

THE GROOMING PROCESS: STEPS THE ABUSER TAKES TO SET UP CHILDREN

Some parents wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children. These include:

1. **Seeking out an approachable child:** Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.
2. **Establishing a relationship with the child:** Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteer for child care duty, become their “buddy,” or buy them candy or presents.
3. **Breaking down the child’s resistance to touch:** Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.
4. **Finding ways to isolate a child:** Abusers find excuses to be alone with children so they can molest them. For example, they may baby-sit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.
5. **Blaming the child and keeping them secret:** Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won’t tell. They use statements like these:
 - “You know you like the way I touch you.”
 - “If you tell, people will think you are bad.”
 - “If you tell our ‘special secret,’ I will go to jail.”
 - “If you tell your mother, she won’t love you anymore.”

Reference: [Helping Your Child Recover from Sexual Abuse](#) by Caren Adaras, M.A. & Jennifer Fay, M.A.

Rental Assistance

INCA	580-795-2372
Grace Center	580-223-3252
Red Cross (seasonal)	580-223-8203

Substance Abuse

Arbuckle Life Solutions	580-226-1656
Alcohol Anonymous, Ardmore	580-223-1883
Behavioral Medicine	580-223-5400
Broadway House	580-226-3252
Drug/Alcohol Treatment Line	800-888-0383
Mental Health Service of South, OK	580-223-5838
Morning Star (adolescent females)	580-276-3153
Reach Out	800-682-4357
US Center for Substance Abuse	800-662-4357
New Vision	580-931-2238

Telephone

Lifeline Program & Link-Up America	800-464-7928
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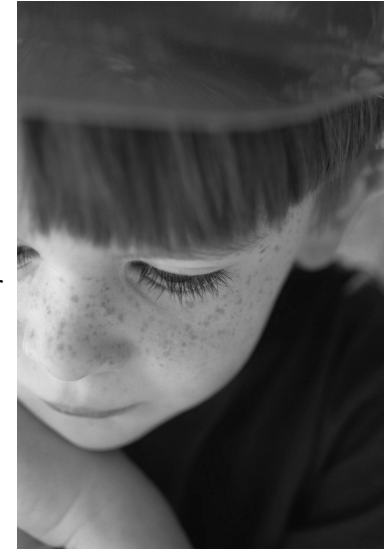
Transportation

SORTS	580-226-5730
Greyhound Bus	580-223-7600
Sooner Ride	800-404-4500

SIGNS SOMETIMES SHOWN BY ABUSED CHILDREN

Children may have some of the following symptoms as a result of abuse:

- Nausea/upset stomach
- Crying
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Withdrawal from others
- Clinging to parents
- Change in school performance
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Lying
- Change in appetite
- Nightmares
- Anger and mood changes
- Avoidance of school/friends
- Aggressiveness
- Rebelliousness
- Fears and phobias
- Attention-seeking



Community agencies usually offer services to help children overcome the effects of trauma. Children react differently depending on age, extent of abuse, support from others and their relationship with the offenders. *The single most important factor affecting the child's recovery is the level of support from the mother or caregiver.* It is this simple. If you do everything you can to support your child, the chances of recovery are much greater. If you feel torn between loyalty to your child and loyalty to the offender, find a professional to help you sort it out.

HUD	405-609-8401
Mary Niblack Apartments	580-226-5634
Meadowbrook Mobile	580-226-0506
Northpark Apartments (Marietta)	580-276-9296
Orchard Apartments	580-223-0038
Rockford Garden Apartments	580-226-5921
USDA Rural Development (Pauls Valley)	405-238-6767

(Rent based on income)

WillowBrook Apartments	580-223-3350
Big 5 Apartments	580-223-3739
Chickasaw Housing	580-226-2095
Pecan Creek Apartments	580-223-6837
Chickasaw Towers (senior citizens)	580-226-4590
Lone Terris Apartments (Lone Grove)	580-657-3669

Legal

Legal Aid	580-226-4863
Oklahoma Crime Victims Compensation	800-745-6098

Prescriptions

Asbury United Methodist Church	580-223-4837
INCA	580-795-2372
Grace Center	580-223-3252
Big 5 (upon availability)	580-223-4613

HOW TO ACT TOWARD YOUR CHILD

Provide safety, love and support. Let them know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't coach or pressure your child to talk about things.

