

## How to Talk with Your Child's Doctor

Parents of adolescents who have abused often wonder how best to speak with others about their children's behaviors. The best way forward for any parent is to be as prepared as possible. The following are some ideas that we hope are helpful.

Before the conversation:

Remember that medical professionals are mandated reporters. When you tell them about abuse, they may need to report this to the local Child Welfare hotline. If your son or daughter is already involved in services, it might be most helpful to tell the teacher that this is a matter that child welfare or the court system is already aware of. If you are uncertain what mandatory reporting is all about, you will want to look this up online; every state and province has different requirements.

Opening the conversation:

The most effective place to start any difficult conversation is with an accurate acceptance of responsibility and what you are doing to make things better. Although this will occur differently based on your situation and your personal style, words to the effect of, *"My son made a terrible mistake and caused harm to others. He is now getting help. We take this very seriously and are doing everything we can to make sure that no one is in a position to be afraid."*

When others hear very directly that you are doing what you can to ensure safety for your son or daughter as well as others, there is a better chance that the entire conversation will go smoothly. Whenever possible, it is a good idea to avoid any kind of complaint about your situation. If you are concerned that some things need to change, you can always talk about this later. It will be vital to be open to questions from the doctor. Keep in mind that doctors are very skilled at asking questions, and in some cases it is best to make your points when answering them.

Things to include in the conversation:

- It is almost never necessary to share the exact details of the abuse itself, although your doctor may need to know in order to make decisions about medical testing.
- Sexual abuse is a behavior, and the right treatment/supervision by adults can help people change their behaviors.
- Adolescents who have abused are only rarely interested in continuing to abuse sexually. They only rarely have a diagnosable sexual disorder.
- Adolescents who have abused have more in common with other teens who have broken rules or laws than they do with adults who sexually abuse. They are less mature, still growing, and have less knowledge about laws and behavior. Their sexual interests are also much less formed, even if they are curious about sex.

When it comes to doctors specifically, it can be useful to say what you need for your child:

- Your goal is almost always for your adolescent to have as normal a life as possible while still being safe. If there is a need for additional psychiatric assessments or treatments, your doctor may be able to provide a helpful and confidential referral.

We hope this information is helpful to you!