



Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault

24 Hour Crisis Line:
MO (816) 531- 0233
KS (913) 642-0233
www.mocsa.org

Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Abuse: *Helpful Tips for Parents and Adults*

Sexual abuse occurs more often than we would like to think; **one in four girls** and **one in six boys** will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. To help you feel more comfortable with and prepared for the challenge of addressing sexual abuse, we offer these helpful tips.

If a child discloses abuse to you, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Believe him or her.** The most important thing is to believe the child. Children rarely lie about abuse; what is more common is a child denying that abuse happened when it did. Tell the child you believe him/her.
- **Reassure the child that the abuse is not their fault.** The child's greatest fear is that he or she is responsible for the abuse. Be sure to make it clear that what happened is not a result of anything he/she did or did not do.
- **Do not make promises you can't keep.** Do not make promises such as the child will never have to see the abuser again, that nothing will change, or other such promises.
- **Stay calm,** even though you may feel surprised or upset. Your calmness will reassure the child that he/she hasn't done anything wrong.
- **Do not interrogate the child.** It can be traumatic for the child to repeat his/her story numerous times. It is often in the interest of the child to wait for a Children's Division worker to conduct the interview.
- **Report the abuse immediately.** Report the abuse or suspected abuse to the Child Abuse Hotline.
 - *Missouri: 800-392-3738*
 - *Kansas: 800-922-5330*
 - *National: 800-422-4453*

Believing and supporting the child are two of the best actions to start the healing process. Appropriate and helpful responses to disclosures are as follows:

- "I am glad you told me, thank you."
- "You are very brave and did the right thing."
- "It wasn't your fault."
- "I am proud of you for telling me."

For more information on child sexual abuse or responding to disclosures, please visit www.mocsa.org.

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