

As parents we never want to think about anything "bad" happening to your child. Hearing that your child may have been a victim of a crime or abuse is one of a parent's worst fears.

We know that telling another about being a victim of sexual abuse or a crime can be difficult. Being prepared in how to behave or what to say is critical for starting the road to recovery and to any possible investigation.

Below are the five "R's" In Dealing with a possible disclosure of abuse:

❖ **Remain calm.**

This news is difficult and hard to digest. Your body and verbal communication needs to be congruent. Humans are emotional beings, but remind yourself that your child came to you because they trust you. They need to feel like you can handle the information being provided. Thus, manage your emotions. Don't lose it. Obtain support for yourself from family, friends and/or a professional. Having a support system is crucial for you to be the support your child needs.

❖ **Respect the child.**

To respect a child means to BELIEVE them. Children do not make up allegations of sexual abuse. Regardless of what you think of the disclosure, you need to suspend any disbelief you may have. Research with survivors has found that those whose parents did not believe them report that the trauma of not being believed was worse than the trauma of the abuse. Believe them and reinforce it through your actions and words.

❖ **Refrain from conducting your own investigation.**

Many times children will hint about the abuse or give vague disclosures. If this happens you will need to get more information. Ask your child only open-ended questions; questions that do not solicit yes or no responses. As soon as you suspect what your child is telling you is abuse, stop asking questions. It is important to allow the appropriate professional to ask the questions so that there is the best possible opportunity for your child to make a full disclosure. If your child wants to talk be sure to listen and provide support. In all cases, let your child know that he/she did the right thing in telling, that he/she is not at fault, that you will keep them safe, and together you will get through this together. It is also important to be honest about the need to tell a professional about the disclosure.

❖ **Refuse to discuss this with others.**

Go to the appropriate agencies & professionals.

Respect your child's privacy. Ask your child if it is o.k. to tell others; this empowers your child.

Also, some people do not understand the dynamics of being a victim of a crime and/or abuse and thus often do not handle the information well. They may say and do things that are hurtful and damaging. While it is critical that your child and family have a support system be careful of the gossip factor.

❖ **Report the disclosure to the appropriate agency.**

Don't wait – make a report to the Department of Human Services or your local police department. You do not need to confirm or be able to prove what your child is disclosing. You are acting in "good faith". Remember that you are in a position to start the road to healing and stop further abuse of your child and possibly that of other children.