

How to Respond to Disclosures



There are steps caregivers can take to help protect children from abuse. These steps include discussing boundaries, understanding the warning signs of abuse and looking for reputable after-school care. But abuse can still happen.

If a child discloses abuse to you, your response makes a big difference as they process this trauma. Even though disclosures can be extremely upsetting, your calm and reassuring reaction can help children feel safe as they start to heal.

REMEMBER: STAY CALM.

Help your child feel safe by maintaining your composure.



Listen carefully.

Make sure you understand the basis of your child's story. Children rarely lie about abuse, but you may notice inconsistencies. Try to uncover facts without interrogating the child or demanding answers. Avoid leading questions.



Report abuse.

Contact your local law enforcement right away and other relevant agencies if necessary. The ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline can help you determine how to report abuse and how you should go about the next steps.



HELPFUL PHRASES:

Phrases like these can help your child feel comfortable talking about a difficult experience.

- **Can you tell me what happened next?**
- **Tell me more about what he/she did to you.**
- **Thank you for telling me.**
- **I believe you.**
- **You did the right thing.**
- **I am not mad at you.**
- **You are very brave for telling me.**
- **I am proud of you.**
- **You did nothing wrong.**
- **You're going to be okay.**



UNHELPFUL PHRASES:

Phrases like these may inadvertently place blame on the child, confuse the child or make the child more upset.

- **Why didn't you tell me sooner?**
Never say anything that could be interpreted as blaming the child.
- **You said earlier that this happened on Tuesday, but now you're saying it happened on Wednesday. Which one is it?**
You may notice slight inconsistencies as children share their stories, but children rarely lie about abuse. Do not ask accusatory questions.
- **Did he/she touch you after he/she showed you that picture?**
Avoid asking leading questions that could confuse a child. Stick to open-ended questions and let the child guide the conversation.
- **The person who did this to you is evil.**
You may feel disgusted and angry when a child reveals abuse. These feelings are normal. However, children may misinterpret your anger as anger towards themselves. It's important to be as neutral as possible to help your child feel comfortable sharing
- **The person who did this to you is going to go to jail for a long, long time.**
Children may have complex feelings about their abuser, and this statement might not comfort them in a vulnerable moment. Additionally, you should avoid making promises about any outcomes you don't know for sure.

It's heartbreaking to imagine a child facing abuse, but your response can help set a path towards healing.

BCGA.org/ParentSafetyResources