

Your response to a child or young person's disclosure of abuse may be the first step in stopping the harm and protecting them from further harm.

Believing the child is an essential step towards helping them feel safe. Actions thereafter may include implementing immediate protective strategies, engaging appropriate support services, and making reports to relevant authorities.

BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE

When a child or young person makes a disclosure of abuse it is important to acknowledge that they have acted with bravery, as disclosure can be extremely difficult. The child or young person may feel scared, guilty, ashamed, angry, confused, or powerless. These emotions are normal and should be validated.

Offenders put a great deal of time and effort into ensuring the child or young person remains silent. Some of the reasons a child or young person may have trouble disclosing include:

- The offender has told them not to tell, often with accompanying threats such as, "they will take you away from your family if you tell".
- The child thinks they will get in trouble.
- They feel ashamed or guilty.
- They feel that no one will believe them.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU *SUSPECT* A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS BEING HARMED

Sometimes a child or young person's behaviour may lead you to suspect they are unsafe or being harmed. In this situation, it is important that you:

- **Do not** frighten the child by getting emotional or angry.
- **Do not** ask confronting or leading questions.
- **Do** let the child know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk.
- **Do** record your concerns including any behavioural observations or conversations you may have had with the child.
- **Do** report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

HOW TO RESPOND IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON DISCLOSES TO YOU

If a child or young person discloses abuse to you, try to follow these steps:



1. **Listen:** Pay attention to what they are saying. Allow the child to share what they are comfortable with in their own words. Do not ask leading questions or force the child to talk.



2. **Affirm:** Tell them you believe them and it's not their fault.



3. **Support:** Help the child to cope with their feelings. Do what you can to help them feel safe, but do not make promises to the child that you may not be able to keep.



4. **Safety:** Let them know you will do all you can to help, and that this includes telling someone who can keep them safe. Though this may upset the child, it is very important that you act in the child's best interest.



5. **Document:** Write down everything the child told you and use their exact words as best as you can.



6. **Report:** Report the child's disclosure as soon as practically possible to Police and relevant authorities.



If you think your child (or a child you know) is being groomed or abused, please report to Police on 000 or child protection services in your State or Territory.

You may also wish to contact Bravehearts on **1800 272 831** or bisl@bravehearts.org.au if you are unsure or need advice.



DOWNLOAD OUR FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS & CARERS - PROTECTING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SEXUAL ABUSE