



/ RECOGNIZE

Abuse is a non-accidental injury of mistreatment by the **actions or omissions** of a child's parents, guardians or other adult influences. It can come in many forms: physically, sexually, emotionally or even from neglect.

Signs of abuse vary based on the form. Become aware of what to watch for and don't hold back from respectfully following up your suspicions with questions. Watch for a collection of signs such as: unexplained bruises of different colours, over-sexualisation of behaviour, flinching and fearfulness around heightened emotion, hyper-responsibility for younger siblings, excessive self-deprecating, being locked out or not fed at home or fear of going home.

/// RESPOND

Abused children are made to suffer at the hands of those they should be able to trust most. Rebuilding trust and processing the meaning of the losses can take many years. Connecting the young person to a competent and trained counsellor that they feel comfortable with can provide them with a solid foundation for this process.

You may find out about abuse through a courageous conversation you initiate based on things you have seen, through friends of the teen coming to you with information that has overwhelmed them, or through the teen sharing directly with you.

In each of these cases, here are some things to remember:

1. Stay calm. Look them in the eye. Sit close with your full attention. LISTEN.
2. Don't push for all the informational details. Simply invite them to tell you about what has happened/is happening and how it is impacting them.
3. Ask who else they have shared this with and what happened from that conversation. If this information has not been brought to the authorities already you will need to make a report (see below). BUT FIRST – care for the young person in front of you with respect and gentleness.
4. Resist the temptation to agree to keep this between the two of you. You cannot and will not stand by and let harm go unaddressed. Let them know that they don't have to carry this burden by themselves any more.
5. Be prepared for any response: anger, relief, minimizing, panic, backtracking...Allow them to feel what they feel and be honest about how you feel. They need to know that something has been taken from them and that your heart breaks for their loss.
6. Help the young person be aware of the process ahead and assure them that you will walk with them through it.
7. Don't forget the parents. Resist the urge to avoid and instead, step toward them with support as soon as it is appropriate. Most parents don't want to harm their children but have very little support to manage what is going on in their home.

// REMEMBER

- 1 out of every 3 adults in Canada have indicated in a recent study, that they've been directly impacted by abuse. If a youth discloses abuse to you, you are part of that group. Make time to process this for yourself with a wise friend, supervisor or mentor. Hold back the names (except with your supervisor), but do not hold back talking about the impact on you.
- You don't need to have an "iron-clad" case against the abuser – you don't even need to know all the details. The responsibility to prove allegations rests with the government ministry and the police. Your job is to represent the heart of God which stands for the abused and gives a voice to the victim.
- Disclosing abuse usually throws an entire family system into chaos. When teens fear this they may avoid disclosing the truth. Help them realize that they are the child and they do not need to carry responsibility for what *may* happen any more than they are responsible for what *has* happened. Holding back the truth is more unsafe for the family than the short term chaos that may result from telling the truth.

//// RESOURCES

- Each province has a designated government service to protect children and encourage family stability. <http://cwrp.ca/faqs> will connect you with the numbers you need to call and the process you need to follow.
- If you need guidance knowing how to walk through a particular situation or have questions, you can contact the professionals at www.kidshelpphone.ca for an online chat or call 1-800-668-6868 to talk voice to voice. They can help.

Find this and more at www.lifeteams.ca



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