

MEDIA RELEASE

Communicating with child sexual abuse survivors during criminal court proceedings



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Francis Sullivan, CEO of Catholic Church Truth Justice and Healing Council, met with more than 100 lawyers and other staff from the NSW Department of Public Prosecutions last week where he discussed his understanding of the unique issues of communicating with survivors of child sexual abuse and the expectations they have.

Speaking at a DPP staff development workshop in Sydney entitled Communication with Victims: Lessons from Experience, Mr Sullivan spoke about the importance of building trust and dealing with survivors honestly, clearly, compassionately and with integrity.

"It is my experience that most survivors will view suspiciously anyone in a position of authority. Winning trust is difficult and losing it is very easy," Mr. Sullivan said.

"It is important for all of us, but particularly prosecutors to understand how significant it is when survivors put their trust in them. Legal representatives need to understand that hearings of this kind can re-traumatise and can place enormous stress on an abuse survivor.

"A prosecutor needs to bring not only their professional skills to these cases but also an understanding of the unique circumstances and difficulties their client faces going through the court process."

Media contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018

The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.