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This handbook was developed by
Family Advocates,
a program of the National Children's Advocacy Center
Huntsville, Alabama
and the
Madison County Multidisciplinary Team

(Rev. 01-2013)

*To guide you through
the system...*



*A handbook for caregivers
of abused children*

National Children's Advocacy Center
210 Pratt Avenue
Huntsville, Alabama 35801
256-533-KIDS (5437)
www.nationalcac.org

Reading List for Caregivers

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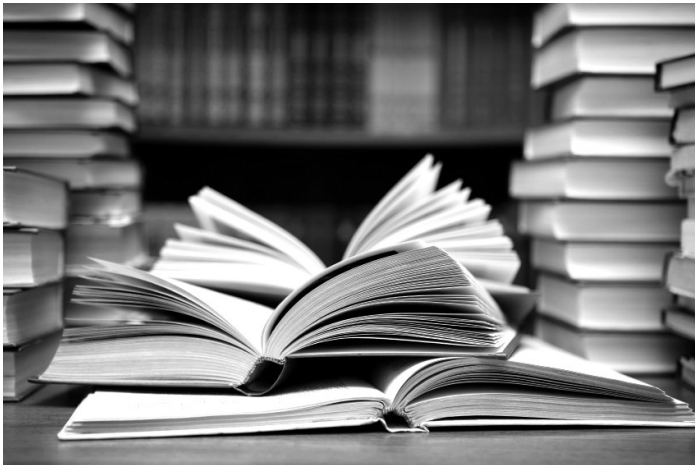
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Your child is at the National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC), also known as the Children's Center, because of concerns about possible abuse. You may notice in this handbook that NCAC is often referred to as the Children's Center. This is done to respect the privacy of you and your child such that others will not know of your affiliation with the NCAC unless you choose to share that information.

Our goals are to:

- Do the best job possible in finding out what happened
- Work with the child protective legal systems to help the child
- Help you understand the child protective and legal systems
- Help make the process as comfortable as possible for you
- Help your children and family begin to heal

We hope this handbook will help you understand more about child sexual abuse. We also hope it will help you understand the system we use to respond to a report of abuse. Please call us at the Children's Center (256-327-3853) if you have questions.

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Reading List for Caregivers

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Taking Care of Yourself

You are going through a very difficult time, and you probably feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of other people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important, so you need to find time to do something just for you and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult to do, but it is in the best interest of you and your child.

Some suggested activities include the following: Take a walk, have lunch with a friend, go to the movies, go out to dinner, join an exercise class, take a drive, and last, but equally important, join a support group.

Caregiver Group

To help the child's caregiver through this difficult time, the Children's Center has developed a group to provide information and support regarding child sexual and physical abuse. This will assist the caregiver to support the child's healing process. This group is designed to provide support for the parent in a confidential setting limited to 8-10 parents or caretakers.

This group meets for six to eight sessions covering such topics as caregiver responses, victim issues, normal child sexual development, and child sexual abuse offender issues. Parents and caretakers will also hear from guest speakers, which may include a parent of an abused child or an adult survivor.

Your assigned Family Advocate will provide you with more information about this group if you are interested in participating.



What is Trauma?

Trauma can be any event that, when witnessed or experienced by a child or adolescent, is extremely distressing to them. These events are often in situations where the children feared for their lives or the lives of others. There are many different kinds of trauma including:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Exposure to violence
- Loss of a significant loved one
- Natural disaster
- House fire
- Car accident

What Are Some Reactions to Trauma?

Each person can react in different ways to a traumatic event based on many things, such as age when the trauma occurred, the severity of the trauma, and the amount of time that has passed since the trauma. Some possible symptoms/effects include:

- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares and/or not wanting to sleep alone
- Difficulty not thinking about the event
- Increased fear in both safe and risky situations
- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty staying still
- Thoughts about death or dying
- Low self-esteem
- Mood swings
- Drop in grades/performance at school
- Irritability and problems with anger control
- Efforts to avoid talking about the event or doing things that remind the child about the event

What is Physical Abuse?

