

A Handbook for Caregivers



**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY
CENTERS**
OF NORTH DAKOTA

Contact Info

Children's Advocacy Center

Forensic Interviewer

Human Service/Social Services Zone Worker

Law Enforcement

State's Attorney's Office

Mental Health Provider

Advocate

Medical Provider

Other

Welcome

Welcome to the Children's Advocacy Center. We are here to offer support to you and your child. We are guided by the Child First Doctrine.

Your child is our first priority.

Our goals are to help you and your family by:

- Doing the best job possible in finding out about your child's experiences.
- Working in cooperation with other services/programs.
- Providing on-going support.
- Providing resources and services to help your family begin to heal.

We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for every client, staff member, volunteer, and contractor. We do not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of our activities or operations.

Working through the experience is difficult for both you and your family. We are here to help. Please contact us if you have any questions.

The Children's Advocacy Center also serves vulnerable and at-risk adults. The information in this booklet is meant to provide support for all clients and their families.



Your Team of Professionals

At the Children's Advocacy Center we work with a multidisciplinary team of professionals who meet regularly to respond to abuse reports. Here are the roles of the team members.

Forensic Interviewer

Listens to your child and asks questions about the concerns in a developmentally sensitive and child-friendly manner.

Human Service Zone Worker/Social Services

Works with the team to determine the best way to ensure your child is safe. Your human service zone worker can also assist you with resources and referrals for services.

Law Enforcement

Investigates the concerns and gathers evidence to determine if any laws have been broken and if/what criminal charges may be filed.

State's Attorney

Reviews all of the case information and decides whether there is enough information to charge and prosecute the case.

Advocate

Works closely with you and the team. Your advocate can assist you with resources, referrals for services and answer questions.

Mental Health Provider

Provides evidenced-based trauma-informed therapy services for children and family members.

Medical Provider

Specially trained medical professionals who provide medical exams and gather forensic evidence.

Your team at the Children's Advocacy Center is specially trained in working these cases and will be able to offer recommendations specific to your family.

What Is Abuse?



Physical Abuse

Physical abuse of a child is when an adult causes non-accidental injury or harm to a child.

28.3% of adults report being physically abused as a child.



Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult uses a child for sexual purposes or involves a child in sexual acts. It also includes when a child who is older or more powerful uses another child for sexual gratification.

20.7% of adults report being sexually abused as a child.



Psychological Maltreatment

Psychological maltreatment is when a caregiver harms a child's mental or social development, or causes severe emotional harm. While a single incident may be abuse, most often emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that causes damage over time.

10.6% of adults report being emotionally abused as a child.



Neglect

Neglect is when a caregiver does not give the care, supervision, affection and support needed for health, safety and well-being.



Exploitation

Exploitation is taking advantage of someone for personal gain. It can take several forms including trafficking, sexual exploitation and child pornography.

Adapted from ChildHelp.org

Signs and Symptoms of Trauma

Unexplained Injuries

- Unexplained burns or bruises.
- Unconvincing explanations of the injuries.

Changes in Behavior

- Appearing scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.

Changes in Eating

- Changes in an individual's eating behaviors may result in weight gain or loss.

Fear of Going Home

- Apprehension or anxiety about going to places or being around people they fear.

Returning to Earlier Behaviors

- Displaying behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some, there may be a loss of language skills or memory problems.

Changes in School/Work Performance and Attendance

- Declining grades, difficulty concentrating or have excessive absences.

Risk-Taking Behaviors

- Engaging in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.



Adapted from ChildSafe.org

Signs and Symptoms of Trauma

Inappropriate Sexual Behaviors

- Overly sexualized behavior or use inappropriate sexual language.

Changes in Sleeping

- Frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

Lack of Personal Care or Hygiene

- May appear uncared for. Present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor. May lack sufficient clothing for the weather.



You Are Not Alone

When referred to a Children's Advocacy Center, caregivers sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal, and it is important to take care of you and your child's emotional needs. These circumstances can affect your life in many ways, and it takes time to adjust. Here are some of the common thoughts and feelings you may have.



Denial

You may feel denial or disbelief that something may have happened.



Helplessness

You probably do not know what to expect and feel that things are out of your control. You may not be sure how to help.



Fear

It is normal to feel afraid when facing the unknown and being uncertain how this will affect your family and life going forward.



Guilt and Self-Blame

It is common to have many questions about how this happened and what could have been done differently.

