



Safe Places

Safe Homes  Safe Schools  Safe Communities

My child has been sexually abused

A Guide for Parents of Children Harmed  by Abuse



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In Little Rock's Historic District

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Who sexually abuses children?

Any family can experience the tragedy of sexual abuse. It is troubling to realize that sexual abusers of children are likely to be people we know, people we might see every day. If sexual abusers were always frightening “strangers” stalking young children in parks or playgrounds, we might be able to identify them as dangerous persons. But many statistics say that in 85 to 90 percent of child sexual abuse cases, the child knows and trusts the abuser.

Any person can be a sexual abuser – relatives, friends, or neighbors. Sexual abusers of children can be fathers, step-parents, mothers, grandparents, uncles, aunts or other family members. They can be teachers or coaches, babysitters or Sunday School teachers, neighbors or ministers. They can be anyone who has close contact with children. Sexual abusers have one common characteristic: that they had thoughts about sex with children and then they acted on those thoughts by sexually abusing a child.

Child Sexual Abuse Includes Touching and Non-Touching Behaviors

Touching behaviors include:

- ◆ Touching a child's genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, breasts, or anus) for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason.
- ◆ Making a child touch someone else's genitals or playing sexual (“pants-down”) games.
- ◆ Forcing a child into prostitution.
- ◆ Putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue or a penis) inside the vulva or vagina, in the mouth, or in the anus of a child for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason.

Non-touching behaviors include:

- ◆ Showing pornography to a child.
- ◆ Exposing a person's genitals to a child.
- ◆ Photographing a child in sexual poses.
- ◆ Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts either in person or on a video.
- ◆ Watching a child undress or use the bathroom, often without the child's knowledge (known as voyeurism or being a “Peeping Tom”).

If you have any questions about these or other signs and symptoms, **please call the ARKANSAS CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE at 1-800-482-5964.**

It's hard to face the fact that someone we know — and even someone we admire — might be sexually abusing children. But we must not try to convince ourselves that this never happens in our churches or schools or communities. Instead, we need to know how to protect the children in our care.



What is child sexual abuse?

Any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a minor is child sexual abuse. Adults or adolescents who sexually abuse young people take advantage of the child's trust, innocence and vulnerability. Child sexual abuse is a serious crime, and is committed against both boys and girls.

Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of behaviors and acts. Some examples are:

- ◆ a person exposing genitals or masturbating in front of a minor
- ◆ exposing young people to pornographic material
- ◆ touching a child's genitals or forcing a child to touch an adult's genitals
- ◆ penetration of with a finger, penis or anything else
- ◆ involving a child in vaginal, oral or anal sexual activity.

However, when sexual activity involves another child or an adolescent, it may not be considered abuse. Some kinds of sexual behavior among children might be sexual exploration rather than abuse.

Do children really abuse other children?

Some statistics tell us that 30-50% of abusers are under the age of 18. A recent study showed that 95% of children with sexual behavior problems were also victims of sexual abuse. Some of the most common danger signals include: a child showing sexual material to younger children, making obscene telephone calls, sharing alcohol or other drugs with younger children, exposing his or her genitals to younger children, forcing sex on another adolescent or child. If you observe any of these behaviors, consider talking to the child or finding someone who can comfortably talk to the child about what is going on.

It is important to remember, however, that some sexual behavior and/or exploration is a part of a child's healthy sexual development. Sexuality is a part of every human being of any age. It helps to know some of the healthy developments and behaviors that children explore at various ages.

Remember that every child develops at his or her own pace. The following information will list some of the healthy sexual developments of children from preschool age to adolescence. If you have any doubt or any questions about your child or another child you know, please make every effort to talk to a doctor, a nurse, a counselor, or contact one of the local organizations that work with children and adolescents.

The Preschool Child (age 0-5 years)	The School age Child (age 6-12 years)	The Adolescent (age 13-17 years)
<p>Common Behaviors: Showing and looking at private body parts; Masturbation; Sexual language used to describe private body parts; Bathroom talk;</p> <p>Uncommon Behaviors: Discussion of sexual acts; Contact sexual experiences with other children; Adult-like sexual behaviors</p>	<p>Common Behaviors: Questions about pregnancy and sexual behavior; Questions about menstruation; Masturbation at home or in private; "Games" with same-age peers, like kissing, fondling, role-playing; Experimenting with other children</p> <p>Uncommon Behaviors: Discussion of sexual acts occurs only occasionally; Masturbation in public; Adult-like sexual behaviors</p>	<p>Common Behaviors: Questions about sexual customs and social relationships and decisions about sex; Masturbation, but only in private places; Experimenting with same-age peers, including open-mouth kissing, touching, and body rubbing; Voyeuristic behaviors.</p> <p>Note: Sexual intercourse occurs in about one-third of this age group.</p>

Myths and Facts About Child Sexual Abuse

Myth: Children often make up stories about adults having sex with them.

Fact: Often children are afraid to tell anyone about being sexually abused. Very young children do not usually know enough about sex to describe sexual behaviors that have not occurred.

Myth: Children are not really harmed by what some call "gentle" incest that does not include any aggressively violent behavior.

Fact: Any sexual contact between an adult and a child, even if it is not overtly violent, is harmful to the child.

Myth: Child sexual abuse is usually committed by a stranger.

Fact: Ninety percent of child victims are sexually abused by someone they know.

Myth: Victims are usually sexually provocative adolescents.

Fact: Many cases of child sexual abuse involve children under five years of age who do nothing to invite the sexual abuse.

Myth: Sexual offenders look violent or frightening.

Fact: Sexual offenders look like any normal person. They can come from every profession and socioeconomic group.

The Facts Are . . .

Some statistics reveal that one out of three girls and one out of six boys will experience some form of sexual abuse by the age of eighteen.

Sexual abuse within families usually begins when a child is very young and may last for several years.

Many cases of child sexual abuse involve children under the age of five.

Child Sexual Abuse Has Serious, Long-Term Effects

Ongoing child sexual abuse can lead to:

- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Guilt and shame
- ◆ Low self-esteem
- ◆ Difficulty in forming relationships
- ◆ Difficulty in trusting others
- ◆ Loneliness and isolation
- ◆ Confusion about family relationships
- ◆ Problems in school
- ◆ Destructive behaviors
- ◆ Bed-wetting and problems toileting
- ◆ Inappropriate sexual behavior

If I am still unsure that sexual abuse is happening, what signs will I see?

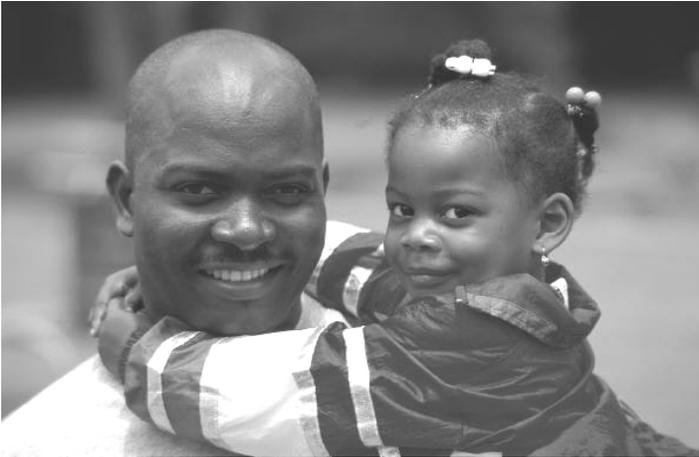
It is always good to talk with our children, because often we are not aware of what is going on with them. If you fear that your child, or any child, has been abused, the following danger signals may alert you that a child is being victimized or has been abused in the past. Keep in mind that some of the behavioral signs listed will show up at other stressful times such as divorce, the death of someone close, or problems in school.

Behavioral Signs:

- ◆ Nightmares, difficulty sleeping, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems
- ◆ “Spacing out” at odd times
- ◆ Intense fear of “monsters”
- ◆ Appetite loss, problems with eating or swallowing
- ◆ Fear or sudden dislike of certain people or places
- ◆ New words for private body parts
- ◆ Sudden and extreme mood swings; anger and crankiness
- ◆ Ongoing and unexplained stomach illnesses
- ◆ In an older child, behavior typical of younger children (e.g. bed wetting)
- ◆ Drawings that are scary or use a lot of red or black
- ◆ Self-mutilation, cutting or burning themselves (adolescents)
- ◆ Sexual behavior with toys, pets, other children, or even adults
- ◆ Answering “I can’t tell you” when asked about secrets
- ◆ Talk of a new older friend
- ◆ Suddenly having money

Physical Signs:

- ◆ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ◆ Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child’s “private parts”
- ◆ Pain or injury to the genitals or mouth



My child told me about the sexual abuse. What now?

Your child has trusted you with a very confusing and painful part of her/his life. This tells you that there is a special relationship between the two of you. Whether you are a father or a mother, you are in a position to become a very important part of your child's healing process.

First of all . . .

Stay calm and ask your child gentle questions about what happened.

In a gentle and caring manner, ask your child what happened, when and where it happened and by whom. Remember to stay calm and ask simple and direct questions. Guilt, confusion anger and shame about the abuse can create fear for your child.

The next step is to . . .

Listen compassionately to what your child tells you.

Listen to what your child says to you and listen to what your child *does not* say. Statements such as "I'm afraid to stay with the babysitter" or "I don't want to stay alone with those kids" should alert you to ask your child more questions. Take care that your questions do not pressure the child to give you names or places. Be patient and do not suggest specific places, names or dates.

Be sure that you . . .

Reassure your child that you will support him/her.

Tell your child that you believe him or her and that you will do whatever you can to keep her/him safe. Do not make any promises that you can't keep such as that you will not tell anyone what happened. Your child may not tell you anything at first. When your child does tell you what happened, tell him/her that she/he was brave to tell you know what was going on and that you will help.

Finally . . .

Seek help for your child and for yourself.

It is important to get help and support. Report what happened to the **ARKANSAS CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE at 1-800-482-5964**. You can also call the national helpline, **STOP IT NOW! at 1-888-PREVENT**.

What kind of help do we need?

