

**Southern Virginia
Child Advocacy Center**



Every Child Matters

Caregiver Resource Book



Important Names and Numbers

Southern Virginia Child Advocacy Center

Rocky Mount Office
300 South Main Street
Rocky Mount, VA 24151

Phone: 540-484-5566

Stuart Office (No Mail)
103 West Blue Ridge Street
Stuart, VA 24171

Phone: 276-694-4669

Department of Social Services

CPS Worker: _____

Phone: _____

Law Enforcement

Investigator: _____

Phone: _____

Franklin County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office

275 S. Main Street #33
Rocky Mount, VA 24151

Phone: 540-483-3092

Patrick County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office

124 Slusher Street
Stuart, VA 24171

Phone: 276-694-3945

Henry County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office

3160 Kings Mountain Drive #D
Martinsville, VA 24112

Phone: 276-634-4500

Martinsville City Commonwealth's Attorney's Office

55 W. Church Street
Martinsville, VA 24112

Phone: 276-403-5470





What is the Southern Virginia Child Advocacy Center (SVCAC)?

You are here because your child may have experienced abuse and/or neglect, or been the witness to a violent crime. We are a safe, child-focused facility where services and referrals are provided to children. We work as a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) with many system partners to investigate what your child may have experienced or witnessed.

Before child advocacy centers were available, your child may have been taken to several different agencies to gather information and/or receive services. At each agency, they would have had to answer the same questions over and over again. Now, because these services are centralized, further trauma to your child and family can be reduced.

Our goals are to:

- Use resources to find out what your child may have experienced
- Make the investigation process as comfortable as possible for both you and your child
- Overview the child protection and legal systems
- Coordinate forensic interviews and medical exams when needed
- Make referrals for your child and non-offending family members to participate in trauma-focused therapy
- Evaluate and assist you in applying for Virginia Crimes Victim's Compensation
- Discuss ways you can help your child heal during the recovery process
- Provide on-going victim and family advocacy, support, and referrals

It is our hope that this resource helps you better support your child.

Remember: You are your child's best support and advocate.





Child Abuse Review Teams (CART)

Our staff participate on Child Abuse Review Teams (CART) for Franklin, Patrick and Henry Counties along with Martinsville City. These teams support the investigation, prosecution and treatment of child abuse/neglect allegations. Team members include Family Advocates, Victim/Witness Advocates, School Personnel, Medical Experts, Forensic Interview Specialists, Law Enforcement, Child Protective Services, Commonwealth Attorneys, Mental Health Professionals, Probation Officers, Domestic Violence Shelter staff, SVCAC staff, and other partners.

Highly trained professionals work together in order to determine if abuse has occurred and ensure beneficial services are being provided to the children and families. Do not hesitate to ask anyone to explain who they are or what role they have in the investigation.



Who will be talking to me and my child?

Family Advocate

The Family Advocate is one of the first people you will meet when you arrive. This person plays a vital role in ensuring your child has a positive experience while at the center.

The advocate will discuss:

- Mental health resources
- Medical resources
- Possible financial resources
- Child protection and legal systems
- Referrals to local resources

Forensic Interviewer

The Interviewer will be talking to your child about what has occurred. This person is trained in specialized protocols for your child's age and social and emotional development.

The interview encourages your child to talk about their experiences using their own words. The interviewer will be the only person in the room with your child. The other team members will observe from another room.





The Interview

Your child's interview is a critical part of the investigation. An investigator will meet your child and escort him/her to the interviewer who will then take your child to a comfortable interview room. One of the interviewer's responsibilities is to assess and monitor your child's comfort level throughout the interview process. If your child shows extreme stress or anxiety, the interview will end and he/she will be returned to you in the waiting room.

Your child's interview will be videotaped with the intention that your child will not have to repeat the experience over and over again throughout the investigation. However, your child could be called to testify in court. If that occurs, your child will speak with the Commonwealth's Attorney and the Victim/Witness Advocate. Only the investigative team is able to see the recording of the interview. You will not be allowed to watch the interview.

