

MIDDLESEX CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

It can be hard to know what to say when a child tells you they are being hurt. How you respond in the first few minutes can shape how safe they feel to keep talking, and how they cope afterward. Your role is to listen, support, and make sure the right people are told.

The following are guidelines that may help:

DO:

- Find a private place to talk.
- Stay calm.
- Listen. Let the child tell their story in their own way and at their own pace.
- Use the child's own words if you need to clarify something.
- Tell the child that it is not their fault and thank them for telling you.
- Let the child know you are available if they want to speak again.

DON'T:

- Push the child to tell you more than they are ready to share.
- Ask leading questions (if you have to ask any at all).
- Make the child repeat to others what they told you.
- Be judgmental of the child, perpetrator, or other family members.
- Make promises you cannot keep, such as promising to keep their secret.

A professional with specialized training in talking to children and gathering information about their experiences in a developmentally appropriate, legally sound, neutral, fact-finding manner will, when appropriate, interview the child after a report is made to the police or DCF.

Ensuring the child knows you believe them, providing emotional support, and protecting them from future abuse have been shown to reduce the short- and long-term psychological impact of the abuse.

If the child is in immediate danger, call 911. Do not send the child back into an unsafe situation. Otherwise, call DCF (1-800-792-5200). Mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected abuse and neglect. If you are not a mandated reporter, you are still encouraged to call DCF or the police.



National Children's Alliance

