

Welcome

Child abuse can be a scary topic for individuals to discuss. When child abuse affects your family or someone you care for, the fear and anxiety one experiences can be overwhelming. The Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center is here to help you, your family, or loved one through this difficult time.

The Child Advocacy Center provides services for children and families who have experienced abuse or neglect. Willow Tree staff is here for you and your child each step of the way, from the early stages of an investigation through healing.

During your time at the Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center, you or your child may receive the following:

- Child Interview
- Advocacy
- Medical Care
- Counseling

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What's child abuse?

The definition of child abuse varies slightly from state to state. Generally speaking, a child is abused when they are mistreated in some way that either resulted in the child being harmed or injured, or if the mistreatment could result in the child being harmed or injured. In Wisconsin, Child Abuse is generally divided into several categories including physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect.

Physical Abuse may include:

- ✿ Physical beatings
- ✿ Slapping
- ✿ Hitting
- ✿ Burns
- ✿ Strangulation
- ✿ Human Bites

Sexual Abuse may include

- ✿ Non-touching sexual offenses may include:
 - ✿ Frank discussions about sexual acts intended to arouse the child's interest
 - ✿ Obscene telephone calls
 - ✿ Exhibitionism
 - ✿ Voyeurism
 - ✿ Pornography
 - ✿ Allowing children to witness or hear sexual acts
- ✿ Touching sexual offenses may include:
 - ✿ Rape
 - ✿ Incest
 - ✿ Touching of breasts
 - ✿ Attempted intercourse
 - ✿ Fondling of the genitals

Emotional Abuse may include:

- ✿ A pattern of behavior that attacks children's emotional development, their spirit and self-concept and makes them feel unloved, unloveable and worthless.
- ✿ Constant criticizing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, withholding love, support or guidance.
- ✿ Emotional abuse is thought to be the most common form of abuse, as it usually accompanies other forms of abuse and has the longest lasting effects.

Neglect

- ✿ Neglect is failing to provide for a child's well being and not meeting a child's needs in critical areas such as:
 - ✿ Proper food
 - ✿ Medical care
 - ✿ Hygiene
 - ✿ Shelter
 - ✿ Clothing
 - ✿ Education
 - ✿ Love and attention
 - ✿ Supervision and setting limits

What happens at the Child Advocacy Center?

After you arrive at the Child Advocacy Center and check in at the front desk, you will be asked to wait in our comfortable, family friendly, waiting area. A Child Advocacy Center staff member will meet you in the waiting room and he or she will gather basic information regarding your child and family.

After meeting with a Child Advocacy Center staff member, your child may participate in a video-recorded interview that is conducted by a Child Advocacy Center team member or another professional trained to conduct the interview. This interview is designed to make a child feel as safe and comfortable as possible while discussing difficult situations. Parents and caregivers are asked to wait in the waiting room during this interview.

Following the interview, your child may have a medical evaluation or exam conducted on site by a nurse practitioner.

At the conclusion of the Child Advocacy Center appointment, the team of professionals may invite you to meet with them to go over the findings, discuss with you what to expect after the appointment, or to provide you a time to ask questions.

Who will we work with at the Child Advocacy Center?

The Child Advocacy Center utilizes a team based approach when working with children and families. Although every family's situation is different, typically families will meet with the following professionals at some point during their involvement with the Child Advocacy Center:

Police Officers: A Police Officer is an individual who keeps the peace, enforces laws, protects individuals and property and investigates crimes. At the Child Advocacy Center, you may work with a Police Officer who is investigating an alleged crime. The Officer will talk to individuals and collect physical evidence specific to the incident that brought you to the Child Advocacy Center.

Child Protective Services Workers: A Child Protective Services (CPS) Worker works for a government run department designed to protect children and encourage family stability. A CPS worker is responsible for developing safety plans, and identifying ways for you and your family to meet your basic needs.

Forensic Interviewer: A Forensic Interviewer uses specific, legally sound methods to talk to children. Information from a forensic interview produces evidence that will stand up in court if the investigation leads to criminal prosecution. The Forensic Interviewer may be a Police Officer, a Child Protective Services worker, or a trained Child Forensic Interviewer who works for the Child Advocacy Center

Nurse Practitioner: A Nurse Practitioner is an advanced practice nurse who has completed graduate-level education. The Nurse Practitioner at the Child Advocacy Center has experience and specialized training in examining children who have been abused. The Nurse Practitioner at the Child Advocacy Center may conduct either a medical evaluation or exam on your child depending on your child's specific situation.

Advocate: The Advocate will assist your family throughout the interview and entire process that may follow. The Advocate will greet you and your child when you first arrive at the Child Advocacy Center and help you understand each step of the process. The Advocate will maintain contact and provide information with you about the progress of the case. The Advocate can also provide information about community resources that may be beneficial to you and your child.

Prevention Specialist: The Prevention Specialist provides prevention education to community schools and other programs for children. The Prevention Specialist works to give children age appropriate information about abuse, how children can protect themselves and the power to effectively communicate about abuse with adults. Children need to understand and properly name their body parts. They also need to understand why some body parts are special and the reason these parts should be protected. Prevention education should give children age appropriate knowledge about how to keep their bodies safe. The Prevention Specialist will also provide prevention education to parents and other adults in the community because ultimately it is the community that is responsible for keeping children safe.

Child and Family Therapist: A Child and Family Therapist has advanced training in conducting assessments and providing treatment to an individual's or family's response to something that has happened. A Child and Family Therapist will work with you, your child, and/or your family, on moving past the traumatic life event so healing can occur.

What is an investigation?

Just as every child is unique, no two investigations are exactly alike. Most investigations share these similarities:

- ✿ A concerned individual reports suspicion of abuse to either Law Enforcement or Child Protective Services.
- ✿ A Law Enforcement Officer may be assigned to look into the allegations that a crime has occurred.
- ✿ A Child Protective Services Worker may be assigned to assess the safety of the child and to determine if a child has been maltreated.
- ✿ A team of professionals will meet to talk about the allegations and decide what needs to be done. This team may include medical staff, Police Officers, Social Workers, Prosecutors, and Child Advocacy Center staff.
- ✿ The child victim and/or child witnesses may participate in a recorded forensic interview.
- ✿ If appropriate, medical evaluations or exams may be conducted.
- ✿ The case may be referred to criminal and/or juvenile court.
- ✿ Ongoing case management and advocacy services may be necessary to manage the case and provide support and services to a child and/or family.

What does the interview process involve?

The forensic interview provides a structured setting where children can talk about a difficult situation in a safe, comfortable environment. Forensic Interviewers are specially trained to gather specific details about an event that occurred. Often times the legal process can be very slow; by recording your child's interview, your child's description of an event is kept as evidence. This allows your child to begin the healing process when they are ready, rather than waiting for the legal process to conclude.

Talking about abuse scenarios can be scary and difficult. It is natural for parents to want to be there for their children to comfort them during this time. At the Child Advocacy Center, parents are not allowed to be in the interview room with their children or to watch the interview in the viewing room. Extensive research has been conducted that shows that more accurate, specific information is provided by a child when the child knows a parent or caregiver is not hearing the information directly from the child. When children know or suspect that a parent or caregiver is listening to their details, they are often unwilling to tell important details in an attempt to spare their loved ones from hearing.

In a typical interview, this is what will occur:

- ✿ The Forensic Interviewer will meet your child in the waiting room and take your child to the interview room.
- ✿ The Forensic Interviewer will explain the interviewing process to your child, including informing your child that they are being recorded and that other professionals are watching the interview in a separate room.
- ✿ The Forensic Interviewer will take the time to make certain your child is comfortable and relaxed.
- ✿ The Forensic Interviewer will ask your child very general questions about your child's life. Based on your child's response to the questions, the Forensic Interviewer will ask your child additional questions that help your child better describe their experiences.
- ✿ At the end of the interview, your child will be allowed to ask the Forensic Interviewer questions.
- ✿ Your child will join you after the interview.

How should I react to my child after the interview?

Your child may ask questions or talk about the interview after you leave the center.

Here are some things you can say that will help your child:

- ✿ "I believe you."
- ✿ "I know it's not your fault."
- ✿ "I'm glad I know about it."
- ✿ "I'm sorry this happened to you."
- ✿ "I'm not sure what will happen next."
- ✿ "Nothing about you made this happen."
- ✿ "It has happened to other children, too."
- ✿ "I am upset, but not with you."
- ✿ "I'm sad. You may see me cry. That's all right. I will be able to take care of you."
- ✿ "I don't know why he or she did it. He or she has a problem."
- ✿ "You still can love someone but hate what he or she did to you."

Be careful not to question your child about the interview or abuse. If you do, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser. Here are some things to keep in mind after you leave the Center:

- ✿ If your child wants to talk about it, just listen. Do not probe.
- ✿ Try to return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- ✿ Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect your child, you, and the suspect.
- ✿ Avoid talking about the case with other victims or their families.
- ✿ Provide your child with an extra sense of physical security. Stay close, and assure your child you will keep him or her safe.
- ✿ Do not tell your child that it is all done when the interview is over. It is possible that your child will be interviewed again or asked to talk in court. The professionals involved in your child's case can help you talk with your child about going to court if needed.

The staff at the Child Advocacy Center is available to help you with any questions and/or concerns you may have.

Reference: *A Handbook for Parents*, by Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

What's the difference between a medical evaluation and a medical exam?

All children who receive services at the Child Advocacy Center will be offered a medical evaluation. At the Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center, medical evaluations are conducted by a Nurse Practitioner who has specialized training and experience examining children for possible abuse. During an evaluation, the Nurse Practitioner will meet with your child in a private, comfortable medical room. The Nurse Practitioner will talk to your child about his or her medical history, do a regular head-to-toe check-up, and talk to your child about any concerns or worries they may have about their bodies.

Based on information received during the investigation, it may be necessary to gather specific medical information from your child that cannot be obtained by conducting a general head-to-toe evaluation of your child. This process, called an exam, is only done on a very small number of children seen at the Child Advocacy Center. You will be informed if it is determined that an exam is necessary, and staff will explain this process to you at that time. The exam is done in a gentle manner by the Nurse Practitioner. The Nurse Practitioner will explain each step to your child and make your child as comfortable as possible.

It is extremely important to understand that most children who have been sexually abused, even with a history of penetration, have normal exams. In determining if abuse has happened, the team does not rely on the exam alone. Often times, children find having an exam helps them to know that their bodies are OK. The Nurse Practitioner will take time to explain to your child the results of abuse to your child's body. This is often an important step for your child in the healing process.

Many parents and caregivers feel more comfortable if their child is examined by their family doctor. The type of exam that may be necessary for your child to receive requires specific medical training; most family doctors and pediatricians send their patients to a Center with the expertise needed to conduct this type of exam, such as the Child Advocacy Center.

Are there behavior changes I should be looking for from my child?

Many individuals have concerns when a child displays any type of behavior that deviates from what they believe is “normal” child behaviors. Each child processes and reacts to situations differently, sometimes a child’s reaction to stress, changes, or uncertainty may be by exhibiting unusual behaviors. Just because a child is acting in a way that may not seem normal does not mean that child is being abused or neglected. What is important is to pay attention to any change your child may exhibit, and share your concerns and observations with the team of professionals working with you and your child during this difficult time.

How should I react to my child?

Just as no two children are alike, no two children will react the same during this process. It can be very difficult for adults to sit by and watch loved ones struggle. The best advice to parents and caregivers during this time is to support their child as much as possible. Research has shown that **the single most important factor that affects a child’s recovery is the level of support the child receives from his or her parents or caregivers.**

The following are reactions your child may have and things you can do to respond to the reactions. All of them are normal and understandable reactions to abuse. These are some general responses. A therapist can help you deal with these behaviors more specifically.

