



# RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

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## WHAT IS A DISCLOSURE?

A disclosure is where a child makes known an experience of abuse, or an incident not legislatively considered 'okay'.

## WHEN WILL A DISCLOSURE OCCUR?

Disclosures are spontaneous and can happen at any time. Incidents of abuse may become evident through a combination of disclosures. A child is most likely to disclose when in a calm & predictable environment; hoping to illicit a calm and predictable response.

Disclosures can be raised:

- 1) As the abuse is happening.
- 2) In fragmented disclosures or recollections - indicated verbally or through change of behaviour.
- 3) Post abuse - including adulthood.

*The timing of a disclosure will impact what the appropriate response is.*



"Your response can have a great impact on the child or young person's ability to seek further help and recover from trauma."

- Western Australia Department of Education, 2018

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### As a carer do I have a legal obligation to report a disclosure?

Under the *Code of Conduct for Authorised Foster, Relative and Kinship Carers*, carers are to 'immediately report to their designated agency any allegations or incidents of abuse, neglect or ill-treatment they are aware of'.

### How do I respond to a disclosure?

Most young people will only disclose to someone they trust. Trust is essential to a well-managed disclosure.

- Quietly listen
- Acknowledge feelings
- Reassure that you are glad they told you

### I think my child is going to disclose, what should I do?

Stay alert, a disclosure can come about in a variety of forms; particularly when children are non-verbal. Keep notes of what your child has said - in the words of the child. This is important as the terminology of children can differ to our own.

If in doubt, always be available to listen. Don't dismiss possible disclosures, and contact your caseworker who will advise if a report should be made.

# SIGNS OF HISTORIC ABUSE & NEGLECT

- Challenging behaviours
- Distrust of adults
- Low self-esteem
- Social withdrawal
- Bed wetting
- Being overly obedient and trying hard to please caregiver
- Appearing 'accident prone'
- Alcohol or drug use
- Suicidal tendencies or ideation
- Avoidance
- Creating art or stories about abuse
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviours for developmental age
- Malnutrition, frequent hunger or hoarding of food
- Poor hygiene
- Frequent school absence
- Lack of supervision for long periods
- Frequent illness, injury or severe nappy rash
- Developmental milestones are not being met, without reason

## WHAT HINDERS DISCLOSURE?

- Shame and embarrassment
- Feeling responsible for the abuse
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of negative consequences
- Normality of abuse
- Mistrust of adults
- Lack of confidentiality
- No one to disclose to
- Communication or vocabulary barriers
- Retraction: withdrawal of the disclosure
- Stigmatisation

# TAKING CARE

- Don't dismiss a child's disclosure, even if you believe it is not true.
- Don't ask leading questions - don't counsel the child. This could change how the child encodes this memory.
- Don't replace words - listen to what has been said and transcribe this.
- Don't attempt to confront the perpetrator. This will be the last person to know if allegations have been made
- You can't promise you can't tell anyone; allegations of abuse are mandatory to report. Have a conversation about keeping that child and other children safe.

## INTERGRATING SELF CARE

As a carer, self-care should be a part of our lifestyle, not something we only cling to in incidents of distress. Good & consistent self care can assist in emotionally preparing for disclosure.

Often, if we have experienced our own trauma, we can be triggered by our child's disclosure. The activation of these memory networks can impact our reaction, such as causing us to become highly emotional. Our reaction should not impact the child's feeling of safety.



## FOLLOWING UP A DISCLOSURE

In the words of the child, record what the child has said

Notify your caseworker

Make a report to the Child Protection Helpline

Support child through the process