



Macomb County Child Advocacy Center

For more information or assistance, please contact:

Care House
131 Market Street
Mt. Clemens, MI 48043

Phone: 586-463-0123
Fax: 586-783-3515
www.mccarehouse.org



Care House is a services partner of VOCA,
Michigan Department of Community Health



Parent Handbook

Resources about Sexual Abuse

The following are only some of the many internet resources available. Additional resources can be checked out through the Macomb County Library System, including several books for children and books for parents/caregivers. Also, professional counselors may have access to materials and resources for victims and their families.



Websites for Parents/Caregivers

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse: www.ascasupport.org
Childhelp: www.childhelp.org
Darkness to Light: www.darkness2light.org
MI Public Sex Offender Registry: www.mipsor.state.mi.us
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:
www.missingkids.com
National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse: www.childabuse.org
National Criminal Justice Reference Service: www.ncjrs.org
National Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence:
www.ncadv.org
National Children's Alliance: www.nca-online.org
National Sexual Violence Resource Center: www.nsvrc.org
Promote Truth: www.promotetruth.org
National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) Parent
Resource Center: www.tlcinstitute.org/PTRC.html

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Services at Care House

Care House provides the following services **free of charge**:

Information:

- Guidelines for normal childhood sexual behavior
- Education on child sexual abuse
- Information and referral for other services in and around the Macomb County area

Counseling:

- On-site support for the family the day of the forensic interview
- Short term counseling
- Links and referrals to local community counseling agencies

Investigation:

- Forensic interviews conducted by a trained professional forensic interviewer
- Referrals for a forensic medical examination conducted by a specially trained pediatrician and/or SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) Nurses

Please note that forensic interviews are conducted ONLY when requested by Law Enforcement, Children's Protective Services or the multidisciplinary team. Interviews are voluntary.

Referrals:

- Referrals are made to appropriate community agencies for children and their families for a wide variety of needs

Community Awareness Presentations:

- Presentations are made to schools, churches, businesses and community groups
- Prevention programs are held in local schools
- Training is offered for people who work in child-related fields

The Care House mission is to *prevent and reduce the incidence and trauma of child sexual and physical abuse in Macomb County through collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and effective family centered activities.*

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The Crime Victims Compensation Fund

It is important that crime victims (or their parents and/or caregivers) know about the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, as money may be available to help pay for medical and counseling services not covered by insurance. When receiving services as a result of child sexual abuse, be sure to save all receipts and bills. For more information regarding the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, or to file a claim for compensation, contact Care House at (586) 463-0123 or the Crime Victim Rights Office at the County Prosecutors Office at (586) 469-5675.

Children’s Protective Services
Michigan Department of Human Services

Mount Clemens District Office 586-469-7700
Sterling Heights District Office 586-254-1500
Warren District Office 586-427-0600



Welcome to Care House

Care House offers a safe, sensitive and child friendly setting for children and their families to come when there is a possibility of child sexual abuse. The purpose of this handbook is to give non-offending parents and caregivers clear answers to their questions concerning child sexual abuse and their visit to Care House.

What is Care House?

Care House is a program that serves to assist child victims (generally age 12 and under) of suspected sexual and severe physical abuse. It also serves their non-offending family members. At Care House, an experienced team of professionals come together to respond to reports of suspected child sexual abuse. This Professional Team can be made up of a Forensic Interviewer, Counselor/Family Advocate, Law Enforcement Officer, Child Protective Services Worker, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, and a Doctor and/or SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) Nurse when needed.



All Services at Care House are Free of Charge

The Forensic Interview

The Forensic Interview is done by a professional who is very skilled at asking children questions they can understand and answer at their own age level. The goal of the interview is to gather information from the child about complaints of abuse that have been made. Information from this interview is then used by Law Enforcement, the Prosecutor's Office and Children's Protective Services to decide whether or not to investigate the complaint any further.

Children often will not tell about sexual abuse or give important details if parents and/or caregivers are present. Also, parents and caregivers sometimes have trouble controlling their emotions while listening to details of their child's abuse. For these reasons, parents and caregivers are not allowed to observe or be in the room during the interview.

Parents and caregivers will have an opportunity to meet with the Professional Team after the forensic interview. They are free to talk with all the team members and ask any questions they wish during this meeting. Following the Professional Team meeting, parents meet with the Care House Counselor. This allows the parents and caregivers more time to ask questions and share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.