Child physical abuse is any physical force or action that results in, or may result in, a non-accidental injury of a child. Physical abuse is usually connected to physical punishment or is confused with child discipline. Although an injury resulting from physical abuse is not accidental, the parent or caregiver may not have intended to hurt the child. Physical abuse may involve a single episode or repeated episodes of abuse resulting in bruises, cuts, welts, burns, fractures, internal injuries, or in the most extreme cases, death. The injury may have resulted from severe discipline, including injurious spanking or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age or condition. Generally, physical abuse results from the following:

- Punching
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Stabbing
- Hitting with hand or object
- Poisoning
- Being held under water
- Beating
- Biting
- Throwing
- Choking
- Burning
- Suffocating

Physical abuse involves external injuries and is more easily detected than other forms of abuse. Some signs of physical abuse may include unexplained injuries, repeated injuries, cigarette burns, burns with a "doughnut" shape on the buttocks, friction burns, unexplained fractures, and changes in child behavior, such as by becoming hyperactive, disruptive, aggressive, complacent, compliant, shy, withdrawn, or uncommunicative. A child may also wear clothing, such as long-sleeves, to purposely hide the injury.

Comments You Can Expect from Others About the Abuse

- "What exactly happened to your child?"
- "Are you sure your child didn't make it up?"
- "Why didn't you know it was happening?"
- "If it were my child, I'd just move away."
- "Your poor child must be feeling really guilty."

Remember, you do not owe anyone an explanation. It may be easier to just nod as an acknowledgement of what someone says. However, some acceptable responses include:

- "I'd rather not talk about it."
- "It's been a very difficult time for all of us."
- "I appreciate your concern."
- "I would prefer to respect my child's privacy."

Keep in mind that most people have very little knowledge about sexual abuse. For example, in response to the comment about your child feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel unnecessary guilt in these cases until they are assured that they are not responsible in any way for what happened. As a caregiver, you might also be experiencing some guilt, and as a result, you may feel defensive. In that case, a good response is, "Parents do their best, but we're only human."

Adults are the people most likely to say something to your child. You may want to tell your child that if someone says, "I'm sorry about what happened to you," respond with a simple, "Thank you." Let your child know that s/he does not always have to respond to comments or questions. Your child could say, "My mom and/or dad told me not to talk about it now."

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested*, by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case

What to Say to Others

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know with which relatives or friends you will be discussing the abuse, and let your child have some choice about who is told.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way than s/he could.

If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about your child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. Their reactions may include hysteria, horror, obvious distress, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest, or unnecessary questioning for intimate details. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy, self-control, and dignity. On the other hand, be careful not to make it seem like a "dirty secret", as this could cause more shame in your child.

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested*, by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case



What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse occurs when a person forces a child to have any form of sexual contact or makes a child perform sexual acts. Sexual abuse may involve touching private parts (clothed or unclothed), penetration using an object, forced sexual acts between children, or making the child view, read, or participate in pornography. These acts are abuse even when offenders say they were gentle and did not hurt the child.

Sexual abuse is also known as molestation and exploitation. Sexual molestation does not always mean sexual intercourse. Sometimes older children abuse younger or smaller children. Sexual acts between children become abuse or molestation when one child uses coercion, force, or violence to get the other child to do the acts. Children with sexual behavior problems should be reported to social service agencies so that they can receive help.



Sexual abuse is often overwhelming to children, especially when an adult is involved. Most children are taught to trust adults. They tend to believe what adults tell them is true rather than to rely on their own feelings. This works against them in two ways. If the abuser tells the child that what is being done is okay, the child may doubt his or her own feelings that the abuse is inappropriate. Likewise, if a caregiver's initial reaction to the child's abuse report is "This can't be true!" the child may wonder if his or her own feelings are wrong. Children almost never tell about abuse "to create problems." More often, they fear that telling will make people angry at them. *It is extremely difficult for children to report abuse.*

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested* by Kathryn B. Hagan

How Caregivers Sometimes Feel When Abuse Has Been Reported

When abuse is reported, parents or caregivers sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal. The report can affect your life in many ways, and it takes time to adjust. The following are some of the common thoughts and feelings of caregivers. You may feel one or more of these, or you may move from one to another.

1. Denial. Your first reaction may be not to believe or accept the possibility that abuse really happened. Or you may believe it happened but that no real harm was done. Caregivers often experience denial because it is too overwhelming to accept that the abuse occurred and that there will be after-effects. For some people, it takes time to overcome denial and face the realities of abuse.

