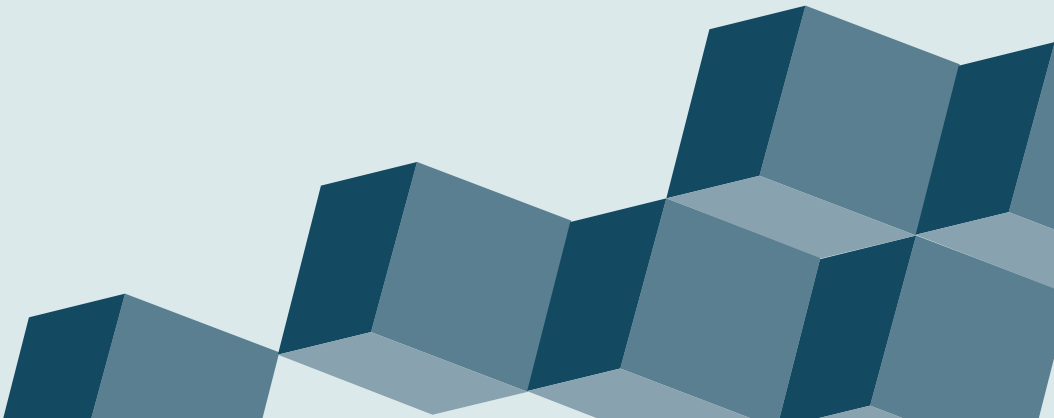




Commission of Investigation
Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools

Survey Participation Guide



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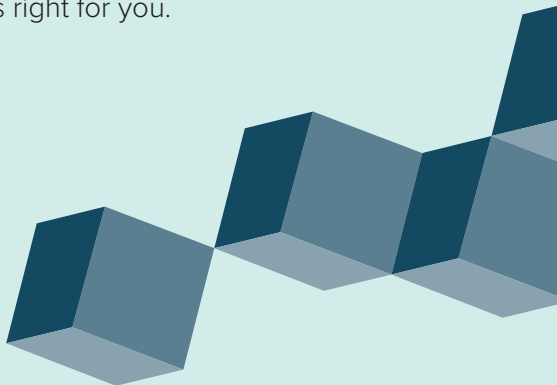
Introduction

The Commission of Investigation into the Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools has been established to examine how concerns of child sexual abuse were handled by schools, and by those responsible for schools, in Ireland.

The Commission will also examine how reports of sexual abuse related to schools were handled by An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, and the Department of Education. Its work will focus on identifying where concerns (including complaints) of child sexual abuse were not handled correctly, why this occurred, and who was responsible.

The Commission will also consider the impact of childhood sexual abuse in schools. It will report to the Minister for Education and Youth on the experiences of survivors, the impact on their lives, and on what can be learned to strengthen child protection in the future. Under its Terms of Reference, the Commission is required to carry out a survey as one of the first steps in its work. This survey will inform the Commission's Investigation and its Survivor Engagement Programme.

This guide is for people who are considering completing the Commission's survey. We understand that reading about, or reflecting on, experiences of child sexual abuse may be difficult, and that deciding whether to take part can be challenging. This guide is intended to help you make an informed decision about whether participation is right for you.



The survey is the first step for anyone who wishes to share initial information with the Commission. It is designed to gather information from people with experiences or knowledge relating to sexual abuse in schools. Information provided through the survey will help the Commission understand experiences, identify patterns and themes, and inform both its Investigation and Survivor Engagement Programme.

This guide explains who can complete the survey, what information it asks for, how responses will be used, what support is available, and what happens after you take part.

You can access general information about the Commission of Investigation and its work on our website www.commissionofinvestigation.ie or in our Booklet: Introduction to the Work of the Commission.

Things to Know

- The Commission's approach is survivor-centred and trauma-informed.
- Taking part is voluntary.
- If you don't know the answer to a question or are unsure, you can say so.
- An independent survey Participation Support Service is available.
- You can decide whether you would like to be contacted about further engagement with the Commission after the survey.

- You can change your mind about taking part at any time.
- In certain circumstances the Commission may need to share information with the appropriate authorities if it raises a current child protection concern.