It is very important that you get help for your child. Experts and parents agree that it is helpful to both the child and to the parents to get outside help, even if your instincts are to "keep it within the family."

If your child is a victim of sexual abuse, be sure to get your child to a safe place and seek specialized treatment for your child. Although there may not be any signs of physical harm, research studies show that a child needs specialized help and attention to heal from this abuse, otherwise he or she might be at risk for further abuse or for showing abusing behaviors.

What do I say to my child?

Everyone, including your child, wants to be asked questions about what is going on in his or her life. When sexual abuse has occurred, your child needs your reassurance and your love.

It will be hard to know what to say and when to say it. It's not possible to know just the right thing to say to your child. But when you do talk with your child, even if you don't always know what to say, your child will know that you are there for love and support.

Even though you are feeling despair yourself, try to be reassuring to your child. Be honest; you do not have to mask your emotions, but try to monitor them. Cry if you need to, but try to also smile at times so that your child knows there is hope. Say something like: "I am so sad right now because you have been hurt, but I know that we'll have good times again. I want you to know that, too."



We can't always know the right words to say in difficult situations. The sexual abuse of your child is such a painful violation of your child *and* you, but these simple points may give you some help in talking with your child:

- ◆ Talk to your child at eye level so that the child feels comfortable
- ◆ Be open to your child's questions.
- ◆ Take your cues from your child and you will sense when he or she feels like talking.
- ◆ Let your child know that she or he can tell you anything or ask you any question.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out."
- ◆ Make sure **you** are comfortable before you try to talk to your child about the abuse.
- ◆ Set aside time when you can focus on your child without being interrupted.
- ◆ Ask one question at a time and listen carefully to your child's answers.
- ◆ Use your child's own words and ask your child to explain anything that is unclear to you.
- ◆ Talk about what is appropriate touch rather than what is good touch or bad touch.
- ◆ Let your child know that an abuser could be someone they know, someone older or close to their age, someone who makes them feel special or grown-up.
- ◆ Say clearly that you love them, whatever they have done.
- ◆ Acknowledge that it must be difficult for your child to talk to you and praise your child's courage to tell you what happened.
- ◆ If your child is reluctant to talk, be patient and keep trying. You may need to wait awhile and open the conversation at another time.
- ◆ Try not to suggest answers to your child.
- ◆ Avoid criticizing your child for his or her choice of words.
- ◆ Try to stay calm and reassuring by not showing shock, horror or anger at what your child tells you.



What if my child is not telling the truth about the abuse?

It is important that you believe your child and let her/him know that you will be there. Believing your child is also important in beginning your own healing process.

Think about these questions:

- ♦ *Even if your child does lie about some things, does lying about coming home late compare with telling about something as serious as sexual abuse?*
- ♦ *Would your child have specific knowledge of sexual acts?*
- ♦ *What does your child have to gain from accusing someone of sexual abuse?*

Most children are sexually abused by someone they know. They tell because they want the abuse to stop, not because they want to hurt the abuser or get them in trouble. If you do not believe your child, he/she may believe that you will not be supportive or protective. Your disbelief will also decrease your child's confidence about telling someone else.

The truth is that children rarely lie about being sexually abused. Children tend to have active imaginations about certain areas of their lives, but not about sexual situations.

It is not unusual for a child to tell what happened in bits and pieces. One of the ways children cope with abuse is to push the memory of the abuse away and pretend it never happened. After they have told someone and feel safe, they may remember more about what happened.

Believing a child shows your love for them, and that love is very important in their healing process.

Even if your child does tell you about the abuse, your child may later say that the abuse did not happen. Sixty percent of victims recant because of their fear of having to see the abuser. Others feel guilty for making "trouble" in the family and just want life to get back to normal.

Why didn't my child tell me sooner?

Sometimes children tell their parents about sexual abuse soon after it happens. However, many children never tell an adult or wait for months or years to disclose that they have been sexually abused. Parents often feel angry with their children for not telling. Or they are disappointed and wonder why their children did not feel comfortable telling them. There are many reasons children do not tell their parents. It may help to examine your relationship with your child — especially if your child was abused by your spouse. Your child may have felt you would not believe her or support her if she told you, or maybe she wanted to protect you from feeling bad.

Sometimes children tell other adults like teachers or family friends. If your child learned about touching problems in school and then felt comfortable telling the teacher about what happened. Sometimes children seem to know that someone outside the family will be less likely to be emotionally upset by the disclosure.



Some of the reasons children give about why they didn't tell sooner include:

- ♦ *I was embarrassed to talk about it.*
- ♦ *He told me I would get in trouble.*
- ♦ *I was scared he might hurt me if I told.*
- ♦ *He said he would have to go to jail, and I didn't want to get him in trouble*
- ♦ *He told me that he would say I wanted to do it and you would believe him.*
- ♦ *He said he would kill himself if I told anyone.*
- ♦ *He told me that my Mom already knew about it*
- ♦ *I was afraid nobody would believe me.*
- ♦ *Everybody really liked her. She always did nice things for us.*



Why did my child go along with the abuse?

Children often feel a great deal of trust and affection for people they know. This can actually set up children to be abused by a person who knows how to manipulate and trick them. The fact that the child often cares about the offender adds to the child's confusion. Remember that we often teach our children to be "nice" and to never say "no" to adults.

People who abuse children usually have the ability to create trusting relationships with children before they sexually abuse them. This is called the "grooming process." The abusers initially engage in appropriate and affectionate touching, and then move gradually to sexual touching. The change often happens so gradually that the child is confused. The child may not know exactly what "normal" behavior is and is unclear about whether or not this fondling is something adults do with children.

Eventually, children become aware that what is happening is abuse, not affection. When they realize this, they are often confused by the fact that they complied with the abuser. They may now believe that they "let it happen." Abusers use the resulting guilt to convince the child that she/he was somehow responsible. This guilt is one of the most difficult issues the child will deal with in healing from the abuse.

Another factor in why children appear "to go along" with sexual abuse is the presence of a power imbalance. A child can feel quite powerless in the presence of an adult power. Also, children typically need to feel accepted and loved by adults. They are told to mind adults – not only their parents, but also coaches, teachers, relatives or baby-sitters.

Children do not comply with being abused; they feel as if they have no choice. Sometimes they are convinced by offenders or other adults that they did go along with the abuse, but in reality they were forced, tricked, confused and/or manipulated. This is definitely not compliance or consent.

It is very important for the child's healing that significant family members (parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents) tell the child: "*What happened was not your fault.*"

It helps a child to hear that it is never a child's fault when an adult abuses the child, even if the child did not actually say "no."

It may take your child a long time to believe that the abuse was not his/her fault. Be patient and supportive as your child works through this difficult issue.

Then is it my fault that this happened?

If there was no way for you to know about the abuse of your child, then it is not your fault that someone else sexually abused your child. No matter what you did or did not do, only the person who actually did the molesting is the one to blame for the abuse. No parent can fully protect a child from everything that could happen, and blaming yourself for what has happened will not help you or your child.

Looking back on what happened, you may see things now that were clues that your child was being sexually abused. It is always easier to look back at things and see the clues and signs more clearly than when you are in the middle of the situation.



Even though the abuse was not your fault, it is a good idea to take a look at what you have learned from the abuse and ways to make a safer environment for your child. You may decide to change how you screen baby-sitters. If you are a single parent, you need to be aware that children who live in a home with a stepparent or mom's boyfriend are at higher risk of being sexually abused. If you abuse drugs or alcohol, you need to look at the ways in which your intoxication leaves your child less protected.

Also, you can take responsibility for how you responded to your child's disclosure of sexual abuse. If you were unbelieving, or angry, or confused about what to do, you can now go back and talk with your child, apologize or explain why you behaved the way you did.

However you handled the disclosure and whatever mistakes you may have made in parenting, remember that the sexual abuse is the fault of the offender. Your job now is to seek support for your child and for yourself so that both of you can begin to heal. You must remind yourself that, although this terrible crime against your child has rearranged your lives, there is hope for healing and living a full life again. Children have an amazing resiliency and have within them a special strength that helps them survive. Place your trust in your child's inner strength and resiliency and help her/him move toward healing.



What do we say when people ask about the abuse?

During this difficult time, you and your child will need to make many decisions. One of those is deciding whom you will tell about the abuse. Your child will likely find ways to comfort him/herself. Some of the ways children do this is by forming closer relationships with grandparents, other relatives, friends, even pets. Be sensitive to your child's needs during this time and follow his/her lead.

It is also important to follow your child's lead in who to tell about the sexual abuse, when to tell, and how to tell others. If your child is experiencing fear or behaviors that need special attention, it may be important to tell responsible persons, such as teachers, school counselors or a regular sitter. You will probably feel a need for support from people you trust, and this can be an important part of your healing. At the same time, you need to protect your child from feelings of exposure and embarrassment. You and your child have a right to privacy. Part of the healing process is having control over your own lives. This means that it is your choice, and your child's choice, who to tell. Determining what your responses will be can be difficult, but it's worth the effort to decide and to talk it over with your child.

The following conversation may help you sensitively explain to your child why you want to tell a teacher what has happened:

I want to tell your teacher you have had an experience with an adult who has a touching problem. I don't need to tell her the details, but I want you to have someone at school you can talk to if you need help. Mrs. Brown will understand that children sometimes must deal with these types of problems. How do you feel about that?"

A response that might help you with the questions of other people is:

Thank you for your concern. We are getting the help that we need.

What do I do about my own feelings?

You will have strong feelings about the sexual abuse of your child. Parents and other family members are often as affected by the abuse as the child. When people hurt our children we have many confusing and troubling feelings, which may include: anger, disbelief, sadness, guilt, shock and depression. When the offender is someone we also love, we may have the added problem of feeling that we must "choose" between the offender and the child.



All of these feelings are common to parents. However, the intensity of your feelings may be too much for your child to handle. Your child may try to protect you from these strong feelings by shutting down and not working on her own feelings. Not talking about the abuse may make the child feel that you are being protected from hurt. You can help your child by getting help with your feelings with another adult — a friend or relative or counselor. This does not mean that you should not express any feelings to your child. It is perfectly appropriate to be honest in saying that this abuse is hurting you too. Just take care to limit the intensity of the emotion you let your child see.

