

## **Responding to a Child's Report of Abuse**

- Take the child seriously when he/she tells the story.
- Avoid judgmental statements such as, "I think you just had a bad dream."
- Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story; since this may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with the child.
- Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way the child reports it.
- Do not make promises to the child that you will not tell anyone what has been shared with you.
- Remind the child that whatever happened was not his/her fault.
- Remind the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened to him/her.
- Tell the child that you want to find help so that the incident can be prevented from happening again.
- Do not offer a child a reward for telling the story or promise a gift if the child tells another adult.
- Reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint; instead, share with the child that other people need to know what happened, and they will talk to the child later.
- Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child's underwear or clothing; only observe those bruises that are accessible. In some communities, removing a child's clothing even to confirm a report of abuse is violation of the law.
- Do not investigate the child's story; rather, listen to the story and take notes immediately afterwards while it is still fresh in your memory.
- Do not tell the child he/she has been abused.
- Offer to support the child and remind the child that you care about him/her.
- Follow through in consecutive weeks and months by speaking to the child and offering support.

