

# CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER MEDICAL EVALUATION

It is upsetting for parents and caregivers to think that their child may have been sexually or physically abused. The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) and the team of professionals responding to your concerns understand this is a very difficult time for you and your family. For this reason, all professionals involved are committed to providing the best care and treatment for you and your child. One thing that can be helpful to both children and caregivers is a thorough medical exam. In addition to ensuring your child is healthy, a medical exam can also take care of any problems like infection or injury. This document will answer your questions about a child sexual/physical abuse medical exam. If you continue to have questions even after reviewing the information, please contact the CAC where your child has been receiving services.

## Why should my child have an exam?

- A medical exam is important to be sure your child is healthy. The visit is recommended even if the abuse happened a long time ago. The medical provider (either a doctor or a nurse) will check to see how your child is doing physically and emotionally. If there are any injuries, infections, or emotional problems, the provider will treat them or refer your child for further care. Most parents and children will get the good news that everything is fine. This really helps at a difficult time.

## What happens during the exam?

- First, the doctor or nurse will talk with you and your child about any medical problems or questions. After that, there will be a full head-to-toe checkup ending with the genitals (private parts). This part of the exam is important to be sure there are no injuries or infections, including sexually transmitted infections. For young girls, there is no exam inside the vagina. In some cases, the private parts may be touched with cotton swabs to test for infection.

## Will the medical exam be able to tell me if anything happened?

- It is important to know that a medical exam alone cannot prove child sexual abuse happened. Children's bodies heal quickly. When there has been injury from abuse, many children have already healed by the time of the exam, even if they get that exam promptly. Injuries rarely leave scars, even when there has been penetration.

## Is this going to upset my child?

- The exam is not that different from a regular checkup, and the provider will explain the parts that may be new to the child. No child is forced to have the exam. If a child becomes upset and cannot calm down, the provider will stop the exam and reschedule the visit.

## Who will do the medical exam?

- Exams should only be done by doctors and nurses who have special training in child sexual abuse and/or child physical abuse examinations.

## What about confidentiality?

- We will only share information with others if you have given us your written permission. You should also know that by law the doctor or nurse may be required to share the results of the exam with law enforcement and child protective services.



## May I stay with my child during the exam?

- Many children want a parent or supportive adult with them for the exam. Others do not. We ask children if they would like to have someone with them during the exam. Even if you are not in the room during the exam part of the visit you will have a chance afterwards to talk privately with the provider.

## How long does the medical exam last?

- Generally, a full examination takes less than 20-30 minutes.

## How will I get the results?

- The doctor or nurse will meet with you immediately following the exam. You will get the results of any lab testing by phone or letter.

## Would it help for me to get more information from my child about what happened?

- It is important you don't question your child. Sometimes asking lots of questions can encourage children to report things less accurately.

## What can I do to make the exam easier for my child?

- You can have a short talk with your child before you go to the medical appointment. Explain that:
  - You are going to a special doctor or nurse so that your child can have a checkup. This checkup will include a look at everything, including the genitals (private parts).
  - You understand that sometimes this is embarrassing, but everything during this visit is to make sure your child is okay and healthy.

Your child may bring a stuffed animal or favorite blanket. It helps if your child is well rested and has had a snack before they arrive.

The more relaxed you are the easier it will be for your child.

It may help you to bring an adult friend or relative to support you. That person can also keep your child or children busy while you meet alone with the doctor or nurse.

Your child's appointment is on:

DATE

TIME

LOCATION

If you have questions, call: