

## Who can help?

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims' Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

## Resources

### Community Information and Referral

(602) 263-8856

### EMPACT Crisis Hotline

(480) 784-1500

### Arizona Criminal Justice Commission

1110 W Washington Ste#230

Phoenix, AZ 85007

(602) 364-1146

acjc@azcjc.gov

### National Criminal Justice Reference Service

(NCJRS)

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

1-800-851-3420

### Office for Victims of Crime

U.S. Department of Justice

810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor

Washington, DC 20531

(202) 307-5983

www.ovc.gov

### National Center for Child Traumatic Stress

NCCTS — Univ. of California, Los Angeles

11150 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 650

Los Angeles, CA 90064

Phone: (310) 235-2633

www.nctsnet.org

### National Criminal Justice Reference Service

(NCJRS)

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

1-800-851-3420

### notMYkid.org

2211 E. Highland Ave., Suite 140

Phoenix, AZ 85016

(602) 652-0163

www.notmykid.org

# Victim Services Unit

## Children and Sexual Abuse



Mesa Police Department

Victim Services Unit

130 N Robson

Mesa, AZ 85201

(480) 644-4075

## This brochure provides information for you and your family on dealing with sexual abuse.

Reactions to a traumatic event may appear immediately following an event, or they may appear days or weeks later. Children who have experienced a traumatic event commonly express their feelings through behavioral changes. This expression occurs because children often do not possess social, developmental, or psychological maturity to fully comprehend what has happened to them.

### Common Reactions

- **Fear** — fear of being separated, fear of being in closed-in areas, fear of new situations, excessive clinging.
- **Sleep disturbance** — nightmares, refusal to sleep alone, interrupted sleep, excessive sleep
- **Physical complaints** — stomach aches, headaches, dizziness, and other bodily symptoms with no physical cause
- **Change in eating habits** — loss of appetite, reluctance to eat, eating binges, hoarding of food
- **Regressive behavior** — loss of toilet training, thumb sucking, bed wetting, fear of darkness
- **School performance** — difficulty concentrating, refusal to attend, decline in performance, difficulty with peer relationships, disruptive behavior.
- **Change in demeanor** — withdrawal, emotional numbing, confusion, anger outbursts, loss of trust in others, expressions of guilt, crying, whimpering

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 of these reactions. That being said, it is important to remember that most children experience reactions for brief periods.

We all have a need for the sense of security and reassuring your child that they are safe and that those they love are safe is one of the most healthy responses you can provide.

Providing a balance of honest information about the incident and education about prevention of future incidents is a wonderful way to help your child gain awareness, a sense of control, and reduce the impact of the traumatic event.

### Respect

Remember that children desire to please and succeed. Monitoring your discussions about the incident, the child, and your feelings and 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 or not they want to talk. For some, art or playing may be the most comfortable way of expression.

Sometimes family secrets surface and grudges develop, resulting in opposing systems of allies. Respect and privacy of the child need to be a priority, therefore you may need to be selective about who you share the information with. Take into consideration how the person you are sharing the information with will react and try to prepare for unexpected responses.

### Rules and Routines

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 them maintain their sense of safety, security, and assist with their recovery.

Parents forget or don't see a child as resilient. Recovery for a child is usually done with little difficulty when provided with support and safety. Parents, on-the-other hand, are usually more upset during the recovery process.

### Time and Patience

Patience may run short for both you and your child. You will require time to adjust or regain a sense of security.

Emotions for you and your child will most likely be at different states and levels. As time passes the strength of the feelings and other effects of the experience will lessen.

Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, and difficulty concentrating. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to turn to a professional for assistance.

### Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

### The Judicial System

For many, this may be their first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It is very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are, more than often, a distorted and unrealistic snapshot of how things truly operate.

Arizona has laws and regulations in place to protect victims. For cases involving prosecution, a court advocate can provide information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Another consideration that is often practiced is that of resolution by plea agreement. By negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

As with any situation, education and information about how the judicial system operates, can assist the victim and their family in the reduction of trauma.