It is very hard to be there for your child when you are feeling overwhelmed. You may even have feelings you don't understand, such as anger toward your child.

It is important to keep your own feelings separate from those of your child. Do not expect your child to feel exactly the way you feel. For example, if your husband abused your daughter, you may be filled with rage. You feel so furious at your husband that your daughter feels uncomfortable expressing how much she misses him. Let her know that her feelings are okay. This may be especially difficult if you were abused as a child. Your child's abuse may bring up old feelings about your own abuse.

This is a good time for you to get counseling for yourself. Parent Support Groups may also be available in your community. The more you can take care of yourself the better you will be able to help your child.

It is important to realize that you are not alone and that your feelings are normal. As you give yourself permission to deal with your feelings, your pain will lessen. It will take time, but you can survive this difficult time if you pay attention to your own feelings and seek the support you need.

Will my child need counseling?

Any child who has experienced significant sexual abuse needs to be evaluated. We encourage you to contact your local sexual assault intervention program or an experienced professional counselor to discuss your child's abuse and the symptoms you are seeing. They can help you decide if your child will need counseling. For example, a child who was touched once on his/her genitals, who told right away, and whose parents believed and supported him/her, may not be severely affected. This child may not need counseling if her/his parents are comfortable with talking about the abuse at home. However, a child that has experienced long-term sexual abuse will need counseling. Child sexual abuse is a term that covers a wide variety of acts and its effect on children is also varied. All child sexual abuse must involve the legal system in order to stop the abuse, but not all children will need counseling.



These are some of the factors that influence the effect of sexual abuse on your child:

- ♦ *The extent of the abuse.*
- ♦ *The duration of the abuse.*
- ♦ *The child's stage of development.*
- ♦ *How responsible the child feels for the abuse.*
- ♦ *The child's relationship with the offender.*
- ♦ *The level of support the child feels from his or her family.*
- ♦ *How significant persons responded to the child at the time of disclosure.*
- ♦ *How well the child was doing before the abuse began.*
- ♦ *The level of fear the child experienced at the time of abuse.*

Some of the things the offender said or did can make your child feel responsible for the abuse. This feeling of responsibility is an issue that requires evaluation and treatment. It is important that a child who has been sexually abused have a clear understanding that the sexual touching was abusive and that it was not his/her fault. The child may have had positive feelings toward the offender and needs to separate what was okay about the relationship from what was abusive. Even a one-time incident can cause confusion and guilt if not handled properly. One example of a helpful approach would be to say:

"I know that Bill did a lot of things you liked. He took you to get ice cream sometimes, and he bought you toys. Bill is not in trouble for the good things he did. He is in trouble because he touched your private parts."

A child who was molested by her father over a five year period, whose abuse progressed to intercourse, and who when she told, was not believed, will most likely suffer immediate and long-term effects. This child will definitely need therapeutic support.

Sometimes a young child will show few symptoms at the time of the abuse but develop problems at a later time. For example, when a child reaches adolescence, usually by the age of eleven, the memories of previous abuse may interfere with the child's development of a healthy sexual identity, as well as the ability to form close relationships. This child may have a new set of questions that may need to be worked through with a counselor.

Child sexual abuse has been covered extensively in the press and people have read that some victims of incest become prostitutes, drug addicts or abusers. While it is true that untreated child sexual abuse can cause negative effects lasting into adulthood, do not assume this will happen to your child or give your child the message that she is now "ruined" for life.

Parents are sometimes tempted to sweep the abuse under the rug and pretend it is "no big deal." Perhaps you were abused as a child and feel it has had no negative effects on you. This attitude will not help your child deal with her/his own feelings about the abuse. Your child needs to know you will take the problem seriously without overreacting. Being willing to seek counseling for your child at any stage that difficulties arise will be an important factor in your child's healing.

How do I choose a counselor?

Think of choosing a counselor for your child as a part of the many things you will do *together* to get through this difficult time. Your relationship with one another is a critical part of the healing process for both of you. Begin your search for a counselor by telling your child why you want to find a counselor. Explain to your child that a counselor can be a support for both of you. Tell your child that you have confidence in the counseling process and try to explain the process in a way that will alleviate your child's fears about it. Talk about therapy or counseling as your child *having a friendly conversation* with another adult who knows how to help.

Treating child sexual abuse requires specialized training. A general counseling background is not enough. There are many licensed counselors who have had no additional training or experience in child sexual abuse.



Call your local children's hospital or a sexual assault program for names of professionals experienced in treating sexually abused children and their families. A skilled counselor will appreciate the fact that you ask questions about her/his qualifications and realizes how important it is for you to have confidence in her/him.

Ask the therapist you are considering the following questions:

- ♦ *What kind of training has the therapist had in the area of child sexual abuse? (What workshops, classes and books has she/he participated in or read?)*
- ♦ *How many survivors of sexual violence has she/he treated?*
- ♦ *How long has the therapist worked in sexual assault treatment?*
- ♦ *Does your child's therapist have a plan for giving you progress reports and an opportunity to ask questions? (This is different from telling you what your child says in therapy.)*
- ♦ *Is your child's therapist willing to see the abuse as a primary problem rather than minimizing the abuse?*
- ♦ *Does she/he see you as a partner in your child's healing?*
- ♦ *Does the therapist place the responsibility for the abuse solely on the offender, not on you or your child?*

What is a Victim Advocate or a Victim Assistance Professional?

A victim assistance professional is a person who has been specifically trained to work with victims of violence. This is an important resource for you and your child. While many counselors and therapists may not be trained to work with victims of sexual abuse, the victim assistance professional will have this unique experience and will know about the physical and emotional consequences of victimization. This professional will also have a thorough knowledge of issues that need to be addressed by therapy or counseling. The victim assistance professional may be the very best person to provide support for you through this difficult time. If she/he is not equipped to provide counseling, she will be able to refer you to a mental health counselor or social worker. It is critical for the mental health professional or social worker who provides counseling to your child to work collaboratively with the victim assistance professional.

What will happen in counseling?

The format of your child's counseling will depend upon the following factors:

- ♦ *The extent of the sexual abuse and its effect on your child.*
- ♦ *Your child's age and emotional needs.*
- ♦ *Your feelings, positive or negative, about having your child in counseling.*
- ♦ *Your choice of a therapist, social worker, or victim advocate to provide counseling.*
- ♦ *The skill and experience of the counselor, social worker, or victim advocate in treating children who have been sexually abused.*
- ♦ *The personality of the counselor, social worker or victim advocate.*
- ♦ *The practitioner's philosophy of counseling.*

This is where your role in the counseling process becomes so important. Make certain that the counselor holds a philosophy of counseling that includes positive outcomes as a result of counseling. Believe that your child will heal and make sure that the counselor also believes that your child will get beyond this difficult time.

Your child's counselor may suggest individual, group or family counseling. Be open to whatever participation the counselor feels is appropriate. Often you're the counselor will suggest a combination of individual, group and/or family counseling because different types of counseling can get to the issues through different doors.

You will discover soon after your child's counseling begins that there will be several common issues that all abused children need to explore during their counseling. These issues include:

- ◆ Guilt and shame
- ◆ Sadness and loss
- ◆ Feelings of being "different" from other children
- ◆ Feelings of betrayal and loss of trust
- ◆ Body image (concerns about being "damaged goods")
- ◆ Premature sexualization
- ◆ Feelings of powerlessness
- ◆ Premature adult behavior

Your child needs to feel that her/his time with the counselor is private. This will help your child have the freedom to express any feelings or worries. The counselor should explain confidentiality to both you and your child. It is understandable that you will want to know what your child is doing in the counseling sessions, but pressuring your child to talk about sessions will not be helpful.

The positive aspect of counseling for your child is that most children actually enjoy it. The activities the counselor uses should be fun for the child. Your child may have the chance to share what happened in groups with other children. It is positive when children find out that they are not the only ones who have been abused.

Remember that children are usually relieved to talk about what happened with someone who is not directly involved. Many children, out of concern for their parents, don't want to tell them things that will worry them or make them sad. The counseling session provides a safe place for children to deal with their feelings without the fear of hurting a parent.

Still, children sometimes are reluctant to go to counseling. This is a normal reaction, because the things they are dealing with are painful. Because feelings like anger or sadness may come to the surface for your child during counseling sessions, your child's behavior after the sessions may reflect that. Be gentle and understanding with negative behaviors and remember that this is a stage in your child's healing process.

If your child does experience discomfort following counseling sessions, this does not usually mean that the therapist is not effective. Before you consider changing therapists, discuss your concerns openly with your child's therapist. Future counseling sessions and trust building will be more difficult for your child if you suddenly switch her to another therapist.

It is natural for you to be concerned about your child during the counseling process. Parents typically have many concerns about their child's counseling experience. The following concerns are common among parents of abused children:

- ◆ *Will this counseling really help?*
- ◆ *How can playing help an abused child?*
- ◆ *What do they say about our family during counseling?*
- ◆ *Wouldn't it be better if we just moved on and forgot about the abuse?*
- ◆ *How will I deal with the cost of the sessions?*
- ◆ *Having to go to counseling disrupts her schedule and makes her remember what happened*
- ◆ *She seems worse sometimes after her sessions.*

Discuss these issues with the child's counselor. Try to listen to the counselor's explanations with an open mind. It is important for you to have confidence in the counselor, so ask whatever questions are of concern to you. Your child's relationship with the counselor is important because it will help your child learn to trust again after being betrayed. The child needs to feel protected and safe enough to sort out the confusion and pain of being

abused with the counselor. Remember that counseling is a process, sometimes a lengthy process. Your confidence in the process will make a difference for your child. Remember that no matter what kind of counseling your child receives, your relationship with your child will be an important part in his/her recovery.



What if my child sexually touches other children?

Children who have been sexually victimized feel very out of control. Sometimes in an attempt to cope with these feelings, children may become aggressive and/or sexually touch other children. Though you may be shocked by this behavior, react as calmly as possible and do not punish your child.

