

Tips on Mandatory Reporting

For the victim, the phone call you make reporting the incident of abuse will set into motion a series of events that are mostly beyond her/his control. Because child sexual abuse is, by its nature, a crime that is about taking control away from the victim, anything you can do to help the victim gain some sense of control in the aftermath can be crucial to her/his well-being and how she/he handles the process to come. The following information uses the pronoun “she.” This in no way dismisses the fact that males are victimized as well.

General Tips:

- **Create privacy and safety** – If possible, take the child to a room where the two of you can speak privately. Speak to the child at eye-level.
- **Be calm and re-assuring:** Take a minute to calm yourself down. Make sure you present as calm and confident. Be aware of your posture, your body movements, your tone of voice, and your facial expressions.
- **Give her lots of positive feedback:** “I’m really glad you told me this, it must be very hard.” “This is a really brave thing you are doing, we’re going to make sure you get the help you need.” “No-one deserves to be hurt like this, I’m really glad you told me. “Everyone deserves to be safe and it is not your fault.”
- **Avoid asking about details of the event**– Take their statements seriously and don’t pressure them to tell you more than they are willing to talk about. Ask, is there anything else you would like to tell me?_Anything else that is important for me to know? Do you have any worries about all this?
- **Ask her about adult support:** Are adults in her life that she would like to know about this? Has she told any adults before? How did that go? If the alleged offender is in the home, ask her directly if she has talked to any of the other adults living in the home (if there are any) and how that went. This will give you information about whether she has any adults who support her in her family, community, and at home.
- **Allow her to make any decisions you can at this point:** “Is there anyone you would like me to call to be here with you for this?” I need to call someone who helps children when things like this happen, would you like to be in the room when I make the call? If she says, “no,” ask her which adult she’d like to have be with her while you make the call.
- **Ask her if she has any worries about you talking with other people (or other people finding out about the alleged sexual abuse).** If yes, ask her to tell you more about them; “What does she imagine happening?” “What is she worried that person will do?” If you believe she has a parent who is supportive, ask her directly about talking with them. “What does she think parent will do and say when they find out?”

Do Not

- Make contact with the child’s parent(s) until DHS or Law Enforcement have talked to the parent(s).
- Ask her why she didn’t tell earlier.
- Ask her what she tried to do to stop it, or why she didn’t do something to stop the abuse.
- say negative things about the alleged offender or the parent(s), make promises about what will, or will not happen.
- Act shocked or react emotionally.
- Make promises about what will, or will not happen. If you don’t know, say so, and tell her that she can ask the other adults who will come to speak with her.

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Discuss Reporting:

- **Don't rush through the process.** Yes the phone call needs to be made promptly, but the rest (interview, telling the parents) will be scheduled to some extent to accommodate the victim's needs.
- **Discussing reporting with the victim:** We need to take steps to keep you safe. You already took the first step by talking to me and that was really brave. Step two is me talking to another adult. This adult talks to children and families all the time about stuff like this. They know that everyone deserves to be safe and they work had to make that happen.
- **Explain confidentiality:** Clearly explain to the victim what confidentiality level exists around this, since she will no doubt be scared about who will find out. Tell her who you are obligated to tell, and that those people will honor her confidentiality.
- **Explain Child Protective Services (CPS):** "There are people who help children and families when things like this happen. Their job is to help everyone be safe, and help parents and adults take care of kids. They will talk with her first to figure out what adults in her life can help keep her safe." If she has had experience with CPS in the past, listen to her experience, and show empathy for her feelings. Encourage her to tell the new caseworker about her thoughts and feelings. Let her know that you can also tell them as well.
- **Discussing Law Enforcement:** Ask the CPS hotline worker if Law Enforcement is likely to respond when they send a caseworker to the school. If so, tell the victim another person will come with the CPS caseworker and their job is to help keep kids safe too. Depending on the age of the child, describe the role of police.