

HELPING THE CHILD WHO HAS BEEN ABUSED

Adults can help children to feel good about themselves. This is really important for children who have been victims of abuse and/or family violence.

HELP THE CHILD DEVELOP POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

Children who have been abused often have poor self-esteem. Staff/caregivers can help to build a child's self-esteem by:

- planning activities where success is built in – these would be based on the child's age and development, and realistic expectations
- giving positive reinforcement for accomplishments and desired behaviour
- displaying the child's accomplishments
- reinforcing through discussion and activities that both women and men are valued, respected and should never be controlled through violence

HELP THE CHILD TO TRUST

Children who have been abused often feel betrayed and do not trust that their world is safe. Staff/caregivers can help the child who has been abused learn to trust again by:

- establishing limits, routines, consistency and predictability
- being loving and affectionate, and respecting those children who may need more time before they feel comfortable with being touched
- allowing children to be angry without the fear of punishment
- spending one-on-one time so the child feels cared for and listened to

HELP THE CHILD TO IDENTIFY AND EXPRESS EMOTIONS

Staff/caregivers can help children who have been abused to show and understand feelings that may have been hidden or punished in the past by:

- naming emotions
- planning sensory and dramatic play activities
- providing books and other play materials that help children learn about feelings
- showing children healthy ways to express anger and solve problems without hurting themselves or others

- accepting a child's need to talk about fears, sadness and losses experienced because of abuse
- helping the child to gain control over the environment, since many children who have experienced abuse and family violence had little or no control in their environment

HELP THE CHILD TO LEARN TO COMMUNICATE

Children who have been abused may not have had opportunities for conversation and sharing in a positive parenting relationship. Staff/caregivers can help the child who has been abused learn communication skills by:

- speaking to children calmly
- using a firm but kind tone when asking children to do things or when expressing disapproval
- giving children the message that it is okay to ask questions and say how they feel
- spending time talking and listening
- planning activities that encourage language and listening skills

HELP THE CHILD TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE PROBLEM SITUATIONS

Many children who have been abused have learned that problems are solved by using violence. Staff/caregivers can help children learn positive ways to problem solve by:

- teaching children that they have choices and how to pick the best choice
- using positive methods to guide children's behaviour
- planning activities that require problem-solving
- solving any conflicts that happen with nonviolent methods, and role-model calm, non-aggressive ways of dealing with anger

HELP THE CHILD TO CATCH-UP DEVELOPMENTALLY

As a result of abuse, many children have not developed at the normal rate. Staff/caregivers can help children with their developmental skills by:

- planning activities that help them practice motor and language skills
- supporting positive relationships with friends
- helping children with schoolwork
- seeking the advice of appropriate professionals (knowledge of atypical development and therapies is a specialized area)

HELP THE CHILD TO DEVELOP A SAFETY PLAN

Children who are in a situation where there is violence, or the fear of violence can be encouraged to:

- learn how to dial 911 (i.e., practice memorizing the phone number with the children; teach the children to leave the phone off the hook until police arrive)
- choose a neighbour they can go to for help
- plan how to keep safe during a violent scene, for example, identify a safe spot to hide, and do not try to stop the fight

LINK FAMILIES TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Victims of abuse and violence need support to cope with stress and to build healthy relationships. Staff/caregivers can help by:

- directing families to local community agencies that work with children and families (e.g., shelters, legal aid, help lines, parenting groups)
- watching how children in their care are developing, and reporting any suspicions of abuse

(Adapted from Reaching Out: Working Together to Identify and Respond to Child Victims of Abuse by Rimer & Prager, 1998.)
