

# Child Abuse

City of El Mirage  
Police Department

Victim Assistance Unit



## What should you do?

### **Initial reactions are critical.**

Immediately after the incident, provide your child with plenty of reassurance, comfort, affection and consideration. After the initial crisis, you need to find a delicate balance. You should not dwell on the issues or give it unusual amounts of attention, but you also need to be open to your child's questions and expressions of feelings.

### **Hide your negative feelings.**

Watch your comments, both those made directly to your child and those that your child may overhear. You may be passing on your fears, biases or shame to your child. Comments that seem helpful on the surface, such as, "You must be angry," or "You must have been very upset," can set the child up for problems. Demands for revenge or threats about the offender can further confuse or frighten your child. Also, be careful not to make your child feel that he/she is "ruined for life" because of the incident. Instead, assure your child that it was an unfortunate experience, but one that they will get through. Children are often so resilient that they can bounce back from bad experiences with little difficulty.

### **Your child's privacy.**

Respect your child's privacy and feelings. Who you and your child tell about what happened is strictly up to you and your child. It is suggested that all adults who are told about the incident read this brochure so that they respond in a supportive, caring way. Some people may say things that hurt simply because they don't know better. Gossip and rumors add to everyone's stress.

### **Don't add to the child's guilt.**

Guilt can be emotionally devastating to a child. Avoid statements using "Why" as these can add to feelings of guilt. Even if you sincerely believe that your child used bad judgment, this is not the time to give a lecture.

Keep in mind that your child did not ask to be victimized. Do not punish your child or try to make him/her feel responsible for the incident. Also, in your attempt to make some sense of what happened, do not blame yourself. Neither you nor your child is responsible - the offender is the only person responsible.

### **Be careful not to create fear.**

Watch for creating a fear of the world. Let the child know in simple terms that what happened was wrong and unusual, and that the offender is a person with problems.

If it ever happens again, encourage your child to say "No," to run away and to tell you or another responsible adult such as a teacher, a school counselor or school nurse about the incident. If your child shows more curiosity or asks more questions, answer them honestly without providing more information than he/she asks for.

If your child exhibits inappropriate sexual behavior, use a "good manners" approach to remold their understanding about what is and is not appropriate. Do not make him/ her feel bad about such behavior. The offender probably tricked your child into thinking it was okay.

### **Understanding the court process.**

Most people do not have a realistic understanding of how the court process works. They fear that the court experience will be traumatic to their child. Victim advocates are available to help you and your child through the court process.

Victims also have specific rights under Arizona laws which ensure that they will be treated fairly. Court proceedings offer an opportunity for your child to see the connection between what was done to them and the consequences to the offender. The courts can also help your child feel protected and assured that the crime will not reoccur

Since many cases are resolved with plea agreements, successful prosecution may be possible without the need for you or your child to formally testify in court.

### **Dealing with the future**

Right now, you are going through a difficult time. It may help to remind yourself that the intensity of your feelings will diminish over time. Do not dwell on the incident. Let your child determine when, if ever, it is discussed. Your goal should be to have everything return to normal as soon as possible. Try to set aside your fears and avoid a tendency to become over-protective.

It may be time to seek professional counseling if you notice your child seems unusually upset or shows signs of emotional distress such as sleeping difficulty, changes in appetite or school performance, withdrawal from social contacts, etc.

For more information the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD or (1-800-422-4453) is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with professional crisis counselors. The Hotline offers crisis intervention, information, literature, and referrals to emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are confidential.

### **What are the forms of child abuse?**

**Emotional** abuse can severely damage a child's mental health or social development, leaving lifelong psychological scars.

**Neglect** is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, or supervision. Sometimes, a parent might become physically or mentally unable to care for a child, such as with a serious injury, untreated depression, anxiety or substance abuse.

**Physical** abuse involves physical harm or injury to the child. It may be the result of a deliberate attempt to hurt the child, but not always. It can also result from severe discipline, such as using a belt on a child, or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age or physical condition. There is a big difference between using physical punishment to discipline and physical abuse.

**Sexual** abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of its layers of guilt and shame. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve body contact. Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved. Boys and girls both suffer from sexual abuse.

### **Resource and Referral Information**

#### **National Child Abuse Hotline**

1-800-422-4453  
[www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

#### **Jewish Family & Children Services (Counseling)**

(623) 234-9811

#### **Catholic Social Services (Counseling)**

602.749.4405

#### **A New Leaf (Counseling)**

623-934-1991

#### **Arizona Department of Child Safety (CPS)**

888-767-2445

#### **Crisis Hotline**

602-222-9444

#### **Community Information & Referral**

211

#### **Maricopa County Sheriff Office**

##### **Victim Notification Unit**

(For Victims Only: Offender Booking & Release Information)  
602-876-8276

#### **Maricopa County Attorney's Office**

##### **Victim Compensation Bureau**

301 W. Jefferson, 9th Floor  
Phoenix, AZ 85003  
(602) 506-4955

#### ***El Mirage Police Department***

##### ***Victim Assistance Unit***

**12401 W Cinnabar Ave**

**El Mirage, AZ 85335**

**623-500-3090**

**[vau@cityofelmirage.org](mailto:vau@cityofelmirage.org)**