Will My Child Need A Medical Exam?

We offer exams to all victims through Carilion Franklin Memorial Hospital when necessary. The medical personnel are specially trained pediatric examiners in the area of child physical and sexual abuse. Medical exams are child friendly and often relieve any anxiety that you or your child may have about the health of their body. A physical abuse exam is similar to a regular checkup at your child's doctor. A sexual abuse exam is also similar to a regular checkup but does include an examination of the genital area for any abnormalities.

These exams are non-invasive and rarely cause any discomfort. Depending on the injuries, it may be able to be conducted at our center. It may be possible to have the exam conducted the same day as the forensic interview. Our goal is for your child to be as comfortable as possible. When the examination is over, the nurse examiner will be able to tell you in general terms what was learned. Even if the exam findings are normal, it does not mean that the abuse has not occurred. Few sexual abuse cases show physical evidence.





Should I get counseling for my child?

Yes! We have mental health professionals, specialized in trauma-informed treatments, on staff. Family Advocates can also give you other mental health referrals in the community as well. Your child may be uncomfortable talking about the abuse with you because of shame or guilt. Children dislike seeing their parents upset or angry; therefore, they may try to protect their parents by not telling them about the abuse. Children may interpret a parent's negative emotions with the situation as negative feelings toward them. In each disclosure, reassure your child that you are not upset with them, rather that you are upset with the situation.

It is important to give your child the opportunity to talk with a mental health professional. Children have different recovery needs. If negative emotions and reactions to the trauma remain untreated, or if the child cannot properly express discomfort, a child may experience greater suffering and further trauma. Counselors can apply special training and knowledge to help promote your child's recovery as quickly as possible.



What Is Trauma?

Trauma can be any event that, when witnessed or experienced, is extremely distressing. These events are often in situations where the child feared for their lives or the lives of others.

There are many different kinds of trauma, including:

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Exposure to violence
- Loss of a significant loved one
- House fire
- Car accident





Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event

Each person reacts differently to a traumatic event. Some factors which relate to a person's response include age when trauma occurred, severity of trauma, amount of time that has passed since the trauma, and level of support.

Possible Symptoms and Effects:

For preschool and young school-aged children

- Difficulty describing in words what is bothering them or what they are experiencing emotionally
- Uncertainty about whether there is continued danger
- Anxiety
- Helplessness
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills
- Sleep disturbances (nightmares, night terrors or fear of going to sleep)
- Engaging in traumatic play that focuses on the traumatic event

For school-aged children

- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Retelling of the traumatic event
- Fear or avoidance of triggers
- Sadness
- Sleep disturbances (difficulty falling asleep, fear of sleeping alone or frequent nightmares)
- Difficulty concentrating in school
- Headaches or stomach aches without obvious cause
- Engaging in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior



For Adolescents

- Fear
- Vulnerability
- Concern over being labeled "abnormal" or different from their peers
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Shame and/or guilt
- Thoughts about revenge and retribution
- Radical shift in the way they think about the world
- Self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors





What happens next?

Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigators work alongside Law Enforcement Investigators during the investigation. He/she may develop a safety plan for your family and may refer your child for counseling or other services. The CPS worker is there to assist you, so don't be afraid to call him/her if you feel you are in need. CPS investigators will interview any suspects and witnesses. He/she may file for an emergency removal order or a protective order.

Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Investigators will continue the investigation after the forensic interview and will also interview the suspects and any witnesses. Gathering evidence can be a slow process, so try to be patient. After the investigation is completed, the investigator will pass the information to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and a decision will be made whether to press criminal charges.

Commonwealth's Attorney

The Commonwealth's Attorney has the final decision on whether or not to file criminal charges. Many factors are considered before a decision to file charges is made. These factors affect the likelihood of success in court and include age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, reaction of the suspect to the charges, presence of medical evidence and the existence of other witnesses. The prosecutor will decide which charges to file based on the acts that occurred and the available evidence to charge.