The End of the Court Case

When the case is finally done (regardless of the outcome), many parents and caregivers may feel let down or a bit depressed. This is normal, as you have most likely used a lot of time and energy to do what was needed. Also, the final result may be frustrating. Parents and caregivers are often unhappy if the case is dismissed or if the final verdict and sentencing was not what they were hoping for. No matter what happens at the end, tell the child it is over and that he or she was very brave. Celebrate the end of a long journey and congratulate yourself for standing up for a child and doing something about child abuse.



Steps in the Court Process

Our current legal system was not set up with children in mind; however, this is slowly changing through the efforts of Children's Advocacy Centers and professional team members all over the country. Working with the legal system can be a confusing and frustrating process. The investigation must be handled carefully and completed by taking certain steps. As a result, it may seem as if the investigation is moving very slowly. In addition, court dates may be rescheduled many times and legal cases may take as long as one or two years to get settled. It is okay for you to check on the status of your case with the investigator and with the Victim Rights Advocate.

After the interview and investigation, the Assistant Prosecutor will decide if the criminal charges will be filed and if the case should go through the criminal court system. It is important to know that every case is different and may not follow the same steps as another, and may or may not result in a trial. If the case does go to trial, you will be contacted by a Victims Rights Advocate. This Advocate will work with you throughout the prosecution of your case. The number to the Crime Victim Rights Office is (586) 469-5675.

Preparing a Child for Court

There are many things that can be done to help prepare a child for court. Contact the Victims Rights Advocate for assistance. The Advocate can arrange a visit with the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, a visit to the courtroom and answer questions about testifying. These actions will help make going to court easier for you and your child. The Care House Counselor/Family Advocate is also available to help with this process.



The Investigation

It is the job of the Detective, the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and the Children's Protective Services Worker to follow up on the investigation and gather more evidence and facts after the forensic interview is done. They may do this by questioning the suspect, possible witnesses, and any other parties involved. A medical exam will be done only when needed. All of this information is then given to the prosecutor's office. The Prosecutor makes the final decision as to whether or not to charge a suspect with a crime. The legal process can be slow and confusing at times; however, the team of professionals works together for the best possible outcome for all concerned. Parents/caregivers should contact the professionals working on the case as needed.

The Professional Team

The Forensic Interviewer. The Forensic Interviewer's job is to interview children who may have been sexually abused. The interviewer is trained to ask questions that do not confuse or lead a child to say something that is not true. The Forensic Interviewer has many hours of skilled training, must know about sexual abuse issues, understands and likes children, knows how to talk with children at their own level and knows what children can say and do at different ages. t.

The Law Enforcement Officer. The Law Enforcement Officer's job is to investigate and determine whether or not a crime has been committed. The Officer watches the interview on closed-circuit TV. The Officer also gathers evidence and talks to parents/caregivers, suspects, and other witnesses. After the forensic interview and investigation, the Officer writes a report and sends it to the prosecutor's office.

The Children's Protective Services (CPS) Worker. The Children's Protective Services (CPS) Worker's job is to make sure the child is safe from harm. The CPS Worker watches the interview on closed-circuit TV. The CPS Worker may also talk to the child, parents/caregivers, suspects, and other people involved with the family. The CPS Worker may also talk with teachers and school staff. Additionally, the CPS Worker may also want the child and family to get counseling and/or other services.

At the post-interview conference, you will be told what your child may have disclosed and will have an opportunity to ask questions about what will be happening with the investigation. Care House is not part of the investigation, but will offer recommendations regarding support services for you and your child.

It is crucial that you do not question your child before the interview takes place. Do not tell your child to tell the professional where "so and so touched them." You can let your child know that the interviewers are people who work with children and it is okay for them to tell the truth about what has happened.



Why Counseling may be Needed

Many people like to think that they can manage their own worries and troubles. When a child has been sexually abused, however, the stress of the entire experience may be overwhelming. All of this may be talked about with a Care House Counselor. The counselor has certain skills to deal with sexual abuse and can guide the child and family through the healing process. You have done the right and responsible thing by reporting your child's victimization. Now it's time to continue and enhance upon your first appropriate and supportive step. Counseling support may be

What Happens after a Child Tells about Sexual Abuse

- If your child has been sexually abused by an adult or juvenile who does not live in your home, the case most likely will be assigned to a law enforcement officer only.
- If your child has been abused by a parent or other adult caretaker who lives in the home or by a parent who does not live in the home but whom the child visits, then the case most likely will be assigned to a law enforcement officer and a Children's Protective Services worker.
- If the abuser is a sibling in the home, the involvement of Children's Protective Services will be determined on a case by case basis.