Current Child Protection Concerns

To help protect children, it is important to note that if information provided to the Commission raises concerns about a child's current safety or welfare, we may have a duty to refer that information to Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), or An Garda Síochána, in accordance with our legal and safeguarding obligations. If you have a concern about a current risk to a child's safety or welfare, you can also report this to Tusla or An Garda Síochána directly using the following contact information:

- **Tusla – Child and Family Agency**

Website: www.tusla.ie

Telephone: (01) 771 8500

- **An Garda Síochána**

An Garda Síochána has set up a special phone line and email address for anyone who wants to report or talk about their experience of child sexual abuse connected to a school.

Telephone (office hours): (01) 666 3924

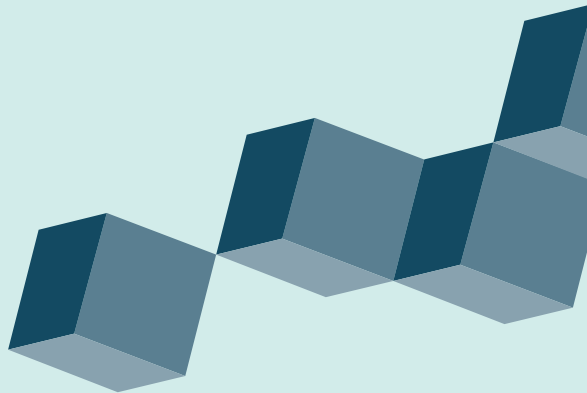
Email (any time): reportsexualcrime@garda.ie

The Survey

Completing the survey is the first step for anyone who wants to share information with the Commission. This survey is available from Autumn 2026 and will be open for several weeks.

It will gather initial information from people who have experience or knowledge related to the Commission's [Terms of Reference](#).

Information shared through the survey will help the Commission understand experiences, identify patterns and themes, and inform the next steps for both the Investigation and the Survivor Engagement Programme. All responses will be carefully considered as the Commission plans and carries out its work.



Why a Survey?

Under its Terms of Reference, the Commission is required to carry out a survey. This is how it will gather some of the initial information it needs to carry out its work.

Using a survey means that people can provide initial information in a structured way, without needing to be contacted repeatedly. We recognise that participation may bring up difficult memories or emotions, and this approach is intended to minimise the burden on participants wherever possible.

The survey will also ensure that everyone is asked a consistent set of questions. This will help the Commission:

- Gather information from people who want to engage with the Commission.
- Understand experiences, themes and patterns.
- Decide where to focus the next stages of the Investigation.
- Make contact with people who may wish to engage further, including through the Survivor Engagement Programme.

The survey is the first stage of engagement with the Commission. It is designed to gather initial information, while recognising that some participants may wish to share more detailed information later through other aspects of the Commission's work.

Who Can Complete the Survey?

The Commission would like to hear from three groups of people about their experiences:

- **Group A: Survivors**

People who experienced sexual abuse as a child in a school, or in connection with a school, between 1927 and 2013.

- **Group B: Family Members**

A family member completing the survey on behalf of a person who experienced sexual abuse as a child in a school, or in connection with a school, between 1927 and 2013, where that person is deceased or cannot be supported to participate themselves.

- **Group C: People with Relevant Knowledge**

People who witnessed abuse, received a complaint or report of sexual abuse, had concerns about abuse, or reported concerns about the sexual abuse of a child in a school or in connection with a school between 1927 and 2013. This could also include people who became aware of concerns of child sexual abuse through their professional role, such as teachers, social workers or other professionals.

Is My School Included?

The Commission's scope includes all day and boarding schools, including special schools, operating in Ireland between 1927 and 2013.

For this process, a school means a place that provides primary or post-primary education (for example, primary schools, national schools, secondary schools, post-primary, community and comprehensive schools). It can also include places that provide early childhood education. However, the legal definition does not include industrial schools, reformatory schools, or certain institutions that were established or run under child welfare, health, or childcare laws. This means that industrial and reformatory schools and certain other institutions are not included in the definition of a school under the Education Act 1998, and so are not within the Commission's scope.

If you are in any doubt as to whether your school is included, you can contact us or the Participation Support Service for assistance.

How is the Survey Structured?

The survey contains three streams which correspond to the three participant groups described above. You will be asked to select the stream that best matches your circumstances and will then be directed to the questions most relevant to you.

Stream A: Survivors

Select this stream if you personally experienced sexual abuse as a child in a school, or in connection with a school, between 1927 and 2013.

This stream asks questions about your experience, including information about where and when the abuse occurred, the person responsible, and whether concerns were reported either at the time or later on.

