

HOW TO RESPOND TO A

DISCLOSURE OF



CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT

BENGALURU, INDIA | [WEBSITE](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [WHATSAPP](#)

ABOUT MAYA

Started in 2021,

MAYA is a social impact organisation based out of Bangalore. By working with more than 1000 students and caregivers across 30+ schools, orphanages, colleges and residential apartments, we have raised awareness about child sexual harassment and mental health. We have also piloted a program of providing free therapy for more than a year, through which, we aim to make mental health resources more accessible too. You can read more about us [here](#).

MAYA was founded by [Anjana Palamand](#), who is a law student. Her interests include child rights, women rights and criminal law.

TRIGGER WARNING



This guide includes references to sensitive topics like **sexual abuse** and **sexual harassment**, which might trigger you. Please remember, support is available, and do reach out to a professional if you need any help.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP CAREGIVERS NAVIGATE THE SENSITIVE AND CHALLENGING SITUATION OF SUPPORTING A CHILD WHO HAS DISCLOSED SEXUAL ASSAULT.

Start by familiarising yourself with the “Do’s and Don’ts” section, which provides guidance on how to respond with care, empathy and responsibility.

When needed, refer to the self-care suggestions and resources to ensure your own emotional well-being is maintained as you support the child through this process.

Use this guide as a steadying tool, knowing that by offering support in a balanced way, you’re contributing to a safe and healing environment for the child.

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WHAT IS CSA?

CSA describes a range of **inappropriate** and **sexual** behaviour toward children below the age of 18. Sexual abuse can include both **touching** and **non-touching** behaviors. Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds may be victims of sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse affects children of all sexes and genders in all neighborhoods and communities.

MAYA has designed a guide which specifically discusses child sexual abuse.

You may find it [here](#).



HOW DOES IT HAPPEN ONLINE?

1. **Grooming:** When a person builds an online relationship with a young person and tricks or pressures them into doing a sexual act;
2. Soliciting/ asking for sexually-explicit images/videos;
3. **Sextortion:** When someone threatens to distribute private/ sensitive material using an electronic medium if the child does not provide images/ videos of a sexual nature or other sexual favours;
4. Sexual harassment in online games;
5. **Deepfake exploitation:** The use of artificial intelligence to create fake sexually explicit images or videos of children;
6. **Revenge porn:** When a person distributes sexually explicit images or videos of a child with the intention of creating public humiliation or character assassination out of revenge against the victim. Any threat/ act of using a child's explicit images/ video is wrong;
7. Blackmail; and
8. Making/ distributing/ selling child sexually explicit material [previously known as "child porn"].

"Share your nude images or I will tell everyone what a *slut* you are!"

This is blackmail, and when done to a child, it is strictly punishable under the law!

DISTRESS SIGNALS

EMOTIONAL

1. WITHDRAWAL/ ISOLATION
2. OVER-SEXUALIZED BEHAVIOUR
3. FEAR OF CERTAIN PEOPLE OR PLACES
4. SELF-HARM OR RISKY BEHAVIOUR
5. UNEXPLAINED FEAR, ANXIETY, OR DEPRESSION
6. LOW SELF-ESTEEM OR SELF-BLAME
7. OUTBURSTS OF ANGER OR IRRITABILITY
8. INTENSE NIGHTMARES OR SLEEP DISTURBANCES

PHYSICAL

1. UNEXPLAINED INJURIES OR MARKS
2. FREQUENT PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS
3. EATING DISORDERS OR CHANGES IN APPETITE
4. BED WETTING OR LOSS OF BOWEL CONTROL
5. SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STI'S)
6. PREGNANCY

HOW TO RESPOND

STAY CALM.

Kids may shut down if they sense alarm or distress.

EXPRESS BELIEF.

Use phrases like, 'Thank you for telling me.' and 'I believe you.'

AVOID PRESSURISING FOR DETAILS.

This can be overwhelming for the child.

REASSURE THEM.

Use phrases like, *'It's very brave of you to tell me,'* or *'I'm with you,'* *'I support you,'* *'It is not your fault, it is that person's fault. They did something unacceptable and unlawful.'*

EXPLAIN THE NEXT STEPS IN A SIMPLE MANNER.

Let the child know that you may need to share this information with others who can help keep them safe. Say, *'I want to keep you safe, so I may need to talk to someone who can help us.'*

FOLLOW MANDATORY REPORTING PROTOCOLS.

This typically includes documenting the child's disclosure carefully, without interpreting or adding assumptions. You may choose to do this afterwards, and not while the child is talking to you.

SUPPORT THE CHILD.

Show continued care and understanding. Allow professionals to lead any further discussions about the abuse.



HOW NOT TO RESPOND

“ARE YOU SURE?”

Questioning their story may lead the child to feel like you don't believe them, which could cause them to withdraw or feel guilty.

“WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME SOONER?”

Children often delay disclosing abuse because of fear, shame, or confusion. This question may make them feel at fault for not speaking up earlier.

