

# Talking to children about a parent or carer's sexual offending

Finding out that a loved one has committed a sexual offence can come as a huge shock and can leave you feeling overwhelmed about what to do next. For some, one of the hardest things can be telling their children what their parent, grandparent or other loved one has done.

We know this is a hard step to take, and want to reassure you that this leaflet is designed to give you advice and guidance on how to approach this topic, and to empower you to talk to your child(ren), in the way you feel is appropriate.

If you have any concerns, questions, or would just like to talk through what you are going to say to your child, our helpline advisors are here to offer further guidance and support. Call **0808 1000 900** or visit [stopitnow.org.uk/helpline](https://stopitnow.org.uk/helpline).

## Guidance on how to tell a child

- Take your time to prepare what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. It might be helpful to practice the words with a friend or with us through our helpline. Think about what questions your child might ask you.
- Make sure you are in the right frame of mind to talk with your child. It's okay to show your feelings, so long as your child does not feel overwhelmed or responsible.
- Consider when and where you tell your child, so they feel as comfortable as possible and in a safe space to express their emotions. Allow enough time for the conversation.
- Based on your child's age and ability, consider how you should approach the conversation. Remember, only say what is known to be factual.
- You don't need to tell them everything all at once. You may need to have several conversations with your child as they absorb and process the information and ask questions.
- Only say what is enough. Ask them what they already know, as they may know more than you think, which might be sufficient. One way of doing this is:
  - **Ask** about what your child already knows: this is helpful as you hear the language they are using.
  - **Provide** information: prioritising what your child needs to know. Be clear and deliver it in manageable doses.
  - **Ask** about the information you have provided: ask them to tell you what they have heard and talk about how they feel about it.
- It is important that you talk to your child as early in the process as possible so that they do not hear information for the first time from someone else, as this can damage trust.
- If your child wants to know more than you deem 'enough', it is okay for you to tell them that they know enough for now.
- Siblings can be told different amounts of information so long as it is consistent as they are likely to talk to each other. Give age-appropriate layered information; you can't take back information, if they are told too much they will know too much.
- Consistency is important. If possible, work together with the other parent or others involved to avoid confusion and distress for your child.

- Encourage an open-door policy so your child can come to you when they want to. Remember their feelings may change. It can be helpful to check in with your child's general wellbeing as you feel appropriate, or as the situation develops.
- Consider thinking of an appropriate appointed adult(s) in the family, school or counsellor to whom your child can go for support, apart from yourself.
- Avoid using the word "secret". If your child wants to tell someone, ask them to discuss it with you first. Consider what information your child might say to their friends. You may want to share some level of information with their parents.

### Having a conversation with your child

Having a sensitive conversation can be challenging, especially if you're worried that your child is having a hard time. But having this conversation will give you both the opportunity to talk about feelings and to provide comfort. Here are some examples of how parents have approached the topic.

"Uncle S. is very upset to have caused so much upset for all the family and he is trying to get some help with his problem. We really didn't want you to have to hear this but thought you had a right to know what was going on."

"Dad's done something very wrong. He's been looking at rude things on the internet. And some of those things were to do with children, which is against the law, so the police are involved and are deciding what to do about it."

"Grandad's been spending a lot of time on the internet and we have found out that some of that time was spent looking at sexual pictures of children. It's against the law to look at that kind of thing and he is in trouble for doing it."

### Other things to consider

- If your child finds something out from someone else, establish what they know, confirm what is correct and be clear with them about what is not true.
- Siblings will have different reactions depending on their relationship with their loved one before the offence and their stage of development. This is to be expected.
- Your child may have questions such as: 'Will I be like them?'; 'Is it okay that I still want to see them?'; 'Are they sorry?'; 'Are they going to go to prison?'; 'Why did they do it?'
- There are likely to be many things you don't know and it is ok to say that you don't know the answer to some of their questions.
- It's important to discuss with children's services what you are going to tell your child. If they want you to say more than you feel is appropriate, explore your concerns with them.
- Your wellbeing is important, so take some time for your own self-care.
- You are best placed to answer your child's questions, but if you are unsure you can talk to your own support network or call the Stop It Now! helpline (see below).

#### Helpful resources for adults

Stop It Now! – 0808 1000 900, [stopitnow.org.uk](http://stopitnow.org.uk)  
 Parents Protect – [parentsprotect.co.uk](http://parentsprotect.co.uk)  
 Prisoners' family helpline – 0808 808 2003, [prisonersfamilies.org](http://prisonersfamilies.org)  
 Family rights group – 0808 801 0366, [frg.org.uk](http://frg.org.uk)

#### Helpful resources for your children

Childline – 0800 1111, [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)  
 Kooth - [kooth.com](http://kooth.com)