



# Helpful Information *for* Caregivers



Granite State  
Children's Alliance<sup>™</sup>

New Hampshire's Network of  
Child Advocacy Centers

# Welcome *to the* Child Advocacy Center (CAC)

Children come here because there may be concerns of possible abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence. The CAC sees all different types of people for all different types of reasons. Our goals are to:

- provide you with a neutral family friendly environment where we work with community partners to find out what may have happened.
- promote healing through consistent, high quality partnerships with community service providers.
- help every child victim move beyond their trauma to heal, survive and thrive.

We hope this handbook will help you understand more about child abuse, neglect, and other childhood traumas. We also hope it will help you understand the system used to respond to these issues.



## ***A special thank you for their contributions:***

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# Understanding Child Abuse *and* Childhood Trauma

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power or influence over the other. This includes forcing, coercing, or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act, exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or online.

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is physical injury to a child that occurs other than by accidental means. Physical abuse can be the result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise harming a child physically. The person who abused the child may not have intended to hurt the child, but rather the child's injury may have resulted from overly harsh discipline or physical punishment.

***\*Sometimes children physically or sexually abuse other children. Even though both people involved are children this is still abuse and should be reported.***

## Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child has been abandoned by his or her parents, guardian, or custodian; or is without proper parental care or control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care or control necessary for the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.

## Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is compelling a person against his or her will to perform a service or labor, including a commercial sex act or a sexually explicit performance, for the benefit of another.

# Childhood Exposure to Trauma

Child traumatic stress occurs when a child or adolescent is exposed to traumatic events that overwhelm their ability to cope with the experience. Prior to age 16, two-thirds of children are exposed to such an event. This could include things such as witnessing an overdose, violence in their neighborhood or intrafamilial violence. Children may experience sleep difficulties, intense and ongoing emotional distress, behavioral problems, or illness. These difficulties may eventually lead to long term problems such as impacts on emotional well being and disruptions in the child's ability to form healthy relationships and handle their own emotions and behavior. Untreated, these issues can create problems lasting long into adulthood.

# Internet Crimes Against Children

Internet Crimes Against Children are crimes of child sexual exploitation involving the use of technology. Examples of these crimes include child prostitution, online solicitation of minors, and the possession, manufacturing, and distribution of child sexual abuse images.



# Potential Signs of Abuse

Children may have some of the following symptoms because of abuse, neglect or other trauma. Children react differently depending on age, extent of trauma, support from others and their relationship with the offender.

***The following are indicators or warning signs that something is occurring with the child that should be investigated. In some instances, there might not be any abuse as these behaviors can be a result of many different stressors. It is important to consider the child and any health or behavioral issues they have when noting these signs:***

Nausea/upset stomach

Regression with toileting

Excessive masturbation

Changes in sleep patterns

Withdrawal from others

Clinging to parents

Change in school performance

Knowledge of sex that is age-inappropriate

Sexually explicit language

Change in appetite

Excessive or ongoing nightmares

Anger and mood changes

Avoidance of school/friends

Aggressiveness

Rebelliousness

Fears and phobias

Bruises

Burns

Welts

Broken bones

Other injury inconsistent with explanation

Children who are absent from home for long periods of time with no explanation

Children who have unexplained new items such as clothes, cell phones, jewelry, etc.

# Understanding *a* Child's Disclosure

Only one in ten children tell of the abuse during childhood. There are many reasons why children might not tell right away. In fact, most children do not disclose abuse right away and it is not uncommon for children to make a first disclosure to someone other than their caregiver. Some, but not all, of the reasons that children do not disclose are:

- » Fear of not being believed.
- » The offender is in a position of power and a trusted adult in the child and/or family's life.
- » The offender may use threats against the child and other family members, including pets.
- » There may be fear about changes or a disruption in the family and/or extended family because of the abuse.

It is extremely difficult for children to report abuse. The CAC is a place where children and families can meet the professionals who may work with them. It is also a place to begin the healing process.

***It is important to remember that disclosing abuse is a process that takes place over time and not an event that happens once. It is not unusual for children to come to the CAC more than once and we are here if ever a child needs to return.***

# Why *is it* Important *to* Support *the* Child

A factor that can be significant to a child who was the victim of abuse or neglect is the level of support from caregivers. Supporting the child is essential throughout this process and can help the child to heal. It is not uncommon to feel conflicted about a child's disclosure for many different reasons. It is critical to support the child despite those feelings and important that you seek supports for yourself so that you can do so. The CAC family support specialist and/or on-site mental health clinician can help connect you with these supports.