Tell your child's therapist. The therapist will work with you and your child on ways to stop these behaviors. It is very important these behaviors do not become habitual. If your child is behaving in a sexually aggressive manner, do not leave your child unsupervised with younger children. The therapist can also help you deal with the parents of your child's playmates. This is one of the most difficult issues for a parent to deal with. Getting professional assistance as soon as possible is the best way to help your child.

I'm still not sure I understand the difference between what is normal play or exploration and what is abuse.

Sexual play and exploration can be a normal part of a child growing up. There are certain sexual behaviors that are appropriate to each age group. However, some behaviors are not normal sexual exploration. Sexual play is abusive when a child engages in sex play with a much younger child, or when a child coerces or forces other children to engage in sexual behaviors. If a child is being used in any way to meet the sexual needs of another, then it is sexual abuse.

Pay attention to whether any sexual "exploration" is appropriate for the child's age and normal sexual development. Important questions are: Does the sexual exploration occur between children of the same age and size? Does the play occur between children within similar social circles? Is there an imbalance of power in the relationship, such as a baby sitter playing "show me yours and I'll show you mine" with a younger child? These situations are NOT merely developmental sexual exploration

Then what sexually abusive behaviors should I look for?

It is not always easy to tell if child sexual abuse is happening especially when children are involved. It will help to remember that you do not have to decide on your own; you can determine that it would be helpful to have someone else take a look at what's going on.

The following are danger signals that might alert you to abusive behavior among children:

Does the child tell you he or she does not want to be left alone with another child?

Does the child/adolescent take younger children to secret places like hideouts, playhouses, forts, etc?

Does the child/adolescent play "secret" games with younger children, like doctor/patient or pants-down games, etc?

Does a child insist on hugging or kissing a child when the other child does not want to be hugged or kissed?

Does the child show sexual material to younger children?

Does the child/adolescent play games with a child that the adolescent would not otherwise enjoy, such as an adolescent playing "house" with a much younger child?

Do you notice sudden changes in a child's moods or habits, such as uncharacteristic outbursts of anger or fear about leaving the house?

Does the child become anxious when he or she is told about a particular person coming to visit?

Does the child force sex on another child?

Does the child expose his/her genitals to other children?

Does the child make obscene phone calls?

Does the child/adolescent use sexualized language?

Does the child/adolescent focus intense attention is overly interested in the physical maturing or developing body of another child?

My son was abused by a man.
Someone told me he could become a
homosexual. Is that true?

You may assume that because your son was molested by a male, it means that the offender is homosexual. This is a myth. Homosexuals are adults who are attracted to other adults of the same sex. Adults who are sexually attracted to children are pedophiles. The vast majority of offenders are heterosexual, not homosexual. Your son may also be confused about this issue and be embarrassed to talk with you about it.

A child's body may respond to sexual stimulation, and if your son's body responded to some of the sexual stimulation with arousal or enjoyment, he may believe this means he is a homosexual. You can explain that this arousal merely means his body responds in a healthy and normal way.

In addition to worries about being homosexual, boys may feel especially humiliated and embarrassed that they were not "strong enough" or "man enough" to physically resist their offender. These feelings can lead to under-reporting by male victims and require special counseling needs.





How can I best help my child recover from this abuse?

The most important thing you can do to help your child recover from sexual abuse experience is to believe and support him or her. Let your child know with words and actions that you are glad that she told about the abuse. Let your child know that you will help and protect her. Assure your child that she is okay.

It is important for your child to be able to talk with you about the abuse. However, it is not helpful to pry and continually question your child about the details. The police and CPS will need to get complete details. They have skilled interviewers who have been trained to ask questions in a way that assures an accurate statement. Sometimes well-meaning parents who ask leading questions can confuse the child or make the child overly anxious.

Treat your child as normally as you possibly can.

Allowing your child to talk about the abuse on his or her own terms gives you a chance to support your child and to see how dealing with it. It gives you a chance to correct any misinformation your child may have about why the abuse happened.

Even though you may be feeling very sad and sorry about what has happened, it is best not to give your child special treatment. When children are upset, we tend to give them more nurturing and bend the rules a little. More nurturing is always appropriate, especially when your child is hurting. When your child first discloses the abuse, it may be necessary to make some special consideration for negative behaviors because of the intense stress your child is under. However, try to follow your regular routine – including chores, bedtimes, limits, and rules – as quickly as possible. Otherwise your child may get the message that something is very wrong and that everyone “different” since the abuse. Your child may feel that he or she is different than before and will never be the same again. This can be troubling to a child.

Remember, the abuse cannot be used as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. You will certainly be understanding about why your child may act out as a result of the abuse and disclosure, but your child still needs the security of consistent and appropriate limits.



Will our lives ever be normal again?

Will my child ever have fun again?

Everything has changed in your lives, but your child *will* enjoy life again. Try to be patient; it will take some time for healing to occur. But you can be confident in the fact that, with the right help and support, your child will get through this dark time and move to a brighter day. And so will you.

You and your child will benefit from developing a picture of your child as a strong, capable individual. With this image in mind, try to find ways to encourage, compliment and praise your child for being a special part of your life. Give these messages to yourself as well! You both need to be affirmed and nurtured.

It's important to remember how to play.

When we get busy with life demands, it is easy to forget how quickly children grow to maturity. The abuse has caused your child to face a life event that significantly impacts development and maturation. So try not to hurry your child's maturation process during these days. Make plenty of time for your child to play, learn, explore and relax without the pressures of trying to make adult decisions.

Remember you did the best you could for your child at the time. Concentrate on the importance of what you will do *today*, and in the days to come, to help your child get through this experience. It may feel tempting for you to try to distract yourself with drugs or alcohol, food, shopping, even television, but this may only delay the healing for you and your family. Do things you enjoy, but try to avoid any activity that would provide a false sense of well being for you.

As painful as sexual abuse is for a family, it can also be a time of healing. If the abuse of your child has triggered painful memories from your past, now is the time to get help and be an example of healing for your child.

Know that there are many ways you can help give your child knowledge and skills that will keep them safe in the future. The following concepts will guide you in providing a positive atmosphere for your child:

A Child's Boundaries

Children who have been sexually abused have had their personal boundaries violated. You can help rebuild appropriate boundaries by encouraging a certain amount of privacy.

For example:

- ♦ *Giving children the right to say "no" to anyone (you included) about goodnight kisses, hugs, etc.*
- ♦ *The right to shut the door to their bedrooms.*
- ♦ *The right to have certain, special toys that they do not have to share unless they choose to.*

Children Have Rights

Children need to know they have certain rights, such as the right to feel and express their own emotions, to have their own opinions, their own likes and dislikes, and the right to say who can touch their bodies. Teaching them that they do have these rights, along with encouraging the building of healthy self-esteem, will allow your child to trust his or her own inner world and sense of self. Above all things, this kind of trust and sense of self will help your child sort out experiences of confusing touch.

Open Communication

If a child is experiencing confusing touch, he or she needs to have relationships with adults that can be trusted. A child needs to feel free to ask trusted adults hard questions. Children need to have parents who take the time to listen to them.

All children – both boys and girls – have a full range of feelings. No feeling should be off-limits for a child. Give your child the permission and the freedom to show all feelings to you. Ask yourself if your child has been taught appropriate ways to show anger, despair, fear, sadness, etc. It is better for children to express these feelings than for them to keep them hidden inside.

Children need to know that they can count on their parents, and that their parents are strong enough to handle strong feelings and tough problems. This does not mean a parent must be perfect, but that the child can trust that the parent will not fall apart and that the parent will be available to listen and understand.

Can I really help my child stay safe, and feel safe?

Yes, you *can* help your child learn safety skills, and that will be an important part of re-building your child's confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to trust relationships.

This will be one of the most important things you can do for your child in these days of trying to heal and getting back to normal life. Start by finding some of the excellent reading materials available, and read them with your child. The following books will give you a place to start:



My Very Own Book About Me!: A Personal Safety Book by Jo Stowell and Mary Dietzel

No More Secrets by Caren Adams and Jennifer Fay

It's My Body by Lori Freeman

A Better Safe Than Sorry Book by Sol and Judith Gordon

Something Happened and I'm Scared to Tell: A Book for Young Victims of Abuse by Patricia Kehoe

Loving Touches: A Book for Children About Positive, Caring Kinds of Touch by Lory Freeman

After reading with your child, you will begin to feel comfortable talking about safety issues. The following guidelines will help you help your child.

Encourage your children to trust their feelings. If they feel something is not okay, tell them to get away as soon as they can, tell a trusted adult, and keep telling until they get the help they need.

Teach your children the correct terms for their body parts. They will be more comfortable with their own bodies and have the vocabulary to talk about any touching problems that may occur.

Show your children how to dial 911 in case of an emergency and explain how to ask for help.

Share with your children that most adults touch children in appropriate (okay) ways. However, some adults and/or teens try to trick children and touch them in ways that are not okay, i.e. on their private parts.

Give your children permission to be assertive with adults and practice refusal skills with them:

"No, leave me alone."

"My mom told me I didn't have to do that."

"I don't like what you're doing."

Develop clear, consistent family rules about safety. These may include rules about going to and from school, how to answer the phone and door, and what to do if they are home alone.

Play "what if" games with your children by making up safety stories and asking them to provide the answers. This problem-solving activity will reinforce family rules and prepare your children in case a similar situation arises.

Discuss an action plan. Teach your children that if someone they do not know approaches them in an uncomfortable way, they need to scream, run, get to a safe place, etc.

Help your children to memorize their personal information, such as their full name, phone number, address and parent's name, as well as their parent's work number.

Identify a wide support system that you and your children can turn to for help in decision-making, including close neighbors, extended family, friends, etc. List names and numbers in a place visible to your children and include local community resources.

Encourage your children to share their concerns with you by telling them you will listen to them, believe them and support them.



If anyone brings up the court process, my child becomes terrified.

How can I help calm some of my child's fears?

Your child's anxiety and fear of the judicial process is a normal reaction. Knowing all you can about the process will help you calm your child and alleviate at least some of the anxiety. The Arkansas Crime Information Center has a guide for victims of crime that gives a wealth of information. Publishing parts of that informational guide here may help you get a better understanding of the details of the judicial process.

