

TALKING POINTS FAITH LEADERS



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This document sets out some talking points for religious leaders who are already persuaded that age-appropriate CSE protects children, and who want public, sermon-ready language. If you are still weighing the question yourself, the companion Faith-Framed Messaging Guide and Theological Response Brief may be the better starting point.

Overarching core message pillars

Protection is a sacred duty

Caring for children, including for their safety, their dignity and their future is one of the clearest responsibilities placed on parents, elders and faith communities alike. Supporting age-appropriate CSE is an expression of that duty, not a departure from it.

Silence is not the same as innocence

Where children are left without honest, age-appropriate guidance, it is silence, not information, that leaves them exposed to harm, exploitation and shame. Speaking truthfully with children, in a manner fitting their age, is consistent with a faith tradition's call to raise children in truth.

This supports the family and the faith community. It should not and will not replace either

CSE is not positioned as a substitute for what happens in the home or in the church, mosque, or community of faith. It exists for the moments a parent or faith leader cannot always be present for, and it is strongest when it reinforces, rather than competes with, what children are taught at home.

Compassion for the vulnerable is a public calling

Our communities already include young people who are pregnant, living with HIV, or recovering from abuse. A faith leader's public voice can either add to their shame or offer them safety. Speaking about CSE with compassion is a way of choosing safety for them, publicly and deliberately.

Talking points

Why you are speaking about this:



I speak about this today because protecting our children is not someone else's responsibility to carry alone. It belongs to all of us: to parents, to elders, and to this community of faith.

Protection versus threat:



What I have come to understand is that this is not a threat to what we believe. Instead, it is a form of the same protection our faith already asks of us: children who are safe, who are respected, and who know they can come to a trusted adult when something is wrong.

Truth and silence:



Our silence has never protected a child. What protects a child is truth, spoken with care, at the right time, in the right way for their age.

Supporting parents, not replacing them:



This does not ask you to hand over your role as a parent, or your role as a person of faith. It asks us to stand alongside you, for the moments you cannot always be there.

Compassion for those already struggling:



Somewhere in this room is a young person carrying a fear, a shame, or a secret they have not told anyone. What we say from here today will decide whether they feel safe enough to come to us, or whether they carry it alone. [Insert your tradition's teaching on mercy and compassion for the vulnerable.]

A closing call to action:



I am asking you, as parents and as this community, not to fear this conversation, but to have it with your children, with each other, and with me. Come and ask your questions. Let us work through this together.

Where to use these

Moment: Opening

How to use it

Use the “why I am speaking about this” line to frame your authority to speak as a matter of protection and care, not politics.

Moment: Addressing a concern directly

How to use it

Use the protection-versus-threat and truth-and-silence points to reframe CSE in the communities’ own values before offering any detail.



Moment: Closing

How to use it

Use the closing call to action to invite conversation rather than end on a contested note.

Moment: A public Q&A or press conference

How to use it

Keep to the compassion and protection framing; where a specific doctrinal question is raised, it is appropriate to say you will respond after further reflection or consulting with your peers or advisors.

Language to use with care

- Lead with **protection, dignity and compassion**, avoid framing that sounds like it is defending an external programme or organisation.
- Avoid language that could be read as taking a public position on contested political debates unrelated to child protection; keep the focus on **safety, honesty and care** for the vulnerable.
- Avoid presenting yourself as having every answer. “I will reflect on that and come back to you” protects your credibility better than an improvised theological position.