2. Anger. At times, you may feel angry at yourself for not protecting the child. You may feel angry at the perpetrator for what s/he did. You may even feel angry at the child. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted person or group.



3. Helplessness. You probably do not know what to expect and feel, or that things are out of your control. Some parents may fear that their children will be taken away. Your Victim Service Officer and Family Advocate can help you to stay informed of how your child's case proceeds through the system.

4. Lack of assertiveness. You may feel invisible and think there is nothing you can do to help the situation get better. We will help you to learn what you can do to be an advocate for your child and yourself.

What to Expect from Counseling Services

What is therapy?

Therapy is a unique opportunity for a child to meet with a trained professional who is willing and able to work together to establish goals for treatment and a pathway toward achieving those goals. For children who are coming to therapy for a history of abuse, this process also uses research-based treatment proven effective in helping children with the trauma.

How will counseling help my child?

The counseling relationship is a safe place for your child to label and express feelings and thoughts related to the abuse, such as anger, fear, and sadness. Your child will also be assisted in re-establishing the personal boundaries and sense of self-worth taken away by the abuser. Your child will learn that the abuse was not his/her fault.

How long will my child need to come to counseling?

Length of time in counseling varies. Your child's counselor will help your child set goals to be reached in therapy. An individual treatment plan will be made and reviewed periodically. Your child may need to seek counseling in the future when leaving home, getting married, or having a child.

How do I request counseling for my child?

You can request for a referral to be made for your child through any of the professionals dealing with your child's case. If your child may be best served by therapeutic services offered by NCAC's Children's Center, arrangements will be made with you to schedule an intake session. If services may be best offered by another therapeutic center, arrangements will be made with you to receive contact information for that center. The NCAC Children's Center may be reached at 256-327-3853.

How to Tell Your Child About the Legal Outcome

It is best to be honest and direct with your child. However, how much you explain depends on your child's age and level of understanding about the case. The most important thing is let your child know that you are proud of him/her for being brave.

When the case is completed, you may feel let down or have a period of depression. This happens to many parents, even if the legal proceedings had a positive outcome. If your child hears you express disappointment in the outcome, your child may think you are disappointed in him/her. Instead, find a supportive friend with whom you can share your feelings and frustration.

Remember you have done your best in trying to prevent further abuse and hold the offender responsible for what s/he did. Even if the case was dropped, ensuring your child's safety is a major accomplishment.

Some things you can say to your child if the alleged offender is not held legally accountable:

- Just because they didn't find _____ guilty, that does not mean they didn't believe you. It's just that they have to follow the court's rules, and sometimes it's hard for other people to prove that it happened.
- You may be wondering how someone can do something wrong or against the law and not be punished. It doesn't make sense to me either.
- It doesn't matter what the court process did. What matters is that you did what you needed to do—you told.
- You are safe. You have been very brave.

How Caregivers Sometimes Feel...

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5. **Shock, numbness, repulsion.** You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to shock, numbness, and repulsion for the new situation you find yourself in. If so, you may need to seek therapy for yourself to recover from the abuse.
6. **Guilt, self-blame.** You may feel it is all your fault. The offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing you can do now is support your child and learn all you can about how to make things better. Reading this handbook is a good first step.
7. **Hurt and betrayal.** It is normal to feel hurt from the loss of your child's innocence. You also may have lost a spouse or partner if that person was the offender. You may even have lost friends. It is very important to take time to grieve for these losses.
8. **Concern about money.** You may be worried about finances because of lost income. A Family Advocate or DHR Social Worker will work with you to help you get on your feet.
9. **Fear of violence.** In homes where violence is common, you may fear the offender will try to harm you or your children. If so, call Crisis Services, the domestic violence shelter, at 256 716-1000.
10. **Fear of drug or alcohol abuse.** You may be afraid that you or the offender will abuse drugs or alcohol because of the stress or that one of you may have a relapse to an old addiction. If you need help, call New Horizons Recovery Center at 256-532-4141.

