

GUIDANCE ON RESPONDING TO A CHILD WHO DISCLOSES ABUSE

A child may make a disclosure to a trusted worker that they have been or are being harmed or abused. Children will have different ways of disclosing this information and all workers should be prepared to respond to this information in a supportive and sensitive way.

- Be as calm and natural as possible
- Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and possibly liked. Do not panic
- Do not promise to keep secrets
- Be aware that disclosures can be very difficult for the child
- Remember, the child may initially be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time
- Listen to what the child has to say. Give them the time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able and wish to
- Do not pressurise the child. Allow him or her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language
- Conceal any signs of disgust, anger or disbelief
- Accept what the child has to say – false disclosures are very rare
- It is important to differentiate between the person who carried out the abuse and the act of abuse itself. The child quite possibly may love or strongly like the alleged abuser while also disliking what was done to them. It is important therefore to avoid expressing any judgement of, or anger towards the alleged perpetrator while talking with the child
- It may be necessary to reassure the child that your feelings towards him or her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what they have disclosed
- Reassure the child that they have taken the right action in talking to you
- Questions should be supportive and for the purpose of clarification only. Do not ask leading questions
- Explain to the child that this information will only be shared with people who can help.

At the earliest possible opportunity

- Record in writing, in a factual manner, what the child has said, including, as far as possible, the exact words used by the child
- Inform the DLP immediately and agree measures to protect the child, e.g. report the matter directly to Tusla
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.

On-going support

Following a disclosure by a child, it is important that the worker continues in a supportive relationship with the child. Disclosure is a huge step for a child. Workers should continue to offer support, particularly by:

- Maintaining a positive relationship with the child
- Keeping lines of communication open by listening carefully to the child
- Continuing to include the child in the usual activities.

Any further disclosure should be treated as a first disclosure and responded to as indicated above.

Where necessary, immediate action should be taken to ensure the child's safety.

