



When a child has been sexually assaulted

Any act of a sexual nature, or sexual threat, or exhibition of sexual behaviours, imposed on a child under the age of 16 years a serious crime.

Those who sexually assault children take advantage of the child's trust, innocence and vulnerability.

Child sexual assault is committed against both girls and boys. Statistics show the perpetrator is most often a family member or a person known to the child.

When a child discloses sexual assault to a parent or caregiver, it's important the child receives considerable support and reassurance.

Key responses

When a child tells you they have been sexually assaulted

Children need to hear from their parent or caregiver that:

- it is NOT their fault,
- they did the right thing in disclosing,
- they are not in trouble,
- the parent or care giver will do everything they can to protect and support the child from here on.

Initial Response

Hearing a child disclose sexual assault is shocking and overwhelming, particularly if the perpetrator is a partner, family member or friend.

The disclosure will often leave the parent or caregiver feeling hurt and angry that their trust has been betrayed. It is common to feel guilty for not being able to protect the child, which is why it's crucial to remember the perpetrator is the only person responsible for what has happened.

Sometimes children who have been sexually assaulted find it hard to disclose due to fear, not being able to articulate what is happening to them, or often because the perpetrator has made some sort of threat to keep them quiet.

Children may not disclose what has happened for some time.

Sometimes they may use other ways of letting an adult know which can include unusual and sudden behaviour changes such as tantrums, expressions of fear of strangers or the dark, wetting the bed, sexually explicit play, not wanting to go to school or play with friends or attend family outings. More than anything, the child needs support, comfort and love, for now and in the future.

Children and young people cope best when their family and environment is calm, caring and accepting.

If the Sexual Assault was recent

A child who has been sexually assaulted may need medical treatment and if the last assault was recent, forensic evidence may be available to assist Police. It is important that counselling options are made available for the child, and for their supporters, as everyone who cares about the child will be impacted by the sexual assault.

The Department of Community Services will need to be informed and they will assist in ensuring safety for the child and other children the perpetrator may have access to. **Ph: 132 111**

The child can also be taken to the sexual assault unit at their local major hospital, where specially trained counsellors and medical staff will help.

Look After Yourself

Assisting someone who has been sexually assaulted is difficult. Their level of pain and distress will impact on you. This is called vicarious trauma. Have your own strategies to make sure you are OK - keep contact with family and friends, laugh and have fun. Notice any changes and take action.

You can ring Rape & Domestic Violence Service Australia 24/7 to talk about supporting others, and for support and strategies to manage your own vicarious trauma.

How Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia can help

We provide 24/7 counselling, support, information and referral to anyone in Australia who has experienced or been impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence.

Our service also provides support for non-offending supporters of those who have experienced sexual assault, family or domestic violence, including counselling and healthcare professionals.

Contact Us

24/7 Counselling is available via:

Phone: 1800 737 732

Online: www.rape-dvservices.org.au

Factsheets on sexual assault, law and criminal justice processes, prevention, and the service can be downloaded from the website.

If you have questions regarding the material included in this handout contact administration:

Phone: 02 8585 0333

Email: info@rape-dvservices.org.au