

John Van Brakle
Child Advocacy Center
Family Handbook



LVHN.org/cac 610-969-4338



About the Child Advocacy Center

At the John Van Brakle Child Advocacy Center, a program of Lehigh Valley Children's Hospital, we strive to rally our community to ensure that children are safe and healthy. Adhering to the National Children's Alliance (NCA) model standards of responding to all child abuse allegations, we make every effort to reduce the trauma experienced by providing a child-friendly environment where children are able to meet with all partners at one place.

Mission

The mission of the John Van Brakle Child Advocacy Center is to serve Lehigh County's most vulnerable children and their families through a committed multidisciplinary and community partnership by providing evaluations, treatment and a coordinated response to promote justice.

Your Team of Professionals

Below is a list of people you may meet before, during or after your visit to the Child Advocacy Center (CAC).

MEDICAL PROVIDER: A doctor or other medical provider with specialized education in child-protection medicine will provide a thorough medical evaluation to ensure your child has no injuries.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: A law enforcement officer will investigate the suspected abuse and present evidence to the District Attorney's (DA) office .

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE: A lawyer from the DA's office (who represents the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania) will review all information gathered during the police investigation and work with law enforcement to determine whether criminal charges will be filed.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES WORKER: Child Protective Services (CPS) investigates reports of child abuse and neglect to determine the need for protection and support. The goal of CPS is to keep families together by providing support and services.



FORENSIC INTERVIEWER: A forensic interviewer is educated in developmentally appropriate techniques for talking to children and adolescents about potential abuse allegations.

SOCIAL WORKER: A social worker, who is trained in trauma therapy, offers mental health counseling and assists with case management.

FAMILY ADVOCATE: An advocate is here to support you and your family throughout the process. The advocate will answer any questions you have and provide referrals for other service as needed.

Medical Evaluation

A medical examination is completed to ensure that a child has no injuries, infections, or other physical or emotional problems. This examination serves to address concerns about a child's health and well-being.

Children receive a full medical evaluation by either a board-certified child abuse pediatrician or medical provider with specialized education in diagnosing and treating child victims of abuse. While some families would prefer their children be seen by their family doctor, this field of medicine is a specialty. In fact, most pediatricians and family practitioners send their patients to a center with doctors who have expertise in child abuse.

The exam for physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect begins with talking to the child. Focus is on how the abuse has affected the child's physical, emotional and behavioral health. After this, there will be a head-to-toe exam, similar to a regular check up. When sexual abuse is suspected, an examination of the genital area is done by looking externally at the area. The medical provider will explain each part of the exam before it starts so the child understands and can make choices about his or her body. Some children may need additional tests ordered; if so the provider will discuss that with you.

The medical provider will explain the process and answer any questions you may have. In addition, the provider will review your child's birth, past medical history, family medical history and social history.



Forensic Interview

At the CAC your child will be interviewed by a trained forensic interviewer. The interview is child-centered and sensitive. The interview is fact-finding only, and information is gathered at your child's pace. Children will use their own words to talk to the interviewer and tell the story in their own way. If your child is not ready to talk, the interviewer will not force or pressure your child to do so.

This interview will be recorded, and investigative professionals will observe from a closed-circuit television in another room. The interview is recorded in order to avoid multiple interviews. Parents and caregivers are not permitted to watch the interview. During the interview you will be waiting with an advocate who can explain more about the investigation process.

Your Rights as a Victim

These standards were created to make sure you are treated with dignity and respect at all times.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TOLD ABOUT:

- ▶ services available to you
- ▶ certain significant actions within the justice system pertaining to your case; including information on bail, escape of offender, release of offender
- ▶ details of the final disposition

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE:

- ▶ notice of arrest of the offender
- ▶ information about restitution and assistance with compensation
- ▶ accompaniment to all public criminal court proceedings by a family member, victim advocate or support person

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PROVIDE INPUT INTO:

- ▶ the sentencing decision and to receive help in preparing an oral and or written victim impact statement
- ▶ post-sentencing decisions



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will the medical exam prove what happened to my child?

