

## **TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN TALKING WITH A CHILD IN DISTRESS\***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a trusting relationship by first showing your interest in the child; show you are concerned.</li> <li>• Regardless of how shocking a child's statements might be, maintain your openness and composure. Never appear shocked at what the child says.</li> <li>• Don't stifle a child's trust by expressing disbelief or outrage.</li> <li>• Be careful not to express a negative or discrediting attitude toward a child's parents.</li> <li>• Let the child go at his/her pace. Listen and pick up on verbal and non-verbal clues the child gives. Do not talk too much yourself.</li> <li>• You may wish to use drawing materials to provide diversion and lessen the tension.</li> <li>• Let the younger child use a less threatening way to speak, through a doll, a puppet, a toy or a drawing for example.</li> <li>• Don't convey anger or impatience if the child is not ready to discuss troubling issues.</li> <li>• Never ask "why" questions.</li> <li>• Try to arrange to talk with adolescents in a recreational setting. They may be more ready to talk while shooting a few baskets or walking the track.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with the child in a quiet place where you will be relatively alone, if you have control over the setting. More than one person may be intimidating to the child.</li> <li>• If a child begins to feel discomfort and wants to break off the conversation, allow him/her to do so. Be alert for the child's readiness to discuss the situation at a later date.</li> <li>• Listen for conflicting statements which may be the child attempting to cover an incident at the direction of a parent, or from loyalty or fear of retaliation from the person who abused them.</li> <li>• Use the child's own words and check to make sure you both understand their meaning.</li> <li>• Remember a child may feel some anxiety after telling you about his/her situation.</li> <li>• You can help the child most by believing the child through the process.</li> <li>• If you feel you should report abuse or neglect, explain this carefully to the child and reassure him/her that you care about both him/her and his/her parents. Explain that you need to tell someone who has helped other children and who may be able to help his/her family.</li> <li>• Do not assure a child that he/she will not have to leave home. If the child asks, only assure that as a child welfare worker you will talk with the family members and try to help them.</li> <li>• Above all, don't promise the child anything that may not happen (for example, "It will be all better.")</li> </ul>
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\*Children's Hospital Intervention and Prevention Services, Alabama Department of Human Resources

