|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Judicial System**  This may be your first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It’s very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or in movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic or a distorted snapshot of how things truly operate.  There are laws and regulations in place aimed at protecting victims. For cases involving prosecution, court advocates may be available to provide information, education, and support that will help reduce your fears and uncertainties (e.g., discussing what to expect when you go to court).  Education and information about how the judicial system works, your rights, and your role can help you navigate these processes.  **Benefits of Counseling**  Children may benefit from talking to a counselor to help them:   * Coping skills and strategies can help children to continue daily activities and relationships. * Establishing a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological, and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences. * In a confidential setting, children can discuss topics such as:   + Safety planning and options for the future.   + The event and how it made them feel.   + Legal and judicial decisions. | |  | | --- | | **Who Can Help?**  [*Agency*] Victim Services can assist you with information regarding victims’ rights, Crime Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system, and referrals to the appropriate community resources or helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.  **Resources**  Local Resources  National Resources  VINE  (Victim Information and Notification Everyday)  1-877-894-8463  www.vinelink.com  The National Child Traumatic Stress Network  www.nctsn.org  This publication was produced under [*Grant Number*] awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this draft publication are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.  [*Revision Date*] | | |  | | --- | | **Children and**  **Sexual Abuse**  **[*Agency*] Victim**  **Services**  **[*address*]**  **[*phone number*]**  **[*Insert Agency logo*]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  Name/ID Number:  Direct Number: | |
| Reactions to traumatic events, such as sexual abuse, may appear immediately following an event or days or weeks later. Children who have experienced a traumatic event commonly express their feelings through behavioral changes. These behavioral changes may occur because children often do not yet possess the social, developmental, or psychological maturity to understand what has happened to them.  **Common Responses**  Just as every child is unique, so is every child’s reaction to a traumatic event. Your child may display one, a few, or all these reactions. It’s important to remember that most children experience reactions only for brief periods.  **A traumatized child may experience:**   * **Fear —** excessive clinging,fear of being separated, closed-in areas, new situations. * **Sleep disturbance —** nightmares, refusal to sleep alone, interrupted sleep, excessive sleeping. * **Physical complaints —** stomachaches, headaches, dizziness, and other bodily symptoms with no physical cause. * **Change in eating habits —** loss of appetite, reluctance to eat, binge eating, food hoarding. * **Regressive behavior —** loss of toilet training, thumb sucking, bed-wetting, fear of darkness. * **School performance —** difficulty concentrating, refusal to attend school or activities, decline in academic performance, disruptive behavior, difficulty with peer relationships. * **Change in demeanor —** withdrawal, emotional numbing, confusion, angry outbursts, loss of trust in others, expressions of guilt, crying, whimpering. | **Respect**  Monitoring your discussions about the incident, your child, your feelings, and your fears is important. Doing so provides respect for your child’s privacy and feelings and may minimize their sense of shame, guilt, or responsibility about what occurred.  Another way to respect your child is by allowing them to decide whether they want to talk. For some children, art or play may be the most comfortable form of expression.  Sometimes family secrets surface, and grudges develop in response to traumatic events. Respect for and privacy of the child should be a priority. Therefore, you may need to be selective about sharing certain information. Take into consideration how the person you are sharing the information with will react and try to prepare for unexpected responses.  **Rules and Routine**  It is common for parents to relax rules and disrupt routines when a child has experienced a difficult event. The reality is that rules and routines help children maintain their sense of safety and security and assist with their recovery. When provided with support and safety, recovery for a child is usually possible. | **Time and Patience**  Patience may run short for both you and your child. After a traumatic event, you and your child will require time to adjust. We all need a sense of security and reassuring your child they are safe and that those who they love are safe is one of the healthiest responses you can provide.  Emotions for you and your child will most likely be at different stages and levels. As time passes, the strength of the feelings and other effects of the experience will lessen.  Providing a balance of information about the incident and education about the prevention of future incidents is a wonderful way to help your child gain awareness, gain a sense of control, and reduce the impact of the traumatic event.  Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, change in appetite, and difficulty concentrating. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially troubling or long-lasting, you may need to turn to a mental health professional for assistance. |