Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Abuse:
Helpful Tips for Parents and Adults

Sexual abuse occurs more often than we would like to think; one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. To help you feel more comfortable with and prepared for the challenge of addressing sexual abuse, we offer these helpful tips.

If a child discloses abuse to you, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Believe him or her.** The most important thing is to believe the child. Children rarely lie about abuse; what is more common is a child denying that abuse happened when it did. Tell the child you believe him/her.

- **Reassure the child that the abuse is not their fault.** The child’s greatest fear is that he or she is responsible for the abuse. Be sure to make it clear that what happened is not a result of anything he/she did or did not do.

- **Do not make promises you can’t keep.** Do not make promises such as the child will never have to see the abuser again, that nothing will change, or other such promises.

- **Stay calm**, even though you may feel surprised or upset. Your calmness will reassure the child that he/she hasn’t done anything wrong.

- **Do not interrogate the child.** It can be traumatic for the child to repeat his/her story numerous times. It is often in the interest of the child to wait for a Children’s Division worker to conduct the interview.

- **Report the abuse immediately.** Report the abuse or suspected abuse to the Child Abuse Hotline.
  - Missouri: 800-392-3738
  - Kansas: 800-922-5330
  - National: 800-422-4453

Believing and supporting the child are two of the best actions to start the healing process. Appropriate and helpful responses to disclosures are as follows:

- “I am glad you told me, thank you.”
- “You are very brave and did the right thing.”
- “It wasn’t your fault.”
- “I am proud of you for telling me.”

For more information on child sexual abuse or responding to disclosures, please visit www.mocsa.org.

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