



The Investigation

Following are the basic steps to an investigation of child sexual abuse.

1. Someone reports suspicion of abuse to authorities, either law enforcement or social services
2. After either law enforcement or social services determines they need to do an investigation the first step is to talk to the child
3. Interviews are conducted with the child at the Child Advocacy Center
4. Medical exams are conducted, if necessary
5. Law enforcement and the Social Worker will continue the investigation, which may include interviewing the person the child first reported to, interviewing any witnesses, interviewing the alleged perpetrator, etc.

This may take some time! Do not expect this to happen overnight. What is most important is that your child is safe!

6. Law enforcement may refer the case to the county attorney's office. The County Attorney then determines if or what charges to bring. You will be notified as soon as the decision has been made. (Please do not hesitate to give a call to track where your child's case is at and get back to you)
7. Social services have a responsibility to make sure your child is being protected. They can also offer services for you and your family.



Facts About the Investigation

The investigation of the abuse will take place by a team of professionals, which may include a law enforcement officer, social service worker, County Attorney, and advocacy center staff. Being left out of some of the proceedings can make you feel uncomfortable and worried.

The legal process moves at its own pace, which is different from your child's need to heal. Emotional wounds may be reopened by the various proceedings, which can take place over many months and sometimes a year. Remember that people are working to gain the best outcome for you and your child. You and your child's healing should not depend on the criminal justice system's response to what happens.

The legal system was not designed and is slow to adapt with the needs of children in mind. The system is designed primarily to protect the rights of the accused, not the victim. The rights of the child are far less defined than the rights of the accused. However, efforts are being made to improve the legal systems response to child abuse cases for example:

1. Professionals in these cases are specifically trained on a variety of topics regarding child abuse.
2. The number of times the child has to talk about the abuse is being reduced.
3. Community agencies involved in these cases are making efforts to coordinate their services.



What to Say to Others

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or feel responsible. If there's no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. A parent may feel hurt that someone knew before them. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. It is very common for children to disclose to someone other than their parent. If that happened in your case, it may also be important for you to take note of who the child chose to tell as that person certainly, in the child's mind, provides additional security for them.

It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy.

Comments you can expect from others about the abuse:

- “What exactly did they do to your child?”
- “Are you sure your child didn't make it up?”
- “Why didn't you know it was happening?”
- “If it were my child, I'd rather move away.”
- “Your poor child must be feeling really guilty.”

Remember, you do not owe anyone an explanation. “I'd rather not talk about it” is an acceptable response. Or simply say, “it has been a very difficult time for us.” “I appreciate your concern” is another response you might want to use. Or it may be easier to just nod in acknowledgement of what someone says. Few, if any, of those who learn of the abuse are true experts in the field and can appropriately respond to the information.

Keep in mind that most people have very little knowledge about sexual abuse. For example, in response to the comment that your child is feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel unnecessary guilt in these cases until they are sure that they are not responsible in any way for what happened. As a parent, you might also be experiencing some guilt, and as a result, you may feel defensive. In that case, a good response is, “parents do their best, but we're only human.” Adults are the people most likely to say something to your child. You may want to tell your child that if someone says, “I'm sorry about what happened to you,” they don't have to respond to any comments or questions. Your child could say, “my mom and/or dad told me not to talk about it now.” If any other children comment or tease, your child might say, “it could happen to anyone, including you.”



Explaining the Law to Children Who Report Abuse

I have/had to tell someone else what happened to you because what _____ did is not ok and they need someone else to help them stop.

What _____ did is against the law. Laws are like rules. Tell me a rule that you have to follow... grown-ups have to follow real serious rules called laws. When _____ touched you the way they did they broke the law or rule.

There are other people making decisions about how to keep you and your family safe. We cannot control the decisions they make. What are some things that we/you can control?

We have/had to tell someone else what you told me because it is our job to protect you from this happening again... we will tell special people whose job is to help protect children from things like this.

Here are a few things you can say to your child that will help:

1. I believe you.
2. I know it's not your fault.
3. I'm glad I know about what happened to you.
4. I'm sorry this happened to you.
5. I will take care of you.
6. I'm upset, but not with you. I'm upset at the person that did this.
7. Nothing about you made this happen. It has happened to other kids too.
8. I will do my best to protect you now that I know.
9. I am sad and angry that this happened to you, but I am not angry with you.
10. What are you most worried about right now?
11. It is ok to cry if you need to
12. It is ok to feel angry or sad.
13. is it hard to love _____ and be mad at them for doing this at the same time?



How Might My Child Be Affected by Sexual Abuse?

The behavior of your child may change for a time period children may have some of the following symptoms:

1. Heightened fear or anxiety
2. Increased tearfulness or crying
3. Changes in sleeping patterns such as nightmares, bed wetting, fear of going to bed, fear of sleeping alone
4. Changes in appetite
5. Irritability, anger, mood swings
6. Withdrawal from usual activities and friends
7. Isolation
8. Changes in school performance such as lower grades, poor concentration, short attention span, or loss of interest in school activities
9. Nausea or upset stomach
10. Clinging to parents
11. Aggressiveness
12. Rebelliousness

All children react differently to the abuse depending on age, extent of abuse, support from others, and their relationship to the offender. You should be aware of any changes in your child's behavior or disposition, but some children are not visibly changed by the experience. Do not look too hard for things that are not there.

The single most important factor affecting your child's recovery is the level of support they receive from you. Your child's reaction depends very much on how you and other important people handle the situation. If your child feels especially loved and protected during this time, they may recover quicker.

If you feel torn between loyalty to your child and loyalty to the offender, find a professional (such as a therapist, counselor, minister, or trusted friend). make sure your child knows that they are your number one priority!



The Abuser & Steps They Take to Access Children

People who abuse children come from all economic and ethnic groups and a variety of social and educational backgrounds.

According to research, about 90% of all sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by someone the child knows. Many abusers are people who are trusted and loved by the child such as a relative, friend, or neighbor.

You cannot recognize abusers by their appearance. They do not fit any stereotypes such as dirty old men, perverts, or loners. Abusers may be married and have children. They may have criminal records, or they may be outstanding citizens.

Although it is difficult for adults to believe, children are sometimes sexually abused by other children. Sometimes, sexual contact between children is curiosity. But if one child is much older or bigger than the other, their behavior may be abusive. Pay attention to sexual behavior between children; if it seems unusual or abusive, intervene.

Some parents wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children.

They:

1. Seek out an approachable child, one who is easy to get to such as a relative, neighbor, or friend.
2. Establish a relationship with the child by spending time playing with them, volunteering to babysit, becoming their buddy, or buying them games or presents.
3. Break down the child's resistance to touch by playing games that involved touching such as wrestling and tickling. As a result, children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual.
4. Find ways to be alone with the child such as babysitting, inviting them to sleep over, or taking them camping.
5. Blame the child and coerce them to keep the secret by making the child feel responsible so they won't tell. They say things like; "you know you like the way I touch you," "if you tell, people will think you're bad," "if you tell I will go to jail," or "if you tell your mother, she won't love you anymore."