

DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

When a victim speaks of his suffering, he is often more disturbed by the reaction of the person they are disclosing to than his existing wounds. The first response to disclosing abuse can often make a significant difference – get it wrong and the victim may never talk about this for a very long time if ever.

Research shows that many boys and men often wait for up to twenty years before telling anyone about what happened. Some of the reasons for this are that they are not sure who it is safe to tell, and/or because they feel deeply ashamed.

Many boys and men also know that they will not be believed, or may be mocked, judged or accused of being gay. Boys and men experiencing abuse have little to gain from speaking out and so remain silent. We can change this by learning how to respond sensitively to the needs of any victim or survivor of sexual abuse.

Training helps develop skills and positive responses that are helpful but the information below is important if you want to help a male survivor take that important first step to recovery.

- **Listen:** you don't need to give advice or press him for extra details – this can be unhelpful. Allow him to express his emotions and explain in his own time.
- **Believe:** telling you his story shows that he places great trust in you – so don't question the truth about what he says. Do not suggest it is not possible or tell him this is a “normal” thing and not therefore not serious. Let him know you believe him and take it seriously.
- **Respect** his choices and don't make him do things – even if you think you know best!
- **Encourage** him to access support from safe people who might be helpful. Ask him what he needs right now but avoid forcing him to do things.
- **Support** him by offering practical assistance like your company, help with transport, contacting organizations, medical services, accommodation and meals
- **Safety** – if there is an immediate risk to his safety, ask him what he needs right now to make him feel safe and try to help him achieve that
- **Confidentiality** – it is vital that you respect his right to confidentiality and not tell other people who do not need to know. If he is a child and needs protecting under Child Protection Policies and legislation you may need to contact someone safe from an NGO or other organisation to help. Always clearly explain what you are doing and why you are doing it – help him to feel part of the process.
- **Keep calm** – listening to distressing stories can make us feel a range of strong emotions but be unhelpful to him – so be aware of your own feelings.
- **Arrange follow up** – make plans to meet or talk again as soon as you can. Reassure him that he is not alone and that help is available from people that believe and care about him.
- **Look after yourself** – neither of you need to face this alone, there are people who can support you both. Call our office and talk confidentially to a member of our team or make an appointment to visit and find out more.