

# ABUSE AND DISCLOSURES

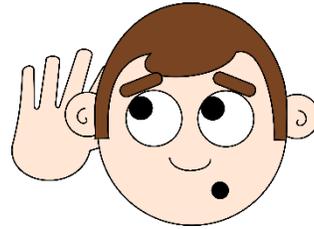
## **AGENCY VIEW OF ABUSE**

It is widely accepted that children rarely lie about sexual or physical abuse since most children would not lie to get into trouble, only to get out of trouble. Therefore, the child's concerns and statements regarding abuse issues will carry the greater weight in determining the fate of the match and subsequent involvement of child protection service and the police.

### **Tips for Handling Disclosures**

When a child or youth makes a disclosure of violence, the Red Cross recommends that you respond according to the **HEARD** procedure:

- **H**ear/observe what the young person is saying
- **H**onour the child or youth and the information
- **E**mpathize with/encourage the young person
- **E**nsure safety
- **A**cknowledge choices and action steps
- **R**espond according to organizational policies
- **R**efer or report to appropriate authorities
- **D**ocument accurately
- **D**evelop confidential guidelines and a safety plan
- **D**ebrief confidentially



### **1. LISTEN**

What a child needs when disclosing is for you to listen. S/he fears an adult's reaction as well as not being believed. It takes incredible courage to share such an experience. Listen attentively. Your role is emotional support: being there, listening, and helping them move forward in a normal way. Keep them in the present, not the past.

### **2. CONTROL YOUR REACTION**

Do not over- or under-react. Be aware of your facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, as the child will be sensitive to your reaction. A child can pick up on differences between what an adult is saying and how s/he is acting. If body language and verbal language do not match, the child will feel confused.

### **3. DO NOT CORRECT LANGUAGE**

A child who has been sexually abused often uses slang or distasteful words for genitals and sexual acts. You should not try to educate a child about correct terms during a disclosure. Doing so could make the child feel bad, stupid, or dirty, and might prevent the child from continuing to disclose.

### **4. NEVER COMMUNICATE BLAME**

Never imply guilt, such as "I told you so" or "This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't ...", when the child discloses sexual abuse. Be non-judgmental, both verbally and non-verbally (gestures, facial expressions). A child who has been abused needs to understand that what happened was not her/his fault, and that s/he is not alone.

## 5. PRAISE THE CHILD FOR TELLING

It takes tremendous courage to disclose sexual abuse, and a child will often assume responsibility for the abuse. Assure the child that it is not her/his fault, and that s/he did the right thing by disclosing. Sometimes a child may retract a disclosure, but that does not mean it did not happen. They may disclose again later.

## 6. PROTECT THE CHILD AND OTHER CHILDREN FROM OVEREXPOSURE

Respect the child's need for privacy and confidentiality, and make sure that no other children are around to hear the child's disclosure. Only adults who will be directly involved in taking action should be present.

## 7. SHOW AFFECTION

Adults can be apprehensive to show affection to a child after hearing that s/he has been sexually abused. Research indicates that a child who discloses abuse needs appropriate affection, support, and understanding.

## 8. AVOID MAKING PROMISES

Promise the child that you will take quick steps to stop the abuse. Avoid making promises about matters over which you have no control (e.g., "I will make sure the offender goes to jail."). [Cooper, 2008, Gil, 1988]

## 9. REPORT TO A CHILD WELFARE AGENCY AND TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

**In Canada, anyone who is aware of or has reasonable grounds to suspect abuse is legally obligated to report the abuse.** Leave any "investigating" to law enforcement and child welfare agencies; information obtained that is thought to have been "coached" can jeopardize an investigation.

Following disclosure, support the child by providing:

- ✓ **Structure** - Keep activities and routines the same. Structure and familiarity will offer security to the child.
- ✓ **Connection** - Let the child know you care by communicating openly and frequently. Check in with the child regularly to see how s/he is doing.
- ✓ **Confidentiality** - Make sure that the disclosure and information about the abuse is limited to those who need to know, and that those people are not openly discussing what happened.
- ✓ **Boundaries** - Re-establish boundaries if the child acts out. Redefining appropriate behaviour with limits will provide security.

It is important to let children know that other adults (child welfare) must be told about what has happened. This is required, even when they plead with you not to tell. Give them back some control by letting them know what is going to be happening next.

## WHO TO CONTACT IF A DISCLOSURE HAPPENS

The agency recommends you take the following steps if a child or youth were to disclose abuse to you:

1. Immediately call your agency office to report the disclosure if it happens within office hours (Monday to Friday, 9:00am-4:30pm).
2. If a disclosure happens outside of office hours, immediately send an email about the incident to the agency's Associate Executive Director, Roslyn Henderson at [roslyn.henderson@bigbrothersbigsisters.ca](mailto:roslyn.henderson@bigbrothersbigsisters.ca) outlining the details of the incident.
3. We also recommend you call the Centralized Screening line for MCFD to report the incident. When you call, they will help you assess the situation and they will take further action to investigate the matter.
4. If the child has disclosed abuse and it is unsafe for the child to return home, please keep the child with you until you can make a contact and have been given further direction on what to do.
5. The important thing to remember is that if a disclosure is made, it is your responsibility to do *something*. The safety of the child must be your primary concern, so if in doubt, call 9-1-1.

### **Centralized Screening MCFD**

**1-800-663-9122**

Ministry of Children and Family Development

604-660-KIDS (5437)

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Langley

604-530-5055 ext. 1

Helpline for Children (children can call)

604-310-1234

Police/ emergency

9-1-1

### **MCFD HANDBOOK:**

<https://goo.gl/NTWn3X> (address is case sensitive)

