



## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

### HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REACT

There is no “right” reaction to hearing that your child has been abused. You may experience a wide range of reactions and feelings that may impact different aspects of your life. Some common reactions from parents include:

- **Anger** - You may feel angry at the abuser for hurting your child or even frustrated with your child for not telling you. It’s also possible to feel angry at your child for disclosing the abuse. It’s not easy news to hear, but it’s important to remember it is not your child’s fault.
- **Anxiety** - You might be anxious about responding in the “right” way to your child or navigating the other relationships in your life, especially if you have a relationship with the abuser.
- **Fear** - Depending on your family circumstances, you may be afraid that the abuser will find a way to harm your child again or be concerned about taking care of your family on your own.
- **Sadness** - You may feel sad for your child, for your family, or for yourself. When a child discloses sexual abuse, it will cause changes in your life. It’s OK to be upset over the changes in your life that may result from this disclosure.
- **Shock** - If you had no idea that the harm was occurring, you may be very surprised to hear what has happened.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no single “right” reaction, and that all reactions and responses are normal. Having both you and your child talk to a professional about these thoughts and feelings can help sort through these issues. Professional support can also result in healthier long- and short-term results for both you and your child.

### HOW DO I MANAGE THESE FEELINGS

Your child is counting on you for support. In order to put your child’s safety first, it’s important to take care of yourself. That means finding a way to work through your feelings and reactions to the abuse that doesn’t interfere with your child’s welfare. It may not be easy, but with the right support it is possible.

- **Consider talking to a counselor one-on-one.** Individual counseling gives you the chance to focus entirely on you and your concerns, without needing to worry about how your child will react to those thoughts.
- **Use your support system.** It might be family and friends you trust, or it might be a support group that you didn’t have a connection with before.
- **Set limits.** Dealing with these emotions can be time-consuming and draining. Set aside time for activities that don’t revolve around the abuse.
- **Practice self-care** to keep your mind and body in healthy shape.

## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

### WHAT IF THE PERPETRATOR IS PART OF MY FAMILY?

Finding out that your child was hurt by someone you know and trust can present some additional challenges as a parent. You may be faced with a range of emotions specific to this situation that others can't relate to. No one has the right to invalidate the way you feel, but it's important to find a way to manage these emotions in order to prioritize the safety of your child. Some experiences of non-offending parents may include:

- Anger towards the child for disrupting your family, especially if the perpetrator is your partner.
- Anger towards the perpetrator for hurting your child and betraying your trust.
- Guilt that you didn't know the abuse was occurring or for still having feelings for the person who hurt your child.
- If the person who harmed your child was another one of your children, you may feel conflicted about how to provide support to the child who was harmed while still trying to protect your other child.
- Losing faith in your judgement or abilities as a parent.
- Practical fears about finances and day-to-day life that may change when the family member who caused harm is removed from the family circle.
- Sense of loss for the family member who hurt your child as you begin to cut ties.

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY CHILD

The effects of sexual assault and abuse vary from person to person. The process of healing from sexual abuse can take a long time, and it's understandable to feel frustrated as a parent. Survivors of child sexual abuse can react in a wide variety of ways. Some of these reactions could cause you discomfort or take you by surprise.

- Being angry at you for not protecting them.
- Being angry at you for removing the perpetrator from the home.
- Confiding in someone who isn't you.
- Not talking about it at all.
- Talking about the abuse all the time.