



Responding to a Child's Disclosure

Believe the child.

Children seldom lie about being sexually abused. They tend to minimize, and to want to protect the offender from "getting into trouble". Offenders often convince children no one will believe them if they tell. Be aware that disclosures often come in small segments over time.

Reassure the child that telling you was the right thing to do.

Offenders may threaten children with dire consequences for telling someone. Emphasize that sexual abuse is never the fault of the child and that the adult, not the child, has done something wrong.

Be truthful and don't make promises you can't keep.

Children sometimes fear repercussions for themselves or siblings, or consequences for parents or other family members. Because of this, a child might ask an adult to promise secrecy before disclosing, or for assurance the offender won't go to jail. Such a promise should not be made.

Don't ask for extensive detail or take an "investigative" stance

Ask only those questions needed for clarification of what happened. Be a supportive listener, and let the child use her or her own words to describe what happened. It is important not to ask questions that suggest the 'right' words to a child, or in a way that can be seen as putting words in the child's mouth. The investigation of the disclosure should only be done by child protection workers or the police.

Let the child or young person know what you will do next

Child abuse often leaves children feeling disempowered and lacking control in their own life. Making sure the child is fully aware of each step can make the process less intimidating and can help return a sense of power and safety. If the child is old enough, he or she can talk directly to Child Protective Services when you make the call to report suspected abuse.

Do not confront the person believed to be an abuser

Do not confront the person believed to be abusing the child or young person. Confrontation has the potential to place the child or others at risk. Child Protective Services or the police will take any necessary action.

Make the call and report the abuse

Report the abuse to the designated agency in your state or province or to the police immediately. If the offender is a family member, do not contact the non-offending parent or other caregiver before reporting the abuse; you have no way of assessing any complicity and such contact may endanger the child. You do not have to be certain that abuse occurred; determining the validity of the allegation is up to the police or designated agency.

CONTACT NUMBER OF REPORTING HOTLINE:

In Canada: <http://cwrp.ca/child-abuse-neglect> - or call Kid's Help 1-800-668-6868

In US: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can> - or call Childhelp 1-800-422-4453