

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Listen carefully: Child abuse disclosures are typically a process, not a single event. Sometimes children are trying to tell us something for a while before we understand what. Tune in to the children around you. Listen to what they are saying (verbally and non-verbally).

Remain calm: A child will be feeling many things during this time. It is essential you remain calm in that moment. Later, ensure you get help from your own support network. Hearing stories of abuse or neglect can be very challenging to deal with even for adults.

Respect the child's privacy: Speak to the child in a quiet space away from others.

Remind the child:

- * They were right for telling you.
- * It is not their fault.
- * You believe them. False reports are rare.
- * You will get them help.

DON'T MAKE PROMISES YOU CAN'T KEEP: Don't promise a child to keep their information a secret. You know you have to get help for them and if they are disclosing abuse or neglect, we know that another person has already violated some trust. Be sure you are an adult that they can count on.

Acknowledge the child's feelings: Children will be feeling a lot of different things. Some emotions can include grief, shame, fear, sadness, and many others. Acknowledge those things: "That must have been _____ (scary, etc), I'm sorry that happened to you."

Allow the child to lead the discussion: Allow the child to tell you what happened in his/her own words. You may ask for clarification if necessary, but do not ask a lot of questions of the child. Investigators and specially trained interviewers are the professionals in this area. It is NOT YOUR JOB to investigate the situation – only listen so that you can make the report. Most children fully disclose only one time. Don't ask closed-ended questions. Instead, ask for clarification on things like, "who is he?" but if the child doesn't answer, then don't ask again. Make the report.

NEVER ask a child why?: We don't understand why people hurt children, certainly children never will either! Asking "why?" is inappropriate and implies blame. Don't ask a child why they never told anyone before. The important thing is that they are telling you now. We never want to lay blame on the child.

Keep the child informed: Tell the child about what might happen next. Tell them you are getting help. If you don't know what will happen next, tell them you don't know. Be honest.

Call the hotline and authorities: Call for help immediately! The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If the lines are busy, be sure to leave your number to be reached at later. Have as much information as possible when making the call, but it's okay if you don't know everything! Give what you know.

State of Iowa Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-362-2178
State of Illinois Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-2873
If child is in immediate danger, dial 911

