

Conversations with Children Regarding Concerns of Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is very common (1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday), and the incidence of fabricated or false reports is very low (it is estimated that only 4-8% of reports of sexual abuse are fabricated), so it is extremely important that adults believe children who overtly disclose or even hint at sexual abuse. The amount of information needed to make a report is minimal, so adults should not feel that they need to know everything about a suspected incident in order to make a report.

Here are some tips for interacting with children around this topic:

- If there are concerns about sexual abuse in a given environment, ask a child if they have heard anything about the concerns. Ask an open ended question such as “what have you heard about that?” and “how does that make you feel?” This will help the adult understand how much a child has heard regarding the incident and assess their level of worry about it.
- If there are concerns about a given individual in a setting, ask a question such as “Has anyone at _____ ever done anything that made you feel uncomfortable?” Or “Have you heard other kids talk about anyone doing anything that made them feel uncomfortable?” If a child says no, the adult should reassure the child that it is safe to talk about anything with them and let the topic go. If a child reports concerning contact with an individual, the adult could ask “Tell me all about that” in order to gather sufficient detail to make a report. Once some very basic details are known, the adult should call Bivona Child Advocacy Center at 935-7800 to talk it through with our triage staff. Be sure to reassure the child that they did the right thing in telling and that they are believed.
- If a child discloses concerning contact, be sure to:
 - Remain calm
 - Let them know you are proud of them and that they are not alone
 - Thank them for telling you
 - Let them know you are going to get help
 - Ask open ended questions such as “tell me more about that”
- It is important that an adult NOT do the following:
 - Make promises that can’t be kept
 - Tell them they will never see the person again
 - Interrupt while they are sharing with you, even to ask questions
 - Ask them probing questions such as “why did this happen”
 - Investigate, for instance asking highly detailed follow up questions