



SAFE PRACTICE GUIDE

Receiving Abuse Disclosures

Why is this important?

Safe and nurturing environments flourish when people are encouraged and supported to raise concerns and make disclosures, and feel they can do so safely. A disclosure is about seeking help. How it is received can affect a victim or survivor deeply and impact their recovery and healing. Archdiocesan workers, particularly those who work with children and adults-at-risk, should be prepared to receive an abuse disclosure.

What should we be doing?

The following points provide some general guidance on how to receive an abuse disclosure from a child. A similar process may be appropriate in receiving a disclosure from an adult-at-risk.

- Use a location that is private yet visible, or within clear line of sight of another adult (not isolated).
- If possible, and agreeable to the child, ask another adult to be present.
- Reassure the child that it's ok for them to disclose and that they won't be in trouble.
- Give full attention, listen, be patient and remain calm.
- Let the child speak freely and avoid interrupting.
- Avoid 'questioning' the child or pursuing sensitive details they may not feel comfortable discussing.
- If needed, clarify your understanding of key issues using open questions or prompts (e.g. What happened then? Tell me more about).
- Monitor the child for signs of emotional distress or trauma and discontinue the conversation if they are not coping.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing.
- Explain next steps, including the need to share the information with others. Explain that the disclosure cannot be kept secret.
- Do not make commitments that may not be able to be met.
- Address any immediate safety concerns, stay close and provide a sense of security.
- Document the disclosure as soon as possible. Use the child's own words. Do not censor, elaborate or include personal opinions or speculations.

IMPORTANT

- Do not promise absolute confidentiality or to keep an abuse disclosure secret.
- The safety and wellbeing of the child is the first priority.
- Archdiocesan workers are not expected to counsel the child or investigate their claims/allegations.

Reference

Adapted from 'Responding to children and young people's disclosures of abuse', Australian Institute of Family Studies, March 2015