- » **Practice how to consent**
- » **Practice how to negotiate with others about how we use our bodies**
- » **Create a sense of what it looks like when someone respects their rights**

Making sure that the person you're supporting/advocating for is consenting to your assistance (physical or otherwise) is an important step for both of you in acknowledging their autonomy.

Support services

The government has funded specialist services for people affected by the Royal Commission. Available services include counsellors, group support networks, phone counselling and workshops. These services are available to anyone affected by the Royal Commission, including witnesses, people who have experienced child sex abuse, their advocates, supporters and family members.

The Royal Commission website (<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>) provides an extensive list of organisations who are providing support for individuals affected by the Royal Commission.

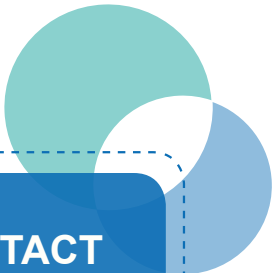
Among others, Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA) (1300 657 380), People with Disability Australia (PWDA) (1800 422 015) and 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732 or 1800 211 028) provide support services for family members and advocates.



Advocates and supporters who are affected by the Royal Commission are eligible to access all of the support services listed on the Royal Commission website.

The following support services may assist in the development of positive sexuality:

STATE	SERVICE	CONTACT
National	Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia	(07) 3396 6614
ACT	Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT	(02) 6247 3077
NSW	Family Planning NSW	(02) 8752 4300
	Touching Base Inc. Touching Base supports access to the sex industry for people with disability	0424 591 409
NT	Family Planning Welfare Association of NT	(08) 8948 0144
QLD	Family Planning Queensland	(07) 3250 0240
SA	Sexual Health information networking and education SA (ShineSA)	1300 794 584
	Sexuality and Disability Association of South Australia	(08) 8272 3398



STATE	SERVICE	CONTACT
TAS	Family Planning Tasmania	(03) 6273 9117
VIC	Family Planning Victoria Disability Services Unit	(03) 9257 0131
	GLBT Disability Support	(03) 9391 6797
WA	Family Planning WA	(08) 9227 6177
	People 1st Programme People 1st Programme supports people with intellectual disability through discussions of sexuality, respectful relationships and sexual health education	(08) 9227 6414
	Sexuality Education Counselling and Consultancy Agency	(08) 9420 7226

This toolkit is designed for advocates and others supporting people with disability affected by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It provides an overview of Royal Commission processes from the perspective of people with disability, along with some background on trauma, vicarious trauma and positive sexuality.