What Happens after my Child's Abuse has been Reported?

The safety of your child is most important. If the offender is living in the home and refuses to leave, or if the non-offending parent is unable to offer the child protection, the child may be temporarily placed in protective custody.

After a police and/or Child Protective Services report has been made, a referral most likely will be made to Care House by one or both of these agencies. Care House staff will set a time for a forensic interview when all professionals involved can meet at Care House and observe the interview with the child via a closed-circuit television. Parents are not in the room with their child during the interview, nor do they watch the interview on the closed-circuit television. This is because many times during a forensic interview, a child will disclose information that a parent is not yet aware of. This new information will almost certainly upset and/or anger the parent, in turn upsetting the child if they were present. If the interview were stopped to calm the parent, it would then become very difficult to reestablish rapport with the child and complete the interview.

The Assistant Prosecuting Attorney. The Assistant Prosecuting Attorney's job is to make the final decision about whether or not to charge a suspect with a crime. This decision is made after getting the report from the Law Enforcement Officer and looking at other factors, such as the age of the child and the suspect, whether or not there is evidence and the ability of the witness to testify in court.

The Counselor/Family Advocate. The Counselor/Family Advocate's job is to help the family feel safe and relaxed on the day of the interview and to listen to their fears and concerns by providing short term crisis counseling. The Counselor also helps the child and family by connecting them with other community agencies for any other needs they may have. The Counselor also contacts the family in the weeks following the interview to provide additional support.

The Doctor/SANE Nurse. The Doctor and SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) Nurse's job is to give a medical exam to a child. If needed, the exam is scheduled on a different date than the interview, and is done with a camera called a colposcope (*cull-pa-scope*) which is able to take pictures of a child's private parts and magnify them. The exam is not painful and lets children know their bodies are okay.



What to Say and Do for a Child after the Interview

- **The single most important factor in helping a child recover is the strong support of his or her family and/or caregiver.**
- Be calm and supportive. It may be difficult to listen to what your child has to say, but your child needs to talk to someone who will believe and support him or her. Your child may need an extra sense of security. Stay close and assure your child you will keep him or her safe.
- Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect the child, yourself, as well as the person suspected of the abuse.
- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- Do not share with the child your feelings of frustration or helplessness. Instead, talk to someone you trust and/or find help for yourself. You do not need to handle this alone.
- Be careful not to interrogate, quiz or question your child about the interview or abuse. Any question you have may be asked of the caseworker or law enforcement officer.
- It is very important that your child be allowed to express his or her feelings. Spending special time with your child may help them to share their feelings and thoughts with you.
- Especially for young children, follow their lead. If they do not ask, you do not need to talk about it.
- Let your child know that talking with the interviewer was the right thing to do and acknowledge the courage it took to do so.
- Do not lead your child to believe that the interview is the only part of the legal process in which they are involved. It is possible that your child may be interviewed again and asked to testify in court.
- Continue to use consistent discipline. This helps your child feel more secure.



- **Do not ask the child a lot of questions about what happened.** A forensic interviewer, law enforcement or child's protective services worker are professionally trained to ask such questions.
- **Do not confront** the person suspected of the abuse. Allow law enforcement personnel to handle this.
- **Report any suspicion** or disclosure of sexual abuse to Macomb County Children's Protective Services at (877) 412-6109 and/or the police jurisdiction where the abuse may have occurred. Reporting sends a clear message to the child that they are believed and that they are a victim of a crime and not responsible for what happened. The investigation of abuse, particularly child to child contact, often turns up more victims and can help those children get the help they need.
- **Do not report** in the presence of the child.
- **Get professional help.** Feel free to contact Care House at (586) 463-0123 for general information and for connections to other community agencies.