You Are Not Alone

Feelings change over time and may not be there forever. If you are feeling these emotions, remember there is a team of people and services available to help you through this. Ask as many questions as you need.



How to Help Your Child

The single most important factor affecting the child's recovery is the level of support from a caregiver. You may be having a lot of feelings and unsure what to do. Here are some ways you can help:

S SAFETY FIRST—HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL SAFE

- Work with your team to create a safety plan.
- Let your child know what will happen next (as appropriate for them).
- Have a predictable routine.

A ALLOW EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

- Help your child name how they feel: "scared," "happy," "angry," "sad." Tell them it's OK to feel that way.
- Help your child express feelings in ways that won't hurt.

F FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

- Different children need different things.
- Listen to your child and watch their behavior to figure out what they need.

E EXPRESS SUPPORT OF YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

- If your child wants to talk, be there to listen, but don't ask questions about details.
- Focus on the child's feelings and not the details.

T TIES—RECONNECT WITH SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE & RITUALS

- Continue simple family traditions to remind you and your family of your way of life and offer hope.
- Encourage your child to spend time with their friends and supports. This can be helpful and provide some normalcy.

Y YOUR CHILD NEEDS YOU

- Just being with your child, even when you can't fix things, helps your child.
- Take care of yourself. Get support when needed.

Adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *After a Crisis: How Young Children Heal*.

How to Help Your Child

Some things you can say that will help your child:



“ I believe you. ”



It's not
your fault. ”

“ I am here
for you. ”



“ I am so
proud
of you. ”



“ Your safety is
important. ”



“ You are so
brave. ”



“ Nothing
about you
made this
happen. ”



“ I'm
sorry this
happened. ”



“ I'm sad too.
You may see
me cry. That's
all right. ”



“ I am upset,
but not
with you. ”



“ It's okay to have lots
of different feelings. ”



In times of uncertainty and high stress some people may have thoughts of self-harm or suicide. If you or your child are having these thoughts it is important that you reach out and get help.

Here are some important resources for you.

First Link (211): A free, confidential service available to anyone 24 hours/day, 7 days/week for listening and support, referrals to resources/help, and crisis intervention.

Call 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis.

Call 911 for emergencies or go to your local emergency room.

Taking Care of Yourself

This can be a very difficult time, and you may feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of other people, remember you need to take care of yourself.

- **Connect with Others** – Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships, and build a strong support system.
- **Take Breaks** – Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Try taking deep breaths and doing activities you usually enjoy.
- **Ask Questions to Your Team** – When you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Stay in touch with your advocate and others who are involved in your case. They can help answer your questions and connect you with resources.
- **Keep Routines** – Maintain your normal routine as much as possible. People often find comfort in the predictability that a routine offers.
- **Seek Help When Needed** – If distress impacts activities of your daily life for several days or weeks, talk to your local Children's Advocacy Center, counselor or doctor.



The Forensic Interview

The forensic interview is a semi-structured conversation that is geared to each individual's age and developmental level. It is a process that allows the individual to share their experiences.

A team meeting is held prior to the interview. The purpose is for the team to share information about the case with each other and make key decisions about the manner in which the interview should be conducted. Only team members involved in the investigation can observe during the interview.

Caregivers and other non-team members are not allowed to watch the interview process as this is an open and active investigation and we are gathering an official statement. Individuals may react to subtle cues from caregivers and may feel pressure to talk about their experiences in a way that can complicate the legal process. Forensic records are considered evidence and property of law enforcement. Therefore, they cannot be given out at any time.

After the interview, if the interviewee wants to talk about it, listen supportively and don't ask for more details. They may remember or decide to tell you more about what happened to them. If this happens, it is important to contact law enforcement and/or social services right away. Never coach or advise the individual on how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators. Avoid discussing the case with other victims or the families.



Advocacy

Advocacy services are available to clients and their families served by the Children's Advocacy Center. The goal of advocacy is to help the family navigate the system while supporting them through a difficult time. Advocacy services may include:

- Crisis intervention and safety planning
- Assessment of individual and family needs and referral to appropriate resources
- Follow-up and support the family regarding the coordinated, multidisciplinary response
- Provide information for accessing victim's rights and crime victim's compensation
- Screening for mental health services and when needed, referrals for trauma-focused, evidence-supported mental health
- Coordination and referrals for specialized medical treatment
- When needed, assists in accessing transportation to interviews, court, treatment, and other case-related meetings
- Provides case status updates to the family and team
- Coordination of court education and support





Mental Health Services

Many children and their caregivers need therapy and support to reduce the emotional impact of trauma. Therapy is a safe place for people to express themselves to help them heal.