“I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT PERSON WOULD DO THAT.”

Expressing disbelief, especially if it's someone close or trusted, might imply that you don't trust the child's word or minimise their abuse.

“DON'T TALK ABOUT THIS TO ANYONE ELSE.”

This could make the child feel isolated and suggests secrecy around the abuse. It's better to reassure them that they did the right thing by telling you.

“WHY DID YOU GO THERE / WITH THAT PERSON?”

Avoid any questions or comments that imply blame on the child. Children are never responsible for abuse, and even a slight implication can lead to deep feelings of guilt or shame.

“JUST FORGET ABOUT IT, AND IT WILL GO AWAY.”

This dismisses the child's experience and suggests they shouldn't feel hurt or upset. It's important to acknowledge the pain and reassure them that help is available.

APPROPRIATE VERSUS INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSES

Situation	Inappropriate Response	Appropriate Response
Child says someone hurt them in a confusing way	"Are you sure? You might be overreacting."	"Thank you for telling me. I believe you, and it's brave of you to share this with me."
Child hints or says they were "touched" by someone	"Why didn't you stop them or tell someone sooner?"	"It's not your fault. You did the right thing by telling me now."
Child is visibly anxious or fearful while disclosing	"Calm down! You're safe now, so stop worrying."	"I see that this is hard for you. Take your time. I'm here to listen when you're ready."
Child describes feeling "dirty" or "ashamed"	"This is too upsetting. Let's just try to forget it."	"I'm so sorry this happened to you. Remember, you did nothing wrong."
Child discloses and wants details kept private	"I have to tell everyone so we can get help."	"Thank you for trusting me. I'll share this only with people who can help, as needed."

Child expresses fear of consequences or blame	"You must have done something to encourage this."	"No one should hurt you like this. It's never your fault, no matter what."
Child is hesitant to discuss details or respond to questions	"If you don't tell me everything, I can't help."	"Take your time. You don't have to say more than you want now. I'm here when you're ready."
Child's story is fragmented or unclear	"That doesn't make sense. Are you making this up?"	"It's okay if you don't have all the details. Tell me whatever you remember."

This is shameful! You cannot speak about this with anyone.



What happened to you is **wrong**, we should take some time and speak to the **people who can help** you in feeling better. You are **not alone**.



IS YOUR RESPONSE SUITABLE?

THESE POINTS CAN HELP YOU NAVIGATE IF YOUR RESPONSE IS
APPROPRIATE OR NOT. USE IT AS A CHECKLIST!

- ☐ STAY CALM AND PRESENT
- ☐ LISTEN ACTIVELY WITHOUT JUDGEMENT
- ☐ AVOID PRESSING FOR DETAILS
- ☐ REASSURE THAT THE CHILD IS NOT TO BLAME THEMSELVES
- ☐ PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
- ☐ RESPECT THE CHILD'S PRIVACY
- ☐ SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT
- ☐ TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL NEEDS

STEPS TO FOLLOW

Do's	Don't's
Stay calm and listen.	Do not show anger or shock.
Believe the child.	Do not doubt the child if their story does not “add up” or if details are missing. Do not minimize or trivialise the abuse.
Report to authorities or seek help.	Do not discourage the child from seeking professional help.
Maintain confidentiality.	Do not disclose the assault to persons that the child would be uncomfortable with.
If the child is willing to share, gather basic information.	Do not ask leading questions or do not force the child to share all details.
Plan how to hold the abuser responsible and accountable.	Do not be impulsive. Do not confront the abuser without any preparation.
Listen attentively and show that you care for the child.	Do not shame or blame the child. Do not ask the child to remain silent.



LEGISLATION

In India, there are many laws which punish child sexual assault, depending on the veracity. This includes the *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012*; *Information Technology Act, 2000* and the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023)*. All of these laws include imprisonment.

POCSO allows the victim to testify via a screen, in some cases, so that the victim does not have to face their abuser. The victim's details are not allowed to be released to the public. There are also special courts, which strive to quickly close cases.

Under *POCSO*, you are mandatorily required to report if you suspect/ know that a child has been abused. Please reach out to a child rights NGO/ lawyer.

The *IT Act* punishes anyone for publishing, transmitting or viewing child sexual abuse material online. Even according to *POCSO*, using a child for pornographic purposes can result in imprisonment of 5 years.

MAINTAINING WELL-BEING AS A CAREGIVER

CAREGIVERS NEED SUPPORT AFTER A CHILD DISCLOSES SEXUAL ABUSE BECAUSE THEY EXPERIENCE EMOTIONAL PAIN. NOT TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF CAN COMPROMISE THE CHILD'S WELL-BEING TOO. THE METHODS, MENTIONED BELOW, MAY HELP.