Some things you can say that will really help your child:

- I believe you
- I know it's not your fault.
- I'm glad I know about it.
- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- I will take care of you.
- I'm not sure what will happen next.
- Nothing about YOU made this happen. It has happened to other children, too.
- You don't need to take care of me.
- I am upset, but not with you.
- I'm angry at the person who did this.



- I'm sad. You may see me cry. That's all right. I will be able to take care of you. I'm not mad at you.
- I don't know why he did it. He has a problem.
- You can still love someone but hate what they did to you.

Workforce Oklahoma	580-223-3291
Grace Center	580-223-3252

Food Assistance

Ardmore Soup Kitchen (M-F 6:00pm)	580-226-2870
Big 5	580-223-4613
Loaves and Fishes	580-223-2399
House of Prayer (Tue morning)	580-226-3430
INCA	580-795-2372
Salvation Army (M-F 12:30pm)	580-223-6176

HIV

AIDS/HIV Hotline	800-535-2437
Care Point	800-285-2273

Housing

Family Shelter	580-226-3750
Department of Human Services	580-490-3600
Ardmore Habitat for Humanity	580-223-1540
Ardmore Village	580-223-4174
Ashbrooke Place	580-224-9674
Highland Park Apartments	580-223-1011
Huntington Falls Apartments	580-223-6466

Dental Hygiene Screenings SOTC 580-223-2070
x 241

Disability

Big 5 Community Services 580-924-5331
 Dept of Rehabilitation Services 580-924-2677
 Handicapped Concerns/Assistance 580-522-8224
 Mercy Memorial Rehabilitation Center 580-220-6602
 Red River Rehab 580-924-8579
 Vocational Rehabilitation 580-332-2785
 Sunshine Industries 580-226-1444

Education

Ardmore Higher Education Center 580-223-3411
 Educational Opportunity Center 580-223-4476
 Mid-America Technology Center 580-232-5580
 Southern Oklahoma Technology Center 580-223-2070
 Southeastern Ok State-Continuing Ed 580-745-2384
 Take Two Academy 580-221-3037
 Adult Education and GED Classes 580-221-3030

Employment Services

Big Five 580-223-4613
 Sunshine Industries 580-226-1444
 OESC 800-980-9675

Some things you can do:

- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible
- See that your child receives therapy as soon as possible. Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.
- Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it all yourself. Contact the Family Advocate at the C/SARA Foundation or DHS for resources.
- Teach your child the rules of personal safety. Tell them what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable way.
- Be careful not to question your child about the abuse. If you do, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser. Specially trained professionals at the Abbott House will interview your child to obtain the necessary information without harming the case or further traumatizing him/her. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.
- Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect you, that person and the child.
- Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.
- Never coach or advise your child on how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators. This could seriously damage the case.
- Avoid the suspect.
- Your child may need an extra sense of physical security. Stay close and assure your child you will keep him/her safe.
- Remember to give attention to your other children.

HELPFUL THOUGHTS ABOUT PARENTING DURING TRAUMA

Families that are dealing with the trauma of abuse may have many questions concerning parenting at this time. We will address some of them here. Of course, this will not replace counseling or parenting classes that will help you deal with this problem over time.

Investigators are rightfully cautioning you not to talk with the child about the abuse as not to taint the testimony of the child. It is wise to be available to listen without comment. Your child needs to know that you believe and are supporting them. If they initiate a conversation about what happened reflect what they are saying with hmmm or Ooh. Good eye contact and your complete attention are all they need right now. Ending the conversation with I love you is most important. If older children bring up information you have not heard before, it should be brought to the attention of the Detective you are working with. He will determine if he needs to speak with the child again.

