



HOW TO HANDLE A DISCLOSURE

For schools, youth organizations, churches, camps, and other kid settings

- Find a place that's private to talk with the child.
- Sit in a way that's natural and helps conversation. Don't sit behind a desk.
- Don't touch the child without permission. Children who've been abused may associate it with physical or emotional pain.
- Stay calm and listen in a caring way.
- Recognize and respect a variety of feelings. Each child is different. Don't assume the child is angry or hurt or scared. They may not be.
- Use the child's language. Avoid words he or she might not understand or find embarrassing.
- Encourage the child to tell what happened, but don't press for details. Don't try to investigate or determine whether it was abuse.
- Honor the child's method of disclosure. Saying abuse has happened to someone they know may be a disguised disclosure of their own experience, or truly be another child. (Kids often tell other kids before adults.) Allow the child to tell about the situation as they feel comfortable.
- Respect and honor the child's relationships, even with an abuser.
- Avoid asking "why" questions. Children often feel they've done something wrong or have to defend themselves when asked why.
- Reassure the child. If they blame themselves, affirm he or she is not to blame.
- Support the child. Even if you've turned over responsibility to child protective services, the child will continue to look to you for support since you know about the situation. The child will see you as a safe person.
- Let the child know what you will do now. Uncertainty brings anxiety. Yet, do not make promises you may not be able to keep, like "I'll see that you never have to be near this person again."
- Reassure that you will not share this with other children, but will tell another "helping person."

Remember, when a child discloses, they're likely to feel:

Guilty: Children often blame themselves for the abuse and often feel guilt for telling.

Ashamed: Children often are ashamed about the abuse itself.

Confused: Children often have conflicted feelings about the perpetrator.

Scared: Children often fear repercussions of telling. They may be scared of the perpetrator, frightened they will get in trouble or not be believed, or worry that their family will break up.