

# What do to if a student discloses abuse?

## Tips For Working With Secondary Students

The suggestions below may help guide your approach:

1. Students that have been abused are most likely not in a position to advocate for assistance because the person that is abusing them has taken their power/voice. Therefore, few students will speak directly about abuse.
2. When students do speak up about being abused, it may indicate an ongoing problem that the student is no longer able or willing to handle alone. They are asking for help.
3. Students that report abuse are in pain, very afraid and in need of validation & support. It is critical that you respond with respect and non-judgment and seek immediate assistance. Getting help reduces the chances of future victimization of self and/or others.
4. Please believe your student. According to the FBI, approximately 95-98% of reported abuse cases are true. Not believing the student or treating them as if they were partially to blame re-victimizes. The negative effects of revictimization by the system and other's responses may last a lifetime. Your student needs you. It does not matter what they did or didn't do, they were not the person who chose to commit the act of abuse. It is never the victim's fault. If the abuse is labeled unfounded, that does not indicate it did not occur, it often means there was not enough physical evidence to determine a crime has been committed. However rare, a false report is an indication that something is very wrong. That individual is also in need of assistance.
5. Please review the PSI Behavior Indicators of Abuse handout. Negative behaviors may be symptoms and indicators of prior abuse. It is very helpful to address negative behaviors with understanding and offer options for peace and positive change.
6. You are a mandated reporter. You must report all abuse disclosures. Failure to report is punishable by law. In Arizona, if a student discloses abuse, you are required by law (Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13-3620(A), (E)-(F)) to file a report in person or over the phone as well as a written report to a peace officer or Child Protection Services (CPS) within 72 hours. CPS may contact the police but you may do so as well. (Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13-3620(K) A person who violates any provision of the reporting laws is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.)
7. DETERMINE THE STUDENT'S IMMEDIATE SAFETY. If you or your student believes there is a safety concern, it is suggested you call the police immediately. You may also call 1-800-4ACHILD.
8. A report is only a request for an investigation. You cannot be sued for requesting an investigation in good faith.
9. Reassure the student that: - You believe them, - You are sorry that someone hurt them, - That no one deserves to be abused, - It was not their fault, (no matter what they did or did not do) - You will do everything you can to help them make the abuse stop, which may involve getting the help of someone they trust at school, and - They did the right thing by telling you.
10. Please, try not to blame or "search for the truth" by questioning or putting words into the student's mouth. It is harmful to the student and may also interfere with any future investigation.
11. Encourage, but please do not pressure, the student to talk. You might say: ' Tell me what happened, I'll listen ' Is someone bothering you? ' What happened next...? ' Are you having a problem with someone? ' Are you having a touching problem? ' Is there anyone making you do something you do not want to do?
12. Concentrate on the immediate needs of the student. Ask the student how they feel and what they want.
13. Please take all disclosures seriously.

14. Document all disclosures and everything the student told you, sign your name and date the information, even if someone else is handling the case.

15. Be honest with the student. Please do not make promises you cannot keep.

16. Always let the student know what you are required and going to do next. If possible, allow the student to make the decision to report. Encouragement to report contributes to empowerment. They may tell you they do not want it reported but they would not have come to you if they didn't want anyone to know.

17. Become familiar with your school's reporting policy and have resources available.

18. Please do not be afraid to report suspected abuse and pay close attention to disguised disclosures. A student may say it is their friend that is having a problem. Please follow up to make sure "the friend is ok."

19. Refer the student to any counseling or support services on campus.

20. Please remember that a disclosure is confidential. Only discuss the case with the appropriate personnel.

**Note:** It is vital that disclosures of abuse be taken seriously as the abuse may escalate if left un-treated. When we observe a student participating in a negative behavior we must first try to understand why and have empathy so that we may solve the problem by addressing the source. Quite often when someone hurts themselves and/or others, it is because they have been hurt. Help and support, not blame, judgment and harsh punitive measures are needed to reduce future victimization. K Fear of legal ramifications has stopped others from reporting abuse. If you report abuse, you are not determining guilt and will not be held legally responsible. K Please don't be afraid to get help if you need it. Call a hotline - 1-800-4 a child or 1-888-SOS-Child. K If you have any questions feel free to contact Peer Solutions @ 602.225.0942 or Respectpsi@aol.com