

How to Respond When a Youth Discloses Abuse

You may find yourself in a situation where a youth confides in you that he or she has been sexually abused by a teacher, family member, another youth, or even by a coach. If this happens, follow these four steps:

Step 1: Listen.

Do your best to stay calm and let the youth talk. Don't pry but you can ask a few questions that will help you understand what happened.

Step 2. Reassure.

The youth may be scared, angry, confused and crying. You can reassure them with a few simple comments like:

"I know how hard this is to talk about."

"You are very brave for bringing this out."

"Don't worry, you are doing the right thing by letting someone know."

"This isn't your fault. You've done nothing wrong."

"I'm very sorry this has happened to you."

Step 3. Protect.

Make sure the youth is safe. Do not let the accused person have any further contact with him or her and tell them you will do everything you can to keep him or her safe. Let them know you must share what he or she has told you with others who can help.

Step 4. Report.

Write down as quickly as you can everything the youth shared with you in as much detail as possible, using the youth's actual words, not your own interpretation. To report concerns or suspected abuse call your local police department.

How to begin:

1. Start the conversation with some brief “chit chat.”

“How was your day? Or “What did you do at daycare today?” or “It’s nice to have a chance to sit and talk for a minute, isn’t it?”

2. Identify the circumstances in question.

“How is everything going at the Child Care Center?”; “What is your least favorite thing to do there?”; “Had anyone made you feel uncomfortable when you were there?”

“If anyone made you feel uncomfortable you should tell mommy, daddy, a teacher or grown up.”

“You know it’s very important that if anything like that happened to you that you tell me right away, right? That way I can make sure you are safe.”

3. Questions if you and your child wants to continue to talk.

“Tell me more, I’m listening.”

Your child may be uncomfortable so you’ll want to do what you can to put him or her at ease. Sitting close, using a calm voice tone, giving a hug or keeping your arm around him or her will help.

You can also say something like, “Honey, you know I love you very much and I’m concerned that you might be upset about something. Can you tell me what you’re thinking?”

If your child stops talking or gets upset, continue comforting him or her.

4. If your child does disclose that something happened:

“I’m really glad you told me about this. You did the right thing by telling me. I’m going to make sure this never happens again. I know you’re upset but you know mommy and daddy are here for you.”

5. After the conversation:

Write down notes about the conversation while it is fresh in your mind. Report concerns to your local police department.