Photo from National Court

Crime Victims Rights

The Arkansas Crime Victim Rights Law mandates certain basic rights for people victimized by crime. The law does not apply to all crimes, but only certain crimes and certain victims, including:

- ◆ *A victim who is a minor*
- ◆ *A victim of a sex offense*
- ◆ *A victim of any felony resulting in physical injury to the victim*
- ◆ *A victim of any felony involving the use of a deadly weapon*
- ◆ *A victim of terroristic threatening in the first degree*
- ◆ *A victim of stalking*

If the victim is a minor, incapacitated, or deceased, a member of the victim's family may exercise the rights of the victim.

Important Note about the Arkansas Juvenile Justice System

It is important to note that, if your child's offender is a juvenile, the rights may differ. Juvenile delinquency proceedings usually are more private than adult criminal trials. Juvenile court records are not public records and are not subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act. The court proceedings and filings may also be closed and confidential. A crime victim and persons providing victim support, or a victim's representative, may be present unless the judge decides that that person's exclusion is necessary to preserve the confidentiality or fairness of a juvenile proceeding.

Crime victims do not have the *right* to present victim impact statements, but some judges may *allow* them.

Also, information regarding juveniles is not available through the Arkansas VINE Program unless the juvenile is charged as an adult.

The following rights are mandated by the Arkansas Crime Victim Rights Law:

(Please note that some of these rights may not apply if the offender is a juvenile. See Juvenile Justice System below.)

- 1) *Victim Information* - The Crime Victim Rights Law protects information about victims. A court cannot compel a victim to give his or her address or place of employment in open court, except when the court decides it is essential to the case. Law enforcement agencies cannot disclose information to the public about the identity of the victim of a sex crime except under limited circumstances. The address and telephone number of the Victim is also protected from release under the Freedom of Information Act.

When property of the victim is seized and used as evidence, the agency holding the property must take reasonable care of the property and promptly return it to the victim when it is no longer needed as evidence.

Employers cannot discharge or discipline a victim of crime for assisting the prosecutor in preparing the case or for attending court if it reasonably protects the victim's interest.

- 2) *Information from Law Enforcement* - Law enforcement agencies responding to crime incidents are required to inform victims in writing of their rights under this law. Officers must inform victims of the availability of services such as medical, housing, counseling, financial, social, legal, and emergency services. In addition, officers must inform victims about how to obtain orders of protection, how to access public records related to the case, and about the Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Board (including the address and phone number). As soon as it becomes practical, law enforcement officials must inform the victim of the suspect's identity and if he or she is in custody, unless this information compromises the investigation. Victims also have the right to know the case file number, the investigating officer's name and telephone number, and the prosecuting attorney's name and telephone number.
- 3) *Pre-sentence Report* – A pre-sentence report is a detailed account of a convicted defendant's educational, criminal, family, and social background conducted as an aid to the court in determining the sentence. The person preparing the pre-sentence report for the court shall make a reasonable effort to meet with the victim.
- 3) *Presence in Court* - Victims of crime have the right to be present in court whenever the defendant appears, other than at a grand jury proceeding. If the victim requests, the court shall also allow the presence of a person to provide support for the victim in the courtroom. However, if the court decides that the victim's presence or the presence of the support person may jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial, the court can exclude either or both of them.
- 4) *Information from Prosecuting Attorney* - If requested by a victim, prosecuting attorneys are responsible for notifying crime victims of critical events occurring in their cases. This notification can be given orally, in writing, or automatically through the Arkansas VINE system. Victims are responsible for giving the prosecutor's office their address and phone number, and for updating this information if it changes.

Upon request of a victim or the victim's family, prosecutors are to notify victims of the following events and rights:

- ◆ *Motions or hearings to establish bail or authorize pre-trial release from custody*
- ◆ *Proceedings on plea agreements*
- ◆ *Date, time, and place of defendant's trial*
- ◆ *Motions that may substantially delay prosecution*
- ◆ *Cancellation of court proceedings*
- ◆ *Pre-sentence report preparation*
- ◆ *Victim impact statement information*
- ◆ *All sentencing proceedings*
- ◆ *Information from custody institutions*

Prosecuting attorneys must confer with the victim of the crime before amending or dismissing a charge or agreeing to a negotiated plea. However, failure of the prosecuting attorney to confer with the victim does not affect the validity of an agreement.

Prosecuting Attorneys or Victim Assistance Coordinators must provide the following services to victims:

- ◆ *Assistance in obtaining protection from harm and threats of harm arising out of their cooperation with law enforcement and prosecution efforts*
 - ◆ *Assistance in applying for financial aid and other social services*
 - ◆ *Assistance in applying for witness fees*
 - ◆ *When possible, a secure waiting area during court proceedings that does not require victims to be in close proximity to the defendant and family and friends of the defendant*
 - ◆ *Involvement with the victims' employers to ensure that they cooperate with the criminal justice process in order to minimize loss of pay and other benefits resulting from court appearances*
- 5) *Information Concerning Appeal* - If the defendant appeals, the Attorney General will inform the victim of that fact, of the date, time, and place of any hearing, and of the decision. These notifications may be accomplished through the Arkansas VINE system.
- 6) *Information Concerning Confinement* - In order to receive information from custody institutions, victims must request that they be notified. The Crime Victim Rights Law requires the Arkansas Department of Correction, the Arkansas State Hospital, and any other facility to which the defendant is committed to notify victims of the following:
- ◆ *Estimated date of the defendant's release*
 - ◆ *Date of Release of the defendant on furlough or to a work-release, half-way house, or other community program at least 30 days in advance of the release*
 - ◆ *Escape*
 - ◆ *Recapture from escape*
 - ◆ *Decision of the Governor to commute the sentence or to pardon the defendant*
 - ◆ *Release of defendant and any conditions attached to the release of the defendant*
 - ◆ *Death of the defendant during confinement*
- 7) *Information from the Post Prison Transfer Board* - At least 30 days before a hearing, if requested by the victim, the Board shall inform the victim of the hearing and of the victim's right to submit a Victim Impact Statement. The Board shall also inform the victim of their decision concerning the defendant. The law requires the Board to consider the Victim Impact Statement before determining whether to release the defendant on parole.

The victim can choose to present the statement orally at the parole hearing or in writing. Because defendants may become eligible for parole every year, under certain circumstances victims may offer impact testimony via videotape. The Board is required by law to provide the defendant with copies of the victim's written impact statement.

It is the responsibility of the victim, or his or her next of kin, to notify the Board of any change in regard to the desire to be notified of any future parole hearings, or change in address or telephone number.

Victim Impact Statements

(Note: Crime victims of juvenile offenders may have the right to present victim impact statements depending on the judge's ruling.)

The Arkansas Crime Victim Rights Law guarantees the right for victims of crime (if the crime was committed by an adult) to prepare and present a Victim Impact Statement. The law also requires the court to *consider* the victim's statement. Impact statements are presented in the sentencing phase of trials and in Post Prison Transfer Board hearings.

Victim Impact Statement forms are provided for both adult and child victims, as well as for the parents of child victims. Victims may wish to use them as an example for drafting their own, but are in no way required to use these forms. If a parent chooses to allow their child to participate, the impact statement allows the child to tell the court in his or her own words, or by drawing a picture, how this crime has changed his or her life.

The Victim Impact Statement allows a victim to provide information on the following:

- ◆ *Emotional and psychological impact of the crime*
- ◆ *Physical effects of the crime*
- ◆ *Effect of the crime on his or her ability to work or do any of the things he or she would normally do, such as going to work or school, running a household, or any other activities he or she would normally perform*
- ◆ *Financial impact experienced as a result of the crime*

When describing the financial impact of the crime, it is important to be as clear, complete, and accurate as possible. The prosecutor, the probation officer, and the judge will rely on the information provided. Information regarding the financial impact may prove useful in the judge's decision to order payment of restitution. Restitution is the possibility of monetary payments made by the defendant to the victim in order to compensate the victim for financial losses resulting from the crime. If restitution is ordered, there is no guarantee the defendant will pay the entire amount.

Victims may also be eligible for financial assistance from the Crime Victim Reparations Board. This program reimburses victims for certain types of out-of-pocket expenses related to physical or emotional trauma as a direct result of a criminal act (See the Crime Victims Reparation Board section below).

Oral statements may be presented with agreement of the prosecuting attorney. This statement can be very useful to the judge in determining the proper sentence to impose. A victim may NOT, however, include his or her opinion of the defendant, or of the sentence that should be imposed. Submission of a Victim Impact Statement is voluntary.

A written Victim Impact Statement may be useful if a plea is taken and/or the victim is unable to appear in court. The statement may also assist the prosecutor and victim witness coordinator in the preparation of actual victim testimony for trial. Only evidence or argument concerning a victim's personal characteristics or the impact of the crime on the victim's family and community are allowed. The Victim Impact Statement, once submitted, will become an official court document and part of the permanent file. The defendant and the defendant's attorney have access to the victim's statement. Victims' addresses and telephone numbers do NOT appear on these documents and are protected from Freedom of Information Act requests.

Safe Places Advocates can help with a specialized Victim Impact Statement.

Our process for assisting you and your child with a Victim Impact Statement is designed to be a therapeutic and valuable process. Our Victim Impact Statement forms are age-appropriate for your child and are completed in a series of individual therapeutic sessions. The number of sessions required depends upon several factors, including the child's age and development level. The length of the sessions and the number of sessions is determined as we work with your child to assess what is most therapeutic.

Only you and your child can tell the court the effect this crime has had on you, your family, and those close to you. One way to do that is through the victim impact statement. If the defendant pleads or is found guilty, your statement will help the judge understand what the impact of this crime has been on your child, you, and those

close to you. While you have the right to fill out a statement, you do not have to fill out a statement if it will make you feel uncomfortable in any way. Filling out the victim impact statement is always voluntary.

It may be hard for you and your child to put into words the impact this crime has had on you and those close to you. However, your impact statement may help the judge in your case decide what punishment the defendant should receive and/or if the defendant will be ordered to pay you any money you have paid or owe because of this crime. When the judge makes the defendant pay the victim, it is called "restitution." If the judge orders the defendant to pay you restitution, there is no guarantee that the defendant will be able to pay you the entire amount.

