



### **Recognizing Disclosures:**

Often it takes some time for a child to disclose abuse. Victimized children often experience a great sense of helplessness and hopelessness and think that no one can help them. Children may try to protect the abuser, or not report abuse for fear of what the abuser may do to them. A child may not report abuse for months and even years, particularly if the abuser is someone close to the child.

Children may disclose abuse in a variety of ways. There could be a drawing "accidentally" left out for a teacher, counselor, or trusted relative to see. A child may frequently go to the school nurse complaining of vague, somatic symptoms, often without organic basis, hoping that the nurse will guess what has happened. They may blurt it out, especially in a safe, warm nurturing environment. They may come privately to talk directly and specifically about what is going on. Some children while reluctant to report or discuss the abuse, may express apprehensions and anxieties about the perpetrator or the home situation. In some cases, abused children will make an outcry which may take the extreme form of a suicide gesture or attempt. Other ways include:

**Indirect Hints:** *"I hate it when Uncle Joe visits." "My babysitter keeps bothering me."* A child may talk in these terms because he/she hasn't learned more specific vocabulary, feels too ashamed or embarrassed to talk more directly, has promised not to tell, or a combination of these reasons.

**Appropriate responses** would be invitations to tell you more or open-ended questions such as "Can you tell me more?" or "What do you mean?" Gently encourage the child to be more specific. It is important that the child use his/her own language, and that no additional words are given to the child.

**Disguised Disclosure:** *"What would happen if a girl told someone her mother beat her?" or "I know someone who is being touched in a bad way."* The child might be talking about a friend or sibling, but could be talking about her/himself. Encourage the child to tell you about the "other child." The child may eventually tell you about whom he/she is talking.

**Disclosure with Strings Attached:** *"If I tell you my problem you have to promise not to tell."* Most children are very aware that some negative consequences will result if they break the secret of abuse. The abuser may threaten these consequences to keep the child silent. Let the child know you want to help. Tell them, from the beginning, that there are times when you too may need to get help and that in order to help them, it may be necessary to get some special people involved. The fact that the child has chosen this particular moment to disclose is important. Assure the child that you will respect his/her need for confidentiality by not discussing the abuse with anyone other than those directly involved in getting help. And, if you can explain the process to them, it may help with their initial fear.





### **Steps to Responding to Disclosures**

In school, if a child discloses during a lesson, acknowledge the child's disclosure and continue the lesson. Afterward, find a place where you can talk with the child alone. It is best to present child abuse curricula before a playtime or recess so that you have a natural opportunity to talk with children privately if they come forward.

### **Before notifying anyone outside of your school or agency, you or another designated person.**

Should sit in a quiet room and speak with the child without interruptions. If a child has chosen you as the person in whom to confide, you should take the time to speak with the child about the problem. If that is not possible, ask the child if she/he would feel comfortable discussing it with someone else. If the child indicates that he wants to tell you, you must make every effort to listen and support the child. She/he may not trust another enough to tell them.

Multiple interviews should be avoided. The child will have to share the story with many others.

When you speak with the child, sit down together; assure him/her that you are concerned and want to know more and that it's alright to tell you.

Go slowly, allowing the child to explain as much as he/she can. Do not suggest in any way that any particular person may have done something to him/ her or that the child was touched in any particular way. Let the child talk as much as possible.

Explain, in age appropriate language, that the law requires you to make a report if any child discloses abuse and that the law is there to protect them. Describe for them who will be involved, for example, the social worker, principal and the CPS caseworker.

### **Supporting the Child After the Report Has Been Made**

If it is necessary for Child Protective Services or a Law Enforcement official to interview the child at the school or agency, you should cooperate and assist by providing access for such an interview. Unless there are compelling reasons against it, a staff member the child trusts should be present during the interview to provide support for the child. (This situation may also arise when the report did not originate from your school or agency.)

**We all have a responsibility for the welfare of children in our community.**





**Steps to Responding to Disclosures, continued from previous page.**

### ***When Talking to the Child, DO***

- Find a private place to talk with the child.
- Sit next to the child, not across a table or desk.
- Use language the child understands; ask the child to clarify words you don't understand.
- Express your belief that the child is telling you the truth.
- Reassure the child that it is not his/her fault, and that he/she is not bad and did nothing to deserve this.
- Determine the child's immediate need for safety.
- Let the child know you will do your best to protect and support him/her.
- Tell the child what you will do, and who will be involved in the process.
- Be kind, caring and reassuring about safety in your presence at all times.

### ***When Talking to the Child, DON'T***

- Disparage or criticize the child's choice of words or language.
- Suggest answers to the child.
- Probe or press for answers the child is unwilling to give.
- Display shock or disapproval of parent(s), child, or the situation.
- Talk to the child with a group of interviewers.
- Make promises to the child, about "not telling" nor about how the situation will work out.

**All adults in the community have a responsibility for keeping children safe.**

