



Samvedna – Protecting the Child from Abuse

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Eight year old Manju began her school life as a bubbly, outgoing child, who made friends easily with teachers and other children. Suddenly she began to spend her time sitting alone. Even during recess she sat alone. Her smile disappeared. The drastic change in her behaviour was noticed by her teacher. So, the teacher called Manju and spent sometime talking to her. During this interaction it was revealed how Manju had been abused by her own uncle. The teacher helped Manju to regain her confidence and Manju once again became her former self.

Lakshmi initially did not bother too much when her five year old son complained of pain. When the pain persisted she took him to the doctor. To her horror she came to know that her had son been abused by the boy who was looking after him.

This is not the story of only Manju and Lakshmi's son. We come across

reports of several children like them who have been subjected to physical abuse by people closely known to them. Abusers come from any walk of life, including well respected people whom you could never have imagined could indulge in such activity. The culprit in many cases may be a neighbour, a caretaker, or someone who knows the child.

But, in the normal course, we do not find this as a common problem. After all, many abuses are the handiwork of socially distorted minds. Yet, even in the stray case when it happens, it can be permanently damage the child's personality. Care and caution by the parent is critical. If at all it happens, one has to know how to handle such events and their after effects. In a variety of ways, children disclose when they are physically abused. Very often we come to know through the behaviour of the child, as in the case of Manju. The kind of

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statements that they make, lead us to suspect abuse.

How should we help them?

➤ **Listen Patiently**

Listen to the child without questioning the child in front of others. Make sure that the child feels comfortable and does not feel guilty or ashamed to tell you about what all happened. In order to minimise child's anxiety you must not project your anxiety to the child. It is important to speak quietly and calmly.

➤ **Create A Relaxed Environment**

Allow the child to speak voluntarily. Do not force the child to disclose more than what he/she wants to say. Allow the child to tell the story without interruptions. Many children feel anxious and apprehensive that people around them may not believe them. Try and use the language appropriate to child's development level. Accept the child's version of sexual terms.

➤ **Allow the Child to Express Feelings**

Assure the child that he or she is not

alone. Abuse happens to many children and they must know that adults want to help them and do what is necessary for them. Impress upon them that talking about abuse to adults is the right thing to do. Children who have been sexually abused may develop feelings of guilt, shame, and fear. We need to convey to them that those feelings are normal and will wear off in due course of time.

➤ **Reassure the Child that the Abuse is not his/her Fault**

Emphasise that it is the adult who should feel guilty. Tell the child that he/she has done nothing wrong, either by participating or by talking about it.

Protect children from abuse. Be sensitive to a child's needs, and by making yourself a safe person to whom the child can disclose sensitive information.

Children often hesitate to reveal physical abuse to their parents for the fear that they may harm the family through such testimony.