



Resources for Parents of Child Sexual Abuse Victims

How to talk to your children about their abuse:

- Validate your child
 - Reiterate to your child that abuse is never the victim's fault, EVER
 - Tell your child that you believe them
 - Tell your child they are safe with you and you intend to support them
 - Tell your child that they are brave for sharing the truth and it will not get them in trouble
 - Say things like, "I am so sorry that happened to you" and avoid making negative faces, noises, or jokes.
 - Avoid phrases and words like "aww", "bless your heart", "you poor thing" etc. and instead say things like, "thank you for telling me"
- Be extremely cautious of your tone and demeanor
 - Do your best to be calm and caring, and not to exhibit any behavior that would make your child feel like they're in trouble or have done anything wrong
 - If you need to step away because it's difficult and emotional for you, make sure you explain to your child that it's not their fault and their story is important and matters, and you need to step away but it's not because of them or anything they have done wrong. Be sure to continue listening and supporting your child after you take a moment to collect yourself.
- Don't rush the process or try to sweep it away quickly
 - Everyone heals from trauma in their own way and time. Everyone's trauma is different, and each person is different. Never rush someone who is healing from abuse or trauma.
 - The best thing you can do to help someone heal from trauma is to validate them, comfort them, encourage them, and give them the space to come to you when they need to, but also heal on their own when they need to as well.
 - Many children seek outside resources they believe will help them [pornography, drugs, alcohol, violence, excessive television or phone usage to escape, etc.] and they need guidance to help them understand that those things won't heal them, they will actually make the process harder and more hurtful to them.
 - Abuse is not something you can make "go away", even though it may seem so or may seem easier. Abuse is extremely traumatic and can shape a child's development in extreme ways. If trauma recovery is ignored or rushed, it can

prolong hurt, delay healing, and make a child feel they are the problem, their abuse doesn't matter, or that they deserved the harm.

- Ask the child directly about what has happened
 - In a calm, non-threatening way, ask the child if someone has touched them inappropriately, harmed them in any way, or done something that made them feel uncomfortable. Remind them that they are not in trouble and you are a safe person to talk to.
 - If the child reveals they have been abused, calmly ask who hurt them.
 - Children may be hesitant to disclose who hurt them to try to protect their abuser or for fear of what will happen to their abuser. If this is the case, remind the child that they aren't responsible for the actions of others.
- Avoid judgment and blame
 - Avoid placing blame by using "I" questions and statements. Rather than beginning your conversation by saying, "You said something that made me worry..." consider starting your conversation with the word "I." For example: "I am concerned because I heard you say that you are not allowed to sleep in your bed by yourself."
- Be patient
 - Remember that this conversation may be very frightening for the child. Many perpetrators make threats about what will happen if someone finds out about the abuse. They may tell a child that they will be put into foster care or threaten them or their loved ones with physical violence.
- <https://rainn.org/articles/if-you-suspect-child-being-harmed>
 - When your child comes to you to talk about their experience, make time for them.
- Listen and then follow up
 - Allow the child to tell their story and share. After they have shared, ask any follow up questions.
 - Don't interrupt the child's story; wait until they have finished for questions or to express validation.
- Don't ask inappropriate questions
 - Don't ask a child "why didn't you stop it" or how could you let this happen?" Children under the age of 14 cannot consent to any sexual activities with any people of any age, and children under the age of 16-18 [depending on your state's laws] cannot consent to sexual activities with an adult. It is not your child's fault that they have been abused, it is only the fault of the perpetrator.
 - Don't ask "what were you wearing" or "were you doing something you weren't supposed to be doing?" It doesn't matter what a person is wearing, drinking, or doing; if someone harms them or takes advantage of them, that is the responsibility of the perpetrator of the abuse alone.
 - If your child was engaging in activities they should not have been when the abuse occurred, listen and validate them. Wait until another time and circumstance to talk about their behavior so they clearly understand that the abuse was not their fault and you are not mad at them for sharing it with you.

