



Tips for Responding to Disclosures About Domestic Violence

Head Start and Early Head Start program staff can use this resource for examples of what to say to family members who have disclosed experiences of domestic violence.

Head Start and Early Head Start staff may wonder about how to respond to family members who have disclosed or shared their experiences of domestic violence. Keep the following points in mind. See ten ways to respond to families who have disclosed domestic violence.

There are no perfect words to say. Simply listening, conveying empathy, and offering support can go a long way!

Keep in Mind

- Trauma shows itself in many ways. Sometimes people experiencing domestic violence react in ways that we may not expect. They may laugh, show no emotion, downplay the experience, or blame themselves. There is no right or wrong response.
- Some disclosures of domestic violence will require follow up by your supervisor, the police, or child protective services. It is important to understand the limits of confidentiality and the kinds of situations that must be reported.
- It can be helpful to practice responding to disclosures about domestic violence. Try role playing and writing key phrases you can use.
- Offer the family member options about what they can do, rather than telling them what to do.
- Think about what you need to know before you ask someone questions about their experiences of domestic violence. Ask yourself, “Do I need to know this to offer support? Or am I asking out of curiosity?” If you don’t need the information, don’t ask. In most cases, you do not need many specific details in order to connect families with other resources.
- Refer to the support strategies and messages in the *Families Thrive, Zero to Five* card when you respond.
- Hearing stories of violence and abuse can have an impact on you, too. Be sure to take care of yourself and seek out support, if needed.

Find *Families Thrive, Zero to Five* card at www.FuturesWithoutViolence.org

Ten Ways to Respond to Family Members Who Have Disclosed Domestic Violence

1. Thank you for sharing your story.
2. What happened to you is not okay, but it is common. You are not alone.
3. This is not your fault. Nothing you did caused this.
4. What you've shared makes me worried about your safety and health.
5. Would you like me to explain options and resources that families in our program are often interested in hearing about?
6. Some parents find talking to an advocate or counselor to be helpful.
7. I have a card called *Families Thrive, Zero to Five* with different resources that might help.
8. What else can I do to help?
9. Sometimes when things are stressful, taking deep breaths can help calm us down. Would you like to take three deep breaths together?
10. Is there someone else we can call together to support you, too? Maybe a friend or family member?

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