The Grooming Process: Steps the Abuser Takes to Set up Children

Some caregivers wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children. These include:

1. **Seeking out an approachable child:** Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.
2. **Establishing relationship with the child:** Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteering for child duty, becoming their “buddy,” or buying them candy or presents.
3. **Breaking down the child’s resistance to touch:** Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.
4. **Finding ways to isolate a child:** Abusers find excuses to be alone with children so they can molest them. For example, they may babysit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.
5. **Blaming the child and keeping the secret:** Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won’t tell. They use statements like these:
 - “You know you like the way I touch you.”
 - “If you tell, people will think you are bad.”
 - “If you tell our ‘special secret,’ I will go to jail.”
 - “If you tell your mother, she won’t love you anymore.”
 - “If you tell, you will be taken away from your family.”

Limits of the Legal System

While the legal system is very important to your child’s case and can be emotionally draining for you and your family, it is only one step in the process and is not essential to your child’s recovery. Maintaining a focus on your child’s wellbeing will help you to prioritize your emotional energy and hopefully lessen the frustrations of the legal process.

Another thing to remember: Day after day, therapists who talk with adult survivors of child sexual abuse hear them say, “My parents didn’t do anything about it.” However, your child will not tolerate abuse.

Celebrate when the court case has ended. No matter what the outcome, conviction or not, tell the child it is over. Acknowledge that you both did your best and worked hard. Recognize your efforts and the end of this stage of the process.



Getting Ready for Court

If there is to be a trial, your Victim Service Office will take your child to the courtroom for a tour. You will also be involved in this process. Giving the child an early look at the courtroom and preparing him/her on what to expect can ease some of the child's fears, which may include the following:

- Seeing the abuser again
- Not wanting to go
- Wanting it to be over
- Wondering where you will be

If you are a witness, you will not be allowed in the courtroom when your child is testifying. In some cases, it might be easier on your child not to have you there. However, your child should never be in the courtroom without a trusting, friendly face, so make sure your Victim Service Officer, Family Advocate, a best friend, or a relative stays with your child at all times.



Signs Sometimes Shown by Abused Children

Children may have some of the following symptoms as a result of abuse:

- Nausea/upset stomach
- Change in appetite
- Crying
- Nightmares
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Anger and mood changes
- Withdrawal from others
- Avoidance of school/friends
- Clinging to parents
- Aggressiveness
- Change in school performance
- Rebelliousness
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Fears and phobias
- Lying
- Attention-seeking



The Children's Center and other community agencies offer services to help your child overcome the effects of trauma. Children react differently depending on age, extent of abuse, support from others, and their relationship with the offender. **The single most important factor affecting the child's recovery is the level of support from the caregiver.** It is this simple. If you do everything you can to support your child, the chances of recovery are much greater. If you feel torn between loyalty to your child and loyalty to the offender, the

Children's Center has services available to help you sort it out.

How to Act Toward Your Child

Provide safety, love, and support. Let them know it is okay to cry or to be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't coach or pressure your child to talk about things.

Some things you can say that will really help your child:

- I believe you.
- I know it's not your fault.
- I'm glad I know about it.
- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- I will take care of you.
- I'm not sure what will happen next.
- Nothing about YOU made this happen. It has happened to other children too.
- You don't need to take care of me.
- I am upset, but not with you.
- I'm angry at the person who did this.
- I'm sad. You may see me cry. That's all right. I will be able to take care of you. I'm not mad at you.
- I don't know why the person did it. S/he has a problem.
- You can still love someone but hate what they did to you.



Working with the System

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- Try not to overreact. It is a difficult time and emotions are probably running high. Losing control can hurt the case and overshadow the needs of the innocent victim, your child.
- Love, support, and protect your child at all costs. If the alleged offender is a significant person to you, balancing your feelings for the offender and your child can be very difficult. Remember that your child has only you to make healthy, protective decisions.
- Please cooperate with investigators. You will probably feel as if investigators are prying into your personal life, but this is necessary and vital to the case and to your child's welfare. The sooner the facts come out, the sooner the case can be resolved and you can return to a more normal life.
- Try to understand the investigator's perspective. You may feel that investigators do not care because they avoid showing emotions. In fact, investigators do care, and part of that caring involves remaining objective and calm in the face of extremely emotional situations.



Working with the System

The system is responsible for protecting children and holding offenders accountable. The more information and cooperation you give to the team of professionals working in the system, the better job they can do on the case.

