U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Children Affected By Crime

Information For Parents

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Office for Victim Assistance
J. Edgar Hoover Building, Room 3731
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535

CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

The FBI investigates a number of crimes against children that fall under federal jurisdiction. These crimes may include: child sexual assault, child physical abuse, child abduction, and Internet crimes against children.

These crimes can be reported to any local law enforcement agency whether it is county, state, tribal, or federal. However, it is usually best to start with your local law enforcement agency which can determine who should be notified.

When your child becomes a victim of a crime, you may meet the following people during the investigation:

FBI Special Agent:

Special Agents may talk to you or your child about what happened. Their job is to investigate the crime and present information to the prosecuting attorney.

FBI Victim Specialist:

The FBI Victim Specialist supports you and your family throughout the investigation and provides you information on the criminal justice process. Your Victim Specialist is available to notify you of victim rights and significant case events, provide referrals for services, locate resources, assist with special needs, and address safety issues that your family may have.

Forensic Interviewer:

The forensic interviewer has special training in interviewing child victims. The forensic interviewer may talk with your child at a child advocacy center, if available in your area. If a medical exam is needed it may be performed there as well.

Local Law Enforcement:

Often there is a joint investigation between the FBI and local law enforcement which may include: city, county, state, and/or tribal agency involvement.

Social Services:

Many state and local laws require that law enforcement and child protective services coordinate information in the investigation of child abuse. These agencies can provide information and resources to help you protect your child.

Victim Compensation Programs:

Victim compensation programs may be available in your state to help you and your child. Please contact your local FBI Victim Specialist for further information.

U.S. Attorney's Office:

The U.S. Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting federal crimes. An Assistant U.S. Attorney is the government prosecutor who will be handling the case on behalf of the federal government. This office also has a Victim/Witness program to assist you and your family during the prosecution. The FBI Victim Specialist will ensure a smooth transition throughout this process.

You have a right to verify the identity of any person who contacts you during the investigation.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Do not question your child

Your child may disclose additional information. It is very important to listen, but do not question your child. Notify law enforcement personnel of any new information, and let them ask the questions. Seeking information is a natural reaction; however, it could cause undue stress and interfere with the investigation.

Do not blame your child

Do not express emotions such as shame, blame, or judgment, as these reactions could cause a negative lifelong impact. Remind your child you love them. **A child is never responsible for the actions of the offender.**

Do not correct anything your child tells you about the incident

Children may have a hard time describing what happened or feel the need to talk about it even before the interview. Be careful not to comment on anything specific, and do not correct your child. You can respond by saying, "I am really glad you told me that" or "thank you for telling me."

Be careful about making promises

It is important to be honest with your child about your role and responsibility in cooperating with the investigation. Be careful not to promise rewards for your child's cooperation. Also, be careful not to make promises about what will or will not happen to the offender.

Be specific

On the day of the interview, be honest with your child about where you are going. Let your child know it is important to talk about what happened and to tell the truth. It is normal to feel anxious. Let your child know he/she is not in trouble and did not do anything wrong.

Respect your child's privacy

Be careful not to discuss what your child tells you with others if it is not necessary.

Keep your feelings under control while in your child's presence

Expressing anger, shock, or judgment can make your child feel ashamed. Showing anger even towards the offender can scare a child or make the child think he/she did something wrong. It can be very upsetting for a child to see you lose control. Also, don't try to confront the offender in or out of your child's presence. Let law enforcement deal with the offender.

Ask for help

When one member of a family is hurt by crime, it affects the whole family. As a parent you may be dealing with difficult feelings and emotions. Feelings of guilt, anxiety, and rage are not uncommon. Counseling can assist you in coping successfully with these feelings.

Here are some ways that you can help your child cope with what has happened:

- When something like this happens, your child may have behavioral and emotional changes that affect his/her relationships, daily activities, and moods. A counselor or therapist can help give you ideas and resources to help you and your child deal with these emotions.
- Try to help your child regain control of his/her life by maintaining a normal routine. Whenever possible, give your child choices. Even simple things like choosing where to eat or what to wear can help a child feel more in control. Of course, there are always decisions that you must make for your child's well-being, but listen when your child says he/she does not feel safe.

On behalf of the FBI Office for Victim Assistance, we are committed to providing you and your family with the most appropriate services to assist in reducing the effects of trauma. Your Victim Specialist is highly trained to assess your needs and link you to the best resources available. It is important that you work closely with your Victim Specialist. Your Victim Specialist can assist in making your experience with the criminal justice process as smooth as possible.

For more information or questions,
please contact your local Victim Specialist.

LIMITED CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

As your Victim Specialist, I am here to assist you as you go through the criminal justice process. However, you should know that I work as part of a team with the FBI Agent and personnel from the U.S. Attorney's Office. Discussions that you have with me may not be considered completely confidential. As part of the team, there may be times when I need to share information you provide with the other team members. This is especially important if you share information regarding your safety or a medical emergency or when the information could interfere with the investigation or prosecution of the case.

If you have any questions about limited confidentiality, you may contact me for clarification.

Remember, your interests are important to us. Many victims have questions, and we are here to help provide you with answers and practical assistance.

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