



VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

Victim support and advocacy services are provided to all CAC clients and their caregivers as part of the Multidisciplinary Team response.



4. VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

Rationale

Research demonstrates that parent/caregiver support is essential to reducing trauma and improving outcomes for children and family members. Client access to, and participation in, investigation, prosecution, treatment, and support services are a core component of MDT response, as encouraged by coordinated victim advocacy services. Up-to-date information and ongoing access to comprehensive services are critical to a child and family's comfort and ability to participate in an ongoing investigation, possible prosecution, intervention and treatment.

Victim support and advocacy responsibilities are implemented consistent with victims' rights legislation in the CAC's state and the complement of services in the CAC's coverage area. Many members of the MDT may serve as advocates for a child within their discipline systems or agencies. However, victim-centered advocacy is a discipline unto itself with a distinct role on the MDT that coordinates and provides services to ensure a consistent and comprehensive network of support for the child and family.

Children and families in crisis need assistance in navigating the multiple systems involved in the CAC response. More than one victim advocate may perform these functions at different points throughout a case, requiring continuity and consistency in service delivery. Coordination of victim support is the responsibility of the CAC and must be defined in the CAC/MDT's written documents. Specific victim support services may be provided in a variety of ways, as dictated by the needs of the case or CAC, such as:

- Employing staff members to perform advocacy functions
E.g., family advocates, care coordinators, victim advocates, and child life specialists.
- Linking with local community-based advocates
E.g., domestic violence advocates, rape crisis counselors, and Court Appointed Special Advocates.
- Linking with system-based advocates
E.g., law enforcement victim advocates, prosecutor-based victim witness coordinators.
- Combining victim support services.

All advocates providing services to CAC clients must meet the prescribed training and supervision requirements.

4. VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY (continued)

CRITERIA - Essential Components

A. Comprehensive, coordinated victim support and advocacy services are provided by designated individual(s) who have specialized training in victim advocacy. The CAC must demonstrate that all Victim Advocates who provide services to CAC clients have successfully completed a minimum of 24 hours of instruction including, but not limited to:

1. Dynamics of abuse
2. Trauma-informed services
3. Crisis assessment and intervention
4. Risk assessment and safety planning
5. Professional ethics and boundaries
6. Understanding the coordinated multidisciplinary response
7. Assistance in accessing/obtaining victims' rights as outlined by law
8. Court education, support and accompaniment
9. Assistance with access to treatment and other services, including protective orders, housing, public assistance, domestic violence intervention, transportation, financial assistance, interpreters, among others as determined for individual clients.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

Victim support and advocacy is fundamental to the MDT response. The support/advocacy responsibilities may be filled by a designated victim advocate who is an employee of the CAC or another victim-serving agency. Or, another MDT member with appropriate experience and training may also serve as a victim advocate as long as the role does not conflict with the other MDT functions s/he may have.

If more than one victim advocate is providing services to the same family, case management

meetings are required in order to discuss individual and shared case responsibilities, needed services, follow-up, and ongoing assessment and intervention.

If multiple advocacy agencies share the delivery of services, the CAC is responsible for establishing protocols and linkage agreements agreed upon by the MDT that clearly define the victim advocacy roles and ensure seamless coordination of victim advocacy services.

B. Individuals who provide victim advocacy services for children and families at the CAC must demonstrate participation in ongoing education in the field of victim advocacy and child maltreatment consisting of a minimum of 8 contact hours every 2 years.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

The CAC and/or MDT must provide initial and ongoing opportunities for professionals who provide advocacy services to receive specialized training and peer support. It is vitally important that victim advocates remain current on developments in the fields relevant to their delivery of services to children and families and to continue to develop their expertise.

C. Victim Advocates serving CAC clients must provide the following constellation of services:

1. Crisis assessment and intervention, risk assessment, and safety planning and support for children and family members at all stages of involvement with CAC
2. Assessment of individual needs and cultural considerations for the child and family to ensure those needs are addressed

4. VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY (continued)

3. Presence at CAC during the forensic interview in order to participate in information sharing; inform and support family about the coordinated, multidisciplinary response; and assess needs of child and non-offending caregiver
4. Provision of education and access to victims' rights and crime victims' compensation
5. Assistance in procuring concrete services (housing, protective orders, domestic violence intervention, food, transportation, public assistance etc.)
6. Provision of referrals for specialized, trauma focused, evidence-supported mental health and medical treatment, if not provided at the CAC
7. Access to transportation to interviews, court, treatment and other case-related meetings
8. Engagement in child and family response regarding participation in the investigation and/or prosecution
9. Participation in case review in order to discuss the unique needs of the child and family and plan associated support services, ensure the seamless coordination of services, and ensure the child and family's concerns are heard and addressed
10. Provision of updates to the family on case status, continuances, dispositions, sentencing, and inmate status notification (including offender release from custody)
11. Provision of court education and courthouse/courtroom tours, support, and accompaniment
12. Coordinated case management meetings with all individuals providing victim advocacy services.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

While the particular combination of services required will vary based upon the child and family's unique needs and the legal requirements of any civil and/or criminal cases, all children and families need support in navigating the various systems they encounter that are often unfamiliar to them. Crisis assessment and intervention, advocacy, and support services help to identify the child and family's unique needs, reduce fear and anxiety, and expedite access to appropriate services. Families can be assisted through the various phases of crisis management with problem solving, access to critical treatment and other services, and ongoing education, information and support. Crises may recur with various precipitating or triggering events including, but not limited to, financial hardships, child placement, arrest, change/delay in court proceedings, and preparation for court testimony. Children may experience crisis and trauma, including suicidal ideation, at unanticipated times. Many CACs provide advocacy services for children and their family members on-site and/or through linkage agreements with other community agencies or system-based providers.

State and federal laws require that victims of crime, including victims of child abuse, are informed of their rights as crime victims, including information about, and eligibility for, crime victim compensation. Caregivers who are affected by the crime may also be entitled to services. Generally, children and their families will be unfamiliar with their legal rights. Therefore, information regarding rights and services should be routinely and repeatedly explained as necessary and made available to all children and their caregivers.

4. VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY (continued)

D. Active outreach and follow-up support services for caregivers are consistently available.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

Often families have never been involved in this multi-system response, which can prove intimidating and confusing. Active outreach requires follow-up with families beyond initial assessment and crisis response. Follow-up services after the initial contact at the CAC must include ongoing, regular contact until the CAC concludes its involvement with the case.

In the aftermath of victimization, the child and family typically feel a significant loss of control. Education provides information that is empowering. Victim education must be ongoing and even repetitive as needed, as families may be unable to process so much information at one time, particularly in the midst of a crisis. The family may be dealing with immediate safety issues, and may be coping with the emotional impact of the initial report and ensuing process. They may need a variety of concrete medical, mental health, and social services. As the case dynamics change, and as the case proceeds through the various systems, the needs of the child and family will also change, and must continue to be assessed so that additional relevant information, support, and services can be offered.

E. The CAC/MDT's written protocols and guidelines include availability of victim support and advocacy services for all CAC clients throughout the life of the case and participation of the victim advocate(s) in MDT case review.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

Because victim support/advocacy is a central function of the CAC response, the availability and provision of ongoing victim support and advocacy by designated, trained individuals must be included in the CAC/MDT's written documents. Service coordination, both within and outside the CAC, must be clearly defined, including the role of the victim advocate during the interview process, follow-up, and case review.