

Sexual abuse / harmful sexual behaviours disclosures:

Do's and Don'ts

What to do during a disclosure:

- Remain calm, attuned and engaged.
- Let them know about level of confidentiality.
- Let them know that you are listening and it is okay to talk.
- Thank them for telling you about the abuse.
- Let them know that you believe them and that what they have told you is important.

“Thank you for telling me about It is not okay that it happened. I believe you and I will be working out how to make sure it doesn't happen again.”

Talk about next steps:

- never promise something that you are not sure will occur. For example, do not tell a child: ‘Now I know what has happened you will never have to see him again.’
- be very careful not to discuss consequences that may be more than the child expected. For example, do not tell a child ‘Uncle Tom is in trouble with the police, not you.’
- ask the child about their worries and hopes, now that they have disclosed the abuse.

“My job is to keep you safe. I need to talk to some people so that we can work together to make you safe from [*alleged abuser or offender*].”

What to do ... afterwards

A child's disclosure does not automatically mean that they are safe. Children who have told others about their abuse can be at greater risk of retribution from the suspected offender or from their parents, family or community. Talk to people who are connected to the child to plan for this.

- Provide nurturance / emotional support / increase level of safety to the child/young person.
- Note down as much as can as soon as possible.
- Report immediately – following agency policy and procedures.
- If seeing a therapist, inform them also.
- Seek advice and expert assistance as soon as possible.
- Seek support for self as required.

What **not** to do ...

- React in such a way that will make the child feel embarrassed or ashamed (manage your triggers).
- Ignore the behaviour.
- Redirect them.
- Automatically assume that ‘sexual abuse’ has occurred – consider was it ‘developmental excepted behaviour’ vs ‘harmful sexual behaviour’?
- Use language that labels a child as a “pervert”, “perpetrator”, “sex offender” etc
- Conduct a formal interview / ask lots of questions (unless this is your formal role).

