

An Informative Booklet



110A East St. Clair Street
Warren, PA 16365
Phone: 814-313-1004



IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM YOUR VISIT TODAY

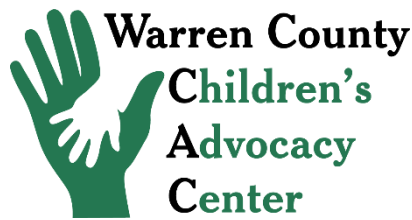
The interviewer was: _____

The CYS caseworker was: _____

The detective was: _____

The victim advocate was: _____

Notes: _____



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What is the Warren County Children's Advocacy Center?

The Warren County CAC (WC-CAC) is a child-focused location where children can report abuse in a safe and comforting environment. The WC-CAC provides protection and justice through a collaborative approach including law enforcement, Forest-Warren Human Services, the prosecutor's office, mental health, healthcare, and trained advocates. The interview conducted is neutral and fact-finding in nature. These interviews are always developmentally appropriate.

What is a forensic interview?

A forensic interview is a neutral, fact-finding interaction conducted by a specially trained interviewer in response to allegations of alleged maltreatment. The interview is viewed by the investigative team.

Why is it best that a child is interviewed here?

- * We provide a safe and welcoming place for children to be heard.
- * We bring the system to the child, by providing a single location for interviewing children rather than having a child taken from agency to agency throughout the investigation and potentially enduring multiple interviews.
- * We utilize a certified forensic interviewer who can meet the informational needs of all investigative professionals involved while remaining child-focused.
- * We facilitate a collaborative approach among investigative professionals that results in effective, efficient and child-centered casework.
- * We ensure that parents or caregivers of the children are guided towards programs that will facilitate the healing process for the child and family.

Should I talk to my child about what happened?

No. If your child brings up the subject and wants to talk about it, listen without questioning. Be sure to reassure your child that they will be alright, and you are taking care of them. If your child does tell you additional information, please contact your law enforcement detective or CYS caseworker.

How do I explain to my child what is going to happen?

It is helpful to inform your child that someone wishes to talk with him or her about what was reported. However, it is equally important not to rehearse with your child or tell your child what to say. You may reassure your child and give him/her permission to talk freely. You should let your child know that they will be in a safe place, and the adults that they are visiting will let them know exactly what is happening each step of the way. Avoid telling your child you will go somewhere or receive something after the interview. Avoid

describing the WC-CAC as a doctor's office, as this often confuses children. Also, medical exams are not conducted at the WC-CAC.

Can I be present with my child or the team during the interview?

No. Due to the nature of these investigations, it is necessary to provide a neutral setting for the child. It is also to ensure our team is fully focused on the child's interview, and not distracted by a parent or guardian in the observation room. Copies of the interview are only released to appropriate members of the team and will not be released to any caregivers or guardians. The WC-CAC uses recording equipment to document the interview. Copies of the interview are only released to law enforcement or CYS.

How long will my visit last?

All visits are different depending on the age of the child. Younger children participating in a forensic interview will go more quickly than older children and teenagers. Depending on the attention span, talkative nature of the child, severity, and history of alleged abuse etc., interview times vary greatly. Please allow time for completion of intake paperwork, the forensic interview, and a post-interview meeting.

The WC-CAC will provide appropriate school/work excuses upon request.

Will someone talk with me during the interview?

The victim advocate will be available to provide support while the interview is taking place and following the interview. It is understandable that waiting for your child may be difficult. If any additional resources or services are needed, the victim advocate can help facilitate this.

What can I expect immediately following the interview?

At the end of the interview, the Caseworker from CYS and/or law enforcement may inform you about what will happen next. The CYS Caseworker and law enforcement are the only agencies able to answer questions regarding the child's interview. The information they provide may be limited due to the fact that it is an ongoing investigation. They will tell you everything necessary to keep your child safe. Unless told otherwise, you and your child are free to leave after talking with the investigators.

What should I say to my child after the WC-CAC interview?

- **Listen.** If your child wants to talk about the interview, listen. Do not ask questions. Do not be concerned if your child does not want to talk about the visit. Many children are "tired" of talking and just want to "get on with it."
- Thank your child for talking and acknowledge his or her courage. Assure your child of your love and support, no matter what was disclosed or determined during the visit.
- Avoid leading your child to think that the interview will end the process. Some cases continue into the legal system and require re-interviews or court testimony.

If you have additional questions prior to your visit, please contact the Warren County Children's Advocacy Center. We look forward to serving your family.

HOW DOES THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER MODEL WORK?



Core Function of CAC



Function Provided by a Team Member

LAW ENFORCEMENT



The role of local law enforcement is grounded in public safety

If not criminal in nature, law enforcement may not take action

Immediate Response

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The role of CPS is to ensure that a child's home is safe

If the family/caretaker is not the alleged abuser, CPS may not take action

Priority Assigned
(24-72 hours)



Child is brought to children's advocacy center

Joint Investigation Begins
Forensic Interview
Evidence Collected
Photos Taken
Witness Interview
Medical Treatment and Exam



CAC coordinates Case Review with all team members, including law enforcement, prosecution, Child Protective Services, the forensic interviewer, a mental health provider, a medical professional, and a family advocate

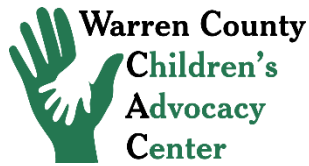


Case presented to District Attorney

Suspect Charged or Case Refused

Child & family receive mental health services— Family advocate works with family to assess critical resources and provide support as the case moves through the justice system

Child Removed from Home, or Case Opened for Services, or Case Closed



What is disclosure?

