

## What are some resources available to help my child?

If your child needs to speak with someone, he/she may reach out for help through the following helplines:



- **Tinkle Friend:** 1800 274 4788 (primary school aged children)
- **CHAT Mental Health Check:** 6493 6500 (16 - 30 years old)
- **Samaritans of Singapore:** 1800 221 4444
- **IMH Mental Health Helpline:** 6389 2222



For professional support, you may seek help from:

- The school counsellor at your child's school
- A counsellor or social worker at your nearest Family Service Centre <https://www.msf.gov.sg/dfcs/familyservice/default.aspx>
- The GP at any polyclinic to obtain a referral to your preferred restructured hospital

## COPING WITH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



\* The information in this brochure was adapted from the following sources:

- Coping with Trauma: Temasek Cares KITS Program (Collaboration between KKH and Temasek Cares)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2014): Complex Trauma, Facts for Caregivers Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Centre for Child Traumatic Stress
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Child Sexual Abuse Committee, (2009): Caring for Kids - What parents need to know about sexual abuse Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Centre for Child Traumatic Stress

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## What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and another individual that involves touching and non-touching behaviours.

### Touching

- Touching of private parts (vagina, penis, breasts, buttocks)
- Putting private parts into mouth
- Putting penis in vagina or buttocks
- Putting fingers or any other objects into private parts

### Non-Touching

- Looking at a child's naked body
- Making a child look at another person's naked body
- Exposing the child to pornography/inappropriate images on different mediums (e.g. phone, computer)
- Taking photos of a child's naked body or private parts

## What are some common reactions after a child experiences sexual abuse?



### Feelings

- Anger
- Fear
- Loneliness
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Self-blame

### Thoughts

- Constantly thoughts about the event
- Poor concentration
- Nightmares

### Body Reactions

- Headache
- Stomachache
- Chest tightness
- Difficulty breathing

### Behavioural Changes

- Difficulties sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Avoiding of people, places or things that remind the child of the event
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Increased sexual knowledge, frequent use of sexual language and/or behaviours that are inappropriate for children of their age

## Why do children not talk about their sexual abuse?

There are many reasons why children remain silent about their abuse. If the abuser is someone the child or family cares about, the child may worry about getting the abuser into trouble. Some children might feel that they had done something to cause the abuse; hence, they worry for themselves. Very young children may not have the language ability to give an articulate account of their experience nor do they have an understanding of the abusive actions. Therefore, **DO NOT TO BLAME** the child for the abuse.

Some other reasons for not speaking up might include:

- Threats of harm towards the child or their family
- Fear of destroying the family's relationship
- Fear of being removed from home
- Fear of being accused of lying
- Shame or guilt
- Fear of upsetting the parents
- Lack of understanding that the abuse was a wrongful act



## What can I do to help my child?

1. Engage your child by doing fun activities like cycling and picnics. Have a conversation about his day as it will help build a close and trusting relationship where they will feel more comfortable to share their worries or concerns with you.
2. Discuss with your child the following matters that is appropriate to their age, culture and religion, to develop healthy sexuality and prevent misinformation:
  - Understanding private body parts, safe touch and safe secrets

### Private Body Parts

Breasts, vagina, penis, buttocks.

#### Safe Touch

Comforting, pleasant and welcomed. e.g. receiving a hug from parents

#### Unsafe Touch

Uncomfortable, unwanted or painful. e.g. being pushed by a bully in school

#### Safe Secrets

A secret that makes you feel excited or happy and are meant to be revealed. e.g. planning a surprise birthday party for your best friend

#### Unsafe Secrets

A secret that makes you feel scared, sad or uncomfortable. e.g. receiving an unsafe touch from a stranger

- Healthy boundaries with different individuals (e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, friends, teachers, strangers)
- Encourage your child to form a safety network
  - Choose supportive adults in their life whom they can trust and are ready to listen when needed
  - Ensure that your child's safety network includes people within and beyond the family circle, in case it is a domestic problem

3. Remain calm and reassuring should your child be keen to tell you about the traumatic experience. Remember not to blame them for the abuse. It may take children weeks, months or even years to fully disclose the sexual abuse.
4. Acknowledge the difficult feelings your child might be experiencing. Encourage them to engage in some activities (e.g. listen to music, keep a journal, watch funny videos) to help themselves feel better. However, if your child does not want to talk about the event, do not force them to do so. Let them know that you will be there to listen when they are ready to talk.
5. Recognise when they are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT)** and respond to their needs:
  - Ensure that your child gets sufficient sleep and rest in order for them to be able to manage stress, uncomfortable feelings and concentrate better
  - Limit screen time and stop all screen activities at least two hours before bedtime
  - Avoid consuming caffeinated drinks after 2pm
  - Engage in a relaxing activity before bedtime
  - Keep to a daily routine as children are comforted when things are familiar and predictable
6. Take time to deal with your own feelings in order to support your child better. It is common to feel angry, sad, guilty and helpless. Do speak with another adult (e.g. close friend, family, religious leader) about your feelings or seek professional support, if necessary.

## When should I consider professional help for my child?

Many children may feel better with the support of family and friends. However, do consider seeking professional help for your child if he/she:

- Continues to feel scared, worried and sad for more than one month after the event
- Is not doing well in school, or does not want to go to school
- Has become withdrawn or depressed