Victim/Witness Advocate

If the Commonwealth's Attorney files criminal charges, you will be in contact with the Victim/Witness Advocate. He/she works in the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and will serve as a direct liaison between you and the attorney assigned to your case. The Victim/Witness Advocate is there to help you and your child understand the legal process. He/she will answer questions, explain the type of victim assistance available, including financial assistance, and prepare you and your child for court.

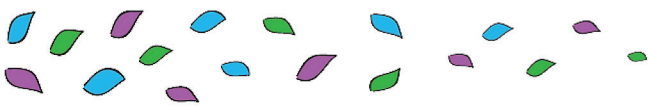


Will My Child Have To Testify In Court?

It is possible that your child may have to testify in court. We work closely with the Victim/Witness Advocate in offering assistance to help children prepare to testify if necessary. Without appropriate preparation children may feel that they are on trial or they are the guilty ones. Children are credible witnesses, but they may require education and special support prior to giving testimony in court. It is important that preparation helps them communicate their experiences and knowledge from the witness stand. Understanding the court process and what is expected of them will help your child feel more confident and less anxious, leading to a more positive court experience.

It's important that you support your child's feelings about testifying in court. Testifying in court can be an intimidating experience for anyone. Reassurance from parents or caregivers is crucial. When parents talk to their children about testifying, they can be most supportive by letting the child know that they will need to answer questions as truthfully and accurately as possible. If your child is asked a question that he/she doesn't know the answer to, it is OK for him/her to say "I don't know."





How to help your child

The single most important factor affecting the child's recovery is the level of support from the caregiver.

- Believe your child and let your child know it is not his/her fault.
- Do not dig or ask questions. Let trained professionals do this.
- Remain calm in front of your child. Try not to talk about the abuse with other adults in front of your child. Many children have added stress from the reaction of those around them, especially their parents and caregivers.
- Try not to worry too much about the events in the future, such as court. Many different things can happen; your Family Advocate will support you at each step. Focus on the present.
- Get help for yourself in coping with your feelings. Talk to friends, family and a clinician, but remember, not when your child is present.
- Reassure your child that you will take care of him/her.
- Return to a routine as soon as you are able. Help your child find ways to feel healthy and strong. Congratulate your child for his/her success.
- Consider mental health counseling for your child. Counseling can be a very important part of a child's healing and can help you learn more about how to help your child.

What to do if your child tells you more about the abuse:

- Listen to what he/she tells you. Remain calm.
- Let your child tell you. Do not ask your child about the abuse.
- Do not punish him/her. Your child is not at fault.
- Be supportive, but don't put words in his/her mouth.
- Write down what he/she tells you and tell your CPS worker and Law Enforcement.
- Reassure your child and thank your child for telling you.





Parent and Caregiver Feelings

It's very important for parents and caregivers to take good care of themselves, both emotionally and physically. Do not hesitate to seek professional support, if needed. Taking care of yourself is a critical step in taking care of your child. The child abuse disclosure and investigation process can be difficult for the entire family. Common emotions experienced by caregivers include: shock, sense of failure, anxiety, frustration, confusion, fatigue, depression, denial, disbelief, anger, fear, feeling alone, feeling overwhelmed, guilt, and blame.

It is not uncommon for your child to have first disclosed to someone else. Sometimes children are afraid their parents or caregivers will not believe them, be angry, sad, or hurt. Children might try to protect you from these feelings. Parents or caregivers might feel hurt, angry or even doubt their parenting and caregiving skills. Talking about abuse is very hard. Do not allow your own feelings to get in the way of future communication with your child.

Your initial reactions may be confusing to their child. Reassure your child that you're sad and angry about what happened but that you are not angry with your child. Sometimes parents hesitate before responding to their child, which can also be confusing. You might explain your hesitation by saying you're sorry you didn't act faster and that you were confused and that you believe your child. Even if your reaction sent a message to your child that you did not intend, it's never too late to talk with your child. It is important to reassure your child that he/she did the right thing in telling someone about the abuse. Reassure your child that you believe and support him/her.





