

## Relating to your child after abuse

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The way that you react to your child can have an impact on how they recover from the abuse. Children are particularly sensitive to the reaction of other people, especially people whom they love and respect like parents and close family members.

Let your child know that you are willing to talk about what has happened if and whenever they want to. Give them the choice of what they discuss and with whom.

Sometimes things can get worse before they get better. Your child may seem to get more difficult once the abuse is out in the open and stopped. This is because, for the first time, they may feel safe to express their fear, anger and distress. Rest assured in the knowledge that the bad times won't continue forever.

## What can I do to help my child?

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It is important to realise that despite your best intentions, you probably can't support your child best all by yourself. There are many places that can help you and your child deal with what has happened. Getting in touch with a support agency like Rape Prevention Education is a vital first step in building a support network for you, your child and your family to help you all deal with how you're feeling.

Rape Prevention Education offers a referral service which is culturally appropriate, safe and supportive. You can contact them to talk through your options and get information about what's available in your area. Call (09) 360 4001 during office hours, email [info@rapecrisis.org.nz](mailto:info@rapecrisis.org.nz), or check out the Rape Prevention Website on [www.rapecrisis.org.nz](http://www.rapecrisis.org.nz).

*You and Your Child: Information on sexual abuse for parents*

Rape Prevention Education  
Rape Crisis Auckland Inc.  
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## YOU AND YOUR CHILD

### Information about sexual abuse for parents



## Rape Prevention Education

RAPE CRISIS AUCKLAND INCORPORATED  
WHAKATU MAURI

*Supporting survivors of sexual violence & their whanau.  
Working to eliminate rape and sexual abuse through  
education and community work.*

### CONTACT DETAILS

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## Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse happens when a child is used by an older person in a sexual way. It can include a range of behaviours from obscene exposure, to the sexual touching of genitals, to intercourse. The majority of abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the child and in many cases the offender is a family member (called 'incest').

Sexual abuse typically involves the use of manipulation, threats, coercion and sometimes force. As they are naturally innocent and trusting, children are very vulnerable to abuse, and are often emotionally or physically dependent upon the adult who is abusing them. Because of this dependence children are often easily persuaded to keep the abuse a secret.

**Any sexual contact with a child (someone under 16) is illegal.**

### How can I help protect my child?

The sexual abuse of children relies heavily on children keeping secrets. By encouraging them to come to you with their worries and problems you can create a relationship in which your child feels safe and supported in disclosing secrets to you. Discuss the difference between 'good' and 'bad' touching (e.g. "Bad touching is touching that makes you feel uncomfortable inside") and the difference between a surprise (a 'nice' secret) and a secret. Help your child to identify the people in their life that they feel they could trust with a secret (like a parent or grandparent), and encourage them to communicate with these people if they do have any worries they'd like to share.

## Effects of CSA

Sexual abuse can harm a child psychologically, emotionally and physically. The specific effects of the abuse can be dependent on such things as the child's age, gender, their relationship with offender, the type of abuse, how long it lasted for, and the reaction the child got when they disclosed.

Feelings of fear and anxiety are common in children who have been sexually abused. They may feel guilty or that they were responsible for the abuse occurring. In the case of incest children may also feel responsible for keeping the family together. This can be a reason why children stay silent when the abuse is occurring.

Some effects may be immediate, while others may surface later in life as the child matures and develops a greater understanding of what has happened. While some effects may lessen with time, others can be more persistent. However, if the abuse has stopped and the child receives support while they are still young, there is less chance of difficulties continuing into adulthood.

### What can I do if my child discloses to me?

Finding out that your child has been offended against can be very traumatic and painful. As well as the hurt you feel over what has happened to your child, hearing about the abuse may bring up issues for you from your past or present. While it's important to recognise and deal with these emotions, when a child discloses your immediate concern should be for their welfare. Your own feelings about the abuse can be dealt with once the child is out of immediate emotional and physical danger.

The following list is a guide that can help you to respond appropriately if a child chooses you as a safe person to disclose to:

- Listen to them and believe what they are telling you
- Reassure them that they did the right thing in telling you
- Let the child talk to you at their own pace
- Try not to put words in their mouth or assume you know what happened
- Explain to your child that what happened to them sometimes happens to other people as well
- Do your best to stay as calm and reassuring as you can, as children often misinterpret angry or upset reactions as hostile
- Explain to the child as clearly as possible that what happened to them was not their fault. Use clear simple sentences like "(The offender) has a big problem and needs to get some help"
- Reassure your child that there are people that can help and support them with this problem, and that you will get help for them.

**Check out the RCA website for more information**  
[www.rapecrisis.org.nz](http://www.rapecrisis.org.nz)

### Taking care of yourself

It can help to find an environment, like a counselling relationship, where it feels safe to talk about how you are feeling. Talking to others who are going through the same thing can also be a great source of support and information to you.