

Coping with the Sexual Assault of Your Child

Here are some ways you can help your child recover and heal from a sexual assault.

What should I know about sexual assault?

- A sexual assault is never the child's fault. Nothing your child did or did not do explains or justifies an assault.
 - The offender alone is responsible for the abusive actions.
 - Every sexual assault is a crime.
 - As a parent or family member you are an important part of your child's recovery and healing process.
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What can I do to help my child?

Believe your child

It may be difficult to believe what your child has said, but it is unlikely that they are lying. Often the reason children delay telling is because they are afraid that no one will believe them or that they will be blamed or rejected.

Stay as calm as possible

It is normal for parents to react with anger, disbelief or a sense of guilt. Your child may be affected by your intense feelings. Assure your child that you are not upset with them. Tell your child that no matter what they said, did or felt, it was not their fault and they did not cause the abuse. Seek support from family members, friends or a professional sexual abuse therapist.

Reassure your child

It is best not to try and get details of the assault from your child. This is best left to professional interviewers. Respond to your child's feelings and reassure them that how they are feeling is OK and that you will keep them safe. If your child shows behaviors that worry you, it would be helpful to talk with a professional sexual abuse therapist. They can suggest responses and tools for helping your child. It is most helpful for your child's recovery and healing to continue their usual routine and activities.

To Learn More

- Harborview Abuse and Trauma Center (HAT-C)
206-744-1600
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Support for you and the entire family is important

It is a crisis for the entire family when a child is sexually assaulted. The child who is assaulted, as well as you and other family members, may have problems sleeping or eating and may develop new fears and feel moody. It is not unusual for a parent to have experienced a sexual assault, and this crisis may bring back those traumatic memories. It is important to allow time for rest and recovery. Be open to seeking professional help until you get through the most difficult stages. Taking care of yourself can help you better ensure the well-being of your family.

For more information, visit these online resources:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
nctsn.org
Click “For Parents and Caregivers”
- Harborview Abuse and Trauma Center (HAT-C)
uwmedicine.org/locations/harborview-abuse-and-trauma-center