

TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN TALKING WITH A CHILD IN DISTRESS*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a trusting relationship by first showing your interest in the child; show you are concerned.• Regardless of how shocking a child's statements might be, maintain your openness and composure. Never appear shocked at what the child says.• Don't stifle a child's trust by expressing disbelief or outrage.• Be careful not to express a negative or discrediting attitude toward a child's parents.• 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.• You may wish to use drawing materials to provide diversion and lessen the tension.• Let the younger child use a less threatening way to speak, through a doll, a puppet, a toy or a drawing for example.• Don't convey anger or impatience if the child is not ready to discuss troubling issues.• Never ask "why" questions.• 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. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.• 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.• 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.• Use the child's own words and check to make sure you both understand their meaning.• Remember a child may feel some anxiety after telling you about his/her situation.• You can help the child most by believing the child through the process.• 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.• 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.• Above all, don't promise the child anything that may not happen (for example, "It will be all better.") |
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