

A Visit to the Children's Advocacy Center

A program of the CAN Council Saginaw County



*Using teamwork to make a difference in the lives of
abused children*

1311 N. Michigan Avenue
Saginaw, Michigan 48602
(989) 752-7226

www.cancouncil.org

Our Mission...

To minimize trauma and increase safety of sexually and physically abused children and their families in a child friendly environment by coordinating a team of community professionals

Your child has been referred to the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) because of concerns about possible abuse.



Together we **CAN** stop child abuse and neglect.

The CAN Council is a non-profit organization that depends on the financial gifts of caring people in our community. Your tax-deductible gift will let us provide a safe, caring place for children to be expertly interviewed and examined lessening the trauma and providing the best opportunity for their safety in the future. Some services at the Children's Advocacy Center and the production of this brochure are provided, in part, through a grant from the Michigan Crime Victims Services Commission (VOCA).

Families referred to our Center have many concerns about what will happen during the visit. This booklet addresses many of these concerns.

As a parent or caregiver, your role is to listen to your child and to reassure her that any abuse was not her fault. Please take time to read and share this information with your child.

** For simplicity "child" is referred to as "she" in this brochure. We are in no way indicating that only females are abused.*

Why have I been referred to the Center?

There is reason to believe that your child may have been sexually, or otherwise, abused. As part of the investigation, your child needs to be interviewed by the proper authorities. The Children's Advocacy Center is a child-friendly, safe place where interviews take place. The Center offers its services for children with abuse related issues.

Who will be there when I get there?

A CAC staff person will be there to greet you and help you fill out some paperwork. There will be a Children's Protective Services (CPS) worker and/or a detective present for your child's interview. There may also be an assistant prosecutor or other professionals present. You will have the opportunity to meet everyone involved in your child's interview.

Is the Children's Advocacy Center part of Children's Protective Services (CPS) or the police?

The CAC is a non-profit agency and is not a part of CPS, the State of Michigan, any police department or the prosecutor's office. The CAC works with these organizations to interview your child and to provide follow up services. The Center employs interview specialists who are trained in child abuse cases.

Who will interview my child?

the benefits of releasing a report to your child's doctor or any other professional.

Remember:

- * Your support is what your child needs most at this time.
- * Continue to let her know you love, believe and support her.
- * Parents need support too. Make use of counseling and other support available through the CAC.
- * You may call the Center at any time-
For a supportive listening ear.
For information about the status of your case.
For suggestions about how to help your child best.

Professionals working with you

Detective:

Case Report #: _____

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

**Family Independence Agency
Children's Protective Services Worker:**

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Children's Advocacy Center Staff-person:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

thing is to let her know she is not in trouble, and she needs to tell the truth.

What should I bring to the appointment?

If your child has a comfort item, please allow her to bring it. Bring your list of questions, any documentation you may have about your child's behavior, or relevant medical information.

How long will the interview take?

Please allow two hours for your entire interview visit. Your child's interview will last about 45 minutes. Additional time allows you to talk with staff and the team before and after your child's interview.

Can I be in the room for the interview?

There are several reasons why it is best for parents not to be present in the interview (*or observation*) room.

- We have found that most kids have an easier time telling what happened when a parent is not present.
- It is difficult for a parent to hear a child's disclosure and remain calm.
- If the case goes to trial, a parent that witnesses an interview may be subpoenaed and have to testify in court about the interview.

If my child doesn't want to talk, can they leave?

Every effort will be taken to help your child tell what may have happened. Part of the interview technique is rapport building – where the interviewer talks with the child to get to know her and help her feel safe and comfortable. This process is designed to make it easier for your child to tell what may have happened. If your child does not want to talk or does not disclose anything that happened, it is unlikely that charges will be brought against the alleged perpetrator. Sometimes the interview

reveals that the suspected abuse did not occur, a positive outcome for all involved.

Will I find out what happened during the interview?

After your child is interviewed, the team will want to talk to you privately. Your child may return to the family room/play area. You will be told about your child's interview. The team may also have some follow up questions for you. Please take some time now to write down any questions you may have. The interview process can be very overwhelming and you may forget to ask something.

Whom should I call if I have questions about my appointment?

Please feel free to call the Children's Advocacy Center at (989)752-7226 with any questions you may have. You may also call the CPS worker and/or detective assigned to your case. Our staff can help you by providing names and phone numbers of these team members.

What's next in the investigation?

The police and/or CPS worker will continue the investigation into whether your child was abused. If there is strong evidence of abuse, the police will request that the prosecutor's office issue criminal charges against the alleged perpetrator. The next step for you is to emotionally support your child. Do not lead your child to believe that the interview is the only part of the legal process in which they may be involved. It is possible that your child will be interviewed again or be asked to testify.

What's next for my child and our family?

Counseling may be recommended and is often very helpful for children as well as their parents. The CAC works closely with providers of specialized counseling for abused children and their families. Our staff will assist you with referrals to appropriate counseling, including services that

are provided at no cost. We often arrange for a counselor to meet you during your visit to the CAC so that you can schedule a first appointment right away. It is often beneficial for children to receive counseling to process any trauma and to identify sexual acting out behaviors. Parents can find support and understand how to best meet their child's many needs. Remember that healing is possible, for you and your child, but it takes time. Your child may need to talk about the abuse long after it happened, and may need counseling at different times in her life.

A medical examination at the Children's Advocacy Center may be scheduled for your child. Specially trained medical professionals conduct these exams at the Center. The team will discuss with you the possibility of an exam. If your child is referred for an exam please consider the following information carefully:

- Let your child know that she will be seeing a special doctor that will check her from head to toe. She will not be given a shot. Let her know you will be with her if she wishes. Most children tolerate this exam very well. A special instrument called a colposcope will be used. The colposcope magnifies the genital area and allows the physician to document any signs of abuse. This instrument does not go inside.
- Most children have no physical injuries to their genital or anal areas. This does not mean that they were not abused. The most important thing is making sure your child is healthy. The medical professional who examines your child will sit down with you after your child's check-up to explain the results.
- Before the exam you will sign a form to release the medical report to the police and Children's Protective Services. At that time you can discuss