

Abuse Prevention Protocol annexed to the Charter in April 2024

Preamble

Like many people in the Church, Esdac is concerned by the issue of abusive influence, be it abuse of power, spiritual abuse or sexual abuse.

Esdac is committed to the defence of human rights and the protection of vulnerable people, both in its internal organisation and in its support activities. This commitment is based on human rights, the Gospel and Ignatian spirituality.

The aim of this text is to protect people against any risk of abuse in support and training involving Esdac and to describe the prevention and action measures that help to create a safe environment.

Commitments

Preventing abuse is a commitment to move away from the culture of "complicit silence" and to put the spotlight on the quality of being listened to with sympathy within a caring relationship.

Esdac wants to ensure that its members promote a culture of good treatment and refrain from any type of mistreatment, violence or abuse of members of the groups being supported, or in training, as well as within the team of support staff and trainers.

This is achieved through concrete actions: clear layout of the premises, reminders of the framework for spiritual guidance, rigorous information on prohibited practices and behaviour, all formalised in writing and shared by the responsible teams in place.

This means paying close attention to the recruitment, monitoring and training of support staff.

This also means setting up training and supervision systems to help them acquire an ever clearer awareness of what is happening between people concerning group support.

The Esdac accompanier

Esdac accompaniers cannot personally accompany members of the group they are accompanying. It is important to keep the two roles separate.

The accompanier of the group must listen humbly to what the group is experiencing and not try to take the place of God who leads the group. The accompanier must encourage an encounter between the Lord and the group, and let God work.

The accompanier must be alert to the various forms of domination and control within a group (abuse of power, reduced freedom of expression, cultural or linguistic domination, the "informal power" of those who criticise and exert influence outside the plenum, etc.). The accompanier has a duty to intervene when witnessing an abuse of power in order to denounce and prevent it. The methods used by Esdac (round-table discussions, spiritual conversations in small groups, co-accompaniment, etc.) are guarantees and aids in preventing abuses of all kinds.

All the members **in a group that is being accompanied experience** their sensitivity heightened by the practice of prayer, reviewing and discernment, an experience to which they commit themselves by becoming involved and trusting. It is up to the accompanier to pay particular attention to this asymmetrical relationship, to constantly seek the right place and the right distance.

To achieve this, the accompaniers need to be supervised so that they can tell a third party how they are proceeding and what inner movements are going through them during meetings with the groups that they are supporting as well as within the support team.

The victims

It also involves, where appropriate, helping people who have experienced sexual violence or any other form of abuse, particularly in the Church.

In some cases, the accompanier may receive a confidential report from a member of the group, who, sometimes for the first time, expresses having been a victim or witness of abuse, or denounces a situation of control within the group.

Welcoming and listening to victims is a priority and must respect certain principles: not questioning their word a priori; listening with empathy and respect without minimising the facts or the suffering; acknowledging what has happened; keeping the right distance; informing victims of their rights; offering to lodge a complaint; guaranteeing protection against the risk of revenge or threats.

In the case of a proven or suspected situation of abuse or control, after discernment within the support team and consultation with a third party (e.g. a supervisor), it is advisable to discuss the matter with the people in charge of the group and, if they refuse to listen, to make a report to the appropriate institutional, administrative, judicial or ecclesiastical authorities.

Esdac counsellors are not therapists and cannot replace professional psychological or psychiatric counsellors. They can only encourage people to speak out, to open up a path to help them reclaim their own words, to help the group to review its history, to discern where its strengths and weaknesses lie, to free itself from the past in order to be open to God's call today.

In the event of suspicion of inappropriate behaviour on the part of an Esdac accompanier, it is advisable to inform the accompanier of the suspicions and to talk to him or her to hear his or her side of the story so that he or she understands the consequences of reprehensible behaviour. Either the accompanier becomes aware of the situation and identifies the attitudes that need to be changed, or does not recognise the difficulties, in which case appropriate measures should be taken (removal, ban on supporting in the name of Esdac, exclusion, etc.).

Responding to abuse of power

In the Gospel, after having said to Simon: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church", in other words: "You are the head of this church", Jesus says that he is going to suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, be put to death and then rise again. Wanting to protect Jesus, and strengthened by the authority as leader that Jesus had just given him, Peter said to him: "God forbid, this will not happen to you! Jesus immediately put him in his place and said to him: "Get behind me, Satan". It was instantaneous... and violent. As violent as a mother grabbing her child to save him from being run over by a car. It's what Rosenberg calls 'protective violence'. We need to react immediately when we witness or experience abuse.

Some examples of abuse:

- Someone is monopolising the floor in a group. It's **up to** me to react, as an accompanier as soon as I notice this. If there's a timekeeper, I can't hide behind the excuse that it's up to him to react. All the members are jointly responsible for

the smooth running of a group. When we are in an Esdac, to avoid offending the person who monopolises the floor and to avoid offending the timekeeper (who does not intervene), it is necessary to remind everyone at the beginning of the meeting that respecting the time allotted to everyone is a standard of justice, and we agree that if anyone sees that this standard is not being respected, they should point it out immediately.

- During a zoom, it emerged that the husband of one of the participants was standing next to her (off-screen) and taking part in the meeting without asking permission. It was important to react immediately and put objective, non-hurtful words to what was happening. If you don't react immediately, you become an accomplice to the situation. And the situation becomes increasingly complicated to manage.
- If I see that an accompanier is receiving guests in his or her bedroom, I have to say "No" immediately. It's a question of prudence or preventing abuse.
- When, during an Esdac accompaniment, a situation of control, abuse of power or sexual abuse is discovered, you are obliged to report this immediately to the competent authority to prevent the abuser from victimising others.
- Etc...

Contacts

Anyone who has suffered abuse at Esdac can contact us:

- the EOF Jesuit Province reception and listening unit: ecoute.abus@jesuites.com
- and/or in each country the ad hoc commission, for example in France the Commission Reconnaissance et Réparation: victimes@crr.contact, tel: (+33) 9 73 88 25 71

This text is addressed to all Esdac accompaniers. By becoming an Esdac accompanier, each of us undertakes to help make every situation of accompaniment a safe space.