Your impact statement will become an official court document after it is given to the court, and will become part of the defendant's permanent file. The judge, prosecutor and probation officer will read your statement. In addition, prison and parole officials may read it if the defendant is sentenced to a prison term. The defendant and the defendant's attorney will be able to read what you have written. They may even be able to ask you questions about your statement in court. However, the defendant will not be able to see your address or telephone number because you are not asked to put them on your statement.

Where Do I Get a Victim Impact Statement and How Do I Complete It?

Safe Places staff persons will help you with this. Two victim impact statements will be available to you. The first statement is for you, the parent. It gives you a chance to tell the judge about any changes that may have happened to your child or to your family; any physical injuries or physical problems your child may have suffered; and, any money you have spent or may owe as a result of this crime. You may complete this statement alone, or you may use it as a therapeutic session(s) for you and request Safe Places staff to assist you.

The second statement is for your child. As a parent, you know what is best for your child. If you are uncomfortable with your child filling out a statement, don't let your child fill it out. However, if your child wants to fill out the statement, he or she will be able to tell the judge how this crime may have changed their life. If your child would rather draw a picture, tell a story; write a poem, this is fine as well.

As mentioned before, Safe Places staff persons work with children and young people to complete their statements in one or more therapeutic sessions. Another possibility is for you to help your child complete his or her statement.

If You Prefer to Work with Your Child on a Victim Impact Statement: Guidelines for Parents

Your child will find it helpful to know that by filling out a statement, he or she can tell the judge how they "feel" about what happened. If your child is nervous or scared and does not want to complete the form, let your child know that it is okay to feel this way and let them take some time to think about what you are asking them to do and what they would like to say or draw. Your child can always fill out the form another day.

Tell your child that they are not being asked to "tell" what the defendant did, but rather how they are "feeling" about what has happened. Let your child know if they make a mistake on the statement, they can start over.

Your child can write or draw as much or as little as they wish. Some children may feel that the statement must be perfect from spelling everything just right to using "big" words. Let your child know that what they are feeling is more important than spelling everything right or using big words.. Let your child know that this is not a test and that there are no right or wrong answers.

If at anytime your child feels that he or she cannot fill out the form, or if you can see that your child is becoming too upset, stop and tell your child that you are proud they tried to fill out the statement, and that you understand how they feel. Let your child know that they do not have to fill out the statement unless they want to.

Suggestions for Parents in Completing the Victim Impact Statement

Many parents find it helpful to arrange the impact statement by the emotional, physical or financial effects of the crime. It may be helpful to write about the emotional impact of this crime on yourself and your child. You may want to think about:

- Has this crime affected your life, your child's life or the lives of those close to you?
- Has anything changed between your child and his or her friends, both at school or in your neighborhood?
- Has anything changed with your child's behavior or schoolwork?

If your child was physically injured, you may wish to write about the physical impact of this crime by:

- Writing about the physical injuries your child received.
- Telling how long these injuries lasted or how long the injuries are expected to last.
- Writing about the medical treatment or emotional counseling your child or your family has received or expects to receive in the future.

If you have paid or owe any money for bills because of this crime, please fill out the financial impact section of the statement. It is important to be as accurate and complete as you can be when listing your costs because this information will be used by the prosecutor, probation officer and the judge to help them determine what restitution the defendant must pay to you, the victim.

In addition to medical or counseling bills, you may want to include any time off from work that you were not paid for as a result of this crime. For example, if you took time off from work to take your child to the doctor, therapy, or to the courthouse and your employer did not pay you for this time, you may want to ask the judge to think about these expenses when he or she decides if the defendant will owe you any restitution.

Other Services for Victims

Arkansas Victim Notification Program (VINE)

(Note: Information regarding juveniles is not available through the Arkansas VINE Program unless the juvenile is charged as an adult.)

When the Arkansas Legislature passed the Crime Victim Rights Law, it also created a program to allow agencies to accomplish victim notifications reliably and efficiently through a program known as the Arkansas VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) Program. This program is administered by the Arkansas Crime Information Center.

VINE is a free automated telephone hotline that provides crime victims with vital information and notification 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service allows victims to obtain inmate information and to register for notification of inmate release and court dates.

VINE serves crime victims in two ways. First, it can be used as an *information* line. The system monitors the custody status of criminal offenders in the Arkansas Department of Correction, the Arkansas State Hospital, and county jail facilities statewide. Crime victims calling the hotline are informed about whether an offender is in custody. If the offender is in custody, the system tells the victim the name and telephone number of the agency holding the inmate.

Court information is also available through VINE. Prosecuting attorneys throughout the state enter circuit court event information into the system. The Attorney General's Office provides appellate court information to the system. In order to obtain court information, a victim must first have the circuit court case number. The prosecuting attorney's office handling the case or the county clerk's office can provide the number. Once the circuit court case number is identified, the system will give callers the next scheduled court event, date, time, court location, and telephone number.

The second way the system serves crime victims is *notification*. By dialing the hotline number, victims can register to receive automatic notification upon a change in the inmate's custody status or court case. To register for notification, a victim can call the toll-free hotline number (1-800-510-0415). The offender or court case can be located using a touch-tone telephone and following the directions given. Once location is made, the telephone number to which victims want the system to call with notifications is entered. Victims are then asked to enter a Personal Identification Number (PIN). This is a four-digit number the victim chooses and uses to stop a notification when it is received. If victims have problems registering or obtaining information through the system, they can press "0" and a live operator will assist them 24 hours a day.

Once registered, notification calls are made by the system approximately every 30 minutes for 24 hours or until the victim enters the PIN. The system will also leave a message on an answering machine. All telephone registrations through the Arkansas VINE Program are anonymous and are protected from the Freedom of Information Act.

For more information about VINE, contact:

Arkansas Crime Information Center
One Capitol Mall
Little Rock, AR 72201
501-682-2222
www.acic.org

Victim Assistance Programs

All 28 judicial districts in Arkansas operate prosecutor-based victim assistance programs. Within the past few years, these programs have expanded to include local police departments and municipalities. Ideally, victim assistance is notified and meets with victims at the scene of the crime, hospital, or police station. Victim assistance providers are well trained and can explain criminal justice procedures to crime victims during this emotional and difficult time. They can also assist in obtaining emergency items such as clothing and personal care items for victims. Victim assistance programs also provide victim advocacy. They assist victims in obtaining Orders of Protection to protect them from their attackers, make community service referrals for crime victims, and provide letters to employers and school authorities explaining the need for victim court appearances. Often it is the responsibility of victim assistance programs to notify crime victims of critical events occurring in their cases. While the Arkansas VINE Program provides automated notification calls to registered crime victims, victim witness coordinators explain what those notifications actually mean in the criminal justice process.

In order to protect victims during the court process, victim advocates can provide court escorts and transportation. When possible, they provide a secure waiting area during court proceedings that does not require the victim to be in close proximity to the defendant, the defendant's family, or the defendant's friends.

Another aspect of victim advocacy provided by victim assistance programs is helping victims obtain possible restitution from the defendant. Victim assistance providers can explain the process and complete the restitution report, attach necessary supporting documentation, and file it with the court.

Victim assistance providers are required to inform victims about the Arkansas Crime Victims Reparation Board and provide application forms. They also assist victims in completing and submitting the form. Most of all victim assistance providers help crime victims through the court process. They help victims prepare for court and, if appropriate, help victims prepare to testify as witnesses or help prepare victim impact statements. They can also provide specialized care for child victims.

For more information, contact:

Office of the Prosecutor Coordinator
323 Center Street, Suite 750
Little Rock, AR 72201
501-682-3671

Community Based Victim Assistance Professionals

Your community may have victim assistance professionals who have unique training in providing sexual abuse counseling. These professionals are available to you if you have experienced any type of victimization, regardless of whether the crime is prosecuted. Services are available to victims of past victimizations as well, even if those crimes were never reported. Community-based victim assistance professionals, sometimes called victim advocates, can support you throughout the criminal justice process and beyond, and can provide a variety of specialized services. Often these services are grant funded and are provided at no cost. If not grant funded, services may be available at very minimal fees. Always ask about the qualifications of any victim assistance professional and ask him/her to provide you with biographical information about his/her training and experience.

For more information, contact:

Safe Places
1609 Broadway
Little Rock, AR 72206
501-374-SAFE (7233)

Crime Victim Reparations Board

The Attorney General's Office administers the Crime Victim Reparations Program and the Sexual Assault Program. The Arkansas Legislature created the "Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Act" with Act 817 in 1987. The legislation provides a method for compensating and providing assistance to victims and their dependents who have suffered personal injury or death as the result of a violent crime, including DWI and hit and run accidents. The administrative staff, consisting of the Administrator, staff attorney, and six full-time investigators, is responsible for making decisions pertaining to awarding or denying claims.

The Crime Victims Reparations Board, consisting of five members appointed by the Governor oversees both programs and is responsible for making decisions on appeals. Victims who disagree with the decision made in their cases may submit a written appeal request within 45 days from the date of receipt of the staff's decision. They must also be present at the appeal hearing, or have a representative present. A victim who disagrees with the appeal decision made by the Board can submit written notice to the Circuit Court of the county, in which the victim resides or conducts business, or in Pulaski County. Notice of appeal must be filed in the court within 30 days from the date of receipt of the Board's decision.

Crime Victims Reparation Program

One of the most positive aspects of the Program is that a portion of the funding comes from individuals who commit crimes. A major source of revenue for the program is the assessment of court costs and fees, as well as the court-ordered restitution collected from criminals. The program also receives money through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). Victims can receive help with medical bills, rehabilitation costs, and dental expenses as well as replacement costs, such as eyeglasses or dentures. Victims can also be compensated for costs associated with crime scene clean up, work loss, funeral expenses, and loss of support to dependents of homicide victims. Mental health services are also available to victims of crime. There are some expenses victims may incur that cannot be covered by the Crime Victim Reparations Board. Victims cannot receive compensation for pain and suffering, property damage, or attorney's fees.

