

Responding to Disclosures of Abuse

1. **Do not force the child to talk if he or she has not disclosed abuse.** If you are suspicious about a child's behavior, you may inquire about his well-being, or tell him or her you are available if the child wants to talk. But, do not put pressure on the child to talk.
2. **Do not ask the child to discuss the abuse she or he has disclosed to you to other staff members.** If the mandated reporter is not sure, she or he may consult with others. Do not insist that the child tell another individual what they have already disclosed. Doing so may further traumatize the child and may compromise the investigation.
3. **Do not ask questions that suggest what happened.** Questions such as "Did your mother do this to you?" lead the child and are inappropriate.
4. **Do not teach the child body parts when a child is disclosing abuse.** Use the same words the child uses instead of substituting an anatomically correct word.
5. **Do not challenge the child's honesty.** Questions such as, "Are you sure this happened?" implies a lack of trust and support.
6. **Never ask a child "Why?" questions.** Children feel blamed when they are asked "Why" (e.g., "Why didn't you tell someone?" or "Why do you think he did that?")
7. **Do not keep asking questions because you want to prove child abuse.** Your object is to receive the child's statement and report it to the authorities. It is the responsibility of the authorities to verify abuse.
8. **Do not demand details.** You do not have to know them. Please remember that demanding details may embarrass the child, compromise your future relationship with the child, and violate the integrity of the subsequent investigation.
9. **Do not use words that imply a judgment like "good and bad."** Children are often confused by what they have experienced and have conflicting emotions about the people involved. A touch is neither "good" nor "bad". Children often love the person who is abusing them and simply want the abuse to stop. Do not be judgmental about the child or the alleged abuser.
10. **Do not use dolls, stuffed animals, or drawings.** Such props can be very suggestive and many lead to storytelling and fantasy. They are also unnecessary. Just talk with the child.
11. **Do not try to change the mind of a child who has recanted or changed his or her disclosure.** Recanting is part of the disclosure process. The child may be experiencing fear or pressure from another individual.

12. **Do not touch the child without asking the child's permission.** Children who have been abused are often very sensitive to touch. Asking permission before touching or hugging a child is always a good practice and helps the child feel a sense of control over what happens to their body.

13. **Do not make promises to the child you cannot keep.** Do not tell the child you will keep her secret or that she won't be removed from her home. Assure the child she has done the right thing by speaking with you.

14. **After the child discloses, do not prohibit the child from returning home.** Under the law, the only people who can take custody of a child are the police, a physician, or the director of a hospital. Children and Youth must obtain the permission of the court before removing a child from his home.