

Children's Advocacy Center



Of York County

# Caregiver Handbook

*Information and resources for non-offending  
caregivers*

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## Commonly Asked Questions from Caregivers

This time can be very confusing for caregivers. It is common for caregivers to be flooded with questions as they try to do what is best for their children. We encourage you to seek support from Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine's (SARSSM) advocacy services to help answer questions and provide you with resources and support during this time.

### ***Why didn't my child tell me sooner?***

Children often don't tell anyone. It is not a reflection on you as a parent. Young children often don't know exactly what is happening to them; they may feel something isn't right but do not have the vocabulary to identify what is happening. Older children may have a whole other set of reasons and concerns about disclosing, including: caring about the abuser, threats from the abuser, shame, fear, etc. It is important to not blame the child or yourself for their inability to tell you. Children rarely lie about such an intense and painful topic. In fact, statistics indicate that children tell the truth 92-98% of the time. Your response to the disclosure of abuse is critical to the child's ability to resolve and heal.

### ***Should I treat my child differently now?***

Children need to be treated with sensitivity under any circumstances. A child who has been sexually abused may need more reassurance of your love and support than usual. Continuing to follow regular household routines is usually best. Children often find comfort in the predictability that a routine offers.

### ***Who should know about what happened?***

With younger children, parents make the judgment about who to tell based on determining what will ultimately benefit the child. If the child is school-aged, it may be beneficial for a teacher to know about the sexual abuse because they can provide support to the child in the school environment. Also, if the sexual abuse has impacted your child in such a way that it will influence or affect others, those who are caretakers of your child may need to be informed. The information should not be too detailed, but should be enough for them to plan how they might respond to these behaviors.

For older children, it is important to consider how they may feel about certain people knowing. Engage them in a conversation about this and make decisions with their feelings in mind.

### ***How do I know if my child needs therapy?***

All children benefit from immediate love, nurturing, and support from significant people in their lives. Sometimes you can have the greatest impact on the child. Most children who display behavioral or emotional changes may benefit from some form of therapy. The type and length of treatment is based on every child's differing needs. There are specially trained clinicians available through local agencies that can provide therapy for you and your child.

### ***Why if my child discloses something else?***

Sometimes after a forensic interview a child may remember or decide to tell you more about what happened to them. If this happens, it is important to contact Law Enforcement and/or DHHS right away.

### **Some things to keep in mind...**

- Be supportive
- Listen to your child
- Write down what your child says
- Let the child tell their story but avoid asking a lot of questions (leave that for the professionals)
- Report what is said to the child protective worker or police detective that is involved
- Seek your own support as it might be difficult to hear your child's story
- Stay calm
- Don't question the child (the investigators are trained to ask the right questions)
- Don't make promises that you cannot keep (that the abuser will go to jail or you will never have to see abuser again)
- Don't confront the offender (this could harm your child and damage the investigation)

## **Impact of Child Sexual Abuse**

The impact of sexual abuse is unique to each child but there are many common elements. Some possible effects are:

### ***Physical***

- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Genital Infections
- Changes in eating patterns

### ***Behavioral***

- Sleep disturbances
- Nightmares
- Compulsive masturbation
- Sexual play inappropriate for child's age
- Behavior consistent with an earlier age
- Detachment from others
- Insecurity

### ***Emotional***

- Mood swings
- Flashbacks
- Aggression
- Acting out behavior
- Self-abuse
- Withdrawn/isolated behavior
- Low energy
- Irritability
- Decreased interest in previous activities

### ***Difficulty in School***

- Inability to concentrate
- Drop in academic performance
- Change in peer relationships
- Change in interests

The presence of these symptoms does not always mean that your child has been sexually assaulted. It is also possible that if your child has been sexually assaulted, they may not show any symptoms. These symptoms are most easily explained as a child's response to fear and anxiety. Some children do not possess adult language skills, but they tend to "tell" how they feel through action and behavior. If you know that your child has been sexually abused, it is very likely they have already shown some of these responses.