You do not need to have all this information to complete the survey. We understand that it may be difficult to recall exact details such as dates, names or places. If you do not know, cannot remember, or are unsure of specific information needed to answer a particular question, you can provide approximate answers and indicate that you do not know or are unsure.

Stream B: Family Members

Select this stream if you are completing the survey on behalf of a family member who experienced sexual abuse as a child in a school, or in connection with a school, and who is deceased or cannot be supported to participate themselves.

This stream is very similar to Stream A. The questions focus on the experience of the person who experienced sexual abuse rather than your own experience. For this reason, it is most suitable for a family member who has detailed knowledge of their relative's experience and can provide information about what happened, where and when it occurred, and any concerns or reports that were made. Where possible, families may wish to consider whether one person is best placed to complete the survey to avoid providing duplicate information.

Stream C: People with Relevant Knowledge

Select this stream if you are providing information about abuse you witnessed, concerns you had, complaints or reports of abuse that you received, or reports you made. This could include information that came to your attention through your professional role, such as a teacher, social worker or other professional, or through your personal experience.

Unlike Streams A and B, this stream does not focus primarily on the survivor's experience. Instead, it focuses on your knowledge of events, any concerns that arose, actions taken, and, if you know, what happened in response to those concerns.

This stream is most relevant for people who wish to provide information about how concerns of child sexual abuse were reported, responded to or handled by schools or other bodies.

Which Stream Should I Choose?

Choose **Stream A** if you are sharing information about your own experience of sexual abuse as a child relating to a school.

Choose **Stream B** if you are completing the survey on behalf of a family member and are describing their experience.

Choose **Stream C** if you are providing information about abuse you witnessed, concerns you had, complaints or reports you received, or reports you made, typically related to the abuse of another person.

The key difference between the streams is that Streams A and B focus on the experience of the person who experienced sexual abuse, while Stream C focuses on knowledge of events or concerns or reports and how they were responded to or handled.

If you are completing the survey on behalf of another person and can provide detailed information about their experience, Stream B is likely to be the most appropriate option. If you are providing information about something you witnessed, or information that you received or reported, Stream C is likely to be the most appropriate option. This stream includes

more detailed questions about reporting, actions taken by schools or other organisations, and the outcomes of those actions.

What Does the Survey Ask?

The survey asks for information that will help the Commission understand experiences of child sexual abuse relating to schools, and how concerns about such abuse were handled.

Depending on the stream you select, you may be asked:

- Your name, contact details and preferred method of contact. This information is required to complete the survey.
- Your reason for taking part in the survey (for example, as a survivor, family member, or person with relevant knowledge).
- The school involved, including its name and location.
- The approximate timeframe in which the abuse occurred (for example, the early, mid or late 1970s). You do not need to provide exact dates.
- Information about the person or people responsible for the abuse, including, where known, their name and connection to the school. Most of these questions are optional, and you do not have to answer them if you would prefer not to.
- Information about any concerns, disclosures or reports relating to the abuse, including whether concerns were reported, to whom, and how they were handled. We recognise that many participants may not have this information or may not be able to recall it. You will be able to indicate where you do not know or are unsure.
- Whether you would like to be contacted about opportunities for further participation in the Commission's work, such as the Survivor Engagement Programme, or to provide additional information if you are asked to do so by our legal team.

You do not need to have all of this information in order to complete the survey. Where you do not know or cannot remember specific details, you will be able to indicate that you are unsure or do not know.

Please note that this survey cannot be completed anonymously. This is to help us to ensure responses are not duplicated and to allow us to follow up where appropriate. We understand the sensitive nature of this topic and will handle all information with care, respect, and confidentiality.

You will have the option to indicate that:

- You do not wish to have any follow-up contact after the survey; or
- You would be interested in taking part in further stages of the Commission's work.

Survivor-Centred and Trauma-Informed Approach

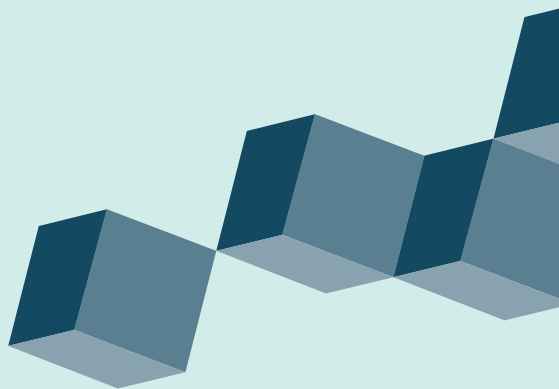
We understand how difficult it may be for survivors to engage with the survey. Some questions may bring back memories that are difficult or distressing to think about.