In addition, persons other than the direct victim may qualify as secondary victims. Secondary victims include persons who are immediate family members (including grandparents) of a deceased victim, victims of sexual assault, and child victims. A child victim of any eligible victim is considered a secondary victim, as are persons who are not immediate family members, but who resided (at the time of the crime) in the same permanent household as a deceased crime victim. Secondary victims also include persons who discover the body of a homicide victim. Victims of crime must also meet certain criteria to be eligible for compensation from the Board. The victimization must have occurred in Arkansas on or after July 1, 1998. Claims must be filed within one year of the incident, and the victimization must have been reported to the proper authorities within 72 hours of the incident. Crime victims under the age of 18 are excluded from this requirement. These requirements may be waived upon a showing of good cause.

Victims do not have to prove financial need in order to be eligible for compensation. To be eligible for receiving assistance from the Crime Victim Reparations Board, a person must be either a victim, a dependent of a victim, or a person authorized to act on behalf of a victim. The victim's conduct must not have contributed to the victimization, nor could the victim have been involved in illegal activity at the time of the incident. Victims must not have been incarcerated at the time of the incident, nor have been convicted of a criminally injurious felony. The victim and the claimant must also cooperate with the investigation and/or prosecution.

Furthermore, the victim's expenses must not have been covered by a collateral source, i.e. medical insurance. Incidents involving a motor vehicle must have occurred intentionally or been in violation of the Omnibus DWI Act. In addition, victims who are injured as a result of a hit and run incident are eligible to receive compensation. There does not have to an arrest or conviction of the assailant before compensation will be paid.

Victims do not need an attorney to file a claim. Assistance in filing a claim is available from the Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Program. The first step in filing a claim is to obtain a claim form from the nearest prosecuting attorney's office, law enforcement agency, hospital, or the Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Program. It is necessary for the claim form to be completed in its entirety and accompanied by the following:

- ◆ *Documentation verifying that the incident was reported to the proper authorities*
- ◆ *At least one itemized statement or invoice*

The maximum limit of compensation is \$10,000 per victim. For victims whose injuries are catastrophic and result in a total and permanent disability, the maximum award limit is \$25,000. Medical expenses are paid at

75% of balance submitted, but if the provider accepts payment they are agreeing to accept as payment in full. Mental health expenses are paid up to \$3,500 for inpatient treatment and \$3,500 for outpatient treatment. Funeral expenses are paid up to \$5,000.

Sexual Assault Program

The Sexual Assault Program is designed to cover the expenses incurred when evidence is being collected following a sexual assault. Unlike the Crime Victims Reparation Program, the medical facility is responsible for submitting these expenses to the Sexual Assault Program for reimbursement. This program does not decide whether the victim was in fact assaulted.

This program covers physician and emergency room fees, lab fees for testing for STDs and HIV, and preventative medication for STDs and pregnancy. It also covers sedatives, tranquilizers, and the cost of an ambulance. It will not cover treatment for physical injury, counseling, or follow-up visits. These expenses may be submitted to the Crime Victims Reparations Board for consideration.

To be eligible, treatment must be rendered within 72 hours and the assault must be reported to law enforcement. This requirement may be waived upon a showing of good cause. Treatment cannot be for pre-existing injury, physical injury, or any other condition.

The victim should not be billed directly for these services, nor should the victim's collateral source, if they are covered by private insurance. If the victim is covered by a federally financed benefits program, such as Medicaid, Medicare, Champus, or VA, that program should be billed for these services.

For more information, contact:

Office of the Attorney General / Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Program
323 Center Street, Suite 200
Little Rock, AR 72201
800-448-3014 or 501-682-1020

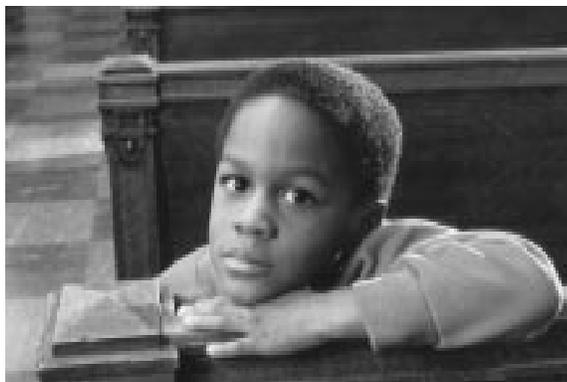


Photo from National Court

We need to understand what will happen, in order.

Can you give us an overview of the court process?

It really does help to have a basic understanding of the criminal justice system and to know what is likely to happen and when. You can help alleviate your child's anxiety about the process if you understand it yourself and feel comfortable with your level of knowledge. Law enforcement will likely be your first point of contact in the process.

Basic Law Enforcement Information

When a crime occurs, law enforcement officers are normally the first to respond. Depending on the size of the law enforcement agency, the first officer on the scene may *not* be the individual who completes the investigation. After the initial report is taken, a detective, or another officer with specialized skills, may be assigned to the case. Jurisdiction regarding law enforcement agencies' responsibilities, as they relate to a particular crime, can vary. Officers first arriving at the scene of a crime may need to provide protection and assistance to persons with physical injuries and/or emotional trauma. Emergency services, such as ambulances and fire department response teams, may be required.



Once the emergency needs of persons at the scene are met, officers then begin collecting evidence. From the beginning, it is critically important to preserve and safeguard evidence, so police officers may be required to prohibit public access. Sometimes property must be removed from the crime scene and taken to the crime lab for processing. *Families of crime victims may be kept away from the scene until evidence is secured.*

In order to collect and document evidence of the crime, officers may ask many questions of the victim, family members, neighbors, witnesses, and potential witnesses. These conversations are often audio taped or video taped. This seemingly intrusive technique can prevent unnecessary, repetitive interviews of the witnesses. Follow-up investigations can be conducted days, weeks, months, and even years after the initial investigation. Officers may need to revisit the crime scene and talk to victims and witnesses previously interviewed.

When a law enforcement agency makes an arrest, the arrested person may or may not be immediately jailed. In less serious crimes, an offender may only be issued a citation ordering that they appear in court on a certain date. In cases involving more serious crimes, a court hearing is necessary to decide whether the offender should be released pending trial, resulting in a bond or bail being posted and a release from custody, perhaps hours after the arrest.

Law enforcement's role does not end with the arrest of the alleged offender. Working closely with prosecuting attorneys, law enforcement officers frequently testify at trials. Officers testify on the contents of the police report, evidence collected at the scene, and how the evidence was preserved for presentation in court.

Some law enforcement agencies in Arkansas operate victim assistance programs within their departments. Specialized victim assistance coordinators provide a wide range of services to victims of crime.



Photo from National Court

Basic Prosecution Information

In Arkansas, the prosecuting attorney is responsible for making the decision to charge a person with committing a crime based on the investigative information provided by law enforcement. All crimes in Arkansas are defined by the Arkansas Criminal Code. It is vital to understand that criminal cases are brought by the *State*, not the victim of the crime. The prosecutor has the sole authority to bring charges and they can be brought contrary to the victim's wishes. If the prosecutor decides to pursue the case, a document called an "information" is filed with the court. The first appearance by a defendant in court is often referred to as "plea and arraignment."

At the hearing, the defendant is asked whether he or she will enter a plea of guilty, not guilty, or *nolo contendere* (no contest). If the defendant pleads guilty or no contest, he or she will then be sentenced by the judge. A no contest plea has the same effect as a plea of guilty as far as the criminal sentence is concerned.

If the defendant pleads not guilty, a trial date is set. The court also considers the amount of bail, and other conditions of release, which permit the defendant to be out of jail until the trial. In Arkansas, every defendant is eligible for bail. Judges, however, are not required to set bail for defendants charged with capital murder where specific circumstances exist.

The trial may be avoided if the defendant and the prosecutor agree to a negotiated plea. Agreements such as these save time, stress, and money. Also, taking a case to trial is always uncertain; there is no guarantee of a conviction at trial. It is important to recognize that a guilty plea *is* a conviction.

Basic Information About the Juvenile Justice System

The Juvenile Justice System is quite different from the Adult Criminal Justice System. The Juvenile Justice System's primary objective is to rehabilitate the juvenile while the Adult Criminal Justice System's objectives are to deter crime and punish the offender. In addition, the terminology used in the juvenile justice system is different from the adult criminal justice process. The following is a listing of commonly used terms in juvenile court and how they correlate to the adult criminal justice system:

Juvenile Justice System	Adult Criminal Justice System
Delinquent Act	Crime
Adjudication Hearing	Trial
Found Delinquent	Convicted/Found Guilty
Disposition	Sentencing
Detention	Jail

Arkansas Juvenile Justice System

Arkansas has a separate court division for children who commit criminal acts. In the juvenile justice system, focus is placed on rehabilitation of the juvenile offender and victim restitution. The commission of some crimes, however, can expose a person age 14 or older to prosecution as an adult in circuit court. If a person under the age of 18 is tried in circuit court, he or she is considered as an adult, and juvenile court procedures do not apply.

When a prosecutor believes a juvenile has committed a crime, he or she may choose to file a "delinquency petition". The delinquency petition summons the juvenile to an "adjudication hearing". If the allegations in a petition are found to be true, a juvenile is "adjudicated delinquent". If he or she is to be incarcerated before or after the hearing, the child is placed in "juvenile detention" or "transferred into the Division of Youth Services' custody". These children who commit acts that would be criminal if committed by an adult are referred to as juvenile delinquents. Under Arkansas' juvenile code, a delinquent juvenile is defined as a person age 10 through age 17.

If a juvenile is an adjudicated delinquent, there are several disposition alternatives available to the judge. The judge may require the juvenile to undergo counseling, place the juvenile on probation, or require him or her to perform community service. Other available options are the C-Step Program, detention, and transfer into the custody of the Division of Youth Services. The judge will decide the appropriate alternative.

It is also important to note that juvenile delinquency proceedings usually are more private than adult criminal trials. Juvenile court records are not public records and are not subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act. The court proceedings and filings may also be closed and confidential. A crime victim and persons providing victim support, or a victim's representative, may be present unless the judge decides that that person's exclusion is necessary to preserve the confidentiality or fairness of a juvenile proceeding. Crime victims do not have the *right* to present victim impact statements, but some judges may *allow* them.

Information regarding juveniles is not available through the Arkansas VINE Program unless the juvenile is charged as an adult.