## **Tips to Help Protect Children from Sexual Abuse**

- Teach children accurate names of private body parts
- Avoid focusing exclusively on "stranger danger." Keep in mind that most children are abused by someone they know and trust
- Teach children about body safety and the difference between "good," "hurtful" or "confusing" touches
- Let children know that they have the right to make decisions about their bodies Empower them to say no when they do not want to be touched, even in non-sexual ways (e.g. politely refusing hugs) and to say no to touching others
- Make sure children know that adults and older children don't need help with their private body parts (e.g. bathing or going to the bathroom)
- Teach children to take care of their own private parts (i.e. bathing, wiping after bathroom use) so they don't have to rely on adults or older children for help
- Educate children about the difference between privacy and secrets
- Encourage children to ask for help if they are ever feeling hurt or scared
- Trust your instincts! If you feel uneasy about leaving a child with someone, don't do it
- If you're concerned about possible sexual abuse, call either DHHS, local law enforcement, or SARSSM's Crisis and Support Line

## **Support Services for You and Your Family**

After your child has been interviewed at the Children's Advocacy Center, there are support services available to you and your family provided by SARSSM. These services can include the following:

- A 24-hour confidential support line for questions, concerns, and support
- Support and accompaniment to appointments related to the investigation such as law enforcement interviews, meetings at the District Attorney's office, court hearings, etc.
- Support and accompaniment with filing for Protection from Abuse (PFA) orders and accompaniment to court hearings regarding PFAs
- Emotional support for you and your family through this process
- Access to support groups
- Questions and clarification of what has happened so far and how to find out information about your case
- Help with referrals for you and your child

All of these services are free and intended to help you and your family in navigating different systems and dealing with what happens next. For immediate support, please contact SARSSM's Crisis and Support Line at 1(800) 313-9900.

## What Happens Next?

There are many pieces to the investigation of child sexual abuse; therefore, there may not be an easy answer about what happens next. This is something you can discuss with an advocate from SARSSM who can help find out information about your case when new information is available. Some things to keep in mind:

- You will receive follow up calls from the CAC's Family Advocate one week and one month following the interview
- The alleged perpetrator may not be arrested right away, if at all
- The DVD of your child's interview is sent with the investigating officer as evidence in the investigation
- The decision whether or not to criminally charge the suspect is a result of coordination and collaboration between the investigators and the District Attorney's office. Immediate safety issues may impact the decisions that are made at that time
- Your child may be referred for a specialized medical exam (See Spurrwink Child Abuse Program Handout)

## To Report Suspected Child Abuse

### **Maine Department of Health and Human Services Child Abuse Reporting Hotline**

1-800-452-1999

### **Your Local Law Enforcement Agency**

*You may call them directly or, if the child is in immediate danger, call 911*

## **Victim's Rights in Maine**

Victims of Crime are entitled to the following basic rights:

- To be treated with dignity and respect
- To be assisted by criminal justice agencies
- To be informed about the criminal justice system
- Whenever practicable, to be notified of plea agreements and the right to comment on them
- Whenever practicable, to be notified of all judicial proceedings, including time and place of trial
- Whenever practicable, to be notified of the proposed dismissal or filing of a complaint, information, or indictment before the action is taken
- To have input at sentencing
- To request restitution
- To request compensation from the Victim Compensation Board for unreimbursed medical and medically related expenses for victims of violent crimes upon request to the Department of Corrections
- To be notified of defendant's release from institutional confinement in all felony cases
- To be provided with a pamphlet containing certain statutes which pertain to victim's rights

*(Provided by the State of Maine Department of Corrections)*

## **Resources**

### **Sexual Abuse Support Services**

***Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern  
Maine***

***1-800-313-9900***

### **Domestic Violence Support Services**

***Caring Unlimited***

***1-800-239-7298***

### **Mental Health and Counseling Services**

***Maine Behavioral Healthcare***

***1-844-292-0111***

***Spurwink Services***

***1-207- 871-1200***

***Sweetser***

***1-800-434-3000***

***Sinfonia Family Services***

***1-207-536-0090***

### **Transportation**

***York County Community Action Corporation***

***1-800-965-5762***

### **Medical Services**

***Spurwink Child Abuse Program***

***1-207-879-6160***

## **Contacts Related to Your Case**

### **Investigating Law Enforcement**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>

### **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>

### **Medical**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>

### **Family Advocate**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>
	CAC of York County	

### **Support Advocate**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>
	SARSSM	

### **District Attorney's Office**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Phone</b>



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