

Child Sexual Assault

How Can You Help A Child

Report your suspicions to the appropriate authority

You have a legal obligation to report any suspected or actual child abuse to the authorities e.g., to the police or Ministry of Children and Family Development. Do not question your child to find out explicit details of the incident. Simply support them as you make the report.

If your child has been the victim of sexual abuse it is important that you give your child the protection, love, and support (s)he needs to work through his/her feelings of confusion, anger, fear, shame, and guilt.

Believe your child

Children seldom lie about sexual abuse. Do not blame your child. Whatever the circumstances, your child was not asking to be abused or molested. Your child was robbed of his/her childhood, personal power, and integrity. Let your child know that you trust him/her and that what happened wasn't his/her fault.

Reassure your child

Reassure your child that (s)he is not to be blamed, that the blame rests entirely with the abuser. Allow the child to regain his/her sense of personal control. Don't be overly protective. Let your child make choices.

Respect your child's fear

Your child may have feared being hurt or that someone else in his/her family may be hurt. Your child may fear being abused again or blamed for being abused. Your child may fear that they will be punished or that they won't be believed. Help your child develop skills to increase their safety. Helping children protect themselves reduces the likelihood of further victimization and helps restore the child's sense of self-esteem.

Accept all their feelings

Tolerate his/her moods. Don't tell your child that they "shouldn't feel that way." Give your child an atmosphere of acceptance, warmth, safety, and love. In order to alleviate his/her fears, let your child know that you will protect them. Allow your child to express their anger. Provide a safe environment where your child can vent his/her feelings.

Listen without making judgments or giving advice

Try to understand what your child has and is going through. Do not criticize his/her actions or feelings. Do not preach. Compliment your child on his/her bravery to tell what happened. Validate his/her worth as a person.

Respect your child's privacy

Don't pressure or pry for information. Your child will talk when (s)he is ready.

Care about your child's well-being

Let your child know you care. Don't worry about doing or saying the wrong thing. Be there for your child. Be okay with silence. Let your child know that you are sorry about what happened and will do your best to protect and support him/her.

Take care of yourself too

This has been an extremely upsetting experience for you. You may need to talk to someone in order to cope with some difficult emotions of your own. If you are experiencing rage or blaming yourself, you can be more helpful to your child if you find appropriate ways of coping with your own emotions. You need support and encouragement as you're struggling through this ordeal with your child. Approaching a medical professional for references is a good place for you to start.

Don't blame yourself

Take a look at your feelings of responsibility. Do you feel it is your responsibility to protect your child at all times? Maybe her abuse gives you a sense of failure. Realistically, no one can protect another person at all times without making that person a prisoner. Check out your own feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, fear, guilt, anger, and loss of control over your own life.

Give yourself credit

For what you've already done and become knowledgeable about child sexual abuse. Accurate information helps parents overcome feelings of isolation, guilt, anger, grief, shame, and embarrassment. Know that children rarely lie about sexual assault and tend to minimize, not exaggerate the facts. Know how frequent child abuse is, that children are often not able to tell in words, and that offenders are usually well known to the family.

Abuse is motivated by a need for power and control. Coercion is almost always an element. Abusers are usually self-centered, don't know or care how much psychological harm their behavior causes, and plan their sexual contacts carefully in advance. Abusers depend on their victims to meet their emotional needs and to "keep it a secret." Abusing children allows him/her to feel like a powerful person instead of a victim. However, they are still responsible for the abuse they inflict on children and need help to change that behavior and those abusive attitudes. Many sexual abusers were victims of sexual abuse themselves as children.