

# Green Bear Guidelines



## Mental Health Safety

### Mental Health Facts

- One of the first seen and most serious consequences of child sexual abuse are emotional/mental health problems that can manifest into posttraumatic stress, which can lead to disruptions in normal development.
- These disruptions include school absenteeism, poor grades and problems leading into adulthood including substance abuse, suicidal ideations/ attempts, depression and psychiatric disorders.

### When Children Disclose Sexual Abuse, remember I CARE

Caring for your child's mental health starts with handling the disclosure:

- I—**Information.** Secure basic information. Do not “over-question” the child by demanding details.
- C—**Calm Demeanor.** Remain calm. Remember you are angry at the abuser, not the innocent child.
- A—**Assure the Child.** Assure the child what happened was not their fault. Do not place blame.
- R—**Report Suspected Abuse.** Report to Missouri's Child Abuse Hotline at 1.800.392.3738.
- E—**Encourage Counseling.** Contact SEMO NASV at 573.332.1900 for counseling or a referral.

### How Does Sexual Abuse Effect Mental Health?

**Posttraumatic Stress** Children who have suffered sexual abuse have difficulties distinguishing the difference between safe and traumatic situations they have endured. Signs include difficulty sleeping, irritability/anger and becoming easily startled at noises. Reactions of adolescents include isolation and substance abuse.

**Brain Changes** Sexual abuse interferes with emotional maturity. Young children who are sexually abused before they learn to identify feelings and emotions will have difficulty managing them constructively

**Self-Destructive** If not addressed, difficulty handling emotions can lead to self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, cutting, depression and thoughts of suicide.

### Healing

**Loving Support** More than anything your child needs to know they will always have your love and support.

**Normalizing Activities** Normalize your child's activities by returning to the child's daily routine, encouraging activity, reconnecting with friends and participating in groups/events.

**Therapy** The best chance for healing a child who has suffered sexual abuse is from the inside out. There are many therapies available for survivors including trauma-focused therapy, pet therapy, play therapy and many others. For more information on scheduling therapy for your child, and non-offending family members, contact South-east Missouri Network Against Sexual Violence at 573.332.1900. You can be seen in our office or we can refer you to a qualified therapist in your area.