



Support for family members following a disclosure of sexual abuse.

Research shows that 1 in 3-4 women may have unwanted sexual experiences before the age of 16.

Finding out your daughter or family member has been sexually abused can be very emotional, so this is some information that can help you provide a supportive environment for your daughter and family.

Research shows that most youth will disclose to someone outside the family first, this may be due to fear of the changes that come when others know. Although there are similar themes that arise after a disclosure, no two experiences are the same. Reach out to a specialist service, such as [HELP](#), if you have further questions or wish for further support.



When she tells you...

At [HELP](#) we find a parent's reaction to a disclosure has a significant impact on the way their daughter copes.

It is normal to feel a wide range of emotions, from denial, shock, anger and confusion. Try not to expose your daughter to all of your emotional reactions and processes. Let her know that you are hurting with her but that you don't need her to look after you.

If alcohol or other drugs are involved, this can sometimes blur how adults view responsibility for the sexual abuse. However, we all have the right to be safe wherever we are and it is NOT your daughters fault if she has been sexually abused.

Sometimes when a disclosure is made people may question it's validity. We acknowledge there is a very small percentage of allegations that are made up (always due to other significant factors) but given the prevalence of sexual abuse and the barriers which make it difficult to disclose, we believe all allegations should be investigated.



How she might be feeling...

Many young women feel intimidated, fear, shame and guilt as part of an experience of sexual abuse and become fearful of disclosure, including any attempts to widen the circle of support.

Wherever possible, talk with your daughter before telling others what happened and check out how this may be for her. There are a range of common responses following sexually abusive experiences. Check out [HELP's website www.helpauckland.org.nz](http://www.helpauckland.org.nz) for a full list. Be patient, spend time with her and be as available as possible if she wants to talk.



Ways to support and react to a disclosure.

Providing there is no longer a risk of continued abuse it is best to let your daughter or family member go at her own pace without adding pressure on to report to the Police or CYFs.

Find support for your daughter, or family member and ask her what she needs / would like to do next.

- It is important she feel a sense of control where she can.
- This includes sharing information and shared decision making if possible.

Do not pressure her to talk about what happened or share details in response to your own shock or confusion.

- This can be extremely upsetting and can lead to her retreating and closing down
- Tell her you are available if she wants to talk but she doesn't have to talk about it if she doesn't want to.

Allow her to re-enter the “every-day world” of school, friends and family at her own pace.

- Do not attempt to overprotect or distract her from the reality of the experience or what she may be going through.
- Be consistent in your behaviour and imposing boundaries but resist being overprotective. This is often not useful and can translate as a sense of blame.

Be supportive, go slowly and respect your daughter's physical space, emotional safety, process and pace.

- Consider talking to her about such things as sleep, her feelings about being alone, her sense of safety and her ability to engage in day-to day activities.

HELP offer the following services:

- **24 Hour Phone Support: 09 623 1700**
- **Crisis Team Support**
- **Counselling Services for women**
- **More info on www.helpauckland.org.nz**