

# FAMILY GUIDE FOR YOUR CHILD'S INVESTIGATION AT THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

Offering a safe place for children and their families to come together with a team of professionals specially trained to investigate, support, and treat victims of child sexual abuse and serious physical abuse.

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For more information, visit  
<https://www.familyplacevt.org/child-advocacy-center/>

## WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER (CAC)?

Children ages 3-17 come to the CAC to speak with trained interviewers about allegations of child sexual abuse or serious physical injury. The CAC process involves a team of professionals from multiple agencies and may include DCF, law enforcement, and CAC staff, including the interviewer and family advocate.

Your child will accompany the interviewer to a separate room that is designed to feel safe and comfortable, where the forensic interview will take place. You will remain with the advocate, and will be asked to sign consent forms, including consent for audio and video recording of your child's interview while providing information, support, and referrals.

## WHAT DO I TELL MY CHILD ABOUT THE CAC INTERVIEW?

Your child may have questions about the upcoming interview. We suggest you answer your child honestly – you might say something like, “We will be visiting a Child Advocacy Center and this is safe and friendly place where kids go to talk about all sorts of things. It’s their job to keep kids safe. It’s okay for you to talk to the people we meet there.”

Reassure the child that they are NOT in trouble.

## WHO WILL MY CHILD TALK WITH?

Your child will talk to a Forensic Interviewer (employed by The Family Place and not affiliated with state or law enforcement agency). The Forensic Interviewer has special training and experience talking with children about difficult subjects.

The interviewer’s goal is to make your child as comfortable as possible while gathering relevant information. Questions are asked in a non-threatening and non-leading manner. The interviewer moves at a pace that is comfortable for your child.

Members of the investigative team are present for your appointment but remain in a separate observation room where they view the interview live on a monitor.

## CAN I WATCH THE INTERVIEW?

Only the team members conducting the investigation will watch the interview. This allows children to speak about their experiences in a neutral setting, without the concern of possible (understandable) emotional reactions from parents, and with the knowledge that their caregivers will be there to support them when they are done.

## CAN I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED?

Questioning and initiating conversation about what happened to your child before the interview is not encouraged. If your child approaches you and wants to talk about it, listen and keep your comments and questions to a minimum. Be sure to reassure your child that they will be alright. If your child tells you something that alarms or upsets you, or tells you new information, contact the Department of Children and Families Services at **1-800-649-5285**.

Following the interview, you may speak more openly with your child. The investigative team is here to help answer any questions you may have about what occurred and is able to put in place any supports and services needed to support your family through the process.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE INTERVIEW?

Following your child's interview, a police officer may ask your child to swear to the truth of their interview, using a sworn statement form.

When the team is finished with the investigation, they may send their reports to the State's Attorney's office to be reviewed for possible criminal charges. In the event that criminal charges are filed, your child may be asked to testify.

If charges are filed, please know that the forensic interview does not replace the possibility that your child may be required to testify in court. If this happens, the Victim's Advocate at the State's Attorney's office will meet with you and your child to prepare them for these steps.

## WILL MY CHILD NEED MEDICAL CARE?

The investigative team members will help you decide if your child needs a medical exam. If one is needed, CAC staff will contact the Dartmouth Child Advocacy and Protection Program (CAPP) to set up an appointment. You will have an opportunity to speak with someone from the CAPP team about any questions or concerns you may have.

You might tell your child, "We are going to see a doctor or nurse who takes care of kids. You will not get any shots. There won't be anything to hurt you. They just need to make sure that your whole body is okay." It is often reassuring to both parents and children to learn that their bodies are okay.

## SHOULD I GET COUNSELING FOR MY CHILD?

We strongly encourage you to seek counseling for your child. Experiencing child sexual abuse can lead to difficult emotions, including shame, guilt, anger, sadness, and confusion. While parents can be supportive and caring during this process, children may find it difficult to speak openly about their abuse for many reasons, including worrying about upsetting their caregivers.

Children may interpret a parent's difficult emotions around the abuse as negative feelings toward them. You can reassure your child that you are not upset with them, but with the situation itself.

A trauma-informed, trained therapist who works with children will be able to help your child process the difficult feelings, emotions and memories that may occur after abuse. Mental health treatment with a therapist who can apply their special training, knowledge and experience will help ensure that your child receives appropriate care and is a positive step toward healing. The CAC has onsite mental health services.

In addition, many parents have their own histories of abuse, and a situation like this in a family can be a strong trigger that may lead to feeling retraumatized. We encourage caregivers to seek counseling, if needed. We can speak with you about some options for your own care and healing.



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