Making a Report

- Clearly document everything
 - When the child is finished sharing their story with you, document what they have told you. Include the details they've shared with you about their abuse and also share the dates and details of when the child told with you.
- Don't make a child tell their story over and over
 - If a child has told you their story, don't make them rehash it to you over and over, as it can be very traumatic for them.
 - After a child tells you their story, document the details for the mandatory report you must make to local authorities.
- Talk to the child before you report:
 - Tell the child that you're going to talk to someone who can help. Be clear that you are not asking their permission. The child may not want you to report and may be frightened, especially if the perpetrator has threatened them or their loved ones. Explain that you are required by the law to report, and you're reporting to make sure that they remain safe, along with others as well.
 - It's important to let the child know you are reporting; sexual abuse often leaves a child feeling like they have no control over their lives or bodies. Even if they object, it's important to help them feel like they have some control again.
 - If the child is older, you can give them options, i.e. you can say "I'm required by law to report this for your safety and the safety of others. Would you like to be in the room with me when I call or would you like to be somewhere else?"

Getting Outside Help

- Outside help [assistance or counsel from someone outside of your close family or friends] is often needed and extremely helpful for victims of abuse. Children may feel more comfortable sharing their abuse with a third party who doesn't know their abuser. It can also be very helpful for parents of child abuse victims to get counsel and support as well, as abuse can impact many people involved.
- Look for a certified counselor, licensed therapist, or licensed trauma specialist.
 - Note that each of these occupations are different and specialize in different areas.
 - Make sure the person you seek professional help from is a professional with proper documentation
 - Research and find out which professional may be best equipped to help you
- Don't hesitate to reach out to professional help if you need it. Seeking help for you and your children is a mark of a good parent who is seeking to help themselves and their children heal in a productive and responsible way.
- Listen to your kids; if they don't connect well with their counselor or therapist, ask them why and try to understand so you can find someone who will fit better with your child.
- Note that many children and adults feel uncomfortable or hesitant at first talking to an outside help support person. It may take some time to feel comfortable and healing is not an overnight occurrence.
- Pastoral or religious leader support can be an excellent resource, but keep in mind that unless your pastor is certified in counseling or a licensed therapist, they are not

professionals. It can be helpful to seek counsel from your church leader and from a professional as well.

- There are many professional, Christian and Biblical counselors and therapists available. Check your local resources and if one is not available to you locally, search for online Christian therapy and counseling options
- Online Christian Counseling Resources
 - Faithful Counseling
 - Cornerstone Christian Counseling
 - Christian Therapist on Demand
 - Grace Wellness Center
 - Mycounselor.online

Moving Forward

- Help the child remember their identity
 - Abuse can often manipulate how a child thinks about themselves and others. They may feel worthless, like the abuse was their fault, like they deserved it, etc. Remind them that their value is inherent and never can be taken away from them.
- Help them create healthy boundaries
 - Sexual abuse often confuses a person's boundaries and what they believe is okay and not okay. Help your child clearly identify what kind of things are okay [i.e. consensual hugs, pats on the back from friends, etc.] and what things are not okay [adults touching them, non-consensual touching, things that make them feel uncomfortable].
 - Clearly explain consent to your child
 - Consent:
 - Agreeing with another person to do something
 - To be of the same mind or opinion
 - Acceptance or approval of what is planned or done by another
 - *synonym*: permission
 - Consent must be given for everything
 - If your child is older and dating or in a relationship, ask them what their boundaries are and remind them often that they never have to do anything they are uncomfortable with. Also enforce that they should **always** ask for consent and never do **anything** without a person's full consent.
- Be patient
 - Healing takes time for everyone and it cannot be rushed
- Continue support
 - Continue validation, encouragement, and comfort
 - Continue to listen
 - Continue to provide whatever resources you can to your child for healing
- Give them the appropriate spaces to talk about their abuse
 - Not every occasion or location is a safe, healthy, or appropriate place to speak about abuse. Not every person is safe or appropriate to speak to either [i.e.

school, friends, adults who are not safe listeners] . Help the child indicate who in their life is safe to talk to and what kind of places and spaces are appropriate [at home, with counselors, parents, trusted adults you approve]. NEVER silence a victim or tell them not to tell the truth about their abuse. If you notice they may be sharing their story at a place or time that isn't helpful or safe, redirect them to the safe places and safe people where/with whom they can share their story and work through their emotions in a healthy, productive way.

- Encourage them as you move forward together
 - Remind your child that it will take time to heal and that's okay
 - Your child may not like certain activities, shows, games, etc. anymore. Be aware of what triggers them to remember their abuse and instead find new activities they can enjoy
 - Encourage them to do the things that bring them joy
 - Help them find an outlet when they're frustrated, angry, or sad
 - Some kids relieve stress through running, exercise, talking, music, painting, etc. Ask your child what helps them and set up a plan to help them.