

Listen

Your response to a child's disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to that child's ability to resolve and heal any negative effects of sexual abuse.

How to Listen

Know how to listen to children who tell about sexual abuse

- Listen and believe the child
- Do not question the child
- Do not deny the problem or blame the child
- Stay calm! If you get upset or angry, it may frighten the child
- Try to talk quietly with the child
- Tell the child that he or she did nothing wrong. Sexual abuse is the fault of the abuser
- Tell the child that you will do your best to make him/her safe
- Tell your child that he or she did the right thing to tell you
- Do not confront the alleged offender
- Always seek advice and support



Worried about Sexual Abuse

Contact us

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Hosted by:
The Ole Schoolhouse
Early Childhood Centre
15 Toko Street
Rotorua 3010 Bay of Plenty

help@sexualabuse.org.nz

www.sexualabuse.org.nz

When a child tells



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RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

When a child tells an adult that she/he has been sexually abused, the adult may feel uncomfortable and may not know what to say or do. The following guidelines should be used when responding to children who say they have been sexually abused.

What to Say

If a child even hints in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred, encourage him or her to talk freely. Don't make judgmental comments such as "why didn't you tell me?"

Show that you understand and take seriously what the child is saying. Child and adolescent specialists have found that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not.

Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling. A child who is close to the abuser may feel guilty about revealing the secret. The child may feel frightened if the abuser has threatened to harm the child or other family members as punishment for telling the secret.

Make sure that the child knows that s/he is not to blame for the sexual abuse. Most children in attempting to make sense out of the abuse will believe that somehow they caused it or may even view it as a form of punishment for imagined or real wrongdoings.

Finally, offer protection and assure the child that you will do all you can to stop the abuse.



What to Do

Protect the child's privacy by limiting who you tell. Report any suspicion of child abuse to Child, Youth and Family (0508 FAMILY) or to the police. Individuals reporting in good faith are immune from prosecution. The agency receiving the report will conduct an evaluation and will take action to protect the child.

The Police should consult with a Doctor and/or paediatrician who specialises in evaluating and treating sexual abuse. The examining doctor will evaluate the child's condition and treat any physical problem related to the abuse, gather forensic evidence in case the matter goes to court, and support the child and the caregiver.

The child is dependent on caregivers for their welfare. Parents/caregivers need to contact a qualified professional who specialises in sexual abuse to access help for themselves and to discuss possible effects of the abuse on the child. They will determine whether ongoing professional help is necessary for the child to deal with any trauma resulting from the abuse. The professional may also provide support to other family members/friends who may be upset by the abuse.

Adults, because of their maturity and knowledge, are always responsible for any abuse of children. The abused children should never be blamed. When a child tells someone about sexual abuse, a supportive, caring response is the first step in getting help for child and re-establishing their trust in adults.