

FACT SHEET — *This fact sheet is for parents, carers, educators and community members.*

## Parents, carers and families need support too.

As a parent or carer of a child who has been sexually abuse you can find comfort in talking to others. Talk to people whose judgement you trust, to those who won't gossip, and to people who will listen without judgement. Or seek professional help from the free counselling services provided by CASA.

Speaking out about sexual assault can cause enormous stress for everyone involved. Many parents and carers say that when their child told them about the sexual abuse, they experienced a crisis in their lives and other relationships. You might also feel this way. Investigations might be slow, and this may be frustrating for you and your family. However, it's important the abuser's behaviours is called out and their actions addressed.

### Common responses and feelings

Everyone will feel shock, anger or disbelief. After a child has spoken out a family often faces a period of deep crisis as they will be overwhelmed by emotions. People can be unsure how to talk to each other about what's happened. This makes family members feel isolated and uncertain about what to do.

#### *By parents or carers*

- All the following feelings are normal: shock, numbness, anger and betrayal, guilt, wanting to know all the facts, sadness and grief, emotional exhaustion, fears for the future, feelings of isolation and aloneness, relationship difficulties, confusion, disbelief, anger at your child, feeling responsible, embarrassment. You may also feel divided loyalty, if both the child abused and the abuser are your children.

#### *Brothers and sisters*

- Older children can feel responsible for not protecting their younger siblings. They may also feel confused by a lack of information. They may fight and feel jealous because there has been a loss of attention from their parents/ carers. They may be angry with or blame parents/carers or they may be angry with the abused child for telling because there's now increased tension within the family.

#### *Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins*

- They may want to avoid the painful reality; be uncertain whether to say something or not; may not believe that the abuse happened; may threaten to hurt or kill the abuser, may feel confused about who to believe because of their relationship with the abuser, they may blame the mother or the child for the abuse. They may even believe the abuser's denials.

## Look after yourself

Don't put huge expectations on yourself at this time. Focus on your family so that there's time for you to be together. Seeking the help of counsellors can be extremely useful. They can provide support and guide your family through the process of healing.

Support yourself physically and emotionally. By looking after yourself, you'll be in a stronger position to deal with whatever stresses may arise. Doing things for yourself may not come easily, especially if you're finding it hard to concentrate.

Try different things to see what helps.

- Walk, swim or other exercise.
- Go out for a coffee or dinner with a friend
- Spend time with supportive friends.
- Ask for help.
- Accept offers for help without guilt.
- Do something relaxing, enjoyable or fun — massage, meditation, shopping, listening to music.
- Give yourself some quiet time away from pressure.
- Visit your favourite places.
- Take part in activities which distract you — hobbies, writing, painting, reading and movies.

Also try to get plenty of rest and sleep and follow a healthy diet. Maintain routines you're comfortable with and avoid making a lot of changes to your life until you're ready.