In some instances, participants may not have the information asked for in a question or may not wish to answer a particular question.

We would like to reassure you that you do not need to have all of the information to complete the survey – it can be very difficult to recall exact details such as dates or names or places. The survey is structured so that you can provide approximate answers and indicate where you don't know or where you are unsure.

Participants may like to have a trusted person to support them when filling in the survey or may wish to avail of the independent survey Participation Support Service before they begin, or during the process.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you can decide at any stage whether you wish to continue.



Independent Survey Participation Support Service

To support people who are considering taking part in the Commission's survey, the Commission has arranged for **One in Four**, a specialist organisation with expertise in supporting adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, to provide an independent Participation Support Service.

The independent Participation Support Service can:

- Assist people in making an informed decision about whether to participate.
- Answer practical questions about how to complete the survey.
- Support people with additional needs to take part.
- Provide clear information about what participation involves.
- Signpost or refer people to additional supports, including emotional and psychological supports where appropriate.

The survey Participation Support Service operates independently of the Commission.

The information you share with the support service is confidential and will not be shared with the Commission unless you provide your express consent.

Speaking to the Participation Support Service does not mean that you have decided to complete the survey, and there is no obligation to take part. You will find contact details for this service at the end of this booklet.

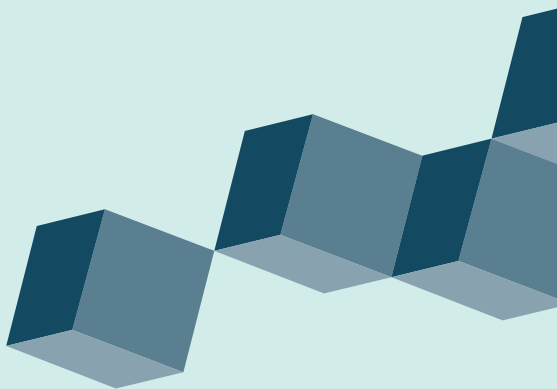
How to Take Part

The survey will be available to complete from Autumn 2026 for several weeks in the following ways:

- Online through our website.
- By filling in a paper version available on request.
- By phone, with help from the independent survey Participation Support Service.

More details on how to access each option will be provided before the survey opens.

If you decide to take part, you may find it helpful to choose a quiet space where you will not be interrupted.



Completing the Survey Online

You can complete the survey using any device, including a mobile phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer.

The survey will be available through an open web link. You will not need to create an account or set up a password to take part.

As you complete the survey, your answers will be saved automatically, as long as you are using the same device and browser. This means you can take a break and return to the survey later without losing your progress.

However, if you are using a shared computer or device this will not be possible as you will need to close the survey to protect your information.

When you have finished, you must select 'Send' to submit your responses to the Commission. Until you do this, your survey will not be received, and we will not have access to your answers.

Accessibility Settings

The survey tool is designed to be accessible and inclusive. You can decide how questions are presented before you begin. Through the 'Language Menu', you can select your preferred language from English, Irish, or Irish Sign Language (ISL).

Once you have started the survey, you can use the 'Accessibility Settings' to adjust text size, customise colour themes, or enable questions to be read aloud. The survey is also optimised for screen readers.

Remember, if you need any assistance, support is available through the independent Participation Support Service.

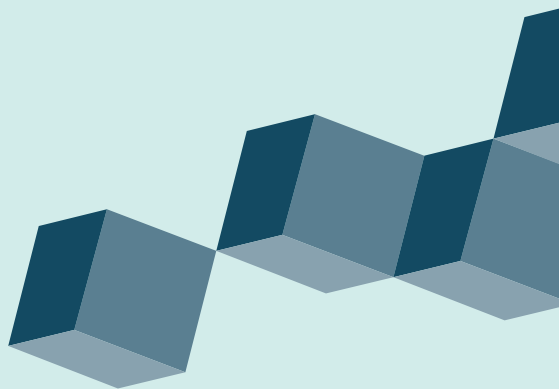
What Happens After the Survey?

After the survey closes, responses will be reviewed and analysed by the Commission.

