



*The Children's Advocacy Center
of Suffolk County supports children
and families impacted by
violence and abuse.*

*We offer trainings on recognizing and
responding to child abuse
and exploitation.*

To learn more, visit our website.



How can I support my child?

How you respond to a child's disclosure of abuse greatly affects their ability to recover.

- Remain calm. If the child senses you are upset, they may think they did something wrong or worry about your feelings.
- Let the child talk to you when they are ready and able. Don't push the child for more details than they are ready to discuss. Children don't always tell everything at once.
- Be available when the child wants to talk around mealtime, bedtime, school, and other activities.
- Maintain routines as much as possible.
- Avoid talking about distressing events in front of the child.

Tell the child:

- You are glad they told someone about the abuse.
- It was brave to talk.
- You care about them, and you will get help.
- The abuse is not their fault.

*Children do heal from the trauma of sexual abuse
and your role is critical.*



CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER
of suffolk county

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**SUPPORTING
YOUR CHILD
AFTER SEXUAL
ABUSE**



CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER
of suffolk county

Healing Starts Here

This project was supported by the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance through a Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA) grant from the Office of Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any act that forces or persuades a child to participate in sexual activities. Any sexual act between adults and children, or between older or more developmentally advanced children and other children, is abuse and is never considered consensual.

Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Direct physical contact
- Exposing oneself to a child
- Forced sexual contact between children
- Forced viewing of pornography
- Taking inappropriate photos or videos
- Coercing children to take photos or videos of themselves

Why do children often delay telling someone?

Children may not tell because they:

- Are afraid of what will happen to them or their family
- May not understand boundaries were crossed
- Don't have the language to tell you something is wrong
- Don't think they have someone they can trust to tell
- Are confused because the offender is someone they know or trust
- Were bribed, threatened, or told to keep it a secret
- Were taught to always obey adults
- Believe the abuse is their fault

How can sexual abuse affect children?

Children who have been abused may experience a wide variety of emotional, behavioral, or physical symptoms.

The child may experience:

- Anxiety or distress
- Nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Feeling withdrawn or “tuning out”
- Self-blame
- Feeling ashamed
- Changes in appetite
- Being easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- Difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- Changes or extremes in emotions and behaviors
- Frequent aches and pains (stomachaches, headaches) without a medical cause
- Less interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Avoidance of anything or anyone associated with the abuse
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased sexual talk and/or sexual behaviors

At the CAC, members of the multidisciplinary team can provide referral information.



What resources are available?

Children often benefit from specialized counseling to deal with the effects of trauma. Most therapists who work with children also work closely with their caregivers. In addition, many caregivers find it helpful to have their own counselor or therapist for support.

Taking care of yourself

Disclosure of sexual abuse is often painful and stressful for families. This process can sometimes bring back painful memories and feelings from your own past. You will be better able to support your child/family if you also take care of yourself.

- Identify family or friends who can help and give you judgment-free support
- Maintain your own routines
- Eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep
- Realize you may need professional support