

A Parent's Guide: Helping Child Abuse Victims

What is a CAC (Children's Advocacy Center)?

The CAC pulls together public and private agencies involved in the investigation, prosecution and treatment of child abuse. Our multidisciplinary team (MDT) includes investigators, prosecutors, medical personnel, counselors and other professionals with special skills in helping child abuse victims and their protective family members. By working together, using the MDT approach, we can do a better job of helping victims recover and bringing offenders to justice.

Roxanne's House (CAC) is a safe place designed especially for children. Using the CAC approach ensures a neutral process for conducting interviews with children so that the truth can be told. This does not replace the need for testimony in court, but allows for a child to tell what happened to them so that they can feel relief and begin the healing process.

What is the role of the MDT (Multidisciplinary Team)?

- Conducts joint investigations
- Minimizes duplicative efforts and mixed messages to victim families
- Team approach to interview process
- Coordinates evidence gathering, follow-up, and tracking of cases
- Regular review of cases – sharing information, expertise and experience

What are the different individual roles of the MDT?

CAC (Children's Advocacy Center)

- Functions as a separate entity working solely as an advocate for the best interests of the child within the criminal and civil justice systems
- Provides a child friendly atmosphere for children with trained staff to conduct forensic interviews
- Provides counseling services or referrals, resource information, case follow up and sexual assault exams or referrals

CPS (Child Protective Services)

- Investigates allegations of possible abuse if a caretaker or family member in the home allegedly committed the abuse or if the family members do not appear protective or are negligent toward the care of the child

Law Enforcement

- Conducts criminal investigations of child abuse cases in which a crime may have occurred as defined by the Texas Family Code and Texas Penal Code

Depending on the situation, it is possible for CPS to investigate alone or with Law Enforcement. Law Enforcement may also conduct an investigation without CPS involvement.

District Attorney's/County Attorney's Office

- Prosecutes all criminal cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect of a child where the alleged perpetrator is either a juvenile or an adult
- Victim Services provides witness coordination, explanation of system, crime victim's assistance and acts as liaison between victim and DA's

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

- Court appointed Guardian Ad Litem to advocate on behalf of child's best interest for children in State care

Why does my child need a forensic interview?

- If anything happened to your child or your child witnessed something, the environment provided by the CAC and the interviewer will be a safe place for your child to tell what happened in their own words.
- A specially trained forensic interviewer conducts the interview. The interviewer is trained to understand children's language and assess children's development. The interviewer is also trained to ask questions in a non-leading way.
- Interviews are only conducted for CPS, Law Enforcement agencies and occasionally the District Attorney's Office. These agencies will follow up on any investigative needs after the interview.

What did my child say in the forensic interview?

Because each case is handled personally and individually, normally your CPS caseworker and assigned Law Enforcement personnel will determine according to their investigation what information can be shared at what time. This can be frustrating at times, but each department has complex requirements that determine how each investigation is handled.

Will my child need a medical exam?

- In some cases involving sexual or physical abuse, a medical examination may be necessary.
- Physical abuse exams are usually conducted by the child's own doctor or a hospital emergency room.
- Sexual assault examinations are conducted by a nurse or other medical provider who has specialized training to do these types of exams. These nurses are referred to as SANE nurses (sexual assault nurse examiners). Our sexual assault exams are done at different facilities depending on availability.

Will my child need therapy?

Roxanne's House is committed to providing each child the opportunity for treatment either on-site or off-site from therapists and counselors who have experience and training in working with abused children. These professionals can help decide how the abuse has affected your child and family and what can be done to assist you in healing from the experience.

Will my child's case go to court?

Most cases never make it to trial. Most are handled through some type of plea arrangement. However, victims and their non-offending relatives do have input on what happens to the accused. In prosecuting a case, all parties must be ready to go to trial even though one is unlikely.

When will my child's case go to court?

It can vary widely, depending on a number of factors. Some cases may not have enough evidence to proceed very far in the criminal justice system. A few cases may get resolved in less than a year. Many cases can easily take much more time than that. Time will allow you and your child to heal and get stronger in order to be ready for your day in court.

Why does everything take so long?

It can become frustrating when the progress of the "official" aspects of the abuse - the investigation and the legal process - seems to move so slowly. Everything must be done in certain ways and in a particular sequence. Any delay in one of the steps along the way delays the entire process waiting to follow. This does not mean the professionals involved aren't doing their jobs or that they don't care. Slowness can be an indication that the agencies involved are doing their jobs carefully and thoroughly. If they don't gather all the necessary facts and evidence "before" they request that charges be filed, for example, the case may not be substantial enough to convince the prosecutor's office that charges are justified.

During this time, devote your efforts to the part of the situation over which you DO have control: helping your child and your family. If you feel you are doing something positive, the slowness of the legal process won't be quite as frustrating. Being able to see the progress you and your family are making in how you relate to one another, seeing your child smile again-will make it easier for you to push the frustrations of any "waiting period" to the sidelines of your life.

How will my child act after the interview?

- It is normal for your child to be anxious before and after the interview. Try to keep your responses to his or her feelings calm and reassuring. Behaviors, such as crying or shouting, in your child's presence will only increase his or her fears or worries.
- After the interview, your child may be unusually quiet. Allow your child to express his or her feelings at this point. Continue to reassure your child that telling his or her truth was the right thing to do, and you realize it took courage.
- You may find your child appears relieved after being interviewed. Be careful not to represent the interview as "the end" to what your child must face. Ideally that would be the case, however, there is always the possibility that additional interviews may be necessary, or that the child may have to give a deposition or testify at a trial.

What should I say to my child after the interview?

- It is important that you **NOT** ask your child any questions about what they said.
- If they share anything with you on their own, simply listen. You can listen compassionately, and non-judgmentally with responses such as, "I see," "yes," "mmm," "I'm sure that was hard for you."
- Be careful not to interrogate your child after the interview. A simple question such as, "Do you feel sad right now?" or "Do you feel glad?" is appropriate. One like, "Did the policeman tell you he was going to put that bad person in jail?" is not appropriate.
- Try not to react to what your child says. Children are sensitive to their parent's reactions. If you become upset, your child may feel as if they have done something wrong to upset you.
- If your child talks to you and discloses information about being abused, encourage your child by telling them it is not their fault. It is important that your child know that the abuse was not their fault, and they did nothing wrong.
- Share any new information learned with CPS or Law Enforcement.

How can I help my child?

- Take care of yourself and your own feelings about your child's abuse. Refrain from emotional outbursts about the abuse in front of your child – emotional behavior on your part will increase your child's anxiety.
- Believe your child.
- Listen to your child. Give your child the chance to discuss feelings about the abuse and the abuser on their own timetable. Avoid asking lots of questions or interrogating your child about the details of what happened.
- Recognize that your child may have wide range of emotions – anger, sadness, anxiety, or positive feelings about the abuser.
- Reassure your child the abuse was not her fault. Tell your child you will protect him from further abuse.
- Refrain from talking with other adults in front of your child about the abuse, your child's case or the abuser.
- Make sure your child participates in recommended counseling.
- Go to counseling yourself.
- Believe your child can heal and be happy again.
- Be patient with your child and yourself – healing takes time.
- Participate In Your Child's Treatment
 - Bring your child to sessions regularly and on time.
 - Communicate with your child's therapist about changes, new or other stresses in the household, and anything that is affecting your child.
 - Participate in parent/ child sessions.
 - Participate in parent conferences with the therapist.

HCWC- Roxanne's House
P.O Box 234
San Marcos, TX 78666
Phone: (512) 396-3404
www.hcwc.org