



FOR PARENTS: HOW TO RESPOND WHEN YOUR CHILD IS SEXUALLY ABUSED

1. **Prayerfully gather your thoughts.**
Sexual abuse is one of the most disturbing disclosures a parent can receive, but panic will inevitably prompt harmful responses. Remember that God's presence, power, and love does not change in the midst of suffering and evil (Ps 46:1-2). Ask God for wisdom and courage as you face this stressful trial (Ps 23:4; 34:4-8).
2. **Calmly and gently talk to your child.**
Sexually abused children have experienced great trauma. They feel great shame often coupled with fear. Therefore, your calm and loving response is critically important for your child.
3. **Honestly share your own sorrow over the abuse.**
Let the child know how sad you are that this was done to them. Let them know that God is also sad and grieves over their abuse (psalms 5:6). It hurts God when his children suffer (Hosea 11:8; John 11:35).
4. **Assure the child that it wasn't their fault.**
Shame causes abused children to innately feel they are responsible for the abuse. Additionally, perpetrators often tell the child it is their fault. It may take a very long time for the child to truly believe the abuse wasn't their fault, so repeated verbal assurances from parents are very helpful.
5. **Assure the child that you will get them help.**
Abused children don't expect parents to have all the answers or to fix every problem. They just need to know that parents will boldly pursue getting the help that is needed.
6. **Contact law enforcement and report the abuse immediately.**
If the perpetrator is a family member, Child Protective Services should also be contacted.
7. **Do not immediately confront the perpetrator.**
While this is often the first thing parents attempt to do, it can easily backfire. First of all, for the sake of the legal investigation, it is important for law enforcement to be the first ones to interview the perpetrator. Secondly, parents need time to work through the complex issues and intense feelings. Otherwise, they might act and speak rashly in ways that are counter productive and even destructive.

8. **Protect the child from the perpetrator, and if necessary, the extended family and the community.**

It is the parents' responsibility to protect the child from the perpetrator who should have no contact with or access to the child whatsoever. Parents must establish whatever boundaries are necessary with the extended family or community to protect the child. Furthermore, if family, church, or community do not accept these boundaries and/or seek to minimize or deny the abuse, then parents need to protect the child from those individuals as well, for their denial can be very damaging to the child. Even though denial and victim blame are some of the most common responses to sexual abuse they are most strongly condemned by God (Proverbs 17:15).

9. **Seek professional help.**

Sexual abuse is confusing, complex, and deeply damaging. Hence, it is advisable to find a Christian counselor experienced in dealing with sexual abuse to work with the child and your family.

10. **Respect your child's privacy.**

Scripture tells us that there is a time to speak but also a time to be silent (Ecc 3:7). Sexual abuse is one of the most shameful things that can happen to a child and often people don't know how to respond to an abuse report. Therefore, be very careful and selective in speaking about the abuse to other people, especially if the child is present.

11. **Be patient.**

Sexual abuse creates soul damage that generally takes considerable time to heal. Remember that God is infinitely committed to the well being and healing of his children (Rom 8:28, 31-37; Phil 1:6). Prayerfully commit the pain caused by the abuse to God and entrust healing to Him (Ps 18:1-6; 1 Pet 5:7). Trust Him to work in His wise way in His time.