

CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY



Child Advocacy Center

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

It is not uncommon for a parent or professional working with children to be the first person to whom a child discloses abuse allegations. Properly handling this situation helps the child, as well as the parent or professional. The following suggestions are important for parents and professionals to be aware of when a child discloses abuse:

Do this...

- Practice your response before the situation arises.
- As a professional, understand your school/agency/clinic's policy for reporting allegation of abuse.
- Let your body language tell the child that you hear what he/she is telling you and that you believe them.
- Write down the exact words the child used in the disclosure and during your interactions. The words the child uses are significant, therefore accuracy is very important.
- Thank the child for having the courage to report this to you. The child needs to know that disclosing to you is the right thing to do. Some things to say are "Thank you", "I Believe you", "We will get you some help to deal with this", or "I am going to just listen if you need to talk"
- Inform the child, as soon as possible, of what will happen next with the reporting.
- Report the disclosure of abuse. South Dakota has a centralized intake where all calls of suspected child abuse and neglect can be made. This number is **1-877-244-0864**.

Don't do this...

- Use shocked or disbelieving body language when a child discloses to you.
- Try to talk the child out of what he/she is telling you. If you are skeptical, try not to express your doubts to the child.
- Hover over the child when he/she is disclosing. This is a position of power and may intimidate the child.
- Suggest or guess that the child might have been abused - this can impair the investigation and prosecution process.
- Make a conclusion about the validity of the allegation. This is the responsibility of the investigators, judge and jury.
- Discuss the allegations with anyone, including non-essential co-workers and relatives. This betrays the child.
- Discuss the disclosure of the allegations with the child's peers around. The child deserves privacy.
- **MOST IMPORTANT - Do not ask the child ANY questions.** Children need to be interviewed by a specially trained interviewer at the Child Advocacy Center where the interview is recorded and the assistance from a multidisciplinary team can be used to ensure the best outcome for the child. Children should only be asked questions about their disclosure ONE time. The more people who ask questions the more the child may be traumatized and the more tainted their statement may become. If the case goes to court, each person who questions the child ultimately risks damaging the child's statement.

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