Child’s reaction	What you can do to help
Fear	
A child may not want to separate from you and may need constant support	Reassure the child that he or she is safe now.
Embarrassment/guilt	
A child may be embarrassed to talk about what happened. Older children and boys often feel a sense of guilt	Tell the child that the abuse is not his or her fault and he or she is not responsible for what happened.
Anxiety/loss of control	
A child may feel out of control or vulnerable. He or she may develop a low self-image of him or herself.	Create situations in which the child feels in control and empowered. Keep a schedule of normal household routines and rules.
Withdrawal/Regression	
A child may stop talking. Remembering things may be hard. It may be hard to talk about the abuse. He or she may start bed-wetting, thumb sucking or lose toilet training.	Help the child feel secure and in control. Explain the purpose of the legal investigation, the medical exam and treatment in an age-appropriate manner.
Difficulty sleeping or taking part in other routine daily activities	
A child may not want to sleep alone, may have nightmares, disrupted eating habits (hoarding food or reluctant to eat), stomach ache or headache. He or she may not want to go to school.	Allow the child to talk about his or her fears. Show understanding about physical complaints. Reassure the child that he or she is safe.

Provide safety, love and support. Let children know it is OK to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't make your child talk about things; this could seriously damage the case.

Reference: *A Handbook for Parents*, by Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

How do other parents react when this happens to their child?

When abuse is reported, parents sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal. The report can affect your life in many ways, and it takes time to adjust. The following are some of the common thoughts and feelings that parents may have. You may have one or more of these, or you may move from one feeling to another.

- ✿ **Denial.** Your first reaction may be not to believe or accept that your child has been abused. Or, you may believe it happened, but that no real harm was done. Parents often deny abuse because it is too overwhelming. It is very hard to accept that abuse occurred. There will be after effects for both the parent and child. For some people, it takes time to face it.
- ✿ **Anger.** At times, you may feel angry with yourself for not protecting your child. You may feel angry with the perpetrator for what was done. You may feel angry with your child. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted adult, counselor or support group.
- ✿ **Helplessness.** You probably do not know what to expect and you feel that things are out of your control. Some parents fear that their children will be taken away. Try to learn about how cases go through the legal system. The Child Advocacy Center staff members will help you learn what you can do to heal and help your child.
- ✿ **Shock, numbness, repulsion.** You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to feelings of shock, numbness and repulsion as it relates to your child's situation. If so, you may need to seek therapy for yourself to recover from the abuse.
- ✿ **Guilt, self-blame.** You may feel your child's abuse is your fault. Remember that the offender is responsible for the abuse – not you. The best thing you can do now is support your child. Learn all you can about how to make things better. Reading this booklet is a good first step.
- ✿ **Hurt and betrayal.** It is normal to feel hurt. You also may have lost a spouse, partner or family member if that person was the offender. You also may have lost friends. It is very important to take the time to grieve these losses.
- ✿ **Sexual inadequacy.** Some women believe the offender abused a child because their relations with him were not adequate. This has not been shown to be a reason that abusers harm children.
- ✿ **Fear of violence.** You may fear the offender will try to harm you or your children. If so, there are resources such as domestic violence shelters with professionals who can help. If this is a concern, please talk to the people who gave you this booklet.

- ✿ **Fear of drug or alcohol abuse.** You may be afraid that you or the offender will abuse drugs and/or alcohol because of the stress, or that one of you may have a relapse to an old addiction. If you need help, find a recovery center or ask for help to find one.
- ✿ **Loss of privacy.** You may be concerned that others in your community or neighborhood will hear about what has happened to your child. The investigation of child abuse is performed in a confidential manner, and no one involved in the case will communicate any factual material to anyone other than involved Team members. Your child's name will not appear in the newspaper. You should use care in what you tell others while the investigation is on going to prevent complicating or confusing it in any way.
- ✿ **Confusion: Why didn't my child tell me?** It is common for a child to not tell his/her parent about the abuse. Children are often aware that such news will upset their parent, but do not understand that the parent would not be angry with them for the abuse occurring. Sometimes the abuser has threatened the child with harm, with responsibility that the abuser will get in trouble if the child tells, that a parent or loved one will be mad at them for disclosing, or that the child will be "taken away" from their parents. Even young children feel protective toward their parents and refrain from doing or saying anything that will upset or anger that parent. Reassure your child that the fact that they told someone was a very brave and important thing for them to do.