## Ways You Can Support The Child

### *Provide Safety, Love & Support*

Let them know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure the child understands it is not his or her fault. Do not tell the child what to say or pressure the child to talk about the abuse. The child is here to speak to a forensic interviewer who is trained to talk with children about these types of concerns and they are welcome to return if they have more information to share in the future. If the child does want to talk about it, it's okay to listen and offer them support.

### **Some things you can say that will help you support the child:**

- I believe you.
- It is not your fault.
- I am glad you shared this with me.
- I am sorry this happened to you.
- I am not sure what will happen next, but I will be here to help you through this process.
- Nothing about YOU made this happen.
- It has happened to other children too; you are not alone.
- You do not need to take care of me.
- I am upset, but not with you.
- I am angry with the person who did this.
- I am sad. You may see me cry. That is okay.



- I will be able to take care of you.
- I am not mad at you.
- You can still love someone but hate what they did to you.

### Some things you can do:

- Teach children the rules of personal safety. Talk to them about what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable way. There are resources at the end of the booklet on how to have that conversation.
- Therapeutic intervention can help to mitigate the long-term negative affects abuse can have on a child. You can work with our CAC family support specialists to find an appropriate provider for the child.
- Find help for yourself. Speak with the CAC family support specialists and/or crisis center advocate for assistance in locating services for you.
- Be careful not question the child about the abuse. If you do, it can jeopardize the case in court against the child's abuser. Specially trained professionals at the CAC will interview the child to obtain necessary information without negatively impacting the case or further traumatizing the child. If the child wants to talk, listen, and remember what they tell you, but do not probe.
- Never tell the child what to say or advise the child on how to act or what to say to professional or investigators. Disclosure is a process, it is important to allow the child to disclose what they want, when they want.
- To protect the child, it is important that you keep the child away from the person suspected of abuse.
- Avoid discussing the case with any other victims, their families, or the alleged perpetrator.
- Social media is never an appropriate place to share the details of the child's abuse. Sharing information on social media can be harmful to the child and could have negative consequences on the integrity of the investigation and any potential future prosecution.
- The child may need an extra sense of physical security. Assure the child you will do your best to keep him/her safe.
- Other children in the home may also be affected by this, even if they were not victimized, it is important to talk to the children and seek services for them if needed. The CAC family support specialist can help you find appropriate services for other children in the home.

# What Caregivers Can Do *for* Themselves

Trauma is not only traumatic to the child, it also echoes its way through families, especially in caregivers, whether they have a previous trauma history or not. After disclosures of abuse are made, it is not uncommon for caregivers to experience feelings of guilt and shame, intense rage, sadness, numbness, and self-blame among many others. It is important to recognize that these intense feelings are normal and experienced by many caregivers following their child's disclosure of abuse.

During this difficult time, it will be important for you to take care of both your mental and physical health to provide the best possible care to the child while they work through their own trauma. Children need their caregivers to model appropriate coping, resiliency, and courage through this process and taking care of you is the first step.

Over the next few weeks and months, it will be important to keep an ongoing thermometer of your own emotions. By bringing awareness to your own emotions, you will be better able to manage them and respond accordingly rather than becoming reactive to them in response to friends, family, and even the child.

Consider trying the following to help become aware of, and manage, your emotions during this difficult time:

## » *Deep breathing*

- Inhale slowly for 5 seconds; exhale slowly for 5 seconds
- Use a cadence that is comfortable and works best for you
- Envision the feeling your struggling with slowly leaving your body with every exhale

## » *Meditation/Mindfulness exercises*

- Participate in yoga
- Get a massage
- Listen to calming/relaxing music

## » **Connect with others**

- It is important to maintain your social supports and connections through this time. Seek out your supports whether familial, spiritual, or other community supports

Other caregivers have found value in entering their own counseling as a child's disclosure can be traumatic for a caregiver. If you begin to find it too difficult to cope with the intense feelings described above, please do not hesitate to reach out to the family support specialist at the CAC to help identify a counselor/therapist for you to begin meeting with.

If the child is participating in counseling, and you are finding that you are having difficulties with caregiver-related issues, discuss these concerns with the child's therapist. Conversations and work with caregivers are a particularly important aspect of trauma therapy for children. The child's therapist will be well-equipped in supporting you in providing the best care and parenting to the child.

