Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Abuse:

Helpful Tips for School Employees:

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 his/her 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 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.

- **Seek resources for the child and their family.** A disclosure often poses serious challenges for the family of the victim. You can help by providing legal, medical and social services referrals.

- **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 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.

- **Protect the child from further abuse.** If a child discloses abuse to you, you are responsible for the well-being of the child. Assess the situation and take action to ensure the child's physical and emotional well-being.

- **Report the abuse immediately.** As an educator, legally you must report any disclosed or suspected abuse to the Child Abuse Hotline or the police.

  o Missouri: 800-392-3738
  o Kansas: 800-922-5330
  o National: 800-422-4453

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

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