



## IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED...

1. **Stay calm.** Fear and anger are normal reactions, but they can frighten the child. Be sure not to blame, punish, or embarrass the child.
2. **Believe your child.** It is rare for a child to lie about sexual abuse. Many children who report abuse are not believed. Do not deny or ignore what your child is telling you.
3. **Listen to your child.** Take your child to a private place and let them tell you what happened in his or her own words. Give your child your full attention.
4. **Reassure your child that it wasn't their fault.** Assure them that you are glad he or she told you. Give positive messages such as, "I know it's not your fault", or "I'm glad you told." Be sure to let your child know they are not to blame.
5. **Protect your child immediately from the suspected abuser.** Reassure the child that he or she is safe.
6. **Report the suspected abuse immediately to Child Protective Services and/or your local law enforcement agency.**
7. **Don't confront the offender in your child's presence.** In fact, it is probably best to let the proper authorities confront the offender.
8. **Seek professional help for your child and your family.** This includes medical attention as needed, child protective services, and a counselor trained in treating sexual abuse.)
9. **Respect your child's privacy.** Be careful not to discuss the abuse in front of people who do not need to know what happened.
10. **Let your child talk about it at their own pace.** Don't pressure your child into talking about the abuse. Forcing information can be harmful and you are not trained to interview a child victim. On the other hand, do not try to silence your child. Allow your child to talk, as they need to.
11. **Allow your child to express his or her feelings but keep your own feelings about the abuse separate.** Your child may have feelings about the abuse and the offender that are different from yours.
12. **Try to resume a "normal" as life as possible.** Protect your child, but don't make him or feel different or isolated.
13. **Don't dismiss your child's feelings by telling them to "forget about it".** You and your child will both need time to work through all the feelings and changes, especially if the offender is someone in the family. The time it takes for a child to heal varies, depending upon the child as well as the circumstances of the sexual assault (such as who the offender is, how long the abuse continued, whether or not threats, bribes, or force was used, and the type of abuse).
14. **Seek help for yourself.** Parents often feel angry, guilty, or to blame when they learn their child has been sexually assaulted. Talk to someone you trust, or call a counselor who will be able to help you.

If you suspect your child, or someone you know, has been sexually assaulted, call the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress. (206) 744-1600

**HARBORVIEW CENTER FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT  
AND TRAUMATIC STRESS  
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