

# A Guide for Caregivers

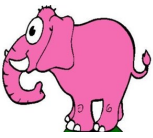
A positive  
Mind will give you a  
positive Life

Ask  
for  
Help



There  
is  
Always Hope

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



*Dear 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 team (MDT) 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 MDT*

**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. Please enter through the front door of the building.

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 do not hesitate to contact the CAC any time at (814) 887-3354.**

The CAC is open Monday through Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm.  
If you call after hours, we will receive your message and return your call on the next business day.

## YOUR TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS

**The Family/Victim Advocate's** role is to work with children and families to provide up-to-date information regarding their case, as well as ongoing support. An advocate will be with the children and family from their initial visit the CACMC throughout the life of the case and beyond, if requested. Advocacy does not play an investigative role, but rather a healing through empowerment role.

**Children & Youth 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 caregivers with the necessary services 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.

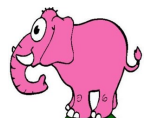
**The District Attorney's Office** is responsible for determining whether a crime has occurred, filing charges and prosecuting cases of child abuse. The District Attorney's Office carefully reviews information provided by the assigned investigator to decide if charges will be filed. The prosecutor has the final decision as to if charges will be filed.

**Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) or Forensic Nurses** 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 –focused treatment to children and families through a referral process from the CACMC.

**The CACMC Forensic Interviewer** is a professional that has had extensive training in gathering information from children in a way that can be defended in court. It is the job of the interviewer to help the child tell about their experience in an unbiased way.

**You might not meet each person involved in the investigation right away; however, your advocate can explain who is involved and what their role is throughout the investigation.**



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

### Family/Victim Advocate:

Advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

### Law Enforcement Investigator:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

### Children & Youth Services:

Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### District Attorney's Office:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Medical Exam:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Notes:** Please write down any information provided by the team.

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## **WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN AT THE CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTER?**

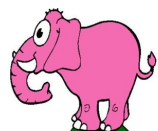
**Prior to arriving to the Center**, an advocate will reach out to ask questions about your child and answer any questions you might have before attending your appointment. If this does not occur prior to the interview, the information will be gathered when you arrive at the Center.

**When you arrive at the Center**, you will see that it is child-friendly and designed to provide a safe and comfortable environment for your child and family.

**After you arrive at the Center**, you’ll be greeted by an advocate. An important part of their job is to listen and address any questions or concerns you or your child might have. Please feel free to talk with them openly. They can give you information about resources and other services that are available to help your family.

**Prior to the forensic interview, the advocate will meet with your child separately**, introduce them to the interview room, answer questions they may have about their visit, and prepare them for what to expect during the interview. This can help your child feel comfortable until it is time for them to meet with the forensic interviewer.

We 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. Our waiting room is separate from the interview and meeting rooms, so your children have space to stay busy while the interview is taking place. If you have concerns with bringing your other children to the CAC, please let one of the team members know prior to the scheduled interview.





## WHAT IS A FORENSIC INTERVIEW?

Forensic Interviews are conducted in a 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 in the same room as the child during the interview.** Although we understand your desire to provide emotional support to your child, the interviewer must be able to explain, if needed, that the information the child gave was not influenced by anyone else.
- ◆ The interview is digitally recorded and will be viewed by members of a Multidisciplinary Team via closed-circuit television during the process. 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 in the investigation. You might not have all of your questions answered immediately after the interview; however, you will be informed and updated throughout each step of the process.

**It is important to remember that, no matter what a child reveals during the interview, they need to be reminded that it was brave of them to come forward.**

## **WHAT TO TELL MY CHILD**

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

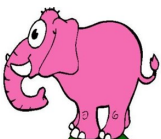
***“The Children’s Advocacy Center is a safe place where children can talk about all kinds of things.”***

### **Please:**

- ◇ Do not interview your child or allow family members or others to question them 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 considered a “bribe” and may seem that you are attempting to influence your child’s statement.
- ◇ Do not pressure or force them into a discussion on the topic. Instead, be open to listening to them if they want to talk.

### **CHILDREN OFTEN FEEL ABUSE IS THEIR FAULT.**

- ◇ **Reassure your child by helping them understand that they did the right thing by telling someone.**
- ◇ **Answer their questions the best you can. If you are struggling with answering a question, let them know that you can reach out to someone to help with an answer.**
- ◇ **Let your child know that it is okay to talk to the people at the CAC, that other kids have come to the CAC to talk, and the CAC forensic interviewer talks to kids all the time.**





## **AFTER THE FORENSIC INTERVIEW**

### **Should I ask my child about their 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. For example:

- **What was the room like?**
- **Was the interviewer nice?**
- **What did you think of the CAC?**

These questions show that you are interested in their experience, without encouraging your child to give details.

