



RAPCAN
protecting children's rights

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FACT SHEET

CHILD ABUSE: DISCLOSURE¹

Introduction

It is very difficult for children to disclose that they have been abused. A huge stigma is attached to abuse and the child may also fear getting the abuser into trouble, especially if it is someone close to the child. Children are therefore reluctant to tell that they have been abused. Appropriate management of the disclosure is critical. Children often mistakenly believe that the abuse is their fault. Your reaction to the disclosure can have long-lasting effects on the child.

Some tips for responding to disclosure²

- Believe the child!
- Find a suitable place to talk to the child where you will not be interrupted.
- Be supportive.
- Sit near the child to put him or her at ease.
- Remain calm and caring.
- Do not touch the child without permission.
- Listen to the child and report any suspicions of abuse.
- Encourage the child to tell, but do not press the child for information.
- Honour the child's wish to disclose as much as he or she wants.
- Use the child's language and keep your language simple.
- Avoid asking "why" questions as the child may already feel as if they had done something wrong.
- Try to get enough information to determine the child's safety.
- Reassure the child, but be realistic. Tell the child that he or she is not to blame for what is happening.
- Try to refrain from telling the child that everything will be alright if that cannot be assured.
- Inform the child that the information will only be told to the proper officials.
- Support the child.
- Inform the child of the next step you will take.
- It is not your job to prove the abuse.

Once a child has disclosed abuse, you must report the abuse to the appropriate officials. The report must be made immediately. The child may continue to look to you as a support system but it is up to the police and Child Protective Services to investigate the case and to determine whether or not abuse has actually occurred.

Endnotes

¹ Fact sheet developed by Moefeeda Salie-Kagee (Training Manager, RAPCAN) and Kimberly Dixon (student intern, RAPCAN)

² VCU VISSTA, undated. Child Abuse and Neglect: Recognizing, Reporting, and Responding for Educators: Responding to a Child's Disclosure [online]
Available at: http://www.vcu.edu/vissta/training/va_teachers/topic2_1.html [accessed 11 June 2008].