

Things You Can Do to Help Once Your Child has Disclosed Abuse

Listen if your child wants to talk about what happened but don't ask them a lot of questions. You can say "tell me more about that", "what happened next" or "is there anything else you want to tell me about?" Let your child know you're listening and interested in what they have to say. If your child does talk, let them know you're glad they've talked with you and that you believe them. Be sure to tell them they're not in trouble and what happened is not their fault. Tell your child that you will do what you can to help keep them safe and will make sure they have the help they need. Do not make any promises. Provide hugs and kisses when your child seeks them out.

Don't pressure your child if they don't want to talk. Just let them know you're willing to listen when they want to talk.

Respect the privacy of your child. Find a place where they can talk to you without others listening. Only tell people who really need to know what your child has said. Help your child to identify other people that they can talk about their feelings with (therapist, friend, family).

Try to have a daily routine and make sure your child knows what to expect. Let your child know ahead of time if there will be something new or different about their day. Changes, surprises, and not knowing what to expect next often make a child who has been abused more anxious, fearful, aggressive, or overly active.

Watch your child's behaviors. Children often act out what happened in their play, drawings, and behaviors. You may see them being withdrawn, daydreaming, having sleep problems, becoming clingy, or misbehaving. Talk with them about what you see but don't be afraid to set clear rules.

Teach your child about safe touch and the importance of not keeping some kinds of secrets. Teach them common names for the private parts of their bodies so that if they talk to someone else about something that happened, they will be understood.

Consider getting counseling help for your child, and for yourself. We know that child abuse can have lasting effects on the mental and physical health of children, but we also know that children who receive counseling help after abuse, can do very well.