Support people are available to help you. If assigned to your case, the Family Advocate will be empathic and familiar with the legal system and child abuse and is available to help. A Victim Service Officer (at the District Attorney's Office) is also available to keep you informed about the status of the case (court dates, etc.), help you work through the legal system, and assist you in obtaining financial assistance, if you are eligible.

Here are some basic tips for working with professionals in the system:

- Be calm and reassuring to your child. Please do not coach your child on what to say. It is important for the story to come out in your child's words and in your child's own time.
- Try to provide as many facts as you can when you are asked for information. Cases are built on the four W's: who, what, when, and where. Avoid guessing if you don't know the answer to a question—it is much better to say you do not know.
- Tell how you feel and why you feel that way. Your feelings are valuable in giving investigators insight. Although only facts are allowed in court, feelings can help give investigators ideas for how to proceed.
- Always be honest, even though the truth may not seem favorable to yourself or others.

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Some Things You Can Do:

- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- See that your child receives therapy as soon as possible. Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.
- Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it all on your own. Contact the Children's Center for assistance.
- Teach your child the rules of personal safety. Tell them what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable way.
- Be careful not to question your child about the abuse. If you do, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser. Specially trained professionals at the Children's Center will interview your child to obtain the necessary information without harming the case or causing further trauma. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.
- Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect you, that person, and the child.
- Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.
- Never coach or advise your child on how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators. This could seriously damage the case.
- Avoid the suspect.
- Your child may need an extra sense of physical security. Stay close, and assure your child that you will keep him/her safe.
- Remember to give attention to your other children.

The Investigation

Following are the basic steps to an investigation of child sexual abuse.

1. Someone reports suspicion of abuse to authorities, either law enforcement or the Department of Human Resources.
2. Interviews with the child are conducted, usually at the Children's Center. A law enforcement officer, social worker, or therapist conducts the interview.
3. Medical exams are conducted if necessary.
4. The child is referred for further evaluation at the Children's Center if necessary. A Family Advocate may be assigned to the case.
5. Law Enforcement and/or DHR will continue the investigation, which will include an interview with the alleged offender, if possible.
6. A team of professionals will meet to discuss the case and decide how to manage it. The team consists of medical professionals, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, social workers, and mental health professionals.
7. The case may be referred to Criminal or District Court, or some other plan may be made for managing the case.

How the Legal System Responds to Abuse

The legal system's response to abuse can be confusing to children and families. Part of this confusion stems from the fact that two different "legal systems" can be working on the same case at the same time. These two systems are the "criminal" system and the "civil" system. In addition, there are two different court systems that can work on a child abuse case—Criminal Court and District Court. Both courts may work on the same case at the same time, but they have different purposes.

The *Criminal Court* is concerned primarily with guilt or innocence of the accused and often uses a trial to decide on the suspect's guilt or innocence. The criminal trial focuses on issues such as:

- Is there evidence to prove the child was abused?
- What illegal acts occurred?
- Was there a confession?
- If proven guilty, what punishment should the offender receive?

The *District Court* is concerned primarily with the safety of the child and focuses on issues like custody, supervised visitation, and counseling. A number of different court hearings can be held to decide these issues. The decisions in the civil system do not depend on whether or not the criminal system finds guilt.



The Legal System

It is very difficult to predict what will happen for you and your child after the report has been made and the case is in the legal system. Sometimes the chance to speak up about what happened can be a good thing for the child—whether or not the abuser is convicted. Many children are relieved to think that someone more powerful will help protect them and tell the offender that s/he was wrong. For other children, however, the events following the report can be upsetting.

The legal process often moves at its own pace, different from your child's need to heal. Emotional wounds may be reopened by the various proceedings, which take place over a period of one to two years. The court date may be delayed repeatedly. It is best to try to remember that people are working to gain the best outcome for you and your child. The team approach to these cases keeps the process as simple as possible.

You can make the process easier for your child by working with the authorities. The legal system may be able to protect your child from future unsupervised contact with the offender. Working through the legal system is also a way to keep other children safe.

