

IMPORTANT RESPONSES FOR YOU TO SHOW YOUR CHILD

- Separate your child from the person who sexually abused them.
- Believe your child. Show them that you believe them by telling them and acting like you do.
- Continue to provide rules and limits in your house. This helps your child feel safe and normal.
- Nurture and take care of your child. Do not be afraid to kiss them or hug them. Your child needs healthy touches.
- Give your child permission to share their thoughts and feelings. For example, if your child is angry, let them show it in a safe way so no one gets hurt.
- Be aware of what you are feeling and thinking. Try not to lose control in front of your child. Your child might think you are upset with them. It is okay to talk about your thoughts and feelings with them as long as you are supporting your child.
- Spend extra time with your child in regular family activities and relaxing (reading or listening to music).

It's good to ask for help in this difficult situation. You may want to keep a list of people you can call when you need to talk to someone. This list may include your best friend, someone from church, your child's counselor or a supportive family member.

Suggestions for parents of sexual abuse victims

Sexual abuse of a child affects the whole family. Parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers are all impacted when a child is touched in a sexual way. The child who experienced the abuse has to deal with many feelings and thoughts that are hard for them to have. Every child who is abused needs to have support to help them make it through the difficult times. Even if your child doesn't show any signs that they are thinking about what happened to them, they still need reassurance that they are important and loved.

Common Reactions

Different children will handle the situation in different ways. Here are some **common reactions** that children who are sexually abused may experience:

- If your child is preschool aged (**children under 5 years**) they may regress or slide backward in their development. For example, they may wet themselves even after they have been potty-trained. They could also begin sucking their thumb again, using baby talk, or become more clingy to you (have trouble separating). They may also show anger and frustration easily or cry more than usual (more sadness and

irritability). They might also show an increase in sexual behavior like touching themselves or talking about sex more.

- If your child is school aged (**5 to 12 years**) you may see a sudden change in their behavior or personality. A calm, laid back child might become very emotional or defiant. An active child with lots of friends may start staying at home more or not want to talk to anyone. School grades might drop, and their eating and sleeping patterns might change. They may also complain more about not feeling well or having pains. They might have a hard time controlling their emotions (feelings) and begin to act younger or older than their age. They may also show an increased interest in sexual activity.
- If your child is an adolescent (**13 years and older**) they may become more secretive and not tell you what is going on with them. They may start having problems with their friends and may change their dating practices (dating a lot of different people or people you don't know). They may not take care of themselves by not washing regularly or not sleeping or eating right. They may start to take more risks such as using drugs or alcohol, hanging out with older people, lying or stealing. They might threaten to hurt themselves. They also might drop their responsibilities and act like they are younger. Their school grades might lower and they might quit their job. They might tell you that they have trouble concentrating because of all of the strong feelings they are having.