



## Responding to a Disclosure

Your response to any disclosure of abuse can be the first step in stopping the harm and protecting the child from further harm. Whilst an initial response may vary depending on circumstances, it is important that when a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse, they are believed. Believing the child will help them feel safe. Responses may consist of implementing protective strategies, engaging appropriate support services, and making reports to relevant authorities.

When a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse it is important to acknowledge that they have acted with bravery, as it can be very difficult to disclose. Whilst making a disclosure, a child or young person might 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 remains silent. Some of the reasons a child 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 into trouble.
- They feel ashamed or guilty.
- They feel that no one will believe them.

### WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON DISCLOSES TO YOU

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

**Listen:** Allow the child to share what they are comfortable with in their own words.

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

**Support:** Help the child to cope with their feelings and do what you can to help them feel safe.

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

**Document:** Write down everything they tell you and use the child’s exact words as best as you can.

**Act:** Follow your obligations and report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

#### DO NOT:

- use or ask leading questions.
- force a child to talk.
- make promises to the child or young person that you may not be able to keep.

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

Sometimes a child or young person’s behaviour or words may lead you to suspect or become concerned that the child is unsafe or being harmed. In this situation, it is important that you:

- Do not frighten the child or younger person by asking confronting questions.
- Do not ask leading questions of the child or young person.
- Let the child or young person know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk.
- Record your concerns including any behavioural observations or conversations you may have had with the child or young person.
- Follow your obligations and report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities

If in doubt, contact Bravehearts’ Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.

**IF YOU BELIEVE A CHILD IS AT IMMEDIATE RISK, CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES ON 000.**

**NEED SUPPORT OR MORE INFORMATION?**  
Bravehearts Information and Support Line  
FREECALL 1800 272 831 (Mon to Fri 8:30am – 4:30pm AEST)  
[bravehearts.org.au](http://bravehearts.org.au)