



Fact Sheet 5 - HOW DO I RESPOND TO A CHILD WHO DISCLOSES SEXUAL ABUSE?

The most important and immediate things you can do are:

- Always believe the child.
- Reassure the child that telling you was the right thing to do.
- Maintain a calm appearance.
- Find a quiet place to talk.

Be truthful

Children and young people sometimes fear repercussions for themselves or siblings, or consequences for parents or other family members. Because of this, a child might ask an adult to promise secrecy before disclosing. Such a promise should not be made. The mandatory reporter can reassure the child and encourage them to speak out about the abuse.

Let the child or young person take their time

It is important the child or young person does not feel rushed or panicked and that you have plenty of time to calm and reassure them. Be a supportive listener, however, remember, it is not a counselling session.

Let the child or young person use their own words

Children and young people have their own way of describing their experiences. It is important not to ask questions that suggest the 'right' words to a child or young person, or in a way that can be seen as putting words in the child's mouth. The investigation of the disclosure should only be done by professional child protection workers or the Western Australia Police.

Let the child or young person know what you will do next

Child abuse often leaves children feeling disempowered and lacking control in their own life. Making sure the child or young person is fully aware of each step can make the process less intimidating and can help return a sense of power and safety.

Do not confront the person believed to be an abuser

Do not confront the person believed to be abusing the child or young person. Confrontation has the potential to place the child, the mandatory reporter or others at risk. Professional child protection workers or the Western Australia Police will take any necessary action.

Make the call

Due to the seriousness of child sexual abuse, a verbal report is the preferred method of reporting in the first instance.

A written report must follow a verbal report as soon as practicable, preferably within 24 hours.

For further information, please refer to;

- *Fact Sheet 7: What information should be provided for further information.*
- *Fact Sheet 9: Sample mandatory reporting form.*

Self-care

Resources and support services are available to mandatory reporters and allied professionals who may experience personal issues resulting from making a mandatory report. Refer to *Fact Sheet 4: Resources for mandatory reporters* for further information.

Remember, any person who has a belief that a child is being subjected to any form of abuse or neglect should report these concerns to the Department for Child Protection.

Further information

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Department for Child Protection

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The Mandatory Reporting Service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.