

MISSION

The Children's Advocacy Center of McKean County Multidisciplinary Investigative Team are dedicated to serving child victims of abuse and their families by providing collaborative services in a child-friendly environment to reduce trauma and promote healing.

424 W. Main Street
Smethport, PA 16749
Phone: 814.887.3354 Fax: 814.887.3355

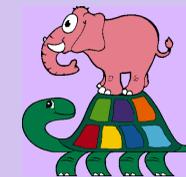


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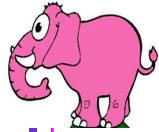
A Member of:



A Guide for
Caregivers and Children



**Children's Advocacy Center
of McKean County**



Dear Parent/Caregiver,

Welcome to the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) of McKean County. The CAC opened its doors in October 2012 to serve the mission of reducing trauma to children while promoting healing. Your child is here due to concerns about possible abuse. At the CAC we put children and families at the heart of everything we do. The district attorney, law enforcement officials, CYS case workers, victim advocates, medical and mental health professionals, and CAC staff work together as a multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT) to investigate allegations of abuse and to offer help and support.

Our CAC provides a child-friendly environment where a child who has alleged abuse can be interviewed in a safe, neutral, and supportive setting. Our goal is to make sure that this process is sensitive to your child's needs and that your family receives the compassionate care you deserve. Everyone you work with at the CAC will try to make the process as easy as possible for you and your family.

This booklet was designed to help answer any questions you may have and to provide a guide for this process. We hope you find it useful. Please contact us if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

The Children's Advocacy Center of McKean County MDIT

**To Report Suspected Child Abuse,
Call Childline at 1-800-932-0313**

Other County Resources

Children & Youth Services: 814-887-3350

Victims' Resource Center: 888-822-6325

Or contact your

Local Police Department: 814-887-4911

After the Appointment

Should I ask my child about his/her experience?

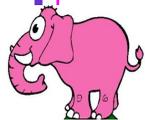
You can certainly ask about how things went, but don't ask for specifics about what questions were asked or what they talked about. Asking things like what the room was like and if the interviewer was nice are comfortable questions and show that you are interested in their experience, without encouraging your child to give details.

What if my child wants to tell me everything?

This is unlikely as children are protective of their parents and caregivers, which is why they are reluctant to talk about sensitive things in the first place. If your child initiates conversation with you, then you should be a good listener. Be careful not to react in a way that makes your child feel guilty (i.e. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?") or makes them feel ashamed or asks additional questions. Let them say what they have to say and thank them again for their honesty. If you feel disturbed by what they say, please contact your Advocate. They will help you process the information.

Should my child seem upset or show signs of sadness or shame?

Most children feel relieved that they've been able to finally get their 'secret' out, so they may actually show signs of relief. They may just seem like their normal selves and want to play or do an activity that is fun. Some children show feelings, such as sadness or fear about the circumstances, especially if the allegations are about someone the child cares about or fears. Children may also be worried about consequences for family members or their reactions. Allow your child to express whatever feelings they have; then invite them to choose a simple activity that the two of you can do together. Remind them that you are not upset or shocked about what they have to say. Above all, be supportive and understanding. Each child is unique, but all children need to feel that they are safe and secure.



You have an interview at the Children's Advocacy Center of McKean County:

424 W. Main Street, Smethport, PA 16749 on

(Day/Date) _____ at

(Time) _____ a.m./p.m.

Parking for the CAC is located immediately in front of the building, as well as on State Street located at the back of the CAC. If you need additional assistance getting to the CAC, please let CAC Staff know and they will assist you in making arrangements.

If you have any questions, please contact the CAC at (814) 887-3354.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Law Enforcement Investigator:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Agency: _____

Child Protective Services:

Caseworker: _____

Phone: _____

Agency: _____

Family and/or Victim Advocate:

Advocate: _____

Phone: _____

Agency: _____

District Attorney's Office:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Agency: _____

Medical Exam:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Additional Notes: Please write down any information provided to you by the investigative team about your case.



How to help your child

Support your child

The best way for you to help the investigation is to support your child. Being supportive may be difficult for you, especially if you were close to the suspect. Ask your child how they feel, but don't stop loving them. Talk with all of your children about sexual abuse. Educate them about contact with adults and other children. Encourage your child to live as normally as possible by doing things with other kids.

Fully Cooperate with Investigators and/or CYS

During the investigation you may feel that your privacy is being invaded. You may not understand why the investigators need to know so many details about your life. They ask personal questions because the information you tell them can help with the investigation. For this reason it is very important that you fully cooperate with the investigation. Provide as many facts as you can, but do not guess answers to any

questions. If you do not know or do not remember an answer, just tell the investigators that. They understand that this process may be difficult for you, and will appreciate your cooperation.

Let the investigators know about any changes in your life as soon as possible, such as whether you have moved, any contact the suspect has with your family, or any new information you have that may affect the investigation. If you are unable to contact the investigators, contact your Advocate.

