

# Do's and Don'ts When a Child Reports Abuse

If a child discloses he or she has been abused or neglected, you may feel outrage, shock, disgust or helplessness. These feelings are normal.

A trusted adult, it is important to keep your composure and focus on how the child is feeling. It's a huge step for a child to come forward and share what has happened.

## DO:

- Find a private place to talk.
- Let the child speak. Listen without judgment.
- Tell the child that you *believe him or her*.
- Say the abuse *was not his or her fault*.
- Let the child know *you will seek help to stop the abuse*.
- Thank the child *for trusting you with this sensitive information*.
- Let the child know he or she *did the right thing telling you*.

## Do NOT:

- *Promise you will keep the information between the two of you.*
- *Press the child* for details. Instead, respect his or her privacy.
- *Put words in his or her mouth.* Instead, listen to what the child says.
- *Place blame* or try to investigate. This is not the time for questioning.
- *Share the child's information* with anyone unable to directly help the child.
- *Overreact.* He or she may stop talking. You must control your emotions.
- *Criticize the child* or abuser.

**Child abuse can be devastating.**  
Admitting it happened can be difficult, too.  
**Be respectful, attentive and supportive**  
when a child tells you about abuse.

*Reports of alleged abuse and/or neglect can be made to the  
Virginia State Hotline for Child Abuse by calling 1-800-552-7096*