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Responding to Child Sexual Assault

Your response to any disclosure of child sexual assault can be the first step in stopping the harm and protecting the child from further harm. It is the first step to guarantee the child’s safety and well-being.

This initial response can vary depending on circumstances and needs. Responses may consist of implementing protective strategies, engaging appropriate services or making reports to relevant authorities. No matter the initial response, it is important that the child’s well-being and safety be assured at each and every step.

When a child discloses assault they will more than likely be feeling negative feelings, including scared, guilty, ashamed, angry, confused, powerless.

If you suspect child sexual assault, but no disclosure has been made, always remain aware of the emotional distress the child may be experiencing. Approach the child in a caring and sensitive manner by assuring them that you are there to listen, and that you will help if there is a problem.

Remember, you will not be helping if you make promises you cannot keep, push for details (beware of asking direct questions that may frighten a child or impede any official investigation), or indiscriminately discuss details with those not directly involved in helping/supporting the child.



DISCLOSURE RESPONSE CHECKLIST

LISTEN: Listen carefully to all that they say

AFFIRM: Tell the child that you believe them

DON'T BLAME: Tell the child that it is not their fault

ENCOURAGE: Tell the child that they are not responsible for the assault and that you are very proud they told you

SAFETY: Let the child know that you will do everything in your power to help them

DOCUMENT: Write everything down, using the child’s own words as best you can, include behaviours and any things they have said previously that may have hinted at the assault.

CHECK: If you work in a school or centre, check the policy on reporting disclosures

ACT: At all times, act in the best interests of the child, report the disclosure to the Department of Child Safety or the Police

- Remember, listening 100% means:
- Having eye contact at the child or young person’s level
 - Listening and responding to the child or young person’s perspective
 - Checking that you have understood what they wanted to say
 - Putting your adult thoughts aside