- Caregivers should consider **individual therapy** to reduce emotional distress. Please check 'Resources' for more organisations that you can connect with.
- **Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Mindfulness practices such as deep breathing, meditation, or yoga can help manage anxiety and maintain focus. Apps like Calm, Headspace, and Insight Timer provide guided exercises.
- **Engage in Hobbies and Restorative Activities:** Make time for enjoyable activities, whether reading, painting, gardening, or any activity that brings a sense of peace and fulfilment.
- **Take Breaks When Needed:** It is okay to step away for a short time to recharge. Self-care isn't selfish; it's necessary to continue offering steady support to the child.
- **Support groups** can help caregivers build stronger support networks.
- **Some child interventions** also offer support for caregivers, either alongside or as part of the treatment (including filial therapy). Please check 'Resources' for more organisations that you can connect with.

MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS

"ONLY ADULTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ABUSE CHILDREN." / "IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKE THAT PERSON WOULD ABUSE A CHILD"

Truth: There is no single profile for those who abuse children. Abusers come from all backgrounds and may not necessarily have a diagnosable mental illness. Some may be outwardly well-respected in their communities, making them more difficult to identify.

"IF THERE'S NO PHYSICAL EVIDENCE, THE ABUSE DIDN'T HAPPEN."

Truth: CSA often does not leave physical evidence, especially when it involves non-contact forms of abuse, grooming, or psychological manipulation. The absence of physical evidence does not invalidate a child's experience or disclosure.

"CSA MAINLY HAPPENS IN LOWER-INCOME OR 'DYSFUNCTIONAL' FAMILIES."

Truth: CSA occurs across all socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and family backgrounds. Believing abuse is limited to certain demographics can lead to blind spots, preventing people from recognizing abuse in seemingly "normal" or "stable" families.



"A CHILD WOULD FIGHT BACK OR RESIST IF SOMETHING WAS WRONG."

Truth: Children often don't resist abuse due to fear, confusion, manipulation, or being groomed by the abuser. Abusers may use threats, guilt, or secrecy to keep the child quiet and compliant. Many children feel powerless and unsure of how to respond.

"PEOPLE WHO WERE ABUSED ARE LIKELY TO BECOME ABUSERS THEMSELVES."

Truth: Most people who experience abuse as children do not go on to abuse others. While abuse survivors may face increased risks of mental health challenges, they are not "destined" to repeat abusive behaviours.

**"CHILDREN WHO DON'T SAY ANYTHING IMMEDIATELY ARE PROBABLY OKAY." /
"WHAT TOOK THE CHILD SO LONG TO REPORT THE ABUSE? MAYBE IT NEVER HAPPENED"**

Truth: Many children delay reporting abuse for months, years, or even into adulthood. Delays in disclosure are common and often due to fear, shame, confusion, or manipulation by the abuser. Silence does not mean the child isn't suffering.



DEVELOPING A SAFETY PLAN

THESE METHODS CAN HELP YOU CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR THE CHILD. USE IT AS A CHECKLIST!

- ☐ LEARN ABOUT SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTALLY EXPECTED SEXUAL BEHAVIORS.
- ☐ PLAN TO ADDRESS CHILD-SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES. REGULARLY REASSESS AND ADJUST THE PLAN TO MEET THEIR EVOLVING NEEDS. INVOLVE PROFESSIONALS, CAREGIVERS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS.
- ☐ DISCUSS SEXUAL ABUSE WITH YOUR CHILD'S CAREGIVERS.
- ☐ SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS; MONITOR CHILD'S RESPONSE OR PEOPLE IN THEIR LIFE.
- ☐ IDENTIFY 'SAFE' PEOPLE.
- ☐ PREPARE TO RESPOND TO SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS OF CHILDREN.
- ☐ TALK ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY.



KNOW YOUR RESOURCES [CHECK THE NEXT PAGE!]



CREATE A SPECIAL WORD OR PHRASE FOR THE CHILD TO INDICATE IF THEY NEED HELP.



CREATE A BUDDY SYSTEM, ENCOURAGE GOING PLACES WITH A FRIEND.



FOR OLDER CHILDREN, TEACHING SIMPLE SELF-DEFENCE MOVES CAN PROVIDE CONFIDENCE AND SAFETY SKILLS.



KEY RESOURCES

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES (FOR FILING COMPLAINTS):

Childline India:
1098.

<https://www.childlineindia.org/>

POCSO E-BOX (National
Commission for the Protection of
Child Rights):

<https://ncpcr.gov.in/pocso/>

Cybercrime reporting portal:
[Website](#)

LEGAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING AND MORE INFORMATION:

Aarambh:

[HTTP://aarambhindia.org/](http://aarambhindia.org/)

Arpan NGO:

<https://www.arpan.org.in/>

Enfold Proactive Health Trust:

+91-99000-94251

enfoldindia.org

info@enfoldindia.org

Iprobono:

<https://i-probono.com/>

Majlis' LAW:

<https://majlislaw.com/>

Nyaaya:

<https://nyaaya.org/>

contact@nyaaya.in

Parivarthan Counselling:

<https://parivarthan.org/>

Rubaroo:

<https://www.rubarooindia.com/>

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TEAM MAYA