

RESPONDING TO YOUTH DISCLOSURES OR CONCERNS OF ABUSE

Children and youth may disclose abuse to you, or you may observe behavior that causes you to have a reasonable belief or suspicion of abuse, which will require you to communicate your concerns. *A safe adult prioritizes the youth's safety and wellbeing. You are called to be a safe adult!*



ACTIVELY LISTEN:

- With all of your attention
- Calmly, without judgment
- Patiently, let them speak at their own pace, with their own words



ASK LIMITED QUESTIONS:

- Ask "what happened," "when did it happen," "where did it happen," and either—"who did it," or, "how do you know them?"
- Question only what's needed for a report



BE AWARE:

- Of your body language and reaction
- Keep your face neutral



BE SUPPORTIVE:

- Believe them
- Let them know you're present to help keep them safe
- Acknowledge the courage it took to share; that telling was the right thing to do
- Tell them what happened isn't their fault, nor is anything that happens later
- Reassure them you'll only share the info to the appropriate people to help



TAKE ACTION:

- After, when alone, list notes and direct quotes to assist in reporting.
- Communicate with child protective services or local law enforcement ASAP.
- Report disclosures, or suspicions and concerns of abuse based on behavior.
- Report even if you aren't sure or feel that you don't have all of the facts.



- Don't be in denial about "what" or "who"
- Don't make assumptions
- Don't put words in the child's mouth



- Don't imply or say it was the child's fault
- Don't interrogate, or ask detailed or leading questions



- Don't show anger, shock, horror or distress



- Don't share your personal experience with abuse
- Don't promise confidentiality
- Don't initiate physically comforting the youth
- Don't make any promises



- Don't attempt to verify or speak to the adult the child spoke about (this could compromise an investigation, and is not your role)

Disclosures occur when a child attempts to discuss abuse (or an uncomfortable situation) that they, or a friend, is experiencing. They may be direct or indirect. Children have great difficulty communicating about abusive behavior they are experiencing (or they may not know what they are experiencing is abuse). They might share in a roundabout way, or tell it as a "story" about someone else. These are always opportunities to ask youth to tell you more. Being a safe person for youth is the most important element during the disclosure process, and then communicating to the appropriate child protection agency. If the possible abuse (including inappropriate or boundary-violating behavior) involves an organization, also communicate concerns to a supervisor.

For more information about reporting abuse in your state: www.virtusonline.org/virtus/Abuse_Reporting.cfm

For more information on child abuse, and possible behavioral indicators: www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/whatiscan.pdf