Your child's behavior may be changing. They may exhibit excessive anger or fear, hit objects or people, whine or refuse to go certain places. They may not want to be away from you. Acknowledging their feelings, expressing the safety of the place they will be staying without you and leaving a phone number where they can call you, are all ways to decrease their anxiety thus their behaviors at this critical time.

Your child may have difficulty sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting or other regressive behaviors. You may want to give them a stuffed animal or leave a night light on. Sometimes soft music on a radio or cd may help regulate their sleep pattern. You may need to make brief trips to their bedside when they are restless at night to take them to the bathroom or just tuck them in again. As your child begins to feel safe again these behaviors will improve without your having to punish your child for their reaction to fear.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Child Health

Carter County Health Department	580-223-9705
Pregnancy Resource Center	580-223-7218
Prenatal Care Hotline	580-311-2229
Soon Care	580-490-3600
WIC	580-226-8289
Children's Shelter	580-226-1838

Child Support Enforcement

Oklahoma DHS	800-522-2922
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Clothing

Salvation Army	580-223-6167
Sharing Basket (Tue 9-12)	580-226-9907
Sunshine Industries	580-226-1444
St Mary Thrift Store (M, Th, F 10-2)	580-223-8033
First United Methodist (Mon 1-3)	580-223-5390
Enon Baptist Association (Thurs only)	580-223-5519

Dental

D-Dent	800-522-9510
Good Shepherd Community Clinic	580-223-3411

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

You are going through a very difficult time, and you probably feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of other people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important, so you need to find time to do something just for you and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult to do, but it is the best interest of you and your child.

Scheduling your own time and space will help you gain or regain a sense of your own identity. Take the time to nurture yourself. Here is a plan that may work for you:

Step 1: Schedule your self-care (exact time, date and place) on your calendar.

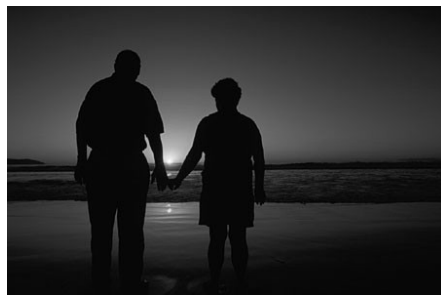
Step 2: Decide what you'll do.

Step 3: Tell anyone who needs to know that you will be gone for the time you've set. Explain that this is your personal time and that you'll be back later.

Step 4: Take care of details, such as finding child care, arranging transportation, etc.

Step 5: Enjoy Yourself!

Some suggested activities: journaling, take a walk, have lunch with a friend, go to the movies, go out to dinner, join an exercise class, take a drive, and last, but equally important, join a support group.



This trauma does not only affect your child. The entire family can be disrupted. You as a caretaker may also have many strong feelings that are expressed as irritability and difficulty sleeping. Some parents may even blame the child during this adjustment period. Having a friend to talk to and taking one day at a time are helpful ways to take care of yourself so you can take care of your children.

The most important thing is to access counseling for your child and yourself as soon as possible. Professional counselors can help you understand and adjust to this major life event without blame or judgment and tighten the bond between you and your child. Parenting programs are very helpful for all of us who are parenting in the 21st century, even more so for homes where safety and trust have been disrupted by some form of abuse.

L Listen to your child, sit down and invite them to talk about anything. Listen when they are talking about movies, TV, friends, school, anything. They will learn you are open and willing to share their thoughts without blame or taking away their feelings. Listen as though you are listening to your best friend. Our children don't want our advice; they want to know we support them in their feelings.

O Observe your child, watch their body language when they are talking, watch them play and when watching TV. Are they constantly moving? How long do they stay interested? What do they really like? What makes them anxious? Are they trying to tell you something with their behavior? Can you tell when they need a change of activities because they are getting anxious?