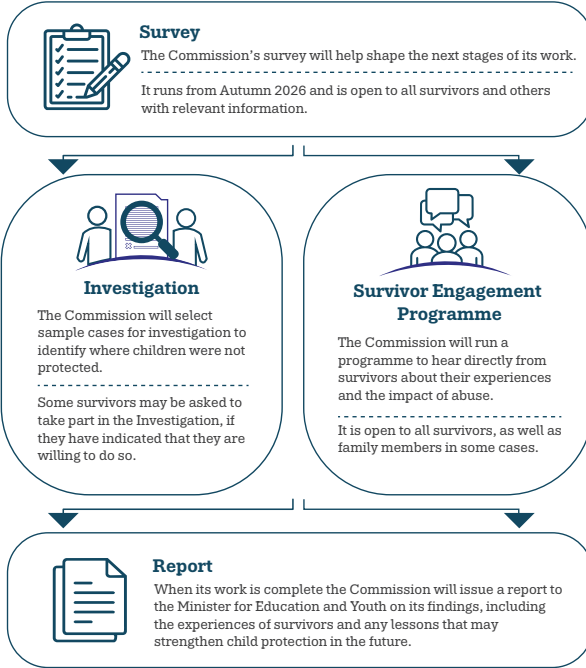
The information provided will help the Commission understand experiences and identify patterns and themes relevant to its work. It will also help inform the Commission's Investigation and Survivor Engagement Programme.

Those who indicated that they want to take part in the Survivor Engagement Programme will be contacted with further details. It is envisaged that the programme will begin in 2027.

Some people may also be asked to provide additional information to the Investigation, if they have indicated that they are willing to be contacted for that purpose.



Work of the Commission



Survivor Engagement Programme

The Survivor Engagement Programme is a voluntary programme designed to give survivors of child sexual abuse in schools a supportive space to share more about their experiences and how these experiences have affected their lives.

The programme is informal and confidential. It is not a legal process or a formal hearing. What you share will be treated in confidence, and your identity will be protected. For child safeguarding reasons, it is important to note that where the Commission receives information that raises concerns about a current risk to a child, we may be required to refer that information to

Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), or An Garda Síochána, in line with our legal and safeguarding obligations. The programme will offer a supportive and informal space where you can talk to a trained facilitator about how the abuse you experienced has affected you. You can share your experience in your own words, in your own way and at your own pace.

Information shared through the Survivor Engagement Programme will be treated confidentially and will be analysed and reported in a way that protects participants' privacy.

Investigation

The Commission will carry out an Investigation into how concerns of child sexual abuse in schools were handled by schools, and by those responsible for schools. It will also examine how An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and related agencies, and the Department of Education and Youth, handled concerns of child sexual abuse, related to schools, that were reported to them.

The purpose of the Investigation is to examine how concerns were handled, identify any failures to protect children, understand the causes of those failures, and consider responsibility for those failures.

The Commission is not tasked with determining whether abuse happened in individual cases. It is concerned with investigating how complaints and concerns were dealt with.

Selecting Matters for Investigation

The Commission will not be able to examine in detail every experience or piece of information provided through the survey.

Instead, information gathered through the survey will be used to identify patterns, themes and matters that may be further examined as part of the Investigation.

The Commission will adopt a sampling approach when deciding what information to examine in greater depth. This means that it will select samples from the information received in order to explore particular themes and issues more closely.

In deciding what will be examined further, the Commission will consider a range of factors, including the availability of witness and documentary evidence.

Information provided through the survey will play an important role in this process. Following the survey, any further participation in the Commission's work will only be with each person's knowledge and agreement.

How Will My Information be Handled?

We understand that participants may have concerns about sharing sensitive personal information.

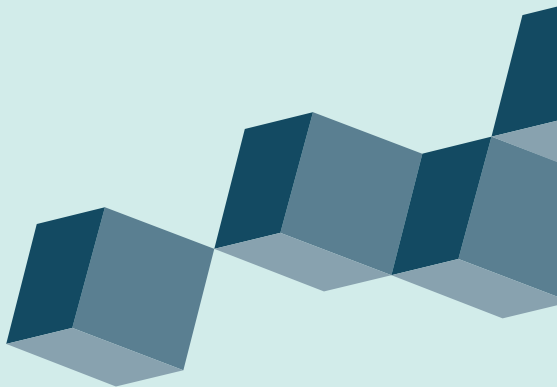
The Commission is committed to handling all information with care, respect and confidentiality and in accordance with its legal obligations.