Disclosure is when a child tells another person information not previously known — either because it's new information or because it's been kept secret. Disclosure can be a scary and difficult process for children. Over 800,000 children are confirmed as victims of abuse or neglect each year in the United States. Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment, followed by physical abuse. Perpetrators are often family members, friends, and acquaintances. In fact, **95% of all victims know their perpetrators**. Some children who have been sexually abused may take weeks, months, or even years to fully reveal what was done to them. Many children never tell anyone about the abuse. In general:

- ◆ Girls are more likely to disclose than boys
- ◆ School-aged children tend to tell a caregiver
- ◆ Adolescents are more likely to tell friends
- ◆ Very young children tend to accidentally reveal abuse, because they don't have as much understanding of what occurred or the words to explain it

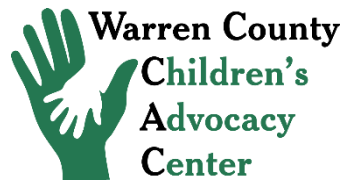
Children are often reluctant to tell about being sexually abused. Some reasons for this reluctance may include:

- ◆ Fear that the abuser may hurt them or their families
- ◆ Fear that they will not be believed, or will be blamed and get in trouble
- ◆ Worry that their parents will be upset or angry
- ◆ Fear that disclosing will disrupt the family, especially if the perpetrator is a family member or friend
- ◆ Fear that if they tell they will be taken away and separated from their family

What do I do if they disclose more?

Your reaction to the disclosure will have a big effect on how your child deals with the trauma of sexual abuse. Children whose parents/caregivers are supportive, heal more quickly from the abuse. To be supportive, it is important to:

- ◆ **Stay calm.** Hearing that your child has been abused can bring up powerful emotions, but if you become upset, angry, or out of control, this will only make it more difficult for your child to disclose.
- ◆ **Believe** your child, and let your child know that he or she is not to blame for what happened. Praise your child for being brave and for telling about the sexual abuse.
- ◆ **Protect** your child by reporting any new disclosures to the detective or a member of the team.
- ◆ **Get help.** In addition to getting any medical care, it is important to give the child an opportunity to talk with an advocate or mental health provider.
- ◆ **Reassure** your child that he or she is loved and accepted by the family. Don't make promises you can't keep.
- ◆ **Keep your child informed** about what will happen next.



WHAT'S NEXT?

What is the investigative process?

The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) consists of a Children & Youth Services (CYS) caseworker, detective, prosecutor, mental health, healthcare, trained advocates, and a child forensic interviewer. All of these professionals are sensitive to the difficult and confusing time that you and your child may be experiencing.

The CYS caseworker must assess the safety and protection of your child.

The detective is from the location where the alleged incident occurred. They, along with the prosecutor, will determine if a crime has been committed and what other investigative steps must be taken.

The victim advocate will be your link to the court system, if and when criminal action is taken.

Together, the victim advocate and the WC-CAC will be your link to resources within your community. They will be available to answer any questions you may have regarding the process.

The MDT's overall goal is to complete the investigation in a child friendly, timely and professional matter.

What about mental health counseling?

At the Warren County Children's Advocacy Center we believe that the most important part of the reporting and investigation process is the welfare of the child. We understand that the process of this investigation can be confusing and frightening and we know that you, as the parent or caregiver, also want what is best for the child.

First and foremost is finding the right path for the emotional recovery for the child and family. The child will greatly benefit from a trained counselor who specializes in working with children. A child counselor will help the child process their experience to facilitate healing and to identify the meaning of healthy relationships.

For the parents or caregivers, dealing with the aftermath of traumatic events can be overwhelming. Ensuring that the child receives therapeutic assistance is only part of the answer. Parents and caregivers should also consider consulting with a therapist who specializes in working with families affected by trauma. Although a traumatic event may have happened to the child, other family members are also impacted. It is important for you, as the significant adult(s) in the child's life, to be prepared to deal with your own emotions as well as the child's emotions. A specially trained therapist will guide you with appropriate ways to discuss the event(s) and answer questions the child may have.

There are many skilled independent therapists throughout Warren County. If you opt to seek assistance from an independent practitioner, we recommend that you inquire about the therapists' training and experience in dealing with trauma.

The WC-CAC, or the victim advocate, can provide you with resources in the community. The WC-CAC can assist with a referral.

If you have questions about the investigative process, please contact the assigned detective, or caseworker with Children & Youth Services.

What if I need additional advocacy services?

We recognize that often a family has additional needs or questions which arise after they have left WC-CAC. We can assist with questions you may have and help ensure you are aware of other community resources that may be helpful to you or your family. If you do not understand what is happening during your investigation and/or you have not been able to communicate with investigators about your investigation, please contact us.