V Visit with your child, talk to them, seek them out for conversation. Let them know what your feelings are and how you handle them. Give them words for their feelings. Remember any feelings are all right; it's how you act them out that makes the difference. Keep conversations simple; be alert for opportunities to listen to your child share.

E Empathy is a neat word for understanding and supporting but not taking away the other person's ability to care for them. Empathy says I am here to stand beside you and support your feelings but I am not telling you how to feel. I will tell you ways I have handled similar problems, but not criticize the way you choose to handle yours. I will keep you from harming yourself and others, and direct you to safer alternatives without condemnation.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

It is very difficult to predict what will happen for you and your child after the report has been made and the case is in the legal system. Sometimes the chance to speak up about what happened can be a good thing for the child—whether or not the abuser is convicted. Many children are relieved to think that someone more powerful will tell the offender he was wrong and help protect them. For other children, however, the events following the report can be scary.

You can make this process easier for your child by working with, and not against, the authorities. The legal system may be able to protect your child from future unsupervised contact with the offender. Working through the legal system is also a way to keep other children safe, because many offenders abuse more kids than those they have actually been caught molesting. In addition, most offenders do better in treatment with the force of the legal system behind them. It is a powerful way to hold the offender accountable for what he has done.

FACTS ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION

At times, you may be asked to wait while your child is being questioned. Being left out of some of the proceedings can make you feel as if you are not very important to the process or to your child. Please be assured that you are very important. In fact, you may be the key to understanding what has happened. Many interviewers, however, prefer that the parents not be present during the interview because they feel that more accurate information can be obtained if you are not there. In your presence, your child may be unwilling to tell important details because he/she wants to spare you from hearing them. And sometimes parents can't control their emotions at what they hear, or they may place pressure on the child to tell in a way that can complicate the legal process.

COMMENTS YOU CAN EXPECT FROM OTHERS ABOUT THE ABUSE

“What exactly did he do to your child?”

“Are you sure your child didn't make it up?”

“Why didn't you know it was happening?”

“If it were my child, I'd just move away.”

“Your poor child must be feeling really guilty.”

Remember you don't owe anyone an explanation. “I'd rather not talk about it” is an acceptable response. Or simply say, “It's been a very difficult time for all of us.” “I appreciate your concern” is another response you might want to use. Or it may be easier to just nod as an acknowledgment of what someone says.

Keep in mind that most people have very little knowledge about sexual abuse. For example, in response to the comment about your child feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel unnecessary guilt in these cases until they are assured that they are not responsible in any way for what happened. As a parent, you might also be experiencing guilt, and as a result, you may feel defensive. In that case, a good response is, “Parents do their best, but we're only human.”

Adults are the people most likely to say something to your child. You may want to tell your child that if someone says, “I'm sorry about what happened to you,” he/she should respond with a simple, “Thank you.” Let your child know that he/she doesn't have to respond to any comments or questions. He or she could say “My mom and/or dad told me not to talk about it now.” If other children comment or tease, your child might say, “It could happen to anyone, including you.”

Reference: *Your Child Has Been Molested*, by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case

WHAT TO SAY TO OTHERS

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know with which relatives or friends you will be discussing it with and let your child have some choice about who is told.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way than he or she could.



If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about your child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. Their reactions may include hysteria, horror, obvious distress, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest or unnecessary questioning for intimate details. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy. On the other hand, be careful not to make it a dirty secret, as this could cause more shame in your child.

Most interviewers will take the time to make sure your child is comfortable without you. This means letting your child see you with the interviewer and making sure that your child knows where you will be during the interview. It should be made clear to the child that you are available, if necessary.

The legal process often moves at its own pace, different from your child's need to heal. Emotional wounds will be reopened by the various proceedings, which take place over a period of one or two years. The court date may be delayed over and over again. You have no control over this. It is best to try to be patient, and to remember that people are working to gain the best outcome for you and your child. The team approach to these cases keeps the process as simple as possible.

