

# Appropriate Responses to a Child Reporting Sexual Abuse & Available Resources



As an adult in a child's life, bearing witness to a child's report that he or she is being sexually abused is difficult and confusing, and you may react with anger, helplessness, or shock. However, keep in mind that the child will watch your reaction and may shut down, refuse to say more, or change their story if you react emotionally or negatively. Children may also tell parts of the abuse or pretend that it happened to someone else to gauge your reaction. It is important to **stay calm** even though it may be hard, **believe** the child and let them know that it was not their fault, and **protect** the child by immediately reporting to local authorities.

*Let the child know that you believe them: very few sexual abuse reports are false.*

## Reporting Suspected Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

Reporting child abuse is everyone's responsibility in Maryland. If you or someone you know suspects child abuse, please contact your local law enforcement agency, department of social services or call 1-800-332-6347.

## Additional Resources

**Maryland's Rape Crisis and Recovery Centers** provide confidential services to both adult and child victims of sexual abuse. They provide crisis intervention, counseling, referrals, accompaniment to hospitals, police interviews, and courts, as well as assistance with legal and judicial services. All of their services are free. To find one in your jurisdiction, visit [www.mcasa.org](http://www.mcasa.org) and check under the tab **For Survivors**.

**MCASA's Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI)** provides legal services to both child and adult survivors of sexual assault across the state of Maryland. For more information, call [877-496-SALI](tel:877-496-SALI) or visit [www.mcasa.org](http://www.mcasa.org).

**Children's Advocacy Centers** coordinate the child protective services (who are only contacted if the suspected abuser is related to, lives with, or is responsible for the child), police, prosecutors, social workers, and other service providers to work together to minimize the number of times a child is interviewed and assure that those working on the case have specialized training. To find an advocacy center in your jurisdiction, visit <http://www.mdcha.org/membercenters.html> or call [410-877-5376](tel:410-877-5376).

**Child abuse helplines** are trained to deal with questions about suspected child sexual abuse, and can direct you to resources in your community:

- Darkness to Light's helpline at **1-866-FOR-LIGHT**
- The Family Tree's Parenting HelpLine is available 24/7 at **1-800-243-7337**
- Childhelp USA's National Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-4-A-CHILD**

*Sources: Sexual Assault Legal Institute, Understanding the Legal System When Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused; Darkness to Light: End Child Sexual Abuse, 7 Steps to Protecting Our Children; Maryland Children's Alliance;*