

## GUIDANCE 15

### RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE/S OF CHILD ABUSE

Children or young people may tell an adult whom they trust that they are being abused. This happens for many reasons, but the important thing to remember is that if they do tell, they are doing so in the hope that the abuse will be stopped. This is true even if the child or young person asks that nothing be done with the information.

#### IN RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE...

##### Do

1. Stay calm and listen to the child or young person.
2. Allow him/her enough time to say what she/he needs to say, to continue at his/her own pace.
3. Where a child or young person is distressed, be supportive and compassionate toward the young person to help them to calm down.
4. Reassure the child or young person that it was the right thing to do, i.e., to say what they had to say.
5. Check with the child or young person to make sure that you have understood what they actually said.
6. Tell the child or young person what will happen next, i.e., that the relevant persons will be informed.
7. Take notes as soon as this is appropriate or possible, making efforts to remember the exact words used by the child or young person.
8. Include in your notes your opinion as to the demeanour and emotional state of the child or young person.
9. Tell the child or young person that they will be kept up to date about what is happening.
10. Be aware that a person's ability to recount his or her concern or allegation will depend on age, culture, nationality and upon any disability which may affect use of language and range of vocabulary.

**Listen, Record and Report.** Reassure the child that, in disclosing the abuse, they have done the right thing. If a child or young person tells you about abuse it is important that you.

##### Do not

1. Make promises that cannot be kept, particularly a promise to keep a disclosure secret.
2. Do not suggest words but use theirs.
3. Use leading questions, make suggestions, or prompt details.
4. Stop the child/young person recalling significant events.
5. Ask for further details or press the child/young person for more information.

6. Make the child/young person repeat the details unnecessarily.
7. Express opinions about the child/young person or members of his or her family.
8. Make assumptions or speculate.
9. Disclose details of the allegation to anyone else, even if the allegations involve them in any way.

#### LISTENING TO A PERSON WHO ADMITS ABUSING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

It is necessary to tell a person who admits an offence against a child or young person that such information cannot be kept confidential. If such an admission is made, even where the admission relates to something which happened a long time ago, you must refer the matter to DLP as soon as possible, who will follow the procedures for referral to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

#### GUIDANCE ON HOW TO RESPOND TO PEOPLE MAKING AN ALLEGATION

It is often very difficult for people to talk about abuse, so it is important to make sure that you are patient, listen carefully and actively, and create a safe environment in which they feel able to tell you as much as they can remember. This will help those people whose responsibility it is to investigate the incident(s) do so as thoroughly as possible.