The legal system wasn't designed with the needs of children in mind. The basis of our criminal justice system is found in the Constitution, which was written more than 200 years ago, and the system is designed primarily to protect the rights of the accused, not the victim. The rights of the child victim are far less defined than the rights of the accused abuser. However, efforts are being made across the country to *improve* the legal system's response to child abuse. For example, in many communities:

- Professionals in these cases are trained annually on a variety of topics regarding child abuse.
- The number of times the child has to tell about the abuse is being reduced.
- Community agencies involved in these cases are making efforts to coordinate their services and responses.
- Legislation is being sponsored to change the law and provide more protection for the child victims, both in and out of the courtroom

HOW THE LEGAL SYSTEM RESPONDS TO ABUSE

The legal system can be confusing and frightening to children and families. Part of this confusion stems from the fact that two different “legal systems” can be working on the same case at the same time. These two systems are the “criminal” system and the “civil” system. In addition, there are two different court systems that can work on a child abuse case, Criminal Court and District Court. Both courts may work on the same case at the same time, but they have different purposes.

The *Criminal Court* is concerned primarily with guilt or innocence of the accused and often uses a trial to decide on the suspect’s guilt or innocence. The criminal trial focuses on issues such as:

- Is there evidence to prove the child was abused?
- What illegal acts occurred?
- Was there a confession?
- If proven guilty, what punishment should the offender receive?

The *District Court* is concerned primarily with the safety of the child and focuses on issues like custody, supervised visitation and counseling. A number of different court hearings can be held to decide these issues. The decisions in the civil system do not depend on whether the criminal system finds guilt or not.

HOW TO TELL YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE LEGAL OUTCOME

It is best to be honest and direct with your child. How much you explain depends on your child’s age and what he/she can understand. The most important thing is let the child know that you are proud of him/her for being brave.

When the case is completed, you may feel let down or have a period of depression. It happens to most parents, even if it is a positive experience. If your child hears you express disappointment in the outcome, your child may think you are disappointed in him/her. Instead, find a supportive friend with whom you can share your feelings and frustration.

Remember, you have done your best in trying to prevent further abuse and hold the offender responsible for what he/she did. Even if the case was dropped, this is a major accomplishment.

SOME THINGS YOU CAN SAY TO YOUR CHILD IF THE ALLEGED OFFENDER IS NOT HELD LEGALLY ACCOUNTABLE

- Just because they didn’t find _____ guilty, that doesn’t mean they didn’t believe you. It’s just that they have to follow the court’s rules.
- You may be wondering how someone can do something wrong or against the law and not be punished. It doesn’t make sense to me, either.
- It doesn’t matter what the court process did. What matters is that you did what you needed to do - you told.
- You are safe. You have been very brave.

LIMITS OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Always remember that the well-being of your child should be the objective. Don't lose yourself in the legal system, because it is only one step in the process, and it is not essential to your child's recovery. The best advice is to enter the legal system without expectations, because the more you expect from the system, the harder the experience is likely to be.

Another thing to remember: day after day, therapists who talk with adult survivors of child sexual abuse hear them say, "My parent's didn't do anything about it." However, if you do everything you can to help your child understand that you will not tolerate abuse, he/she will never say that. *This is very important.*

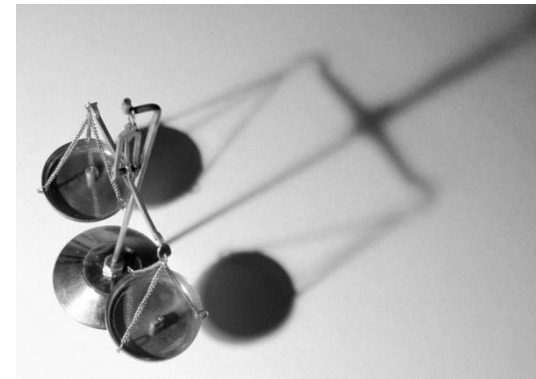
Celebrate when it is over. No matter what the outcome, conviction or not, tell the child it is over. You and the child did your best, worked hard and put in a lot of time. Celebrate a job well done.



