WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR CHILD:

- I believe you
- What happened wasn't your fault and it shouldn't have happened: you did nothing wrong
- Thank them for telling you, it was a brave step and they did the right thing by telling you
- We will keep you safe (This should be a priority of the parent/guardian)
- We love you so much and are here for you always
- We will get the support and help you need in your journey of healing
- What this person did to you is against the law. The perpetrator must be held accountable as a consequence of their actions
- Let the child know that when adults break the law, they deserve to be punished by other adults. Laws are like rules, only much more serious
- Let them know that you will REPORT the abuse
- We may not have all the answers or be able to control the outcome of the legal process, but people who break laws must be held accountable and you did nothing wrong!
- We can talk about this as much or little as you like. Communication is important and revealing your feelings is part of the healing
- I didn't know and/or I'm sorry that I couldn't protect you. I love you so much and we will get through this together

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WHAT TO DO FOR YOU:
(Parent or Caregiver)

- Get Psychological &/or Spiritual support for possible feelings of guilt, shame, anger, depression, fear &/or anxiety
- Reach out to trustworthy friends & family for support
- Be warrior-like, while at the same time being a protective nurturing mother and/or father
- Know that you can't always control the outcome of the situation in terms of the prosecutorial process

"Every situation of sexual abuse is different, yet we hope this guide helps in supporting you and your child in their recovery by providing reassurance, validation & love.

When I went through this process, I had to forgive myself, although there was nothing to forgive.

If you have faith, rely on it to help you through this painful situation."

Tell yourself the 3C's

1. *I didn't **Cause** it*
2. *I can't **Change** what happened*
3. *I **Can** heal*

References:
Personal experience from SCARS Founder

"Helping Your Child Recover from Sexual Abuse"
By Caren Adams & Jennifer Fay

"When Your Child Has Been Molested"
By Kathryn Brohl with Joyce Case Potter

SCARS
Support Guide

After a Disclosure and Report of Child Sexual Abuse

This guide is designed to support parents and guardians of children who have been sexually abused

SCARS
SAVING CHILDREN AND REVEALING SECRETS
BERMUDA

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HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD:

- No matter how angry you may be, be careful **not** to say that you will kill the perpetrator because this may cause your child to shut down for fear that you will go to jail
- Let them know that they didn't cause your anger and sadness. You are glad they told
- Let your child know that you are upset, but not with them. You are angry with the person who did this and sometimes may feel sad. Let them know that sometimes they may see you cry or be upset, but you will still be able to take care of them
- Show them that it's OK to cry, be sad or be mad.
- Where possible, immediately protect your child from the perpetrator. (Ask the child if they'd like for all pictures and reminders of the perpetrator be removed)
- Tell them "I'm sorry that I didn't protect you". "I love you very much and we will get through this together"
- Reinforce that you are proud of your child's courage by telling and **you believe them.** Let the child know that they did nothing to cause what happened and **it was not their fault!**
- Have a reward for you & your child for getting through a hard day - go for an ice cream or shopping
- Let your child know that it was OK to tell because that was the only way the abuse was going to stop. Reinforce how proud of them you are for telling
- Let your child know that they don't have to take care of you
- Tell your child that just like we recover from an illness or an accident, we will get over this, but it will be a process / journey.
- Let your child know that this has happened in other families
- **Your child may need a lot of assurance and help to feel safe again.** (This may take time) It's OK if they want to leave a light on at night or have you stay with them until they fall asleep.
- Professional counseling is critical. Find a trained Psychologist experienced in child sexual abuse and one that your child feels comfortable
- Let your child know as often as possible that they are worthy & beautiful. Let them know that what happened was as a result of someone's selfish actions. They must be told that the perpetrator is 100% responsible for what happened. Children are innocent and perpetrators take advantage of this
- Don't make promises about what will happen to the abuser. Let the child know that you don't know what will happen, as you can't control the outcome. The abuser may or may not go to jail. Reinforce that the child did the right thing because it is against the law to harm children

COURTROOM PREPARATION

- If and when the perpetrator is prosecuted and your child is required to testify, make sure your child is prepared emotionally by a professional several weeks in advance of the trial
- Ask the Department of Public Prosecution (DPP) to see the courtroom in advance
- Take your child to the courtroom. Show him/her where the judge will sit, where the prosecutor & defense attorney will be. Allow the child to sit/stand where they will be and if you as a parent are allowed in the courtroom then show them where you will be sitting
- If you as a parent are a witness and not allowed in the courtroom, make sure a best friend, a relative, or someone the child loves & trusts is there too. Allow them to take a special toy/object, if necessary, to give them comfort
- The legal process will also help your child feel listened to, believed, less burdened and less alone
- Regardless of whether the abuser is convicted or not, it is a chance for your child to speak up about what happened. They can say – "he/she did this and I didn't like it". The legal process could provide an opportunity to get their power back.
- Let your child know that it was the choice and actions of the abuser that has caused him/her to be prosecuted. Sexual abuse is a crime. Reinforce that It's OK for your child to want him/her to be punished. A child may be afraid of the perpetrator going to jail

  A) Adults know between right & wrong and it's their job to protect children – not hurt children

  B) The legal system is used to stop the abuser from hurting other children and is the only way to hold the abuser accountable for what they have done
- The outcome of the legal system is only one step in the recovery process. If the outcome is no conviction, tell your child you still believe them!
- Remember the objective is the well being of your child. The outcome of the trial IS NOT essential to your child's healing
- Celebrate the fact that you made a choice and a statement loud & clear to everyone - although the process was stressful & difficult, abusing your child won't be tolerated! Many parents make a choice to do nothing and children suffer the consequences for years of that choice