On top of your mental health, it is important you work towards maintaining good physical health. Please make sure you:

## » **Get enough sleep**

- Lack of sleep can affect your ability to handle and cope with stress and other difficult emotions.

## » **Maintain healthy nutrition habits**

- Food and nutrition can be a form of self-care that many of us overlook in times of high stress. Ensure that you are eating multiple meals a day and avoid skipping meals as this can lead to increased fatigue, low blood sugar, and increased stress.

## » **Seek appropriate medical care**

- Sometimes the impact of intense stress can manifest physically through sleep deprivation, appetite loss, headaches/migraines, etc. It is always important to consult with a medical professional when experiencing physical symptoms of any nature to ensure healthy functioning.

## » **Exercise**

- Even in small doses, exercise can help combat stress and other intense feelings resulting from trauma and secondary trauma. Exercise also releases endorphins (the body's "feel good" hormones) which can have an uplifting effect on our mood and emotions.

# The CAC Team

## Understanding *the Roles of the* Team Members

### THE FORENSIC INTERVIEWER:

A forensic interviewer has had specialized training in conducting interviews of children who may have been abused or witnessed serious crimes. The interviewers' training and skill ensures that reliable information is elicited from the child in a **developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, culturally competent, legally defensible manner**. The forensic interviewer coordinates the investigative MDT and conducts the interview.

### THE FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST:

The Family Support Specialists are there for the family or adult caregiver(s) during the forensic interview to provide support and education. The Family Support Specialists follow up with the family after the interview to assist families in scheduling specialized medical evaluations, connections with mental health providers, provide information on other services that may be needed for the child and provide continued support to the family after the interview is complete.

*\*Not every CAC utilizes the family support specialist position, however every CAC has staff that will provide these supports for children and caregivers.*

### THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER:

Local, state, county or federal law enforcement or any combination thereof may be on the team. They will observe the forensic interview and use the information gathered to guide their investigation. During the investigation they may interview non-offending caregivers, suspects and other witnesses and gather evidence.

### THE COUNTY ATTORNEY/PROSECUTOR:

The prosecutor leads the team and the decision-making process regarding any criminal charges that may be filed against the offender. The prosecutor will speak to the caregiver to explain this process. Criminal prosecution may not happen in all cases.

### THE VICTIM/WITNESS ADVOCATE:

County, State and Federal prosecutor's offices all have Victim Witness Advocates who work with victims and their families to help them understand their rights

in the criminal justice system. Victim Witness Advocates track cases as they come in for prosecution, work with the family to prepare for court proceedings, accompany families to court and provide other necessary support services.

### **THE CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE WORKER:**

The role of the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) is to investigate allegations of child abuse and/or neglect, and to make sure that children are safe, and their basic needs are being met. By conducting interviews with you and your family, and gathering information from people who are familiar with your family, the Division will make a determination as to whether abuse or neglect occurred and may provide referrals and recommendations that can assist with the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the children.

### **THE MEDICAL PROVIDER:**

The medical provider has specialized training in the examination and diagnosis of children when abuse is suspected or disclosed. Medical Examinations are necessary for both physical and sexual abuse. The CAC family support specialist can provide more information on these exams. The medical exam is important because it allows the provider to identify and treat any health problems the child may have.

### **THE MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER:**

Mental Health Clinicians are licensed mental health professionals that work in community-based setting, private practices, in-home settings, or Child Advocacy Centers. The mental health clinician's role is to assess the impact of disclosed trauma(s) and additional stressors on the child and family and to provide therapeutic services to children and non-offending caregivers.

### **THE CRISIS CENTER ADVOCATE:**

A crisis center advocate is available to provide support for co-occurring traumas that may be occurring or other needs the family or household may have. The parent/caregiver can speak with the crisis center advocate confidentially if they would like, to know what crisis center services might be available.

# The Investigation

## **Following are basic steps to an investigation of child abuse:**

- » Someone reports suspicion of abuse to authorities, either law enforcement or Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).
- » An interview with the child is conducted, usually at the CAC.
- » In most cases, a medical exam is conducted and a referral for a mental health assessment is made.
- » The MDT present for the CAC interview will discuss the information gathered during the interview and any other case information and decide how to proceed.
- » Law enforcement and/or DCYF will continue the investigation, which may include interviews with people involved in the child's life, including you and in many cases the offender.
- » The MDT may meet to discuss the case as it progresses. This is called Case Review and it is essential to ensure that case updates are shared, and any potential needs the child and family may have are being met.
- » The law enforcement officer, victim witness advocate and/or DCYF worker will be in contact with the family as the case progresses.