THE INVESTIGATION

Following are the basic steps to an investigation of child sexual abuse.

1. Someone reports suspicion of abuse to authorities, either law enforcement or the Department of Human Services.
2. Interviews with the child are conducted, usually at the Mary Abbott Children's House. A forensic interviewer will do the interview.
3. Law Enforcement and/or DHS will continue the investigation, which will include an interview with the alleged offender, if possible.
4. A team of professionals will meet to discuss the case and decide how to manage it. The team consists of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, social workers, and mental health professionals.
5. The case may be referred to District or Criminal Court, or some other plan may be made for managing the case.



THE CRIMINAL COURT PROCESS

1. Using evidence discovered through the investigation and the input received from the team, the DA's office determines if there is enough evidence to take the case before a grand jury.
2. The grand jury consists of 18 anonymous citizens. They decide if there is enough evidence (probable cause) to take the case to trial (called a "true bill") or not (called a "no bill"). They make this decision by listening to the evidence gathered during the investigation and then voting on how the case should proceed. This voting is done in secret, and it is against the law for anyone to reveal what the grand jury has done or why they did or did not "true bill" a case.
3. If enough evidence is found, it can take up to a year for a case to be placed on court docket for trial. The case can also be settled by agreement without a trial. This is commonly known as "plea bargaining." Most cases are settled this way. A "plea bargain" is reached when the District Attorney, the victim, the defendant, the defense attorney and the judge agree on a charge and a sentence. The offender may have to pay fines, do jail time and/or be placed on probation with required counseling. In a plea bargain a conviction will appear on his record and he will have to register as a sex offender.
4. Even if the case does not go to trial, it is important to remember the child and the family may need some help in dealing with the after effects of your experience.

GETTING READY FOR COURT

If there is to be a trial, your Court School and/or ADA will take your child to the courtroom and show him/her around. You will also be involved in this process. Giving the child an early look at the courtroom and preparing him/her on what to expect can ease some of the child's fears, which may include.

- Seeing the abuser again
- Not wanting to go
- Wanting it to be over
- Wondering where you will be

If you are a witness, you will not be allowed in the courtroom when your child is testifying. In some cases, it might be easier on your child not to have you there. However, your child should never be in the courtroom without a trusting friendly face, so make sure your DHS case worker, Family Advocate, a best friend, or a relative stays with your child at all times

WORKING THE SYSTEM

The system is responsible for protecting children and holding offenders accountable. The more information and cooperation you give to the team of professionals working in the system, the better job they can do on the case.

Here are some basic tips for working with professionals in the system:

- **Be calm and reassuring to your child.** Don't coach your child on what to say. It is important for the story to come out in your child's words and in your child's own time
- **When you are asked for information, try to provide as many facts as you can.** Cases are built on the four W's: who, what, when, and where. Don't try to guess if you don't know the answer to a question - it is much better to say you don't know.
- **On the other hand, your feelings are important.** Feelings are valuable in giving investigators insight, so tell how you feel and why you feel that way. Although only facts are allowed in court, feelings can help give investigators ideas for how to proceed.
- **Always be honest, even though the truth may not seem favorable to yourself or others.** In the long run, you will be much better off.
- **Try not to overreact.** It is a difficult time and emotions are probably running high. Losing control can hurt the case and overshadow the needs of the innocent victim, your child.

- **Love, support and protect your child at all costs.** If the alleged offender is a significant person to you, it can be very difficult to balance your feelings for him with the need to protect your child. Remember that your child has only you to make healthy, protective decisions.
- **Cooperate.** You will probably feel as if investigators are prying into your personal life, but this is necessary and vital to the case and to your child's welfare. The sooner the facts come out, the sooner the case can be resolved and you can return to a more normal life.
- **You may feel that investigators do not care because they avoid showing emotions.** In fact, investigators do care, and part of that caring involves remaining objective and calm in the face of extremely emotional situations.

