

Frequently asked questions by parents and carers

Why didn't my child tell me? Why didn't I know?

It's not your child's fault that they didn't tell you. It's also not your fault. Abusers enforce a culture of secrecy to enable the abuse to continue. They trick, bribe and threaten children with lies so their abuse will not be revealed. Children are then too frightened to tell anyone what's happening. Telling requires great courage. Reassure your child that whatever threats the abuser has made will not come true. Let them know that the abuse will now stop and that they are loved and safe.

What if my child does not want to tell me anything?

There are many reasons why a child may not want to say anything. Abusers trick, bribe and threaten children with lies so the abuse will not be revealed. Children are then too frightened to tell anyone. They may think that the abuse is their fault and that they'll get in to trouble. Or they may not want to think about the abuse at all.

Some children worry about upsetting the people closest to them. How you express your feelings in front of your child will influence they respond. If you're visibly upset, they may think you can't cope with hearing about it so they may want to spare you from the trauma and refuse to talk about it.

At CASA our sexual assault counsellors can guide both you and your child through discussions. Please get in touch and have a chat with us.

I didn't think this could happen to my child. What could I have done to prevent it?

Parents and carers often blame themselves and think *'I should have known, I could have stopped it'*. This is an extremely common reaction. No one expects this type of illegal behaviours, so no one is actively looking for it, nor on-guard against it. The abuser will have spent time building your trust, actively planning the abuse, and then threatening your child to keep the abuse secret. An abuser who is a family member or friend has breached not only your child's trust, but your trust.

Will my child be ok?

The fact that your child has told someone about the abuse is the crucial first step. Children say that the most important thing for them is for the abuse to stop. Tell them they're now safe and reassure them that any threats the abuser has made will not happen. For a child, being believed and having their family listen and provide ongoing support are essential to help their recovery. So, yes, your child will be ok.

Who can I trust now?

If someone you trust has abused your child, you may feel you can't trust anyone around you. This is a common feeling, especially if the abuser is your partner. It might take a long time before you feel you can trust anybody again. This too is a normal reaction.

Other people in your child's life may not be aware of the sexual abuse. They may have thought the abuser was helpful, concerned, trustworthy and loving towards your child and family. The abuser has breached their trust as well.

You may find it helpful to talk to a friend or an organization like CASA. We provide free counselling and support for family members and anyone in your circle affected by the assault.

What do I tell my other child/ren?

The ripple effects of sexual abuse are wide ranging. Many parents struggle with what and when to tell their other children. Also, what and how to tell their extended family and friends' network.

The amount of detail shared with other children depends on their own level of maturity and each situation. But each family member will need reassurance. They may notice the abused child seems different (withdrawn, naughty, angry, or destructive) — and that you may also be behaving differently.

If others in your social circle know the abuser, then they too may be confused and angry. They also need an opportunity to have their questions answered in a truthful way. We provide free support and counselling for family members and anyone who feels the ripple effects of sexual assault.

I'm not sure about having the abuser charged. How do I find out what it involves?

Sexual assault is a crime. If you ignore the abuse, then the abuser may think they can get away with this type of behaviour. They may then go on to abuse other children.

Charging an abuser will result in your child having to participate in criminal proceedings. This can make parents and carers anxious as most people won't be familiar with the criminal justice system. They may be concerned this will upset their child more, making matters worse, and that it would be better to put the abuse in the past.

One important thing to note is that your child does not have to see or face their abuser in court.

Victoria Police's Sexual Offences & Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT) and Child Protection will become involved. They're trained to handle your child's case with empathy and care. Your child and your family will be treated with respect and understanding. Your child's statement (normally a recording of them talking) is vital evidence to gain a conviction and have the abuser put on the Child Sex Offender Register.

How CASA can help

We offer free support and counselling and we can help you prepare for court and support your family through the whole process. If you're unsure about having the abuser charged, please get in touch and have a chat with us. It's important that people who sexually abuse children (or anyone!) are not given agency to continue this destructive illegal behaviour.

What if the abuser harasses my child or me?

Some abusers (or their friends, family or associates of the abuser) may harass or threaten your child, you or your family members with emotional blackmail or violence. If this happens contact police to obtain an Apprehended Violence Order. At CASA our counsellors can guide you through this process and help you deal with the emotional distress. Please get in touch and have a chat with us.

Who should I contact if I have concerns and need help?

- Call 000 if you're worried about safety, or anyone else.
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (www.sacl.com.au) — 1800 806 292
- CASACV (casaCV.org.au) — 5441 0430
- Victoria Police Sexual Offences Child Investigation Team — 5444 6752
- 1800Respect (National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line) (www.1800respect.org.au) — 1800 737 732