### **What if my child wants to tell me everything?**

- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Let them say what they have to say and thank them for their honesty.
- ⇒ If your child reveals new information to you after the interview, please contact the law enforcement officer or CYS caseworker immediately.

**Always remember that your advocate is available to help you process the information and to answer questions.**



## Keep in Contact with the Family/Victim Advocate

- ◇ On the day of your child’s interview, you will meet the CACMC Family Advocate or a Victim Advocate from your county’s local program. If an advocate is not present at the interview, referral information will be provided.
- ◇ Children and families can benefit by having a supportive person available to walk them through each part of the systems that may be involved - from the initial visit to the CAC, throughout the investigation, and beyond, if requested.
- ◇ An advocate will provide a list of resources and services available in the community, in order to give the opportunity to discuss your family’s needs and to make referrals to meet those needs.
- ◇ Advocates are familiar with the dynamics of abuse and can make further referrals to more specialized trauma-informed treatment, including a medical exam or mental health services.
- ◇ Specialized medical services are provided by Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (sometimes called Forensic Nurses) at the Bradford Regional Medical Center First Step Clinic. If a mental health referral is requested, an advocate will provide you with a list of providers that specialize in trauma-focused therapeutic services.



## Investigations take time.

The team understands how frustrating this can be, but it is important that law enforcement and CYS take the time to conduct complete and thorough investigations. Rely on your advocate to discuss feelings that may arise throughout each step of the investigation.

Please notify your team about any changes in your life as soon as possible. For example:

- ⇒ if you move or change your phone number
- ⇒ if the suspect has contact with your family
- ⇒ any new information that may affect the investigation.

If you cannot reach the investigators, contact your advocate.

## Allow your child to express whatever feelings they have.

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.



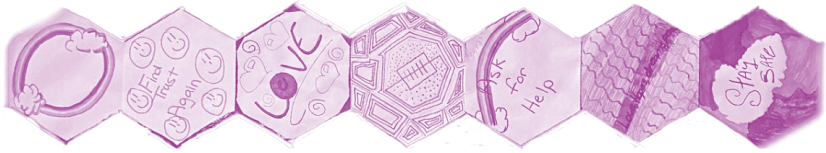
## COMMENTS YOU MIGHT EXPECT FROM OTHERS...

- ◆ *“If it were my child, I’d just move away.”*
- ◆ *“I don’t know how I could live through my child being abused.”*
- ◆ *“What exactly did they do to your child?”*
- ◆ *“How didn’t you know it was happening?”*
- ◆ *“Don’t you just want to kill the person who did that to your child?”*
- ◆ *“Are you sure your child didn’t just make it up? Kids have such vivid imaginations.”*

## Remember:

**YOU DO NOT OWE ANYONE  
AN EXPLANATION.**

**If you do not want to talk about it, let the person know - that is perfectly acceptable and appropriate.**



- ⇒ The protection of your child's privacy, to the extent that it is possible, is very important.
- ⇒ Sharing details is only necessary and important to do with investigative authorities.
- ⇒ Having responses already in mind can help you feel less uncomfortable when someone comments or asks about what happened.
- ⇒ You have the right to ask friends and relatives not to discuss with others what you tell them, in order to protect your child's privacy.
- ⇒ Very young children often talk about their abuse at inappropriate times or to inappropriate people. It can be helpful to your child if you give them suggestions or responses to use if other people bring up the abuse.
- ⇒ If you have to be firm, abrupt, or even rude to get people to understand how important your child's privacy is, that is OKAY.
- ⇒ Depending on their age, your child has a right to know who knows about the abuse, or even to participate in the decision about who is told.



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

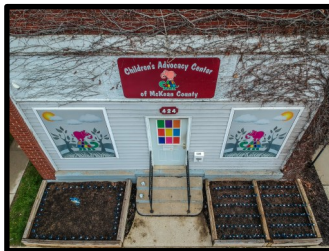
### Other County Resources

Children & Youth Services: 814-887-3350

Victims' Resource Center: 888-822-6325

Local Police Department: 814-887-4911

We are located at



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

## 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.*

Download the

**CAC of McKean County APP!**



Backed by  
**National Children's Alliance**<sup>®</sup>  
Accredited Member



**Children's Advocacy  
Centers of Pennsylvania**