



# CCASA

CALGARY COMMUNITIES AGAINST SEXUAL ABUSE

# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DISCLOSURES

**QUICK  
GUIDE**

# HOW CHILDREN DISCLOSE

## CHILDREN TELL A LITTLE AT A TIME

Children often do not have a linear narrative. Disclosures can happen a little at a time, which is usually the result of the child needing to feel a sense of safety. Children and youth might make vague statements to “test the waters” around what an adult’s reaction might be. Statements could include:

- A dislike for someone
- A change in relationship with someone they used to like
- An aversion to certain people or places
- Something is happening at home
- A secret that cannot be shared

## CHILDREN MAY TRY A DIFFERENT WAY OF TALKING ABOUT IT

Some indicators or phrases could be:

- “A friend of mine” speaking in hypothetical terms about themselves
- “I don’t like \_\_\_\_\_ anymore”
- “Can I stay at your house?”
- “What if” statements

## **CHILDREN MIGHT TAKE IT BACK**

We can see that sometimes based on adult reactions, children may take their disclosure back. Some reasons a child might recant their disclosure may include:

- Children see the reaction of them telling
- Children see changes and consequences to telling and may try to turn back time
- Young people may withdraw based on negative reactions or fear of consequences

Children who recant disclosures often affirm their abuse later in life.

## **CHILDREN OFTEN DON'T TELL PARENTS FIRST**

We know disclosing can be tough and scary and because of this we see that children often don't tell their parents first due to their relationship being so important. In considering this, we see that children often disclose to teachers, coaches, grandparents or other trusted adults first.

# SUPPORTING A DISCLOSURE

## Listen

Showcase active listening when speaking to a child by responding with empathy and support to establish trust.

## Mirror Language

Mirror a child's body language, meet them at their level and use words that they are using.

## Use Key Messages

Use empowering messages to validate and reassure the child's feelings, i.e., "it takes a lot of courage to share what has happened," "thank you for sharing, you did the right thing by telling me". When a child discloses to you, it means that they feel safe and trust you. Giving supportive messaging helps build the foundation for a child's healing journey. To be a supportive listener here are some messages to convey:

- It is not your fault
- I believe you
- Your feelings are normal

# GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

When sharing something difficult or scary, the body can react in different ways. Grounding techniques can be helpful tools to help regulate the body and mind, when we share something that is difficult or scary. Because the body can react in different ways, these techniques can be used to help center, refocus and bring us back to the present moment when strong emotions or feelings arise. These activities can be self-directed or used by having someone guide you through the steps.

- 5 Senses – 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste.
- Breathing – take a breath on the count of 4 seconds, hold in for 7 seconds and then exhale for 8 seconds (adjust as necessary)
- Descriptive Imagery – describe or write down a place or environment in which you feel peaceful or comfort. Use your 5 sense to help describe the place and feeling.

# DUTY TO REPORT & SELF CARE

## DUTY TO REPORT

Every adult in Alberta has a legal obligation to report concerns of child abuse to Alberta Children's Services. This can be a hard conversation to have but the child's safety is your main priority. Unlike Children's Services, **there is no legal obligation to report to police**- this is a family choice.

Children's Services Intake - (403) 297-2995

## SELF CARE FOR THE HELPER

Being on the receiving end of a disclosure can be really difficult, emotional and impactful. It's important for you to take care of yourself and well-being. Take some time for yourself and do an activity that you find relaxing or enjoyable.

If you need support or have any questions, please call the CCASA Support and Information Line - (403)-237-5888

# ABOUT CCASA

Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse (CCASA) is the primary sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexual assault crisis, counselling and education service provider for Calgary and the surrounding areas. Our services are available to everyone including people of all colour, race, ability, sexual orientation, religion, education, socio-economic status, or gender.

## OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Counselling (Individual and Group)
- CCASA Support and Information Line
- Sexual Assault Response Team (24-Hour Hospital Accompaniment)
- Public Education and Training
- Police and Court Support (PACES)



# IMPORTANT CONTACTS

**CCASA Support and Information Line- (403) 237-5888**

**Alberta One Line - 1 (866) 403-8000**

***Children's Services Intake - (403) 297-2995***

***calgarycasa.com***



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