Reference: When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parent's Guide to Healing and Recovery, Kathryn B Hagans

It helps to talk to a good friend or counselor about your feelings rather than your child. Evidence shows that **the single most important factor affecting a child's recovery is the level of support from the parents or caregivers.**

What's the best way to work with the legal system?

The legal system has the responsibility to protect children by holding offenders accountable for their actions. The legal system is able to do a better job when they have as many facts as possible and when people cooperate. Here are some basic tips when working with the legal system:

- ✿ **Refrain from talking about the abuse and the investigation in front of your child.**
- ✿ **Remain calm and strong for your child.** Don't question your child about the abuse, don't tell your child what to say, and don't correct the child when he or she talks about the abuse. It is extremely important your child uses his or her own words when he or she is ready to talk about the abuse.
- ✿ **When professionals ask you questions, be as factual as possible.** Never guess if you don't know the answer to a question. It's better to say you don't know than to guess. Try to keep your opinions out of your statements.
- ✿ **Never lie, even if the truth may not make you or others look good.** In the long run, you will be much better off.
- ✿ **Remain supportive, protective and affectionate towards your child.** It is possible that the alleged offender may be a significant person in your life and it may be a struggle to balance your feelings with your responsibility to your child. Remember, your child needs you to be there for him or her to make healthy, protective decisions for him or her.

- ✿ **Cooperate.** When people are asking you personal questions without explaining why they are asking the questions, it's easy to feel as if they are prying into your personal life rather than helping you. The professionals who ask the questions are required to obtain specific information. It is important to the investigation as well as your child's welfare that the professionals involved get the answers to their questions. Cases where individuals are cooperative and forthcoming with information tend to be resolved faster. This allows you and your child to return to a more normal life.
- ✿ **Try not to jump to conclusions.** It's easy to believe that because someone doesn't show any sign of emotion that they don't care about what's going on around them. In fact, these professionals do care! The professionals involved are avoiding becoming emotionally involved in the situation so they can remain objective and make sound, rational decisions.
- ✿ **Get your questions answered.** This is a very difficult, chaotic time and many different things will be happening at the same time. You will receive lots of information from many different people. It's easy to get overwhelmed! Never be embarrassed or ashamed to ask someone to slow down or to repeat things. If you have a question, ask it. Keep this booklet or a notebook with you at all times so you can write the important information down that the professionals give you and keep track of the questions that you want to ask when you think of them. If you ask someone a question and they don't know the answer, ask who does know the answer so you can get your question answered.

Will I get what I want from the legal system?

The most important thing should be your child's well-being. It's important to remember that the legal system is only one step in the entire process; don't allow yourself to get lost in the legal system. The outcome from the legal system is not essential to how your child will recover. **The best advice is to enter the legal system without expectations, because** the more you expect from it, the harder the experience is likely to be.

Celebrate when the legal process is over. No matter what the outcome, tell your child that it is over. You and your child did your best, worked hard and put in a lot of time.

How do I tell my child about the outcome?

The best advice is to be honest with your child; he or she has been through a lot and they deserve to know the truth. How you talk about the outcome depends on the age and developmental level of your child. The most important thing is to let your child know that you are proud of him or her.

Sometimes the case will not come out as you expected and you may feel let down or have a period of sadness. It is important that you don't share these feelings with your child because if your child hears you feel this way, he or she may internalize this and think you are disappointed in him or her. Instead, find a friend or family member you can confide your feelings and frustrations with.

