

Responding to Disclosure of Child Abuse and Neglect

What is disclosure:

- Disclosure of abuse is usually a process and rarely a one-off event. Once a child or young person discloses abuse, they are more inclined to disclose the abuse again.
- Age and developmental stages may influence the child or young person of how disclosure happens. Younger children are more spontaneous when disclosing abuse, while older children or young people usually take longer to disclose abuse.
- There are three main types of disclosure: **Indirect disclosure** (one or more ambiguous statements which imply something is wrong), **Direct disclosure** (direct statements of what is occurring or has occurred) and **Behavioural disclosure** (deliberate or inadvertent behaviour that indicates something is wrong).

Responding to a disclosure of Child abuse and neglect:

When a child or young person discloses abuse, it is important that you respond appropriately. When receiving a disclosure:

- Be calm, patient, and professional. Do not show negative emotions and allow the child or young person to lead the conversation.
- Move to a suitable location, which is quiet and where you won't be disturbed.
- If required, attempt to calm the child or young person and reassure them that they are not in trouble, that they have not done anything wrong, and that they are safe.
- Do not interrogate or use probing words to push for additional information.
- Do not worry about saying the 'right' words, just listen actively and be empathetic.
- Validate the child story, tell them you believe them and acknowledge their bravery.
- Explain what will happen next, including that you will have to pass the information to an appropriate authority. Be honest and do not make promises you cannot keep.

After receiving a disclosure:

After receiving a disclosure, you should report the abuse. When in doubt about who to report to, contact WA Police:

- **Emergency: 000** (if the child or young person is at immediate risk of harm)
- **Police Assistance: 131 444**

When reporting make sure you pass on all the information the child or young person has provided you, in their words. Once you have completed reporting and the child is safe:

- Limit the number of people you talk to about the disclosure.
- Do not share any confidential or identifiable information unless necessary.
- Do not confront the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.
- Ensure your own self-care activities are in place to help with vicarious trauma and reaching out if necessary for professional support services.