Information provided through the survey will only be accessed by authorised members of the Commission and by those working on its behalf who need the information for the purposes of carrying out the Commission's work.

The survey cannot be completed anonymously. Participants will be asked to provide their name and contact details. This helps the Commission to avoid duplicate responses and to make contact about further participation where consent has been provided.

You can indicate whether or not you wish to be contacted about further participation in the Commission's work and we will only contact you if you have given your permission for us to do so in the survey.

Where information from the survey is used in reports, updates or publications, the Commission will take appropriate steps to protect participants' privacy.



Legal Proceedings and Confidentiality Agreements

If you are involved in civil or criminal proceedings, or if you have signed a confidentiality agreement, settlement agreement or any other arrangement that may restrict your ability to share information, we recommend that you seek independent legal advice before taking part in the survey or providing information to the Commission.

An independent legal adviser can help you understand your rights and any legal obligations that may apply in your particular circumstances.

Further information about how the Commission processes and protects personal data, and about any obligations the Commission may have, is available in the Commission's Survey Privacy Notice which is included as an appendix to this guide. You can also access our Data Privacy Notice on our website or by contacting the Commission.

Further Information

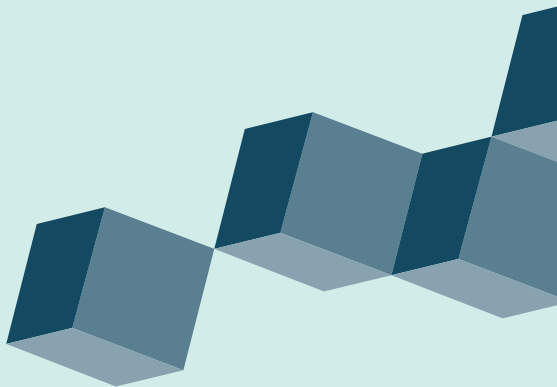
Additional information, including answers to frequently asked questions, is available on the Commission's website at www.commissionofinvestigation.ie.

You can contact the Commission:

- By phone: **(01) 920 8787**
- By email: info@commissionofinvestigation.ie

If you have questions about completing the survey, you can also contact the independent survey Participation Support Service:

- By phone: **(01) 611 4654**
- By email: coi@oneinfour.ie



Appendix A:

Survey Privacy Notice



Commission of Investigation

Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools

In Brief

- Taking part is entirely your choice. You can take breaks or stop at any time.
- This survey is not anonymous. However, any information published from the survey will not identify you and will be published only in summary form and cannot be linked to individual participants.
- We keep what you tell us confidential. In some circumstances we may have a duty to report information given to us to the appropriate authorities, such as if there is a potential risk to a child currently. You have rights over your information, explained below, and you can contact our Data Protection Officer at any time with questions.

Why We are Asking You to Take Part

The Commission is investigating how concerns of child sexual abuse in schools were handled between 1927 and 2013. This survey is an early step in that work. It asks a number of initial questions of survivors, and of others who have relevant information, so that the Commission can decide where to focus the next stages of its work.

If you experienced sexual abuse related to a school, the survey will also ask whether you would like to take part in the Survivor Engagement Programme, where you can share a fuller account of your experience in a confidential, non-adversarial process. All survivors who wish to do so can take part in this programme. You will also be asked if you would be willing to provide information to the Commission's legal investigation, if invited to do so by our legal team. Not everyone who comes forward will be asked to do this, as the Commission is required to use a sampling approach in its Investigation.

Taking Part is Voluntary

You do not have to take part. If you do take part the Commission requires certain questions to be answered to allow us to progress with our work. However, where possible we have made questions optional or provided an option for you to indicate if you are not sure of the answer.

What Information We Ask For

- Your name and contact details.
- The school(s) you attended and the relevant period.
- Information about your experience, including information about sexual abuse, which is a special category of personal data under data protection law:
 - We do not ask detailed questions about the nature of the abuse in the survey.
 - We ask about the time period when the abuse happened, and you have the option of naming the person or persons who carried out the abuse.

- We also ask questions about whether your experience was reported to the school or certain other agencies.
- Whether you would like to take part in the Survivor Engagement Programme.
- Whether you would be willing to be contacted by the legal investigation team to provide further information if invited to do so. Not all those who come forward will be asked to do this.

We only ask for information we need for the purposes described in this notice. If you complete the survey online, in paper copy or over the phone, the same information is collected; only the format differs.

