



## MEMORANDUM

To: Parents  
From: S/HE staff  
Re: What to do if your child tells you s/he was sexually assaulted  
Date: January 7, 2016

According to a study conducted for the National Institute for Justice, “Being a victim of sexual assault is one of the most violating experiences anyone can endure and can cause immediate, as well as long-term, physical and mental health consequences.” Of rape victims, approximately 35% suffer from nongenital trauma; 21% suffer from genital trauma; up to 40% get sexually transmitted infections; and up to 5% become pregnant. Four out of five rape victims subsequently suffer from chronic physical or psychological conditions, and rape victims are 13 times more likely to attempt suicide than people who have not been crime victims and six times more likely than victims of other crimes. Your child will likely be suffering severely.

But learning that your child has been sexually assaulted will also be extremely painful for you. You must remember, however, that the sexual assault happened to your child, not to you. You must put the needs of your child before your own. This can be extremely difficult under the circumstances. Both you and your child will be in an extremely vulnerable emotional state. You will not be thinking clearly. You may want to lash out, and the only available target at that time will be your child. You may say things you regret or that will be deeply hurtful to your child, even unintentionally. To help you avoid this, please review the following script.

- I love you unconditionally.
- I love you as much now as I ever have.
- I believe you.
- You are not to blame in any way for this.
- What steps would you like to take now?
- Whatever you decide to do I support your decision.
- What can I do to help you?
- Tell me whatever you want to tell me.
- Even though I have a lot of questions I want to ask, I’m going to let you decide what you want to tell me in your own time.
- I want to encourage you to get medical treatment and see a counselor about what happened.

Giving your child the third degree about who, what, where, when, why, and how will not be helpful or viewed as supportive. If your child pursues



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criminal, civil, or school disciplinary remedies, then plenty of people will fulfill that role.

Immediate medical treatment is extremely important, particularly in reducing exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, providing pregnancy options, alleviating physical trauma, and securing evidence for later prosecution.

Prompt counseling is recommended both for the child and the parent. Learning your child has been sexually assaulted may trigger in you mental health problems that if left untreated, will manifest themselves and traumatize your child more. There is no shame in seeking counseling from a professional.