What To Say To Others

One challenge your family will face is what to say to others about the abuse. If there is no publicity about the case, you will be able to decide whom you tell. Share with your child which relatives or close friends you will tell. Let your child have a role in who is told.

If you are close to your family, you might want to discuss the abuse allegations with them as abuse can affect the entire family. It is important to remember that the reactions you receive from relatives and friends will be different. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may decide not to tell them. It is important to protect your child's privacy, but be careful not to make the abuse a secret. This may cause feelings of shame for your child.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind

- The protection of your child's privacy is extremely important.
- Your child has the right to know whom you have told.
- You have the right to ask people you tell not to discuss this topic with others.
- Having prepared responses in mind can help you feel more comfortable when the topic of abuse comes up.
- It can be helpful to give your child responses that he/she can use if someone else brings up the abuse.
- It is okay to be firm, or even rude, to help people understand how important your child's privacy is.

Remember that you don't owe anyone an explanation. Telling someone you'd rather not talk about the abuse is perfectly normal and OK. You will also want to prepare your child for comments that he/she may encounter. If someone comments to your child how sorry they are for him/her, a good response is to just say "thank you".



Let your child know that he/she does not have to respond to any comments or questions. Your child can simply say "My mom and/or dad told me I don't have to talk about it right now." If other children comment or tease your child, he/she could simply say that the abuse could happen to anyone and it's important to tell an adult.





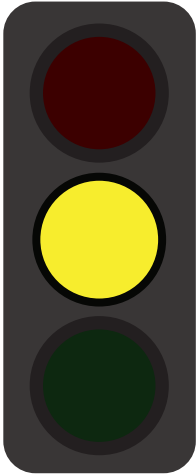
Safety tips for families

- Teach your child they have the right to say “NO” to an adult if that adult is making them feel uncomfortable in any way.
- Be aware of your child’s activities and friends.
- Never leave the abuser alone with your child even if he/she is an extended family member or lives in the home.
- Pay attention when someone shows an unusual interest in your child or gives them gifts or money.
- Monitor your child’s activities and participate in them. Do not allow children to play alone in fields, on playgrounds or in other isolated areas.
- Teach your child to never tell anyone over the phone, online or at the door that they are, or will be, home alone.
- Develop open communication between you and your child. Be a good listener.
- Know your child’s online account passwords and monitor his/her online and other electronic communication (email, texts, instant messaging, etc.)



Keeping Children Safe From Sexual Abuse

As adults, we are responsible for keeping children safe. By knowing the warning signs and what actions to take, you have the opportunity to prevent sexual abuse - and to help children who are being abused.

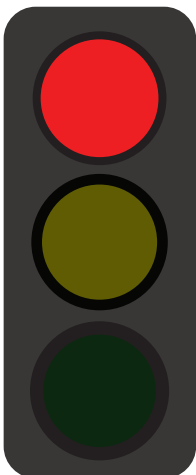


Yellow light behaviors are concerning or inappropriate

- Showing favoritism to one child, such as giving special gifts
- Seeming overly interested in one child
- Frequently initiating time alone with a child
- Frequently walking in on children in the bathroom
- Hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with, or holding a child even when he/she does not want it
- Children being uncomfortable or scared around a specific adult or other youth.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Set clear boundaries and give reminders of appropriate interactions. Increase monitoring with random drop-ins and observations. Provide ongoing support for the child.



Red light behaviors are harmful and constitute abuse

- Talking in sexually explicit or suggestive ways to a child in person, over the phone, through texts, or over the internet
- Taking sexually explicit or suggestive photos of a child
- Showing sexually explicit or suggestive images or videos to a child
- Exposing oneself to a child
- Coercing a child to fondle him/herself or someone else
- Fondling or rubbing against a child's genitals, butt, or breasts
- Inappropriately viewing private behaviors of a child (undressing, showering, etc.)