A: Many times, especially with sexual abuse, it's normal to be normal. Most children have no abnormal findings on physical exams. In most cases, diagnoses are made based on statements of the child. For the majority of cases, the medical exam will neither confirm nor disprove abuse allegations. Purpose of the medical exam is to confirm body normality and health, with a focus on correcting body image issues that victims may suffer.

Q: Why didn't my child tell me?

A: Disclosure is a process, not a single event. Most children do not disclose abuse immediately following the event. This is for a variety of reasons, sometimes stemming from fear of the abuser. Other times children are reluctant due to feelings of helplessness, leading children to think no one will believe them. Reassurance and support can help your child through the disclosure process.

Q: How can I talk to my child about what happened?

A: Allow your child to tell the story in his or her own way and time. Listen to your child with a calm and neutral demeanor – try not to react with shock or indifference. Let your child know you believe what he or she is telling you, and that it is not his or her fault. Don't offer names of possible offenders or possible acts of abuse. Avoid asking for details.

Q: Do children sexually harm other children?

A: Over one-third of all sexual abuse of children is committed by someone under age 18. This occurs for a variety of reasons, including children experiencing abuse themselves, or being exposed to sexually explicit material. In some instances, youth may act on impulse and hurt other children.

Q: How can we protect our children?

A: Encourage open communication, talk about what your child enjoys and engage him or her in regular activities. Other things you can do include setting clear standards for behavior with everyone involved in your family and speaking up when any of those rules are broken.

Q: What happens after the interview?

A: After your child's CAC appointment, team members will get together to discuss evidence gathered and decide on next steps. You also will be able to talk with investigators to voice your concerns. Your family advocate will remain in contact with you throughout the investigation.



Crime Victim's Compensation

The Victim's Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP) helps victims and their families by easing financial burdens they face as a result of a crime. The Child Advocacy Center can help in the preparation, filing and follow-up of any VCAP claims.

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE IF:

- ▶ crime occurred in Pennsylvania
- ▶ crime was reported to proper authorities within 72 hours unless there is reasonable explanation for delay
- ▶ claim is filed within two years after crime unless victim is a child
- ▶ victim did not participate in illegal activity that caused injuries unless crime involved rape or sexual assault, or was related to domestic violence
- ▶ victim cooperates with law enforcement
- ▶ minimum loss requirement of \$100 is met

Which Costs May Be Paid?

MEDICAL EXPENSES: Your crime-related hospital, doctor, dentist, ambulance, medication and medical supplies may be eligible for reimbursement.

COUNSELING: Therapy bills for the direct victim, family members and witnesses may be considered for reimbursement.

LOSS OF EARNINGS: If you or your family members were unable to work due to injuries or providing care, your loss of earnings may be reimbursed.

RELOCATION: Expenses related to moving to ensure the health and safety of the victim may be reimbursed.

Other qualifying expenses include transportation, funeral costs, crime scene cleanup and stolen cash benefits.



You and Your Child May Be Feeling:

- ▶ hopeless about the future
- ▶ lonely and detached
- ▶ unable to concentrate or make decisions
- ▶ nervous and easily startled
- ▶ on guard and constantly alert
- ▶ tired, or experiencing disturbed sleeping or nightmares
- ▶ shocked or numb
- ▶ angry and irritable
- ▶ upset stomach or headaches
- ▶ guilt and shame
- ▶ overwhelmed
- ▶ frustrated and confused
- ▶ regression that may include clinginess and bedwetting

What You Can Do About It

Help yourself and your child feel safe, stay calm and keep regular routines. Develop a support network and ask for help when you need it.

Be aware of your own trauma response, and remember that everyone heals differently. Encourage your children to talk about their feelings and take time to listen to their stories. Reassure them that what happened was not their fault.

Relax and teach your children to relax. Try deep breathing and listening to soothing music. Take time to play a game and laugh with your children.

Your children need your support to recover, so take time to take care of yourself. Remember to eat and sleep regularly, read a book or take up a hobby.

Please reach out to your family advocate with any questions or concerns. An advocate can be reached at **484-425-0754**.

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ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al **1-610-402-8000**.

注意：如果您講中文，可以免費獲得語言援助服務。請致電 **1-610-402-8000**。