

Suggested Script ideas for Sexual abuse disclosure

Beginning

Ask the child where they would like to go to share the information and confirm that you are the person they wish to share the information with. You must inform them that the Designated Safeguarding Lead (if that’s not you) will need to be alongside to hear the information in order to ensure the right outcome and safety measures for them.

Start with the statement the child made e.g. ‘you said you wanted to tell me something serious’, ‘you said you had some important information to share’.

Allow the child the opportunity to share, only asking questions to clarify information, words or phrases they are using. Remember not to fill the silences, just allow the child thinking time and the opportunity to reflect on what they are saying.

Suggested phrases or prompts:

Tell me what happened

What happened next?

Can you continue?

Go on…

I’m listening…

Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Have you said everything that you wanted to say?

Avoid Judgement of the perpetrator or abuser

While you may be shocked at what you are hearing, without knowing the full history you cannot be certain how long the abuse has occurred or how much the child understands about the abuse being harmful. For them this could be part of everyday life and they may have limited understanding that this behaviour is unacceptable/abusive or criminal. Avoid any commentary such as, ‘He/She shouldn’t have done that’, ‘He/She is not a very nice person’, ‘He/She will have to talk to a policeman/go to prison’ etc. This in itself could terrify the child from going further or lead to a retraction of the disclosure. Instead try to gain the child’s understanding and perception about what has happened. However do give reassurance to the child that it is right to tell an adult.

Suggested phrases or prompts

How did that make you feel?

That sounds difficult..

What did you do?

You did the right thing telling me about this.

It is always the right thing to tell somebody something that makes you sad or unhappy.

Facts are important

There is no expectation that as a member of staff you would be expected to investigate, fact find or interview the child about what has happened. That is the role of the statutory agencies of the Police and Social Care. However the truth is the child may divulge or disclose more information to you as their trusted adult and so it is important to gather as much factual information as possible, without leading the child or interviewing them. For example are they talking about one incident or more than one incident? If it is more than one incident it is likely that some of the information regarding the abuse might merge and it may be difficult to differentiate or separate the incidents. Don’t push for the detail but do clarify the facts. The facts can make a difference in the final outcome in court.

Suggested phrases or prompts (age appropriate)

Has this happened before?

How many times has this happened?

When did/does this happen?

Where did/does this happen?

Supporting the child

Every child may have a different view of sharing information, some children who do not recognise the abuse as harmful may be quite clinical in their description of it, some children may be anxious, upset, or distressed in their disclosure and so the support that might be required will be different depending on the child’s needs. The importance of supporting the child is the recognition that their disclosure is valid and that you believe what they are saying. It is also necessary to commend the child’s bravery in sharing the information with you. It is important to stress to the child that you do not know what the outcome will be, for example don’t tell them it will go to court or that a parent/carer/perpetrator will be put in prison, but do try and explain as much of the process to them of what will happen next.

Suggest phrases or prompts

You have been brave in sharing that information with me.

I believe what you are saying.

I don’t know what will happen in the long term but these are the next steps I will take…

You have done the right thing, it is always important to talk to a safe adult if you feel unsafe.

You are not to blame.

Adults are responsible for their actions.

Remember that disclosures may be continuous

Remember that the child might come to you frequently over the next few days and months with additional information, new information or repeated and confused information from the initial disclosure. This may be because it has triggered new memories or because now that child feels safe, there may be an outpouring of new information. Manage each shared conversation/disclosure and record them separately on the days and times they are shared. Don’t correct their new information by saying, ‘you didn’t say the first time’, or ‘are you sure’. Just allow that child to feel safe and listened to and don’t panic if the information doesn’t seem the same. Continue to be open and actively listening to the child and their version of events.

Suggested phrases or prompts

Thank you for sharing.

Please keep coming back to me with anything else you want to share.

Recording

Record as much information as possible with accuracy and clarity and in the words and language of the child- depicting that in your recording, if a word used needs clarity. In taking any disclosure, besides trying to gain the voice of the child and the facts and description of what they are telling you, it is important to comment upon the child’s presentation, their body language and behaviour when sharing the information.

Suggested phrases or prompts

How is the child presenting to you during the disclosure?

What is the child’s body language telling you?

What is the child’s appearance and understanding of what they are saying and sharing with you?

Next Steps

Children need to know what will happen next. Start with what that means for them, will they be going back to class for now? who will you be speaking to and why? Keep this simple and share information that is age appropriate. At this stage you do not need to mention the police and social care unless the child does. If the child does mention those agencies be careful to check in with them and their view and understanding of what these individuals and agencies do particularly as they may have been told these agencies take children away or put parents/carers in prison.

Suggested phrases and prompts

I need to speak with the headteacher about what you have shared in order to make sure that you are safe. The headteacher may need to speak to you and there may be other people who need to speak to you…

Remember that at any time you can ask any of the adults any questions that you might have…

While I am doing that, you can stay here or go back to class.

It might take a little while, but I haven’t forgotten you and I am doing something with the information you have told me.

I don’t know what will happen but I do know that it is my job to keep you safe and I have to share this information in order to do that.

As soon as I know what is happening next I will come and tell you.

Retraction of disclosure

It may happen that part way through the disclosure, afterwards or even after several more disclosures the child may decide to retract their disclosure. This may be because they have had time to reflect on it or are worried about the consequences of sharing the information. It is important that even if this happens the information is still shared, recorded and action is taken and that the child understands that this will still happen and why.