Understanding Children’s Disclosures

WHY CHILDREN DON’T TELL US THEY HAVE BEEN ABUSED

- They are afraid they won’t be believed.
- They are afraid of getting into trouble themselves.
- They feel it is their fault and/or they caused the abuse to occur.
- They may fear threats made by the offender (e.g., break-up of the family. Offender might go to jail fear of rejection by offender and/or family, fear of retaliation).
- They try to protect the offender, may love the offender, but don’t like the abuse.
- Children may not know “how” to tell. They may not know correct words or may describe the situation in vague terms.
- Children may not know the sexual activity is wrong or even that it is something anyone would want to know about.
- Some children fear peer reaction: being singled out, laughed at or losing popularity.
- If it was a sexual abuse involving an adult and child of the same gender, they might fear being labeled a homosexual.
- Some children don’t know whom to tell.
- Children may not feel there was an “appropriate” time or opportunity to tell.
- They don’t want to be labeled a tattletale.

WHY CHILDREN FINALLY DO TELL SOMEONE THEY HAVE BEEN ABUSED

- The molestation escalates in frequency or type of behavior and alarms the child.
- The child receives some sexual abuse prevention information and realizes that what has happened to him/her should be reported.
- If the offender had told the child to keep the sexual abuse a secret, sometimes the child may brag or want to share the secret with a friend, who then reports it.
- The victim’s younger brother or sister is now at the age when the victim was first sexually abused, and the victim does not want him/her to be abused as well.
- The child develops a physical symptom that causes him/her to need medical care that leads to a disclosure.
- The child encounters a caring adult he/she can trust and feels confident in disclosing to.

SOME POTENTIAL SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:
Remember every child and each situation is unique. Some signs or symptoms may be more obvious, and some may never show. This is just a guideline. The best thing you can do is just pay attention to behavior changes that are severe and significant without obvious reasons.

- A child that is scared of things they did not used to be scared of. (Like a particular person or place)
- Inappropriate sexual play that is difficult to redirect.
- Sudden behavioral changes
  - Problems in school
  - Sleeping patterns
  - Isolation from family and friends
- Acting out behaviors (Delinquency, stealing, lying, keeping secrets, running away)
- Depression or anxiety. (Being clingy or sudden separation anxiety)
- Regression of developmental milestones. (Such as thumb sucking, bedwetting, baby talk)
- Depression, guilt, anxiety, phobias or obsessions.
- Swelling, bruises, bleeding, pain or itching in genital area
- Frequent physical complaints of the body
- Talking about a “special” friend or having new clothes, toys or money not given to them by their parents.

HOW TO HANDLE A CHILD’S DISCLOSURE:
The most important thing you can do is REMAIN CALM.
- Let your child know that you love him/her and that you are very sorry that this happened.
- Tell your child that it was not his/her fault, that he/she did not do anything wrong.
- Let your child know that you are proud of him/her for having the courage to share this with you.
- DO NOT question your child extensively.
- Report the disclosure to the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline and local Law Enforcement.

If you have suspicion of Sexual Abuse please call:
Missouri Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-392-3738  573-751-3448