Even if your child's offender is a juvenile, your child has certain rights that can be explained by the victim witness coordinator in the prosecuting attorney's office or by a community-based victim advocate. Make sure to ask all the questions you need to ask about your child's rights and the resources available to you.



Photo from National Court

How do I help my child deal with the fear about what might happen in court?

A child who is the victim of a personal assault by an adult perpetrator is usually the principal witness in the criminal court process. A child who has experienced sexual abuse may already be feeling fearful and anxious, and the idea of going into a courtroom just adds to that anxiety.

As we have already discussed, an almost universal response in the child victim of sexual assault is guilt. The guilt arises from the child's own feelings of responsibility for the sexual activity, the disclosure of the 'secret' and the disruption to the lives of those involved and their families. This is an even stronger factor when the abuse occurred within the family unit. Victims of abuse frequently fear further abuse and retribution from offenders or their families if they testify in court. They are often depressed and sad that a trusted person hurt them and that other trusted people, for example a non-offending parent, failed to protect them from harm.

Children who have been abused tend to have a low self-esteem, feeling that they must be of little worth to have been treated as they have. They are also likely to have difficulty trusting new people in their lives, this often being the result of broken promises by offenders for example 'I won't do this to you again'.

All of these factors complicate the task of preparing the child for the judicial process. It is extremely important for the child to have a trusted adult who will be sensitive to all of these feelings, particularly if the child is a prospective witness in the judicial process. As a parent/guardian, you must contact the victim assistance coordinator in the prosecuting attorney's office. This individual will be an advocate for your child and help to prepare your child for the court process. The important thing for you to remember is that the intense emotions your child is experiencing can actually be used to great advantage in achieving the result of a strong, credible and fully prepared child witness.

How do I help prepare my child for court?

What if the experience is a difficult one?

The victim assistance coordinator's job is to help prepare your child, and you, for court. He or she should concentrate on three key areas:

- ◆ *Informing your child about what will happen;*
- ◆ *Instilling trust and confidence;*
- ◆ *Giving the child a friend in court.*

How You Can Help

You can help by being sure that your child is informed of the roles of all the professionals involved in the judicial process. Many child victims and their families have the impression that the people to whom they have previously related their story, perhaps police, social workers and/or doctors have failed them by not conveying details of the complaint to the other people who need to know. They feel they should be spared the trauma of repeating their story to yet another stranger.



Photo from National Court

Minimizing the number of people to whom a child must tell their story may reduce trauma to the child. However, it is important to help your child understand that there may be five or six key people who each have a different role in helping them, and that each of them want to hear the child's story so that they can best help.

Make sure that the professionals explain their role in the helping process to you and to your child. The police officer should explain the investigative role. The counselor or advocate should explain their informative and supportive role. If a doctor or nurse is involved, they should explain their role in issues of the child's medical status. And, of course, the prosecuting attorney's victim assistance coordinator should explain the steps and stages of the prosecution and their role in preparing the child for court.

Knowing what's about to happen is important.

A child who has been victimized needs a sense of normalcy and predictability. Try to avoid sudden changes in plans for your child as much as possible. The judicial process can be somewhat unpredictable, so it is important to keep your child informed of what stage in the process has been reached and what other helpers will be involved at a later time.

The Court Process

The court process is mystifying to many non-legal professionals and is much more so for the victims of crime, particularly where they are children. Children need to be as prepared as possible when they will be subjected to cross-examination in courts.

Make sure your child understands that the criminal case is against the *accused person*, and not about anything the child may or may not have done. The prosecution's victim witness coordinator can help with this. You may also contact a community-based victim advocate to provide support.

The victim witness coordinator should keep you and your child informed of the various aspects of the process, including:

- ◆ *How many times evidence could be heard and by which court(s)*
- ◆ *Who will decide whether there is enough evidence to go further*
- ◆ *Who will decide whether or not the accused is guilty*
- ◆ *How, when and how many times your child may be asked to give testimony and to whom*
(The child should be told from the outset if they are likely to be required to give evidence twice. If the child is not made aware that he/she may have to give testimony more than once, the child may feel tricked, lose faith in the people who should have advised them and be reluctant to give evidence at trial for fear that will not be the last time they have to give evidence.)

Before trial the child should be told that, if there is a verdict of not guilty this does not mean that people did not believe them, but only that the evidence was not enough to pass the very hard test that courts impose before they find someone guilty of a crime.

Giving Evidence

The child should be told that there will be three people in court who will ask them questions. The first will be the judge who will ask the child a series of questions designed to ascertain whether they are of sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand the duty to tell the truth. Depending on the age and background of the child, the presiding judicial officer may also wish to discover whether the child has the capacity to swear an oath. It is sometimes useful, particularly for a prosecutor, to have a discussion with the child about these things and to prepare the child to answer simple questions about the difference between the truth and a lie.

The second person who will ask the child questions in court will be the prosecutor who, ideally, will be known to the child before the hearing and who will have taken at least some part in the child's court preparation. This part of the evidence is where the child gives their story, prompted (where necessary) by non-leading questions (for example 'What happened then?' 'How long did this continue?'). The child should also be prepared to have to identify the accused (if the circumstances of the case require it) and be reassured that a casual hand gesture in the direction of the accused, without eye contact, should be all that is required.

The child should then be told that the final person to ask them questions will be the defense attorney who is being paid to do a job for the accused person. The child should be frankly informed that the defense will

probably suggest to them that they are lying, making up the story, or imagining it. A child witness will often be asked whether they have ever told a lie, and it is wise to prepare the child that a truthful answer to this question will not harm the case and that an explanation of why this is a different matter (for example because it is very serious or because I have promised to tell the truth) is quite appropriate.

The Court Layout and Personnel

Your child may have never seen a courtroom before. The victim witness coordinator should make arrangements for the child to see the court in which the proceedings will take place. The victim witness coordinator should talk to the child about all the trial personnel, their roles, and where they will likely be seated in the courtroom.

Instilling Confidence in Your Child

Any witness of whatever age is likely to be extremely apprehensive about the prospect of giving evidence in court. The younger the witness the more frightening the ordeal. Children frequently lack confidence when facing the ordeal of verbal confrontation with adults. The child victim has the added stress of being at least the principal, and in most cases the only, witness. They are mindful of the fact that if they fail to come up to proof the prosecution will not succeed. Do all that you can – working with the victim witness coordinator, the prosecutor, a community-based victim advocate, etc – to make sure that your child is as prepared as possible for the experience of giving evidence.



The child victim is the most important person in court.

In the majority of cases of assault upon children there is no corroborative eyewitness. This means that there may be only two people in the courtroom who know what really happened during the incident in question. It also means that your child may be the only one who will relate the events truthfully. The court wants and needs to know what this vital witness has to say. Let your child know that she/he is the most important person in court.

The child victim is the boss.

The most important person in court also has the privilege of being 'the boss'. They can, during their testimony, ask for questions to be repeated, unfamiliar words or expressions to be explained or for counsel to slow down. They can ask to be excused if upset or in need of the toilet. They can pause to take a drink of water. They can write down any word or phrase they do not wish to verbalize.

Answering Questions in Court

Be honest with your child and let her/him know that she/he may be asked hard and perhaps confusing questions in court. They should pause and think carefully about the questions and, if their meanings are clear, answer clearly and honestly. Boost your child's confidence by letting reminding her/him that the court really wants to know what they as 'most important witness' have to say. The child should be reminded that they are there to tell the truth about what happened because they were there. The defense counsel was not. The judge and jury were not.



Giving Your Child a Friend in Court

If the prosecuting attorney took some time to participate in your child's court preparation, he or she has likely built some rapport with your child. Help your child view the prosecuting attorney as their "friend in court."

The child may also benefit from viewing the judge and the jury as "friends" as well in that these people want to know the truth of what happened to the child. It may be helpful for your child to be encouraged to look only at their friend(s) in court and not to make eye contact with the accused.



Photo from National Court



Art from National Court

Will testifying in court traumatize my child?

The Therapeutic Value of Giving Testimony

A child witness cannot be expected to be confident or self-assured if they do not have sufficient knowledge of the court process and the skills to employ while under cross-examination. But be assured that it *is* possible to create a high level of assurance and confidence in a child witness. It is important for you to help make sure that a professional involved in court preparation is available to you and your child. It is normal for you to feel fearful for your child and to want to spare your child from going through a traumatic court process. But also remember that if your child is well prepared and confident, there may well be therapeutic value for her/him by going through the investigative process and through testifying in court.

Help your child view the testimony as a way to break down the secrecy involved in the assault and publicly stating how the accused person has hurt them. Even if the accused person is found *not guilty*, let your child know that this does not mean that the accused did not hurt them. Explain that a *not guilty* verdict may be the result of insufficient evidence and many other factors, but that she/he did everything she/he could do in the interests of justice. Your child might actually find the experience of giving evidence in court a positive step in regaining her/his control and self-esteem.

And finally, don't forget that there are people who can help you and your child get through this.

Please contact Safe Places if you have questions.

Safe Places
501-374-SAFE (7233)

We can help connect you with other services you might need for your child, and even for yourself and other family members. Our job is to help you find qualified victim advocates, therapists, counselors, health care professionals, pastoral counselors, and to help with your needs for support groups, criminal justice and court advocacy, the Crime Victim Reparations Program, the VINE program, and other resources.



Art from National Court

A Handy Resource List for Your Contacts

RESOURCE	CONTACT NAME(S)	PHONE
Safe Places		501-374-SAFE (7233) 501-351-4206
Arkansas State Police Investigator		
Your Local Law Enforcement		
Department of Children and Family Services		
Prosecuting Attorney / Victim Coordinator		
Hospital / Clinic		

Please help protect all children.

Place these Child Abuse Hotline numbers near your phone.

In Arkansas, call

1-800-482-5964

OR CALL THE

Childhelp® USA National Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-4-A-CHILD®
(1-800-422-4453)

TDD: 1-800-2-A-CHILD

My child has been sexually abused

A Guide for Parents of Children Harmed by Abuse



1609 Broadway
In Little Rock's Historic District

501-374-SAFE (7233)
www.SafePlacesLR.org