# The Legal System Response *to* Abuse

## The legal system can be confusing and intimidating for children and caregivers

Many cases that involve child abuse and/or neglect are heard in two different “legal systems,” the Criminal Court and the Civil (Family) Court. Not all cases will involve both court systems. Although the separate court systems may both be working on the case at the same time; they have different purposes.

**THE CRIMINAL COURT** is concerned with crime and the guilt or innocence of the offender. Criminal court proceedings, sometimes including a criminal trial, are the legal process used to decide an alleged offender’s guilt or innocence. The criminal court process focuses on:

- » Did a crime occur?
- » Is there evidence to support an allegation of a crime?
- » Is the defendant innocent or guilty of the alleged crime?
- » If proven guilty, what punishment should the offender receive?

The criminal court process can take a long time and can involve many different court proceedings. There are several different ways to resolve a criminal case, not all cases result in a criminal trial. For those that do, it may be a year or more between the initial report/disclosure and when a case scheduled for a criminal trial. Victim Witness Advocates working with the prosecutor’s offices will help you to better understand this system and keep you informed as to where the case is in the process.

**THE CIVIL (CIRCUIT OR FAMILY) COURT** is concerned primarily with the safety of the child and focuses on:

- » Custody
- » Visitation
- » Services to the family and child
- » Family reunification

Different court hearings can be held to decide these issues. The decisions in the civil system do not depend on whether the criminal system finds guilt or not.

The decision to seek court intervention and bring a child under the courts' protection and jurisdiction represents a belief that this action is necessary to ensure the ongoing safety of the child. The Division engages in court cases for children and youth when the Division is unable to otherwise engage the family in a child protective case outside of court. In circumstances where continuation in the home is determined to be contrary to the child or youth's welfare, the Division will pursue court-ordered placement.

Court action is not intended to be a punitive action against either parent or the child. At all times, parents must be treated with courtesy and respect. The goal of all the parties is the same, to secure the safety of the child, to preserve the unity of the family, and to provide for the care, protection and healthy development of the children.





# Working *with* My CAC Team

Always be honest. Even when the truth may not seem favorable to yourself or others.

The MDT members may ask you for information. It is important that you provide as many facts as you can. You may not have all of the information that the team is asking for. Do not try and guess. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is important that you tell the team that you do not know. These types of investigations require investigators to gather a lot of information. This information, although sometimes very personal, can be vital to case and to ensuring the welfare of the child.

Your feelings are important. Feelings are valuable in giving investigators insight, so tell how you feel and why you feel that way.

Cases involving child abuse, neglect or extreme violence can be exceedingly difficult to handle. Although managing emotions can be difficult, it is important that caregivers keep in mind that CAC staff and the members of the MDT are working in the best interest of the child.

Investigations of child abuse/neglect can be lengthy and take some time complete. To ensure that you are kept up to date with all developments in the case, it is important that caregivers keep the MDT up to date on any changes in contact information or address. This update can be done directly with the MDT members or through the CAC family support specialist.



# What Can I Say *to* Others?

It is important to remember that cases involving children are confidential. Investigators are not able to share information about the child with members of your family or the community.

Sometimes an extended family member or friend is the first person to learn of the abuse. It is not uncommon that a child may tell someone other than a caregiver. This is not a reflection on your relationship with the child. Understand that the child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. The child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way.

It is challenging to decide what to share with others about the abuse. The child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let the child have some choice about who will be told. It is important to remember that family and friends may have many different reactions when they learn this information. It is important understand that how others react can affect children, please consider this when deciding how and when to share with others.

Social media is an outlet for many things and can be a source of information and/or comfort. It is not a place to share detailed information about what is happening with a child, especially during something as difficult as an investigation of child abuse. Do not share any information about the investigation and/or the process you and the child are engaged in with law enforcement and/or Department of Children, Youth and Families.

This may be especially challenging if the child's case is being reported in the news media and may appear on social media sites. It is crucial to stay away from the comments section and not participate in any online conversations about the case. It may jeopardize the investigation, the potential for prosecution and ultimately the well-being and safety of the child.

# Reading List *for* Non-Offending Caregivers

Adams, C. and Fay, J. (1995). *Helping Your Child Recover from Sexual Abuse*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Bailey, R. (2013). *Safe Kids, Smart Parents: What Parents Need to Know to Keep their Children Safe*, New York, NY. Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.

Case, J. and Hagan, K. (1988) *When Your Child Has Been Molested*, New York: Lexington Books.

