

Responding to a Disclosure of Childhood Sexual Abuse

If someone tells you about abuse that happened to them as a child:

- Listen to what the person tells you;
- Convey your belief in them; and
- Thank them for sharing their experience with you, letting them know you respect them.

Do not interrupt

Before asking questions, listen, remain calm and be patient.

Be present, don't rush

A person's story happens at their own pace so it is important to listen and don't hurry them up.

Generally, we maintain eye contact when people are speaking and this is good practice. However, in some communities and cultural groups they don't maintain eye contact. Many people feel shame when sharing their story, so continual eye contact can be uncomfortable.

Take cues for your response from what the person is doing and where they are looking.

Don't make promises you can't keep

Only offer support that is within your capacity.

It happened

Being believed is especially important to survivors. If you ask a lot of questions, they may feel that you don't believe what they are saying. Let them tell you as much or as little as they are comfortable with.

It is a big deal

Never play down or brush over what someone has said, even if they are playing it down themselves. They might be being cautious or reserved as a way of protecting themselves. Always treat their experience as true and important.

Reassure and validate

If appropriate tell them that what was done to them was not their fault and was a crime. Tell them you believe them. Let them know that they have done the right thing and you respect them.

You might like to ask whether they have shared this with others and what has been their response. This will help you in how you respond.

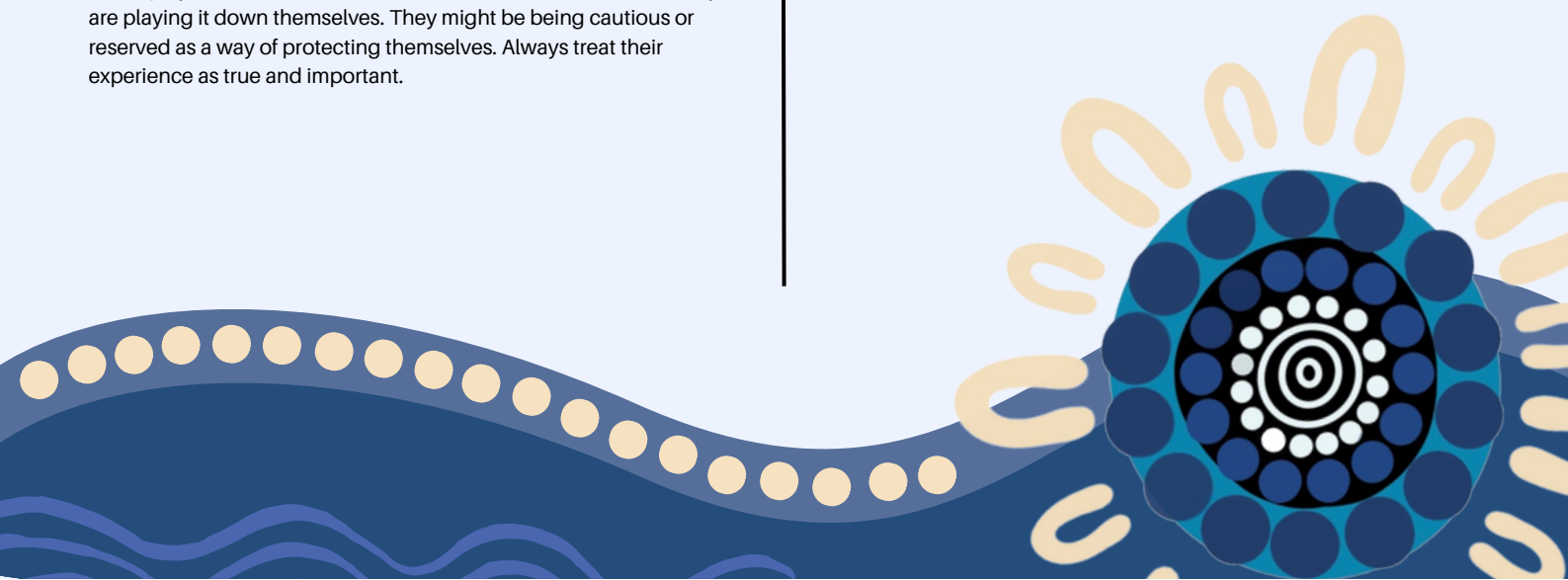
What comes next?

You should never advise what they should or should not do, but ask how you can support them.

If you are concerned about whether you might need to report what they have told you, you must talk to your line manager or supervisor.

What if you can't do this?

Some people know for various reasons, they cannot hear this. That is ok too. If you feel you cannot hear this disclosure, tell them that what they are telling you is important and should be heard by the right person. If they would like you to, help them to find the right person to talk to.



After the Disclosure

If your client or you need immediate support, 24-hour telephone assistance is available through:

1800 RESPECT	1800 737 732
beyondblue	1300 224 636
MensLine Australia	1300 789 978
Lifeline	13 11 14
13 Yarn	13 92 76 (First Nations Crisis Support Line)
Full Stop	1800 211 028 (National Sexual Abuse & Redress Support Service)
Suicide Callback Service	1300 659 467
Q-Life	1800 184 527 (3pm to midnight)

Do not confront the perpetrator

If they ask you to confront the perpetrator with them, think about your personal and professional boundaries. This is not your role.

Debrief

Responding to a disclosure of abuse can be overwhelming. If it has occurred as part of your work role, consider speaking to your supervisor as they may be able to help you access services paid for by your organisation.

You will be in a better position to support this person if you get support for yourself.

Referral Pathways

Support for the person after sharing their story is important. Check with them if they already have supports (personal and professional) and whether they'd like your help in finding professional support. Offer the crisis numbers listed at the top of this page if appropriate.

You can also contact Redress Support Services for guidance. These services are free and confidential services who can support survivors before, during and after a redress claim. Services can provide practical and emotional support, legal advice and financial counselling.

Details of the current Redress Support Services can be found on the
National Redress website:

<https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/support>

or by phoning the National Redress Scheme on 1800 737 377