ACTIONS TO TAKE

**Call the child abuse hotline 1-800-25-ABUSE
If there is an immediate safety concern, also call 911**

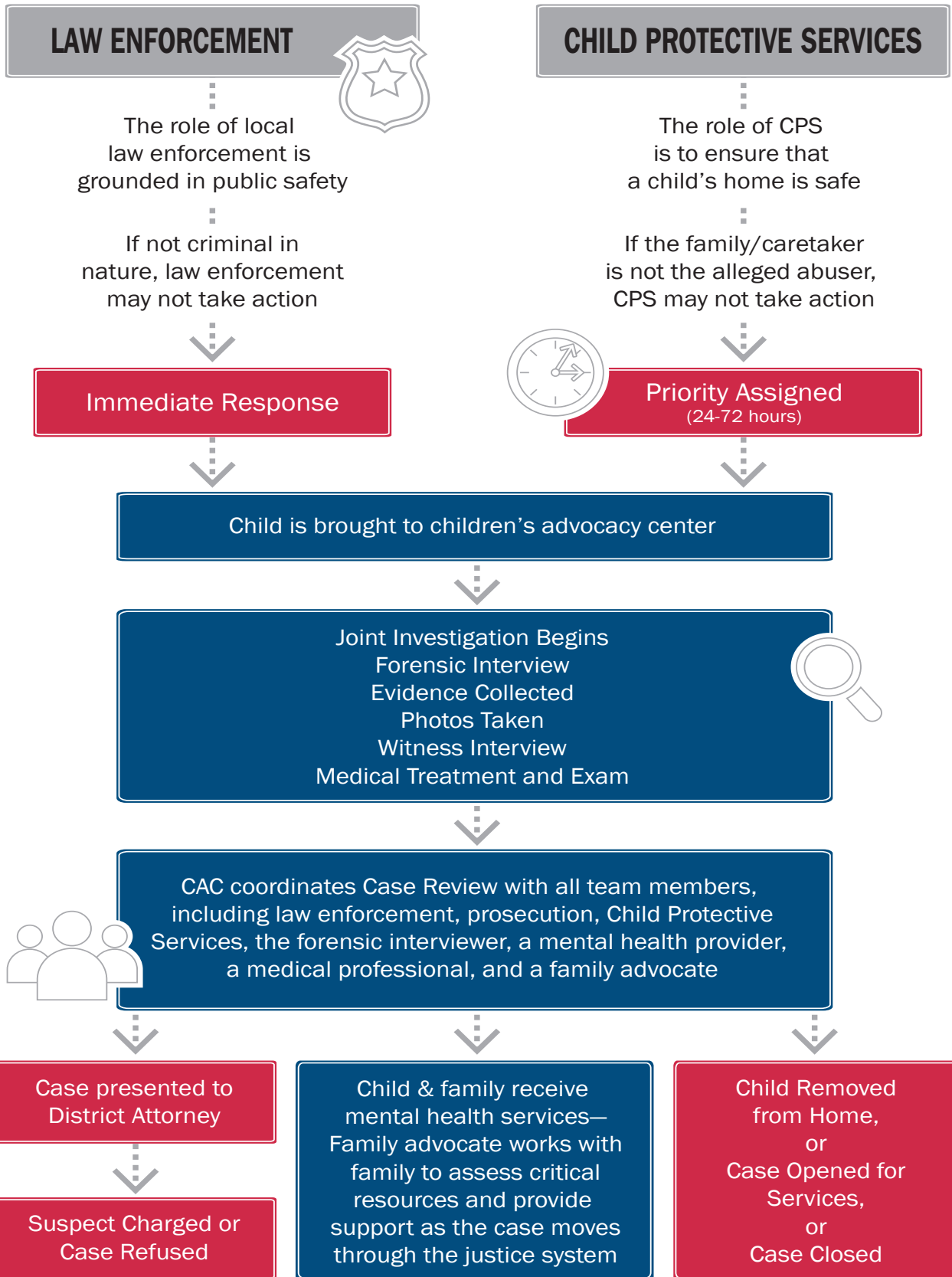
HOW DOES THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER MODEL WORK?



Core Function of CAC



Function Provided by a Team Member



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