



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DARWIN

## When a child or young person talks about abuse

### What you can do if a child or young person talks about abuse

When a child or young person tells you something about being harmed, it's important to give them your full attention - without making them feel scared, or to feel they have done something wrong. They may have deliberately decided to tell you, or the information may come out accidentally.

You may feel disgust, sadness, anger or sometimes disbelief. Remember, these are your feelings and the child or young person has their own. You need to put your emotions to one side and be there for the child or young person.

### When a child or young person talks about abuse

When a child or young person talks about being abused they may:

- feel confused, scared, guilty, ashamed, sad, angry or powerless
- not understand that their caregiver's behaviour may be abusive
- believe they are responsible for the abuse
- want to protect the person responsible - and be frightened for them
- want to protect family or their own reputation
- have been threatened with more harm to themselves or others if they tell someone.

### If a child or young person talks to you about being abused

#### *Listen to the child or young person*

- Be calm, patient and listen supportively to the child or young person - let them use their own words and don't interrupt them. Respond sensitively and don't judge. Say: *'Thank you for telling me.'*

#### *Reassure them*

- Help the child or young person feel safe to talk. Reassure them the abuse is not their fault.

#### *Respect them*

- Respect the fact the child or young person may only tell you some details. Acknowledge their bravery and strength. Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Don't ask them lots of questions – Ask: *'Does this still concern or worry you?'*; *'Have you told another adult?'* Leave the investigating and fact finding to trained people.

Tell the child or young person that you will need to talk to someone whose job it is to keep them safe. You should then [make a report](#).

In the case of harm to a child or young person, any adult is obliged to report their belief of harm immediately:

- ***If a belief is held that a child is being, has been, or likely to be abused or neglected by a family member, you are required by law to report their concerns: Territory Families Central Intake Team - 1800 700 250***
- ***If a belief is held that a child is being, has been, or likely to be abused or neglected outside of the family, you are required by law to report their concerns: report directly to the police.***
  - ***If emergency response required, 000.***
  - ***If non-emergency, phone 131 444 to report your concern***
- ***If the offender is engaged in church activities a report must also be made to the Diocesan Integrity Officer / Child Safety Coordinator***

Professional discernment may indicate that a child, young person or vulnerable adult should be referred to a professional service such as CatholicCare NT or a similar agency for support. This decision may be taken in consultation between the Diocesan Integrity Officer and/or Director of Professional Standards and CatholicCare NT.

In the case of **domestic and family violence**, any adult is obliged to report to police if they believe:

- A person has caused or is likely to cause serious physical harm\* to someone they are in a domestic or family relationship with and/or
- The life or safety of a person is under serious or imminent threat because of domestic or family violence that has been, is being or is about to be committed
  
- **If reporting Domestic and Family Violence: report directly to the police.**
  - **If emergency response required, 000.**
  - **If non-emergency, phone 131 444 to report your concerns**

\* *Serious physical harm is defined by Section 1A of the Criminal code as: unconsciousness, pain, disfigurement, infection with a disease and any physical contact that a person might reasonable object physical harm to in the circumstances, whether or not the person was aware of it at the time. Serious harm (including the cumulative effect of more than one form of harm) is defined as: anything that endangers, or is likely to endanger a person's life, or that is or is likely to be significant and longstanding. You will need to make a decision to determine if the injury or circumstances fit within the definition of serious physical harm.*

There is no mandatory reporting for domestic and family violence that falls outside the definition of "serious physical harm". This does not change your professional obligations to provide support, safety planning and appropriate referral of persons in need of help in this area.

#### **Protection of person making report**

The Northern Territory of Australia Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 states that:

*(1)A person acting in good faith in making a report under section 26 is not civilly or criminally liable, or in breach of any professional code of conduct:*

- (a) for making the report; or*
- (b) for disclosing any information in the report.*

This same protection applies to mandatory reporting of domestic and family violence under the amendment to the Domestic and Family Violence Act 2009.

Situations involving harm and reporting harm or abuse can become volatile very quick for all involved and may place everyone in that situation at risk of harm if not considered carefully. Safety to the Church staff, specifically the person/s engaging with the vulnerable adult must take first priority and the Police should be called without hesitation on 000 if there is an escalation in behaviour and safety for any person is compromised.

**You cannot offer meaningful assistance to a vulnerable person if your own safety and well-being is compromised.**

Debriefing and pastoral care after a disclosure of harm is received and reported is very important for your own self-care and well-being.