

## Suggestions for Responding to a Child Who Discloses Abuse

- **Take the child seriously.** Do not try to convince the child that the story is not true or did not really happen that way. Do not suggest an alternative explanation (such as a “dream”).
- **Stay calm and reassuring.** Do not overreact with fear, disgust, or anxiety or the child may stop talking or may believe that you think they have been bad.
- **DO NOT promise not to tell anyone.** Do say that you may need to tell people who will know how to help. Tell the child that you want to find help for everyone so that the child will be safe from the hurt.
- **Reassure the child that it WAS GOOD to tell someone.**
- **Remind the child that whatever happened WAS NOT his/her fault.**
- **Remind the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.**
- Do not frighten the child with talk about police or medical examinations.
- Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child’s clothing.
- **DO NOT investigate; LISTEN closely** and write down the information immediately after the conversation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- **Remind the child of your care.**
- If you feel it is appropriate, **pray with the child.** Keep the child, family, and situation in your own private prayers.
- **Follow up** in later weeks and months by showing concern and support. This will help reduce the shame.

*Any suspected abuse involving a minor should be reported to authorities*

To make a report you will need to tell what you have seen and/or heard that causes you to suspect abuse. For more information go to:

**In the U.S.:** (800) 422-4453 – [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

**In Canada:** (800) 668-6868 - [cwrp.ca/faqs](http://cwrp.ca/faqs)

## Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse – School Age

**Note:** Children rarely exhibit just one sign that they are the victims of abuse. Some symptoms may also represent typical developmental changes, or the after-effect of other kinds of trauma in their lives. Conversely, it is possible for abuse to be taking place without the appearance of any symptoms because of the child's ability to mask or deny what is very confusing and painful to acknowledge. Generally, several symptoms appearing at once may be an indication of abuse.

1. Complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the child's bottom; smearing feces on walls or objects
2. Pattern of injuries, multiple injuries, injuries about the face or neck; failure to complain about or explain an obvious physical discomfort; hiding bruises
3. Unusual fears: a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences
4. Poor concentration in classroom
5. Exhibiting adult-pleasing behaviors, striving for perfection, acting miserable if failing
6. Engaging in self-injury; engaging in excessive masturbation or masturbation in a public setting
7. Acting enraged and out of control; expressing anger through destruction
8. Shyness about physical touch
9. Exhibiting sexual behavior beyond comprehension or maturity level; behaving in a sexual manner with other children or adults
10. Exhibiting signs of needing to be in control of others or situations; bullying others
11. Hostility and distrust of adults, mood swings and irritability, violent disruptions
12. Acting out, including hoarding food and toys, lying, stealing, assaulting
13. Frequent absences from school or other scheduled events because of being punished
14. Low self-esteem, particular sensitivity to criticism
15. Hyper-vigilance, excessive and suspicious watching of other people; is easily startled
16. Preoccupation with fire and setting fires
17. Eating disorders, use of laxatives, unexplained and dramatic changes in weight