

# Supporting a Child or Youth Impacted by Sexual Abuse

## Try to Stay Calm

Receiving a disclosure from a child can bring up strong emotions, however, it is best to process these emotions with other adults. Expressing these emotions in front of the child can cause them to feel as if they have done something wrong in disclosing.

If you do express how you are feeling in front of the child, make sure to explain that you are upset at what has happened to them, but that you are happy that they have come to you for help.

Ensure that the child knows that they have done the right thing in telling someone what has happened.

## Tell the Child You Believe Them

Children are often very afraid that they will not be believed when they disclose experiences of abuse. By showing the child that you believe they are telling the truth, you can help them to feel safe and more comfortable seeking help.

The following statements can often have a positive impact on someone when they reach out for help:

- "I believe you."
- "Thank you for telling me."
- "I'm sorry this happened to you."

## Tell Them It's Not Their Fault

Reassure the child that the only person who did something wrong was the person who used abusive behaviour. This can help to reduce feelings of guilt and self-blame.

## Validate Their Feelings

Tell the child that however they are feeling is okay. There is no one way, or a wrong way, to be feeling following an experience of abuse.

## Be Mindful When Asking Questions

When responding to a disclosure from a child, only ask questions when they are needed to make a report of child abuse, or to better support the child.

When a question needs to be asked, avoid leading questions. Instead, ask questions that are open-ended. The following is an example of an open-ended question:

- "Do you want to tell me more about that?"

When asking questions it is best to avoid the following:

- Questions that start with "why".
- Questions that have to do with the details of the abuse.
- Questions about how someone responded during the abuse. For example, "did you say no" is not an appropriate question to ask during a disclosure.

## Ask Permission Before Giving Physical Support

It is important not to assume that physical affection - like hugs - will be helpful to the child. Instead, it should be up to the child to decide if physical support is something they would like. This also helps to reinforce their ability to decide what happens to their body.

## Avoid Making Promises

Ensure the child that you will help, but avoid making promises you can't keep.

## Report

In Alberta, all adults (18+) have the legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse of any kind; you do not need a disclosure to report.

Call the Child Abuse Hotline at **1.800.387-KIDS (5437)**; reports can be made anonymously.

## Practice Self Care

Hearing a disclosure can be very upsetting, and for some it can be a trigger to remember their own experiences of abuse.

It is important to take care of yourself when you are supporting a child who has experienced sexual violence.

If you would like to talk to someone about how to respond to a disclosure, or to receive support in your role as a supporter, call the SACE Support and Information Line at **780.423.4121**.

## Other Resources

Native Youth Sexual Health Network  
**nativeyouth-sexualhealth.com**

Children's Mental Health Crisis/Mobile Response Team  
**780.407.1000**

Child Abuse Hotline  
**1.800.387.5437 (24/7)**

Kids Help Phone  
**1.800.668.6868**  
**kidshelpphone.ca**

CHEW Project  
**(2SLGBTQ+ ages 14-29)**  
**fb.com/chewprojectyeg**

Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)  
**(14+) Access from any emergency room in the Edmonton Zone**

Birth Control Centre  
**780.735.0010**

Edmonton Distress Line  
**780.482.4357 (24/7)**

Need Help Now  
**needhelpnow.ca**

STI Clinic  
**780.342.2300**



**Listen. Believe. Support.**

[sace.ca](http://sace.ca)