Abuse and other forms of trauma can have lifelong effects on individuals, their families and communities. Studies show a strong relationship between trauma and the development of mental and physical health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, substance use, heart disease, obesity and strokes. Access to and engagement in evidence-based services and support helps to prevent such serious, long-term effects.

Children's Advocacy Centers are committed to using evidence-based and trauma-specific screening, assessment and treatments that research shows to be effective in helping children and families heal.

Telehealth services are also available.



Benefits of Mental Health Services

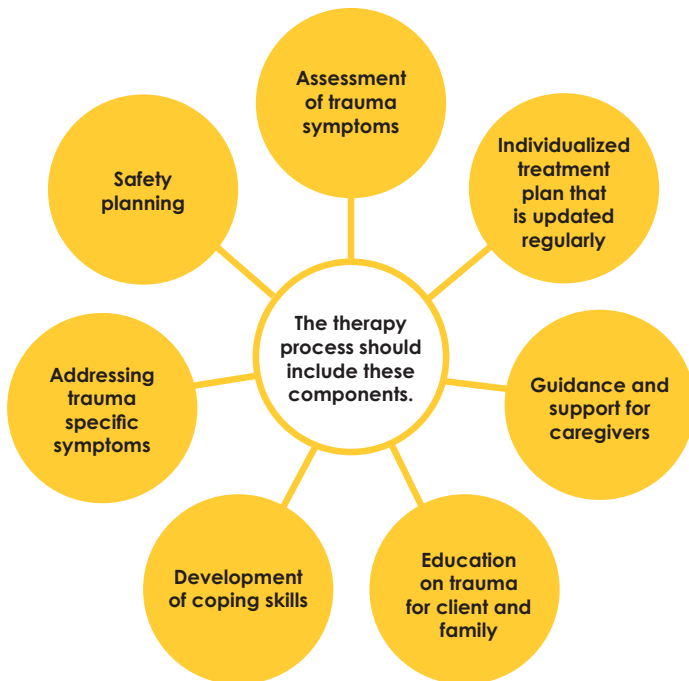
- Starts the healing process
- Develops relaxation and coping skills
- Addresses other mental health concerns
- Provides the chance to share their experiences in a safe place
- Improves self-esteem and confidence
- Enhances future safety
- Builds resiliency to handle future stress

Mental Health Services

Having a strong, positive, support system plays an important role in healing and recovery from trauma. Caregiver involvement in treatment is critical and improves outcomes. Caregivers are involved in supporting treatment goals and will assist in modeling and practicing skills at home.

Trauma impacts the whole family, so part of treatment includes support for you as the caregiver.

There are different types of evidence-based therapy for trauma and the first step to knowing which type is needed is an assessment. Assessment and therapy is available to individuals who have experienced trauma and abuse. You can request therapy by visiting with our staff.



What Happens Next

What to Say to Others

There may not be an easy answer about what happens next. These cases take time. This is something you can discuss with your advocate, who can help find out case updates as new information is available. Some things to keep in mind:

- You will receive follow-up contacts from your advocate to see how you are doing.
- The alleged offender may not be arrested right away, if at all. Developing a safety plan is important to keep your family safe.
- It is important to follow through with the team's recommendations.

One challenge your family may face is what to say to others, if anything, about the case. Keep in mind that this is highly personal information and your decision should be based on who can support you through this and help provide safety for your family. You and your family can decide together if you will tell anyone. It is important to maintain your family's sense of privacy.

Remember, you don't owe anyone an explanation. "I'd rather not talk about it" is an acceptable response. Or simply say, "It's been a very difficult time for all of us. I appreciate your concern." Or it may be easier to just nod as an acknowledgment of what someone says.

Notes & Questions



Dakota Children's
ADVOCACY CENTER

Bismarck/Dickinson/
Wattford City/Standing Rock

701.323.5626

www.dakotacac.org



Northern Plains
Children's Advocacy Center

Minot/Bottineau/Williston

701.852.0836

www.northernplainscac.org

RED RIVER
CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY CENTER 

Fargo/Grand Forks

701.234.4580

www.rrcac.org