

Procedures Regarding Disclosures made by Children/Youth in Classroom Settings

Evidence suggests that very few allegations are false allegations; therefore, every disclosure should be taken seriously. If a child discloses abuse in a classroom setting:

Respect the Victim

- Sometimes children make *pseudo- disclosures* in which they casually mention abuse. For example, a time when an adult or older child has behaved inappropriately toward them. Often the child does not realize that he/she is disclosing abuse. In these instances, try to prevent a full public disclosure from occurring in front of the classroom. If possible, attempt to change the subject or comment that everything the child says is important but that you would like him/her to hold that thought until you can speak with the child more privately in a few minutes. Speak with the child as soon as possible.
- If a child makes a *full disclosure* of abuse in front of the group, in a calm manner let the child know that what they have said is important and that you would like to speak about what they have said in private. Make arrangements to do so as soon as possible without calling undue attention to the situation. This may require bringing the classroom discussion to close and having the other children turn their attention to another project.
- *Condition disclosures* occur when a child discloses abuse but then asks the adult to promise not to tell. Children who make conditional disclosures are often very fearful of the consequences of telling, and the offender may have threatened them. Acknowledge that telling must have even been very scary, and that the child is very brave and did the right thing. Also let them know that *you cannot promise not to tell* because part of your job is to make sure that the child is safe and healthy. You might promise that you will do everything in your power to get the child any help that they need. Stand by your promise.

Inquire but Do Not Investigate

- Your job is NOT to investigate the abuse, but to find out the minimal amount of information necessary to determine whether a report needs to be made.
- Children should be allowed to tell their story in a private and safe setting. Ideally with having an adult that they are familiar with present.
- Remember not to force a child to talk about abuse.
- Use open-ended questions. Close-ended questions limit the amount of information the child will share.

- Refrain from asking leading questions or questions regarding specific people or places. Allow the child to disclose on his/her own. Leading questions may contaminate an investigation.

Report

- AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, contact the local Department of Child Protective Services and/or local Police Department to report the allegation. Report the allegation to the jurisdiction where the abuse allegedly occurred. When making a report, always write down the name of the intake worker or Police Officer with whom you spoke. You will need to follow up in writing within 48 hours. If you find that the CPS intake worker is not helpful, do not be afraid to ask to speak with their supervisor.
- Ask CPS and/or the Police what to do if the parent/caregiver will be picking up the child that day.
- Remember that individuals who make reports of child abuse in good faith are immune from civil liability.
- Inform the administrator on site that you are making a report. However, it is the responsibility of the individual to whom the disclosure was made to call CPS.
- If the allegation involves church personnel, also report the concern to the church administration immediately.
- If the child discloses abuse but does not name an offender, or if the alleged offender is a family member, NEVER call the primary family member/caregiver before calling CPS. Be sure to inform the CPS intake worker if the situation is urgent. If you have questions as to whether or not to call the parents, discuss the situation with the CPS intake worker but do not make the decision on your own. A poor decision may interfere with an investigation and may place a child in danger.