



WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Hearing a child disclose a traumatic event can be difficult for any adult to hear. Here are a few tips on how to handle this should you ever have to deal with it.

Remember, any time you suspect abuse or neglect you should call the child abuse hotline in your state **immediately**. A report of suspected abuse is not an accusation but a request that a professional look into the situation for the sake of the child and family. In the end we must remember that it is every adult's responsibility to protect children and we cannot ignore them simply because reporting is too difficult for us.

State of Iowa Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-362-2178

State of Illinois Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-2873

If necessary or if a child is in immediate danger dial 911

- 1. Listen Carefully:** Child abuse disclosures are typically a process not a single event and therefore sometimes children are trying to tell us something for a while before we understand. Tune in to the children around you; listen to what they are saying (verbally and non-verbally).
- 2. 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.
- 3. Respect the child's privacy:** Speak to the child in a quiet space away from others.
- 4. Remind the child:**
 - They were right for telling you
 - It is not their fault
 - You believe them. False reports are rare, listen to what children are telling you.
 - You will get them help





5. **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 they can count on.
6. **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"
7. **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 to listen and make the report.
8. **Don't Ask A Lot of Questions:** This is not an interrogation. Remember, it isn't your job to investigate-it is your job to report suspicions. Specially trained interviewers will ask the necessary questions to get help for the child. Don't ask questions with closed ended answers (such as yes, no). If you need to ask for clarification you can say things like "what does that mean?" "who is he?" but if the child doesn't want to answer do not ask again. Make the report and allow the professionals to ask questions.
9. **NEVER Ask a child Why?:** We at the Child Abuse Council don't understand why people hurt children, certainly children never will! This is an inappropriate question and implies blame. Don't ask a child why they never told you before or why someone hurt them. The important thing is that they are telling you now. By asking them this we may unintentionally lay blame on the child.
10. **Keep the child informed:** Tell the child about what will happen next. Tell them you are getting help and tell the child what they can expect next. If you don't know then tell them you don't know. Children want to know what will happen.
11. **Call the hotline or authorities:** Call for help immediately! The hotlines are available 24 hours a day 7 days a week. If the lines are busy be sure to give them a number to reach you at later. Have as much information as possible with you during the call. Whether it is a license plate or a full enrollment form of information the more you are able to provide the better it is.