Appropriate Responses to a Child Reporting Sexual Violence & Reporting Requirements & Information

Overview
As an adult in a child’s life, bearing witness to a child’s report that they are being sexually abused, or have been sexually assaulted, is difficult and confusing; 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 only parts of the abuse or pretend that it happened to someone else in order to gauge your reaction. It is important to stay calm even though it may be hard, tell the child it was not their fault, and let the child know that you believe them: very few sexual abuse reports are false. If it is a case of child sexual abuse, report it to an appropriate agency.

Reporting Suspected Cases of Child Sexual Abuse
- In Maryland, child sexual abuse or sexual abuse of a minor, is defined as sexual molestation or exploitation of a child (age 0-17) by a parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by any household or family member.1
- Sexual assault of a minor includes any sexual contact with a minor (age 0-13) that is perpetrated by a person who is not covered under the “care or custody” or familial or household requirements of child sexual abuse and is at least four years older than the minor. Sexual Assault of a minor also includes any sexual act or vaginal intercourse with a minor age 0-16 by a person who is at least four years older than the minor.2
- In Maryland, it is illegal for a person in a position of authority over a minor (age 0-18) to have any sexual contact with the minor. A person in a position of authority is anyone 21 years or older who works for the child’s school and has supervisory authority over the child.3
- Maryland law makes everyone, except attorneys and clergy, a mandatory reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect as defined by Maryland Family Law Code §5-701.4 There is no similar requirement to report the sexual assault of a minor if the assault does not fit the definition of ‘child sex abuse.’
- If you or someone you know suspects child sexual abuse, please contact your local Department of Human Services, Child Protective Services office (www.dhs.maryland.gov/child-protective-services/reporting-suspected-child-abuse-or-neglect/local-offices) or your local law enforcement agency. If you are unsure of the local jurisdiction to report to in Maryland, call the Maryland Department of Human Resources at 1-800-332-6347.

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. To find one in your jurisdiction, visit MCASA’s website: www.mcasa.org/survivors/find-a-rape-crisis-center

1 Md. Code Ann., Criminal Law § 3-602
2 Md. Code Ann. Criminal Law §3-301 et seq.
3 Md. Code Ann. Criminal Law § 3-308
- **MCASA’s Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI)** provides legal services to both child and adult survivors of sexual assault across the state of Maryland. More information is available in SALI’s *Understanding the Legal System When Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused* booklet. You can order copies of this free resource by calling **877-496-SALI (877-496-7254)**, or visiting the website: [www.mcasa.org/survivors/sali](http://www.mcasa.org/survivors/sali)

- **Children’s Advocacy Centers** coordinate the child protective services, police, prosecutors, social workers, and other service providers in cases of **child sexual abuse** to work together to minimize the number of times a child is interviewed and ensure that those working on the case have specialized training. To find the advocacy center in your jurisdiction, call **410-877-5376** or visit the Maryland Children’s Alliance website: [www.marylandchildrensalliance.org/child-advocacy-centers/member-centers](http://www.marylandchildrensalliance.org/child-advocacy-centers/member-centers)

- **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: call **1-866-FOR-LIGHT (1-866-367-5444)** OR text LIGHT to 741741
  - The Family Tree’s Parenting HelpLine: call **1-800-243-7337**
  - Childhelp USA’s National Child Abuse Hotline: call or text **1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)** OR chat at: [www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline](http://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline)