



## **RESPONDING TO A CHILD'S DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE**

**The Diocese of Salt Lake City is committed to protect our children from abuse. We will continue to screen adults working with children; to develop and provide training on safe environment for both adults and children; and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Charter.**

### **Create a Safe Environment**

**As a teacher**, you are in a unique position to create a safe space to allow children to talk about abuse, but it is important to remember that it's not your job to investigate allegations of abuse.

*The proper reporting of a disclosure initiates the investigation.*

**Invite** the child to speak to you in a safe, neutral place where other children and/or adults cannot overhear the conversation. Ask the child to tell you what happened in his/her own words. **Listen**. Let the child tell you what happened. If you need to ask a question for clarification, use the child's vocabulary.

### **Reaction**

**Your reaction** is very important. Try to remain calm. Although challenging at times, it is crucial that the child's experiences are being heard and not being judged. The adult abuser has probably already told the child that he or she will not be believed, so any strong reaction from an adult may confirm the child's fears and may result in the child recanting. Express your belief that the child is telling you the truth. Don't promise not to tell anyone else. Let the child know that you take the disclosure seriously and that the story will be reported to the proper authorities.

### **Respect**

**Respect** a child's privacy by not discussing the information with other people who do not need to know. Avoid having the child repeat his/her explanation to different staff. Tell the child what to expect. If you don't know, say so, but let the child know he/she can be supported by you.

### **Reassurance**

**Reassure** the child that it is good to tell what happened and that what happened is not his/her fault. Acknowledge the child's courage in coming forward. Let the child know that you realize how difficult it can be to talk about these kinds of things. Thank him/her for speaking up and for trusting you to help.

### **Report**

If, after talking with the child, you believe that he/she has been abused, you are legally required to report the abuse to the appropriate authorities. Your Director of Religious Education or your school principal will help you relay the information to the authorities and/or the diocese. If it does not endanger the child's safety, it is also important to inform the child's parents or guardians of the disclosure and reporting process.

### **Listen with Compassion**

**Regardless** of the age of the child, it is not easy to talk about abuse. Children often feel guilty or feel responsible for it happening. They may even have been told that they, or someone they love may be harmed if they tell. On the other hand, you may wonder whether the abuse actually occurred, especially if they do not appear upset when telling you about the abuse. Many children who have been abused learn to hide their feelings at a young age and may tell of their abuse without much emotion.

***Every disclosure of abuse is to be taken seriously and responded to quickly and compassionately and as required by law.***