Please Note that the Survey is Not Anonymous

Your responses will be collected and held together with your name and contact details, and your identity will therefore be known to the Commission. Access to your personal information will be strictly limited to those members of staff and authorised personnel who require it to carry out their roles in connection with the work of the Commission. Your personal data will be stored securely and handled in accordance with applicable data protection requirements. The Commission will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity, and no information from the survey that could identify you will be published or included in the Commission's reports or public outputs.

The Commission also operates a Survivor Engagement Programme. Participation in this programme is voluntary. The programme is intended to hear accounts from survivors regarding the impact of their experiences of sexual abuse in schools. Any documentation arising from participation in the Survivor Engagement Programme will be anonymised.

How We Are Allowed to Use Your Information

The lawful basis for processing the data required by the Commission, including individual personal data, is in the performance of an Official or Public Task. The legal basis for processing personal data is enabled by

legislation including by regulations made under S.38(4)(b), S.51(3) and S.60(6) of the Data Protection Act 2018. The regulations were made by way of statutory instruments S.I. 350 of 2026, S.I. 351 of 2026 and S.I. 352 of 2026 signed on 16 July 2026. The Commission shall be the controller, for the purposes of the Data Protection Regulation, in respect of personal data provided to the Commission.

The Commission is authorised to process special category data pursuant to S.51(3) of the Data Protection Act of 2018 and statutory instrument S.I. 352 of 2026 in so far as it is necessary for, and proportionate to, the substantial public interest.

Who Sees Your Information?

Your survey responses are seen only by Commission staff and contractors who need access to carry out the Commission's functions, on a strictly necessary basis. Where analysis of survey responses does not require your name and contact details, we work from a version of the data that does not directly identify you.

We may be required by law to share information with An Garda Síochána, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), or another authority in the circumstances described below.

The Limit to Confidentiality: Keeping Children Safe

We treat what you tell us as confidential. However, if, at any point during your engagement with the Commission, you tell us something that makes us concerned that a child is currently at risk of harm, we have a duty to pass that information to Tusla (The Child and Family Agency) or An Garda Síochána. You may also report circumstances where a child is currently at risk of harm directly to Tusla or An Garda Síochána and there is information on how to do this on our website and in this guide.

In certain circumstances the Commission may have an obligation pursuant to Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 to report information to An Garda Síochána.

In circumstances where the Commission is required to share information, the Commission will re-process your information solely for that purpose. By participating in the survey you are giving your consent to such reprocessing.

If You Are Completing the Survey on Behalf of Someone Else

In certain circumstances, a family member may complete the survey on behalf of a person who experienced sexual abuse. If you are doing this, we will ask you to confirm your relationship with that person and the basis on which you are providing their information.

How Long We Keep Your Information

Personal data provided to and processed by the Commission will be subject to the National Archives Act 1986 which provides that its records must be deposited with the Department of Education and Youth on completion of the work of the Commission.

After thirty years, those records will then be transferred to the National Archives. No record may be disposed of without authorisation from the Director of the National Archives.

While you have the right to request to have your data deleted, this request may not be capable of being fulfilled if your data is subject to the National Archives Act 1986.

The Commission will comply with any instruction or authorisation received in that regard.

Relevant guidance from the National Archives can be found at www.nationalarchives.ie.

Your Rights

Under data protection law, you generally have the right to:

- Ask us for a copy of the personal information we hold about you.
- Ask us to correct information that is inaccurate or incomplete.
- Ask us to restrict how we use your information, in certain circumstances.
- Object to our use of your information, in certain circumstances.
- Ask us to erase your information, in certain circumstances.

As the Commission is carrying out a statutory Investigation, some of these rights may be restricted under S.I. 350 of 2026. If a participant provides personal data to the Commission, the Commission may restrict their rights where this is necessary to protect an important objective, such as carrying out the Terms of Reference. Any restriction will apply only for as long as it is necessary and must be proportionate to the objective being protected.

Where the Commission restricts a data subject's rights, the Commission shall notify the data subject concerned in writing within one month of the restriction, unless notification would itself be prejudicial to the achievement of the relevant objective being safeguarded

If you have any questions about how your information is used, please contact our Data Protection Officer at dpo@commissionofinvestigation.ie.

You also have the right to make a complaint to the Data Protection Commission (www.dataprotection.ie) if you are unhappy with how we have handled your information.

