

The Department of Human Services in Victoria defines child abuse as: “an act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person’s physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time.”

Child abuse can be broadly defined into 4 categories: physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

Remember: always believe the caller. It is very rare for a child to fabricate a story of abuse. It is far more dangerous to disbelieve a legitimate story than it is to believe a fabricated one.

Always use empathy and age appropriate language.

See notes on Safety Planning below.

**Suggested Referrals** (Keep in mind other broader referrals available for individual situations):

- **The child’s school.**
  - If a concerned adult or a child calls, a good place to start is the school the at-risk child attends. They could speak to a welfare coordinator or a trusted teacher.
- **Child First: 1300 367 441**
  - Assists families with their problems so they don’t escalate to crisis. Call Child First where there is an identified low level of risk and where prevention and support is needed.
- **Child Protection Metropolitan Victoria: Eastern: 1300 360 391; Southern: 1300 655 795 ; North/Western: 1300 369 536; Or, After Hours Child Protection Crisis Line 131 278**
  - Reports on serious child protection issues.
- **Domestic Violence Resource Centre: [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au) or phone 9486 9866**
  - Information for mothers and other people concerned about children who witness family violence

**Phone Prompts:**

- Explain confidentiality, for example where a child calls say “everything we talk about is confidential, however if you tell me something that indicates that you or another child is at risk, I may have to tell someone else about it. I would tell you first though. Remember that you don’t have to tell me your name and contact details if you don’t want to”. This lets the child/young person know about your professional responsibility of disclosure whilst giving them the option to remain totally anonymous (in which case no disclosure can be made).
- “What has happened to you is wrong and it was not your fault. Everyone has the right to feel safe”.

- “It’s very brave of you to come forward and tell someone about this. I will do my best to find help for you”. *(However do not make any promises such as ‘I promise you will be OK etc’)*.
- “Try to keep a diary of all the times you feel worried or scared”.
  
- “It helps to talk to people, think of a friend or adult you can trust and let them know how you feel”.
- “When you feel upset, give yourself time to do things you enjoy. This could be listening to your favourite song, playing your favourite game, talking to friends etc. What activities make you happy?”.

### **Safety planning for kids:**

Know where the closest telephone is. Don't ever be afraid to call the police. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers in your pocket or wallet.

Make a list of people you can contact to talk to. This may be a friend, a teacher or trusted adult.

Think of a safe place that you can go to if things get really bad. This may be a room with a lock, a friend or neighbour's house.

Don't try to get involved in the fight. Even though you may want to stay to help your mum, it's better for you and for her if you keep yourself safe.