

**A Parent's Guide What to Do**  
**When Your Child Wants to Talk to You about Abuse**

Even preschool children understand the meaning of rules especially when it comes to personal safety. When you talk with your child about rules, add rules about touching private parts of the body. It might be as simple as "The only person who should touch your private parts besides yourself are your mom or dad to help you with a rash or an injury. A doctor or medical person might need to help with mom or dad's permission. If someone tries to break this rule I want you to tell me." Encourage your child to report this to a trusted adult if you are not present; remind him/her to tell you as soon as possible so you can make sure the behavior stops. You can also tell the person, whether it's an adult or another child, "No!" or "No, Don't touch my private parts!" or "Don't do that!" Practice this at different times with him/her. Also, instruct him/her that if it's okay to refuse a hug or sit in someone's lap if he or she doesn't want to do this. Encourage your child to walk away from the person who is breaking the rules or making him/her feel uncomfortable.

**A Pastoral Guide for Reporting Child Sexual Abuse**

Parents, guardians, and caring adults should remember that most children do not lie about abuse. So, when a child discloses abuse—directly or indirectly (such as telling about a friend who is being hurt by someone)—it is important to provide support for the child. By following some simple rules, you can assure children that they are safe and that telling was the right thing to do.

1. **Let children talk. Console them by your attentiveness and calm demeanor.** Let them tell what happened. Listen; avoid questioning; leave this to the experts.
2. **Avoid displays of shock or disgust.** While this may be challenging, it is essential for the child to know that the adult is listening and not judging. Remember, the adult abuser has probably already told the child that nobody will believe him or her. An emotional or otherwise uncontrolled response by the person the child trusts with the story may entirely shut down the child's willingness to communicate.
3. **Respect the child's privacy.** Find a private place to listen to the report and write down what happened. Include details of names, dates, times, and locations that are provided in the disclosure. This will spare children from extensive questioning, which can make a child feel as if trusted adults do not believe the child's report.

## Parent Handout 2

4. **Address the child's feelings and let him or her know that you trust the child and that the story will be investigated.** A child molester may threaten children with dire consequences if the child tells what happened. When a child overcomes that fear and is willing to talk, it is critical to trust the child and to treat the child's story as if it is completely true.

5. **Reassure the child that you believe him/her.** Realize how hard it is to "break the silence" and disclose the abuse. Tell the child that he or she will be loved and protected from future abuse.

6. **Be honest with the child about what will happen next.** Tell the child that the incident will be reported to the proper authorities and that you will share the information about the incident with only those people who need to know to help keep the child safe.

7. **Do not scold the child.** No matter how many times a child has been told not to keep secrets or not to go somewhere with a stranger, this is not the time to punish the child or to express your anger about the incident. Such a reaction may confirm the child's fears about reporting and may stop the child from trusting his or her parents or other safe adults in the future. Do not threaten to harm the person whom your child is accusing. If it sounds like abuse leave that to the legal authorities. If your child gives you an example of a behavior that seemed inappropriate or made him/her feel uncomfortable, but not actual abuse, share this concern with the appropriate party.

8. **Get immediate medical attention if necessary.** Contact local medical professionals to determine who is best qualified to examine the child for the physical effects of sexual abuse and to test for sexually transmitted diseases, if necessary.

9. **Get counseling/therapy for the child.** Get the best professional help available to provide the child and the parents or guardians with support to deal with the effects of sexual abuse.

10. **Don't be surprised or upset if the child reports the incident to someone outside of the family.** In most instances, the abuser is someone the child knows and trusts—frequently a family member or trusted friend. Children become very concerned about a parent's reaction and often seek the advice and support of someone else to get through the initial period of telling an adult about the abuse.

## Parent Handout 2

Your response to a disclosure by a child has three primary goals. **First**, to protect the child from further abuse. **Second**, to stop the molester from abusing any other child. And, **third**, to address the child's symptoms and the harm done to the victim and the victim's family. Praise the child for reporting the touching incident—regardless of which particular adult to whom the child reported. Reassure the child that he or she will be loved and protected—*no matter what*.

If you have reasonable suspicion that abuse occurred, contact child protective services within your area and shield your child from future abuse. **To Report Abuse, Call Texas Department of Family Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400.** If it appears that a touching boundary was violated accidentally, discuss appropriate boundaries with the adult or child in question. Parents will need to explain to the child why the touch was an accident. Additionally, discuss your touching rules regarding that particular boundary and request that in the future, the other person honor your child's boundaries. When approached in this manner, a caring adult will understand—and a potential child molester is put on notice that you are paying attention and that your child talks openly with you about everything that happens to the child.

Finally, if abuse happens within your family, follow the same rules. Protect your child from the abuser, call child protective services as soon as possible, and seek counseling for your child and everyone else affected.