



# Resources for Parents

## *What Can I Do to Support My Child?*

While it is true that you, as the primary caretaker, are dealing with your own trauma around the abuse of your child; it has been shown that **the best predictor of healing is the continued support of a parent!**

It's a tough problem, but you are in the best position to help! The following information will support you in knowing how!

- Stay close to your child immediately following disclosure and provide an extra sense of physical security.
- Give your child opportunities and permission to express feelings about the abuse as they come up.
- Try not to “talk the abuse into going away”. Be a good listener but try not to pry beyond what is necessary to understand what happened. Professionals may have to ask your child for the details of the abuse. Continual probing questions may add to your child’s embarrassment or sense of shame and may become a means of getting attention.
- Respect your child’s privacy in deciding whom to tell and do not repeat the story to others in the presence of the child.
- Permit your child to have positive as well as negative feelings. A child may have good feelings about the abuser, who may be regarded as a friend, even though he or she did some confusing, uncomfortable or hurtful things to your child. Allowing your child to express whatever he or she is feeling without getting a negative reaction can spare your child additional guilt about these feelings. Remember: **We can like a person and hate their actions.**
- Try to make every effort to help your child and the family **return to the normal routines**. If your child feels that the abuse has caused disruption of the entire family pattern, it may take on larger traumatic proportions.
- Encourage normal expressions of affection and positive physical interactions. Some parents, particularly fathers, tend to withdraw from physical contact with molested children because of their own emotional reactions or because they assume that it will be upsetting to the child. Instead, it may make the child feel that there is something wrong with him or her, that he/she is being punished, or that molestation and family expressions or affection are similar and related behaviors. Your child may not want to be hugged or kissed at first, but that may pass quickly. **Encourage family members to interact with your child as they have always done and take cues from the child.**



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- **Other children in the family will need attention and reassurances during this time too.** Pretending that nothing has happened and ignoring the crisis and its effects on them is not helpful. Tell the siblings in a general way what has happened to the victim but that he/she is okay now and no one is in any danger. It is best not to go into any real details of the abuse. The victim may decide to tell them later and that should be his/her choice, cautioning them not to scare their brothers or sisters. If they know the abuser, they too might have ambivalent feelings and may also suffer from guilt feelings for not being able to protect the victim. Stress that the victim is telling the truth, no one in the family is to blame and that this has happened to others too.
- **Use the opportunity to educate all the children in your family about sexual abuse and what they can do to protect themselves.** Again emphasizing that it is still not the victim's fault even if they have prevention education. Teach them to recognize different touches, trust their feelings, and feel they have a right to their bodies and a right to say **"No"** to touches that make them uncomfortable. Talk about who are the adults in their life that they could go to about a touching problem. Use lots of "What if...?" questions and practice appropriate responses as the child matures.
- **Take care of yourself and your feelings.** As you try to help your child and protect them from some of what they are feeling, they will need safe places to explore and heal their pain. Just as your child will probably find comfort in knowing that they "aren't the only one", parents might benefit from talking with other parents who have had similar experiences.