Rosenzweig, J. (2015). *The Parent's Guide to Talking About Sex: A Complete Guide to Raising (Sexually) Safe, Smart and Healthy Children*, New York, New York: Skyhorse Publishing.

Wickland, P. (1995). *Sleeping with a Stranger: How I Survived a Marriage to a Child Molester*, Holbrook, Massachusetts: Adams Publishing.

Holmes, Margaret. (2000) *A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children Who Have Witnessed Violence or Trauma*. Magination Press.

Alexander, Debra. (1999) *Children Changed by Trauma: A Healing Guide*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Informational Websites *for* Non-Offending Caregivers

*The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Physical Abuse*

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/physical-abuse>

*First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brVOYtNMmKk>

*The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: About Child Trauma*

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>

*The National Child Traumatic Stress Network : Effects of Childhood Trauma*

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/effects>

*Child Welfare.gov: Helping Your Child Heal From Trauma*

[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trauma\\_ts\\_2019.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trauma_ts_2019.pdf)

*National Center for Missing and Exploited Children*

<https://www.missingkids.org/home>

*NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence*

<https://www.nhcadsv.org/>

*RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)*

<https://www.rainn.org/>

*OVC Faces of Human Trafficking*

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/human-trafficking/faces-of-human-trafficking>

*LOVE146 Human Trafficking Resource Guide for Caregivers*

<https://love146.org/caregivers/>

# New Hampshire Child Advocacy Center Locations:

## **The Hillsborough County Child Advocacy Center-North**

Manchester, New Hampshire  
603-623-2300

## **The Hillsborough County Child Advocacy Center-South**

Nashua, New Hampshire  
603-889-0321

## **The Greater Lakes Child Advocacy Center**

Laconia, New Hampshire  
603-524-5497

## **The Monadnock Region Child Advocacy Center**

Keene, New Hampshire  
603-352-0413

## **The Child Advocacy Center of Carroll County**

Wolfeboro, New Hampshire  
603-569-9840

## **The Child Advocacy Center of Coos County**

Groveton, New Hampshire  
603-636-1999

## **The Child Advocacy Center of Rockingham County**

Portsmouth, New Hampshire  
603-422-8240

## **The Merrimack County Advocacy Center**

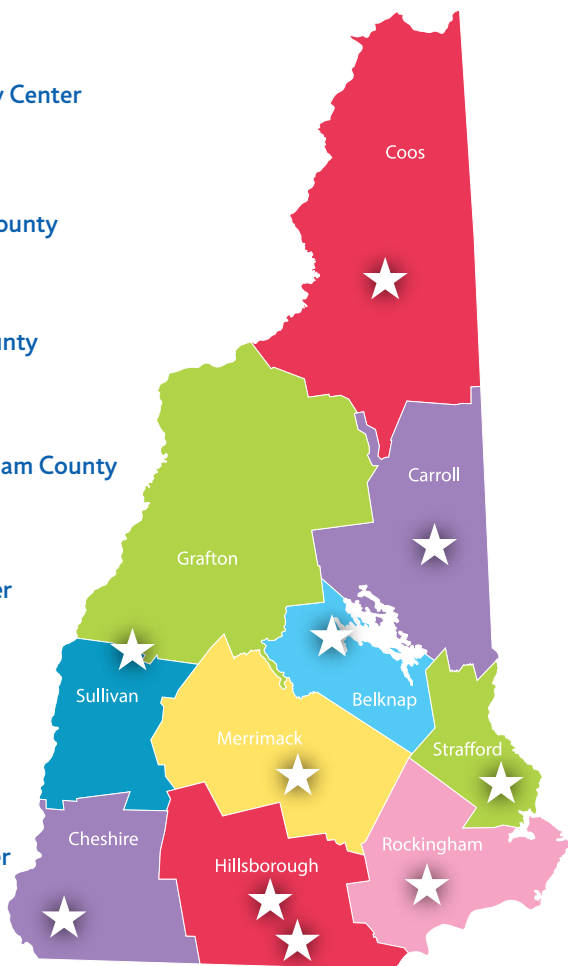
Concord, New Hampshire  
603-219-0627

## **The Child Advocacy Center of Grafton and Sullivan Counties at DHMC**

Lebanon, New Hampshire  
603-653-9012

## **Strafford County Child Advocacy Center**

Dover, New Hampshire  
603-516-8100



For more resources please go to: [www.cac-nh.org](http://www.cac-nh.org)