

COUNSELLING

Consider the need for counselling or therapy for the child as well as for yourself, if necessary. To ignore the incident, to sweep it under the carpet, or to pretend that it did not happen is not going to help the child or yourself deal with the abuse. On the contrary, pretending it did not happen will exacerbate the problem for many, many years.

In deciding what counsellor to use, look for someone who is experienced in cases of sexual abuse. Find a counsellor you are comfortable with and don't be afraid of changing counsellors.

Social Services, Victim Services, community groups and women's organizations are all possible sources that will direct you to the best counselling available. Do not rely on clergy or other helpers unless they are able to properly direct you to people with experience in abuse counselling.

IT SHOULDN'T HURT TO BE A CHILD

I was so small, just six years old
When my father's crown turned to tarnished gold
His hand became my enemy
No one else was there to see
"Come here" he said, "we'll play a game"
It had no rules, it had no name
It fed on fear and feasted on shame
I was a child, I wasn't to blame
What could I do? I loved him so
To make him happy, I would go
Into the bathroom with heavy heart
The child I was fell apart
We played "the game" for several years
With silent lips so no one hears
It's "our little secret" he said to me
I longed to tell, to be set free
One day he decided he "needed it all"
He took my body, my heart, my soul
I told my mother what he did



REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE A PARENTS' GUIDE



**Sylvan Lake & District
Victim Services**

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GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

This brochure is intended to prepare and assist parents in the event they are confronted with child sexual abuse or exploitation in their family. It is important for the parent to understand that this information is intended to prepare you to properly respond to a "disclosure" should it occur. It is equally important to encourage you and your children to be aware and always be careful, but don't be afraid.

HOW YOU REACT

Should your child disclose sexual abuse, you must be prepared to help your child. The way you react to a child's disclosure of sexual exploitation is a very important part of how your child will handle it. As an adult and a parent, you must control your personal feelings and focus all of your energy on how you can assist your child in recovering from the abuse. The guidelines below will assist you in dealing with such a situation in an appropriate manner.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not over react to anything that your child may disclose. Remember that the child opens up to you for your support. With your help and support, both of

you will make it through these painful times.

Do not criticize the child. Also, the worst thing you can do is to express anger at the child for having violated previous instructions.

Avoid saying "I told you not to..." Such remarks only serve to further hurt the child and interfere with your ability to help. This is definitely not the time to blame the child for what happened.

WHAT TO DO

Ensure the child's privacy. Accompany the child to a private place where he or she can relate the incident.

Be careful not to discuss the incident in front of people who do not need to know what happened.

YOU MUST

Help the child and convince them to tell you what happened. It is quite normal for children to fear telling others - especially parents.

Assure the child that telling what happened is the right thing to do and that you will protect the child from future harm. It is most likely that the child molester has told the child bad things will happen if he or she ever tells anyone about the abuse. Therefore the child will be especially fearful of punishment or the loss of the parent's love.

Show signs of affection and express your love and confidence with words and gestures.

Avoid sentences starting with "Why," such as "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

Give the child positive messages such as "I'm proud of you for being so brave and telling me this" or "I know how you feel, I know you couldn't help it."

Explain to the child that he or she has done nothing wrong. Most children have feelings of guilt and responsibility and assume that they are to blame for what happened. Most children are enticed or tricked by the abuser and think they should have been smarter or stronger.



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BELIEVE THEM

You must remind yourself that children seldom lie about acts of abuse. It cannot be stressed enough that it is extremely important the child feel that you believe what he or she has told you.

Your belief and trust in your child, as well as the manner in which you react to a disclosure, can keep open the lines of communication with the child. In the future it will be vitally important that the child believe you are sympathetic, understanding, in control, supportive, trustworthy and optimistic so the child will be comfortable in making further disclosures and most important, comfortable in discussing their feelings in the future.

STEPS TO TAKE

- **Notify the police**
- **Notify a social worker** at the nearest government Social Services offices.

You must take these two steps immediately. Do not contact anyone else until you have done this.

TRUST

Both the police and personnel from Social Services have experts who deal with matters of child abuse.

Trust them. Quite often the offender will be a member of your family or someone known and trusted by your family.

Do not under any circumstances attempt to confront the person or investigate the child's allegations on your own. You must be strong.

Again, you must notify the authorities before doing anything else.