To help guide you through the legal process, the District Attorney's office will assign a Victim Service Officer (VSO) to you and your case. This person will help you through this difficult period and will be available to answer questions, explain the types of victim assistance and services for which you may be eligible, and generally help you through this difficult period. Also, the VSO will serve as your direct liaison to the District Attorney's office and the particular attorney assigned to prosecute your case. Once the investigation in your case is completed and your case is received in the District Attorney's office for prosecution, you will be notified by letter of who your Victim Service Officer is. Please contact your VSO as soon as possible for assistance throughout the entire process.

Your Team of Professionals

In Huntsville and Madison County, we are fortunate to have a highly trained team of professionals that meets every week to respond to child abuse reports. The roles of the team members are described below.



The District Attorney/Prosecutor: The prosecutor leads the team, which decides whether charges will be filed. Consideration is given to many factors which will affect the likelihood of success in court. Some of the factors considered are age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, whether or not the suspect has admitted to the allegations, presence of medical evidence, and whether or not there are other witnesses.

The Victim Service Officer: The Victim Service Officer is a professional in the DA's office who coordinates the court preparation, helps victims and their families understand the legal process, and provides other valuable services to victims and their families.

The Law Enforcement Officer: Huntsville Police Department, Madison City Police Department, and the Madison County Sheriff's Office have investigators on the team. They interview children, non-offending caregivers, suspects, and other witnesses, and they gather evidence from the scene of the alleged event.

The Social Worker: The role of the Department of Human Resources is to help protect your child. The DHR social workers conduct interviews and develop safety plans. They may refer you and/or your child to counseling.

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Your Team of Professionals

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The Child Forensic Interview Specialist: The CFIS is a trained professional who is responsible for providing legally defensible forensic interviews of children and adolescents when there are suspicions of abuse or when the child has been a witness to violence against another person. The CFIS will meet with your child so that your child can provide a statement about what happened.

The Nurse Practitioner/SANE Nurse: Depending on what may have happened to your child, a medical exam may be requested by the investigative team. Caregivers may also request a medical exam. If the abuse has occurred in the past 72 hours, then a SANE Nurse (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) from Crisis Services of North Alabama may conduct a medical exam to evaluate and collect evidence from the child. However, if the abuse occurred more than 72 hours previously, then a non-emergent medical exam is conducted by the NCAC Nurse Practitioner. This exam, performed in a child friendly room, is not invasive or painful. Medical exams are performed to assess for and treat STD's and injuries, evaluate for pregnancy, and to document trauma. More importantly, exams help to reassure the child that his or her body is okay. Regardless of when children are evaluated, most children will have normal examinations. This does not mean that no sexual abuse has occurred. It is possible that children and teens have been involved in sexual activity without injury or lasting signs.

The Therapist: Mental health professionals (therapists) on the team help decide how the abuse has affected the child and family and what can be done to assist them in healing from the experience. Therapists also help in the investigation by conducting what is called Extended Forensic Interviews (EFI). If a child is too young, frightened, or confused to tell the whole story at the first interview, the therapist may conduct an EFI with the child for up to six sessions. This gives the child time and a feeling of safety to tell what has happened. Additionally, the therapists provide research-based counseling services to aid in coping with the trauma.

The Family Advocate: The Family Advocate is a trained professional who helps the caregiver when abuse is reported. The Family Advocate helps the caregiver connect with services in the community and provides education and emotional support as the caregiver protects the child in the aftermath of the abuse report.

The Interview Process

Once your child has reported that abuse has occurred, your child will be interviewed at the Children's Center. At times, you may be asked to wait while your child is being interviewed. Being left out of some of the proceedings can make you feel as if you are not very important to the process or to your child. Please be assured that you are very important. In fact, you may be the key to understanding what has happened. However, caregivers are not present during the interview to make sure that the child's testimony is unbiased and will stand up in court.

Interviewers will take the time to make sure your child is comfortable without you. This means letting your child see you with the interviewer and making sure that your child knows where you will be during the interview. It should be made clear to the child that you are available if necessary.

At the end of the interview, the DHR investigator and law enforcement will inform you about what will happen next. In some instances, a medical examination will be recommended. Unless told otherwise, you and your child are free to leave after talking with the investigators. The team will meet to develop a plan, and an advocate or the DHR investigator will contact you at a later date with more detailed information.

