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Comfort for the Parent & Family

Hearing that your child was sexually abused is nearly as devastating as a death in a family. Many families cannot imagine how a person could do something as horrendous as sexually violating a child. We have found at ReClaim Global that this discovery can cause great emotional upheaval inside families.

Learning how to handle and accept your emotions during this time can be a very healthy process. Families need to give themselves permission to heal from the shocking discovery of abuse. The following are some tips that will help you.

1. If your child(ren) was sexually abused give yourself permission to be shocked. Sexual abuse is NOT normal. It should never happen to a child. Learning about sexual abuse in families can cause tempers to flare, depression, emotional upheavals, anxiety, fights, arguments or splits in opinions. On some occasions, opposite side development occurs where some family members will believe the child while others may not. In all of this — keep yourself focused. This happened to your child and it was wrong. Period. Do not let anyone budge you off of this position.
2. Remember your war is not with others and their varying opinions about what should be done. Your war should only be directed at the perpetrator(s) and making sure that you do everything in your power to get him/her put away.
3. Do not double think or over think the issues – meaning when you report the molester, do not overwhelm yourself with thoughts of what the family will do or what it will cost him/her. You must focus on one thing, which is making sure he/she does not get to other children. That is the ONLY right thing to do.
4. These decisions are hard and may be accompanied with feelings of sadness, loneliness, isolation, and grief. It is okay to cry. Allow yourself to experience this and work with a trained counselor.
5. It is very common to think about the details concerning the molestation, specifically what happened, how it happened to such a small child, how horrific it was to your child(ren), and how it physically hurt the child's body. That is also normal. It is a pictorial nightmare to have these images burst forth from our heart and brain. This is also a healthy process but you cannot dwell on this. The guidance of a professional can help you put these images in their proper place.
6. One way a parent can put these images in their proper place is to not dwell on what the perpetrator did, but rather focus on the actual innocence of a child. Always remind yourself that the child is still very, very innocent. Do not project any bad images that arise in your mind towards your child. This did not happen to you, this happened to the child, and the child deserves to hear from you that he/she did nothing wrong.
7. You will likely be able to go back and your hindsight will become 20/20. Most parents do suspect sexual abuse is happening, but they wrestle with the idea that this just could not be possible. When the information of sexual abuse is brought forth and the parent starts connecting the thoughts that they have had about the behavior of the child or the perpetrator(s) — the parent will then start self-blaming.
8. Just like it is NOT the child's fault, in some cases, it is also NOT the parent's fault for not investigating

the possibility that sexual abuse is occurring. For many parents, as it should be, the thought of sexual abuse is such an unrealistic idea that they just cannot bring that into the forefront of their possibilities. That is normal, too. So you should NOT blame yourself.

9. You have to take one position here and that is to do everything in your power to make sure you, your family, and especially the child moves towards a new pathway of healing and wholeness. This will require some difficult steps for you, e.g., reporting the perpetrator(s); handling the opposing views of the family; the confusion of the legal process, which takes time; the denial of the perpetrator(s) and the venom that he/she can target at you; the loyalty and love that maybe you or the child may have; the guilt that you have of taking the parent away from the child; and the financial loss you may suffer — all of these issues do not matter. You should maintain one goal. Your responsibility is your child(ren) and no one else. He/She deserves to heal, and if you do not get that help for him/her, no one will.

10. Make sure you get sufficient emotional support for yourself. Blog on the Internet, get help from support groups, read all of the literature offered from ReClaim Global, work with the school and other counselors to get your child the help he/she may need.

11. Your child(ren) may blame you for not protecting them. The other children in the home might blame you for not keeping the secret quiet with questions like, “Why did our daddy have to go away?” The mother of the perpetrator may help her son with legal defense money and her nonchalant attitude might hurt you. Let it go, remain on your course. Remain faithful to the process and protect the rights of your child(ren).

12. Sometimes sexual abuse causes permanent breaks in families. This should bring no shame to you at all. That is on them — not on you. You just keep focused to what is needed. All lepers should be put outside the camp. EVERY FAMILY DESERVES A HERO.

13. In this process, there is a big possibility that others might come forth and say this perpetrator(s) molested them too. You may experience anger here because had that person reported this perpetrator he/she may not have ever gotten to your child(ren). Be careful to not allow this anger towards them distract you from ultimately helping your child and protecting other children.

14. Remind yourself that you and your child can get through this and that restoration of a family can happen. Get spiritual help if needed but do not let spiritual advisors confuse the needs of forgiving the perpetrator(s) with your responsibility to prevent him/her from creating more victims. Remember some spiritual advisors are very unskilled when it comes to helping victims of sexual abuse.

15. A report of sexual abuse by your child may cause you much confusion and even personal doubt. Some women’s personal self-esteem is even affected and she may wonder why her spouse/boyfriend “loved” her daughter more than her. It is not unusual for a mother, especially, to wonder why she was not “enough” for her spouse. While ReClaim Global has heard mothers confess these feelings, it actually comes from a place inside them that is broken. A perpetrator does not choose a child over a spouse. They have sex with a child because they are sick, very sick. The wife has nothing to do with it. It is his sickness that drives him to do such unconscionable activities. No woman could ever be enough for him because his lust is for children.

16. The difference between a mother and father’s feelings towards sexual abuse can be significantly different. More often than not we see a father wants to get his “hands” on the perpetrator, while a mother wants to hold and rock her child. Both feelings are normal; nevertheless, neither one of them should ever be acted out. It is obvious that you do not want two people in jail, a father and the perpetrator. A child who has been sexually abused typically will not accept the rocking and cuddling by a mother. Parents understanding this and finding other ways to get their emotional needs met is critical. The most important thing is to stay united against the perpetrator and FOR the child. Of course this depends on the age of the child. An older child will feel very awkward acknowledging and discussing the details of sexual abuse with his/her parents. It is best to leave that up to a professional. You reassuring your child and getting hugs is good for the both of you. However, do not expect that child to

show the significant devastation that you feel about the abuse.

17. Take time to breathe and know this too shall pass. Your family can be whole again. Mark a day where you will put it behind you. Sometimes the best time to do that is a few weeks after the trial.

“Crying is an option for any parent who finds their child has been sexually abused. Anger is an option, also. But, it must be expressed in an appropriate, non-dangerous manner. Working outside the protocol of how sexual abuse cases should be properly handled is never an option, and if it is done it can ultimately cause more damage to the child and to the family. Therefore, follow protocol to get you and your child the help you need.” - Dr. Kaye Smith