

Take care of yourself

Parents and carers can feel a range of emotions when they discover their child has been sexually abused. These may include shock, numbness, confusion, fear, disbelief and anger.

Supporting your child following sexual abuse can be demanding and your child will need lots of support to help them feel protected and secure. This can be emotionally exhausting, and you are only human. It is important that you look after yourself for both you and for your child who will be relying on you. Take time and make space to talk about and reflect upon your feelings. This may be through talking to friends, family or a counsellor.

Positive outcomes

Research tells us that children are more likely to recover from the effects of trauma with the support of a parent/carer. With support, children who have suffered sexual abuse can go on to overcome trauma with positive outcomes for their mental health and emotional well-being, ultimately taking back control of their life.

Let's work together

There may be times when your child needs therapeutic support. The PSA service gives children the chance to explore their thoughts and feelings around their experiences of abuse in a safe place and involves parents and carers within this support wherever possible. Therapeutic support aims to improve well-being and mental health and to look at new ways of coping and regaining control.

Family Action PSA Service

You can find out more information about the PSA service and how to refer by calling **0116 213 8334** or visiting our website: www.family-action.org.uk/psa



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Child sexual abuse and trauma:

and trauma:

A parents guide to supporting their child



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Understanding trauma following child sexual abuse

Some children may suffer emotional shock (trauma) following a distressing experience such as sexual abuse.

Children can show symptoms of trauma at any time. This may be in the immediate weeks or months following the abuse or even years later. Some children may never show signs of trauma and some may never need professional support. Children can show signs of trauma in different ways. Here are just some of the physical and emotional effects of trauma:

- Nightmares and/or sleep disturbances
- Low self-esteem
- Bedwetting/soiling
- A child may feel anxious, angry, depressed, guilty or scared

How to support your child

You can help your child by supporting them to feel safe and to find ways to cope with and manage their feelings and emotions. Here are some ideas:

Talk

It is important to allow your child to choose how much they want to talk. Let your child know that you are there for them to talk to you. Be a good listener and remind them they are not to blame

Reassure

Let your child know that you are there for them. This will help them to feel safe and secure

Quality time

Focus on fun things you can do together. This might be going for walks, colouring or playing a game. This will help your child to feel relaxed, which helps to build emotional strength

Stability

Children thrive on stability and the best way to provide this is through routines and boundaries. This will help a child feel secure at times when the unknown can raise anxieties

Relaxation and coping skills

Helping your child to develop relaxation and coping strategies can help them manage overwhelming feelings. Here are some examples of strategies that can work:

- Deep breathing exercises can help children relax and calm themselves when they experience stress or frustration
- A relaxing bedtime routine can include a warm bath, story or light yoga
- Writing a journal can also help manage overwhelming feelings. A good idea is to include writing positive affirmations
- Listening to music
- Exercise helps strengthen the brain and makes it more resilient to stress and adversity. This can include fun activities such as cycling, playing on the swings or even a game of tag.

Messages to give to your child

Providing positive and reassuring messages will help your child build resilience.

Try encouraging your child to re-frame their negative thoughts as positive ones using positive affirmations. For example, when they say "I can't" respond with "I will try my best".

When a child has been sexually abused, it is really important that they understand that they are not to blame for what has happened.

Here are some more suggestions for reassuring messages:

- I am always here for you
- You can trust me – I will do what I say
- I'm here if you want to talk
- You are brave
- It's okay to be angry
- What happened was not your fault
- I am listening
- You are strong and you can have a successful life
- You can still achieve your goals
- What has happened to you does not define you
- I love you – no matter what
- You will get through this
- You are a survivor

