

# What to Do if Sexual Abuse Occurs

## If Your Child Discloses Sexual Abuse

### During a Disclosure:

Find a private place to talk with your child.

Do not express panic or shock.

- Reassure your child that you believe her/him.
- Do not pressure your child to tell you more than s/he is comfortable telling you.
- Ask limited questions.
- Listen.
- Reassure your child that it is good to tell and that you are proud of him.
- Reassure your child that it is not her fault and she is not bad or in trouble.
- Promise your child that you will protect and support him.
- If your child sees you are upset, explain you are upset with the *abuser*...not the child.

Report the abuse immediately to your local law enforcement agency. (Questions? Call ChildHelp USA Nat'l Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-442-4453.)

### After a Disclosure:

After your child has revealed abuse, you may be shocked, confused and/or angry. Regardless of what you are feeling or thinking, it is important to respond to your child appropriately.

- Remember that your child is a *child*, and treat her as such. Don't expect your child to respond like an adult.
- Be supportive of your child, but do not treat him differently.
- Keep to your regular routine as much as possible.

- Do not expect your child to appear "changed."
- Do not question your child about the abuse; by doing so, you may compromise the police investigation. If your child wishes to discuss the abuse with you, just listen and be supportive.
- Do not advise your child on what to do or say in a police interview beyond encouraging them to tell the truth.
- Explain in simple, age-appropriate terms what is happening throughout the police investigation (or as your child has questions).
- Acknowledge any feelings of anger, guilt, frustration, sadness, etc. that your child may experience. Let your child know it is okay to feel anything. Teach him appropriate ways to express his feelings.
- Sexually abused children may be susceptible to feelings of low self esteem. Help your child nurture a positive sense of identity with positive and supportive messages.
- Be prepared for depression or "let-down" weeks or months after the disclosure. Your child may become withdrawn or act out repeatedly over time.
- Obtain professional help, if needed.
- Be aware of your own reactions and get support and help as you work through your own feelings.
- Don't discuss the abuse with others in your child's presence.

Children often feel a sense of relief after disclosing abuse. Support from the parent or caregiver is one of the most important factors in your child's healing process. By offering support, you play an important role in your child's mental and emotional health.



### Important Local Phone Numbers

Police: \_\_\_\_\_ School Counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency: **911** \_\_\_\_\_ Child Protective Services: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_ Victim's Advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

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