Follow up with a Victim's Advocate

You will be provided on-site services or referral information to the local victims' advocacy program. Most children who are victims of abuse and their families benefit by having a supportive individual to walk them through the legal system. The Advocate can help guide the course to healing and empowerment. The Advocate is familiar with the dynamics of abuse and can make further referrals to more specialized trauma informed treatment if necessary.



Why didn't my child tell me earlier?

Sometimes children do not tell anyone that they were being abused. In our experience at the Center, many children do not tell immediately when they are victimized. The reasons can be as varied as the children themselves. Some children are scared or confused about what will happen if they tell. They may be reluctant to betray a loved one. Many offenders are adults who have a trusting relationship with the child. It is important for you to understand that the person who hurt your child may have threatened him or her into keeping the abuse a secret. Please remember that you should not blame yourself if your child did not tell you, you should not blame your child for not telling as well.

Does this change the kind of parent I need to be?

You have made the most important step towards your child's recovery by believing what they have told you. You have acted in your child's best interest by cooperating with the investigative agencies. You have shown your child that, above all else, you want to protect them. You cannot undo what has happened to your child. What you can do now is be a model for your child and show them confidence and resilience. This does not mean denying your grief and anger. It does mean letting the child know that, even though this disclosure has caused great stress in your lives, you are very glad they told you. Your child still needs boundaries, rules, affection, and discipline just like before. They need to know that they can talk to you about what happened. They also need to be included in decisions about whether family members and friends will be told. They need to know that, although they will never forget what happened, they can recover. They need to feel your love and strength. And they need to know you will get through this together.



Who we are

The Children's Advocacy Center of McKean County provides a sensitive, caring response for children between the ages of 3 and 17 who may have experienced abuse. The CAC is a child-friendly, safe environment for children and families. Children come to the CAC with their non-offending caregivers, parents, family members, or guardians. Please note that anyone accused of abusing the child (the "alleged perpetrator") is not allowed to be present at the CAC.

Children are referred for a forensic interview at the CAC by:

- ◇ Children & Youth Services
- ◇ District Attorney's Office (DA)
- ◇ Local and State Law Enforcement Officials

Once a report of suspected child abuse has been made, investigators from the above agencies make a referral to the CAC. Through the CAC, an interview is conducted with the child, which allows the police and CYS to obtain their information all at once. This collaborative investigative process is intended to reduce the number of times your child is interviewed, therefore preventing additional trauma for your child and improving the entire investigation.

CAC Staff:

Director—Mikele Bay	814.887.3493
Family Advocate—Tonia Hartzell	814.887.3486
Forensic Interviewer—Mindi Brown	814.887.3481

Your Team of Professionals

The Children's Advocacy Center of McKean County Staff provides coordination of the multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT), managing the process from the initial contact to completion of services. We work with team members and families, coordinating and tracking the investigation, prosecution, child protection, and treatment efforts.

Child Protective Services (CYS) is responsible for the immediate safety of children who are allegedly being abused and /or neglected. The role of the CYS caseworker is to protect children and assist the caregiver(s) with the necessary services needed to ensure children's safety.

Law Enforcement Officers are responsible for investigating and determining whether a crime has been committed. They interview caregivers, suspects and other witnesses, and gather evidence from the scene of the alleged incident.

The District Attorney's Office is responsible for determining whether a crime has occurred, filing charges and prosecuting cases of child abuse. The prosecutor has the final decision as to if charges will be filed. The District Attorney's Office carefully reviews information provided by the assigned investigator to decide if he/she can prove beyond a reasonable doubt, in a courtroom, the incident happened.

The Victim's Advocate role is to work with children and families to provide up-to-date information regarding their case, as well as ongoing support. They assist with court preparation and help victims and families to understand the legal process. Advocacy does not play an investigative role, but rather a healing through empowerment role.

Medical Evaluation/SANE conduct a specialized medical evaluation in cases of suspected abuse and collect and identify medical-legal evidence if present. The primary purpose of the medical evaluation is to make sure your child is physically and medically healthy.

The Mental Health Professional offers trauma –informed treatment to children and families through a referral process from the Children's Advocacy Center.

What does it mean if there are "no findings"?

Not all children who have given a history of abuse will have visible physical findings. It is common for children who make a disclosure of abuse to not have any medical findings; this does not mean your child has made up a story. It may be that the particular incident did not result in a visible injury or the injury has healed. There are many types of abuse that can leave no traces. This does not mean that your child's case will not be pursued. You will have an opportunity to ask questions of the examining SANE and discuss findings after the exam is complete.

How much will this cost?

Your child's evaluation and associated costs are eligible for coverage and/or reimbursement to you from the Pennsylvania Crime Victim's Compensation Fund. Staff at the hospital will complete the necessary paperwork to submit a claim on your behalf. The medical evaluation for your child will not be a cost incurred by the caregiver. If transportation issues arise for the medical appointment, please notify staff at the CAC so that arrangements can be made to assist with these needs.