What to do if a Child Tells about Sexual Abuse

Learning that a child may have been sexually abused can be very upsetting. It is suggested that adults act in these ways:

- **Encourage the child to talk freely**, but do not “put words in their mouth.” Do not deny the problem. Do not make judgmental comments and never blame, punish or embarrass the child.
- **Stay calm** on the outside. Feelings of guilt, denial, anger, and /or confusion are normal reactions to have; however, if you have a strong reaction to a child’s report, the child may be unwilling to talk any further about this with you, the police or a counselor. Also, a strong reaction from you may cause them to withdraw or may increase feelings of shame, embarrassment and guilt.
- **Believe the child.** No one wants to believe that any child has been a victim; however, children seldom make up stories about sexual abuse.
- **Tell the child** that he or she is not to blame for the sexual abuse. Most children, trying to make sense out of the abuse, believe that somehow they caused it or should have been able to stop it.
- **Offer to protect** the child and promise to do your best to stop the abuse. Let the child know that telling you was the right thing to do. Do not promise not to tell.
- **Do not express shock** or criticize the child’s family. Be available to listen and remember to respect a child’s right to privacy. Be careful not to discuss the incident in front of people who do not need to know what happened.

Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse, also known as molestation and exploitation, happens whenever a child or an adolescent is threatened, forced or pressured into any form of sexual contact.

Sexual abuse may involve: fondling (inappropriate touch), anal, vaginal or oral penetration of any kind, mouth-to-genital contact, exhibitionism (sexually exposing oneself), voyeurism (intense interest in viewing things of a sexual nature), verbal stimulation (purposely using sexual words to sexually arouse) and/or making children read, look at or participate in pornography.

Sexual abuse of children by adults or by other children is a widespread problem. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reports that 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 4 boys will be sexually molested by the time they are 18 years old. Sexual abuse can happen to any child at any time, anywhere.

Sexual Abusers

There is no such thing as a “typical” child abuser. Abusers come from all age, ethnic, social and economic groups. Research shows that most abusers are male; however, both men and women abuse children. In addition, **children are almost always abused by someone they know and trust**; a family member, family friends, relative, babysitter, neighbor, etc.

The abuser usually tries to control the victim. The abuser may use force, threats or alcohol and/or drugs to pressure a child into sexual behavior, or make the child feel responsible for the abuse. It is true that some child sexual abusers were also sexually abused as children; however, most child sexual abusers come from homes in which some form of physical, sexual or psychological abuse was present.

Why Some Children Tell and Others Don't

Sexual abuse is overwhelming to children, especially when someone they trust is involved. Children are taught from a very young age not to talk back to adults, to behave the way adults want them to and to believe whatever adults or older children tell them. Sometimes children blame themselves for the sexual abuse. For these reasons, **it is very difficult for children and adolescents to tell about sexual abuse.**

Other common reasons for not telling are:

- They are afraid no one will believe them
- They are afraid they will be blamed, punished, or get into trouble
- They may feel very confused and do not know what to say
- They may feel love and loyalty for the abuser
- They may have been threatened in many ways
- They may be embarrassed to talk about the abuse and to use words that refer to sexual behavior and body parts.
- They may not know that some sexual activities are inappropriate
- Some touching may feel good
- They may think that they have told and the adult “didn’t get it”
- **Children may tell about sexual abuse when:**
- They learn about sexual abuse through information and/or programs which lead them to tell
- They become very scared because the types of sexual behaviors they are experiencing get worse and/or the number of times it is happening increases
- They meet an adult that they trust and feel safe enough to tell
- The child may fear that the abuse will begin happening to a younger sibling
- They may feel physically safe from the abuser

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

Usually, one sign alone may not point to sexual abuse; however, if many of these physical and/or behavior changes are seen, sexual abuse is something to consider. These are just a few of the signs:

Behavior

- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Change in school performance
- Adult sexual knowledge
- Sexually inappropriate behaviors
- A return to infant-like behaviors
- Intense sadness, anger or aggression
- Suicidal behavior and/or talk

Physical

- Bloody, stained underwear
- Pain and/or bleeding in the private areas
- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Ongoing difficulty sitting or walking
- Odd or unusual bathroom behaviors
- Repeated yeast or urinary tract infections

Many children are afraid to tell that they are being sexually abused or do not know how to tell. They may drop hints or make odd statements as a way of telling. These statements or hints may sound like the following:

“He/she hurts me”

“_____ does things to me that I don’t like.”

“I’m afraid to go home.”

“I’m afraid to go to _____’s house.”

“I don’t like being alone with _____.”