

Responding to disclosures

This information is intended to be used by professionals who work with children to be used when children disclose about potential child sexual abuse. It is not intended to be used in the workshops with children and/or to be discussed with children directly.

When a child decides to tell someone about sexual abuse (any form), it is called making a disclosure. **The way you respond can make a world of difference for that child.**

Disclosures during a workshop

Remember that the aim of workshops should not be to encourage personal disclosures during the workshop. However, as a result of the issues raised, it is possible a child makes a disclosure to you or the group about a personal negative experience, or something they have witnessed, that needs follow up. If this happens, **remain calm** and **do not cast any judgement**. Acknowledge the child for doing the right thing by speaking up and **thank him/her** for sharing. Make sure he or she is **signposted to a time and place** they can share their story with you or an appropriate member of staff and get adequate support.

A useful strategy to prevent children and young people from saying something inappropriate or disclosing abuse in these settings is '**protective interruption**'. This means interrupting the child or young person before they disclose and at the same time advising they can talk privately with you after the session or in a break.

Disclosures after a workshop

When a child discloses about sexual abuse, it is important to:

Listen:

- Remain calm and re-assuring
- Take the child to a private place
- Sit at the child's eye level
- **Listen** carefully to what they are saying
- Let the child use their own words (do not use words the child has not used)
- Provide plenty of time
- Control any expressions of panic or shock

Believe

- Reassure the child or young person that you **believe** them
- Recognize how brave they are for speaking up and that it is hard to talk about this
- Reassure the child that the abuse is not their fault
- Avoid intensive questioning (do not ask about details of the abuse)
- Don't use 'why' questions ('what' and 'how' are preferable)

Act

- Understand your responsibilities
- Meet health + safety needs
- Let the child know that you will need to let your supervisor, or the child safeguarding lead know about the disclosure to seek their advice as to what you need to do next.
- It is not your role to investigate the disclosure or abuse. Reassure the child that there are people whose job it is to investigate and support them.

Following up:

Follow your organisation's **child protection policy or safeguarding procedure**, is that is in place. It is important for children to understand that while the workshop provides a space to be open and honest, you have a duty to protect children and that if a disclosure concerns illegal activity or a risk of harm, you may be obligated to inform the school. The child can be involved in that conversation if they wish. You may need to contact your supervisor or person in charge (e.g. child protection officer within your organization or project) immediately after receiving a disclosure so that a police or child protection notification can be made. The safeguarding contact or officer in your organization should be able to support you in this process.

Only contact **parents and carers** once you have advice and guidance from the organization's child protection staff, manager or external agencies. **Inform the child** about the process you must follow

Reporting to the police

- If there is a concern about illegal activity, you need to make a report to the police/authorities. While anonymous tips are always an option, identified reporting increases the likelihood of prosecuting the perpetrator.
- Ensure that the child is in a safe place. If you have concerns over the child's safety, be sure to discuss them explicitly with authorities when you make a report.
- If you are not concerned that the parents are causing harm, you can consult with them prior to making a report to authorities.
- If possible, continue to play the supportive role you always have in that child's life.
- **Take care of yourself.** Reporting sexual abuse isn't easy. It's important to practice self-care during this time