Sometimes, even though everyone does their job really well, there may not be enough evidence to prosecute the abuser. Explaining this to your child can be difficult, here are some things to say to your child in this situation:

- ✿ “Just because they didn’t find _____ guilty, that doesn’t mean they didn’t believe you. It’s just that they have to follow the court’s rules.”
- ✿ “You may be wondering how someone can do something wrong or against the law and not be punished. It doesn’t make sense to me either.”
- ✿ “It doesn’t matter what the court process did. What matters is that you did what you needed to – you told.”
- ✿ “You are safe. You have been very brave.”

Remember, despite it all, you have done everything that you could to try to protect your child, prevent further abuse, and to hold the offender responsible for what he or she did. Even if the case was not prosecuted, this is a major accomplishment.

How do I tell others what happened?

For many families dealing with similar situations as yours, the prospect of talking to others about what happened was very overwhelming and left them thinking things such as:

- ✿ “Should I tell them?”
- ✿ “Will they treat my child differently if they know?”
- ✿ “Will they think poorly of me?”
- ✿ “How much should I tell them?”

Before you make the decision to share this experience with others, talk to your child and allow him or her some choice about who is told, if your child is old enough to make that decision. Everyone heals at a different rate, and although you may be at a place where you are comfortable sharing with others, your child may not yet be there with you. If your child is younger and there is no publicity or public awareness of what happened, the choice is up to you what and when you share. Either way, it is important that your child knows which individuals you have talked to.

For those who make the decision to share with others, it’s important to keep in mind how the person you are going to share with usually reacts to stress. Common reactions may include hysteria, horror, rejection, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest or more questioning for intimate details. These reactions may be even stronger if the offender is a family member. If you know the person you want to share with will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. Above all, regardless of with whom you choose to share with and what information you choose to share, it is important to respect your child’s sense of privacy.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that the person could tell you in a less upsetting way than he or she could.

What do others typically say when they learn that a child they know has been abused?

- ✿ “What exactly did he or she do to your child?”
- ✿ “Are you sure your child didn’t make it up?”
- ✿ “Why didn’t you know it was happening?”
- ✿ “If it were my child, I’d just move away.”
- ✿ “Your poor child must be feeling really guilty.”

Never forget that you don’t owe anyone an explanation. “I’d rather not talk about it” is a good response. Or simply say, “It has been a very difficult time for all of us. I appreciate your concern.” Or it may be easier to just nod as an acknowledgement of what someone says.

Keep in mind that most people don’t know much about this topic. For example, in response to comments about your child feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel guilt in these cases until they’re assured that they are not responsible for what happened. As a parent, you too may be experiencing some guilt. You may feel defensive. In that case, a good response is, “Parents do their best, but we’re only human.”

Adults are the people most likely to say something to your child. You may want to tell your child that if someone says, “I’m sorry about what happened to you,” they should respond with a simple, “Thank you.” Let your child know that he or she doesn’t have to respond to any comments or questions. He or she could say, “My parents told me not to talk about it right now.” If other children comment or tease your child, he or she might say, “It could happen to anyone.”

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested* by Kathryn B. Hagan

What about me?

This is a very difficult time in your life. It’s common to feel pressure from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important! Schedule time for yourself where you do something just for you – and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult, but it is in your and your child’s best interest to do so. Scheduling your own time in your own space will help you gain or regain a sense of your own identity and put things into the proper perspective. You’ll think clearer, you’ll feel more calm, and you’ll get through this process better if you take the time to take care of yourself.

Above all, it’s ok to find help for yourself. Know that you don’t have to tackle this on your own. It is important that you take care of yourself so you can do the best job taking care of and supporting your child. If it has been recommended by a member of the team that your child receive therapy see that this happens as soon as possible. Although this happened to your child, it also happened to your family. It is important that all members of the family are taken care of as part of the healing process.

Important Contact Information

	Agency	Case Number	Name	Phone
Law Enforcement				
Child Protection				
Advocate				
Attorney				
Doctor				
Therapist				

Important Dates to Remember

Date	Time	Place	Purpose	Notes