Where is the First Step Clinic located?

Bradford Regional Medical Center
First Step Clinic
116 Interstate Parkway
Bradford, PA 16701

Free parking is available on N. Bennett Street. Enter the main entrance of the hospital and take the first elevator to the 3rd floor. Step off of the elevator and take a left at the first suite, suite 33. In most instances, our Family Advocate will meet you at the main entrance to accompany you and your child to the appointment.



What happens in the medical exam?

The CAC staff will complete a referral, schedule the exam, and preregister your child to attend a medical evaluation that will occur at the Bradford Regional Medical Center (BRMC) located in a discreet location on the 3rd floor of the hospital named First Step Clinic. The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) will provide the medical examination with your child; a medical staff who is an acknowledged expert in the field of child abuse overseen by a physician. The purpose of the medical exam is to make sure your child is physically and medically healthy.

The exam is, in general, more concerning for parents to anticipate than for the child to experience. For girls, the exam is **NOT** like an adult female physical. In younger children it is not intrusive at all. In some cases, the examiner will visually examine the child's genitals with a photographic instrument. The instrument is hands free and does not touch your child in any way. Most young children are not upset by examination of their genitals; many older children are understandably embarrassed but will receive lots of support from the staff. In addition, your child is given the choice of who may accompany them into the physical. After the examination is completed, caregivers are provided education by the SANE. You should plan on being there up to 2 hours for the entire process.

During the examination, the SANE may recommend that tests be done to rule out any communicable diseases. Diagnostic testing will be based on the disclosures. If you have particular questions or requests, please let the medical provider know. If tests have to be done, the results are generally available to the parents within one to two weeks.

An Advocate, whom you and your child will have met at the CAC, will accompany you to the appointment, remaining until the evaluation has been completed to assist with questions while providing support to your family during this emotional time.



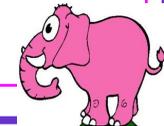
What is going to happen at the Children's Advocacy Center?

When you arrive at the Center, you will see that it is child friendly and decorated to be cozy and cheerful. Our Center is designed to provide a safe and comfortable environment for your child and family. You will notice that the Center may be busy with activity. That means you are not alone; many other families are dealing with the same things you are.

After you arrive at the Center, you'll be greeted by our Case Manager. An important part of their job is to listen and gather basic information about your child. Please feel free to talk with them openly. They can give you information about counseling and other services that are available to help your family.

While you are talking with the Case Manager your child will be meeting with an Advocate who will introduce your child to the interview room, answering questions your child may have about their visit, and preparing them for what to expect at the appointment. This will make your child comfortable until it is time for his or her interview.

We also understand that finding child care for your other children may be an issue. Children are welcome at the Center, regardless of whether or not they are being interviewed. A CAC staff member can supervise your children while you are meeting with the Case Manager and/or Advocate; however during the interview you are required to keep watch of your children.





What is involved in a Forensic Interview?

A Forensic Interviewer is a professional that has had extensive training in gathering information from children in a way that can be defended in court. Interviews are conducted in a warm, safe, child-friendly environment. The interviewer uses techniques and materials appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. The caregiver is not permitted to be present during the interviews. Although we understand your desire to provide emotional support to your child, the interviewer must be able to explain in court that the information the child gave was not influenced by anyone else. It is the job of the interviewer to help the child tell about their experience in an unbiased way and, if necessary, testify in court as requested.

The interview is digitally recorded and will be viewed by members of a Multidisciplinary Investigative Team via closed-circuit television during the process. This team is comprised of representatives from Law Enforcement, the District Attorney's office and/or Child Protective Services. The purpose of this technology is to limit the number of interviews and interviewers, reducing the trauma for the child during the investigation.

After the interview, you may meet with members of the team to ask questions and discuss the next steps of the process. It is important to remember that, no matter what a child reveals during the interview, they need to be praised for coming forward. The child will often take their emotional cue from the caregiver. You may feel extremely shaken, but it is helpful if you can appear confident to your child.

What to tell my child

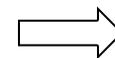
You may be concerned about what to tell your child about the forensic interview. We suggest that you tell him/her:

“The Children’s Advocacy Center is a safe place where children can talk about all kinds of things.”

Please:

- ◇ Do **NOT** interview your child or allow family members or other to question him/her regarding the incident(s) prior to the interview.
- ◇ Do **NOT** encourage your child to say anything specific.
- ◇ Do **NOT** offer to give your child something for talking at the CAC or for “telling what happened.” While we understand that this is generally intended only to comfort the child, it can be construed as a “bribe” and may seem that you are attempting to influence your child’s statement.

Children often feel abuse is their fault. Reassure your child by helping him/her understand that they did the right thing by telling someone. Answer your children’s questions the best you can. Please be open to listening to your child if he or she wants to talk, but do not pressure or force your child into a discussion on the topic.



Let your child know that it is alright to talk to the people at the CAC, that other kids have come to the CAC to talk, and the CAC staff talk to kids all the time.