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CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER  
of Fairfield County

**Handbook for  
Caregivers**

**11147 E. Main St.  
Lancaster, OH 43130  
Phone Number: 740-652-9604  
Fax Number: 740-652-9729**

# Fairfield County Directory

## Law and Protection Services:

Fairfield County Child Advocacy Center:	740-653-9604
Fairfield County Child Protection Services:	740-653-4060
Lancaster Police Department:	740-687-6683
Fairfield County Sheriffs Office:	740-653-5223
Fairfield County Prosecutors Office:	740-653-4295

## Counseling:

Mid Ohio Psychological Services	740-687-0042
New Horizons Youth & Family Center	740-687-0835
The Lighthouse	740-687-4423
Pickerington area Counseling Services	614-834-1919

## Shelters:

The Lighthouse	740-687-4423
Lutheran Social Services	740-653-2012

## Legal Services:

Southeaster Ohio Legal Services	740-653-7705
Victim Advocate	740-687-6778
Job & Family Services Legal Clinic	740-653-1701
Information & Referral	740-687-0500

## Taking Care Of Yourself

You are going through a very difficult time, you probably feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of other people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important, so you need to find time to do something just for you and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult to do, but it is in the best interest of you and your child.

Scheduling your own time and space will help you regain a sense of your own identity. Take the time to nurture yourself. Here is a plan that may work for you:

1. Schedule your self-care time on your calendar
2. Decide what you'll do.
3. Tell anyone who needs to know that you will be gone for a time you've set. Explain that this is your personal time and that you'll be back later.
4. Take care of details, such as finding child care, arranging transportation etc.
5. Enjoy yourself!

## What To Expect Afterward

It is recommended that child who have been sexually abused receive mental health counseling. If you decide not to pursue counseling, you should be attentive for the following issues with might arise in your child after he/she has been sexually abuse, even if he/she seems "fine" after the abuse:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Depression or mood swings
- Eating disorders
- Sleep disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Participation in unsafe sexual activities or inappropriately sexualized behavior. Those who have been abused as children have an increased risk of becoming abusers themselves when they reach adulthood. Constant supervision and vigilance by adults is essential to preventing further child abuse.

## What To Say To Others

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. Of there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know what which relatives or friends you will be discussing it and let you child have some choice about who is told.

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

If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about you child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. Their reactions may include hysteria, horror, obvious distress, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest, or unnecessary questions for intimate details. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy. On the other hand, be careful not to make it a dirty secret, as this could cause more shame in your child.

## Comments You Can Expect From Others About Abuse

“What exactly did he 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.”  
“You poor child must be feeling really guilty.”

Remember, you don't owe anyone an explanation. “I'd rather no talk about it” is an acceptable response. Or simply say, “It's been very difficult time for all of us.” “I appreciate your concern” is another response you might want to use. Or it may be easier to just nod as acknowledgement of what someone says.

Keep in mind that most people have very little knowledge about sexual abuse. For example, in response to the comment about your child feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel unnecessary guilt in these cases until they are assured that they are not responsible in any way for what happened. As a parent, you might also be experiencing some guilt, and as a result, 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,” he/she should respond with a simple, “thank you.” Let your child know that he/she doesn't have to respond to any comments or questions. He or she could say “My mom and/or dad told me not to talk about it now.” If other children comment or tease, you child might say, “It could happen to anyone, including you.”

## Welcome to the Fairfield County Child Advocacy Center

Your child is here because of concerns about possible abuse. Our goals are to:

- ✦ Do the best job possible in finding out what happened.
- ✦ Work with the legal system to help the child.
- ✦ Help you understand the child protective and legal system.
- ✦ Help make the process as comfortable as possible for you.

Help your children and family begin to heal.

We hope this handbook will help you understand more about child sexual abuse. We also hope it will help you understand the system we use to respond to a report of abuse. Please call Fairfield County Child Advocacy Center at 740-652-9604 if you have any questions.

## Fairfield County CAC Procedures

The investigation and treatment of alleged child abuse is a complex process that involves professionals from several different disciplines. The multidisciplinary team (MDT) of the CACFC is comprised of professionals from Child Protective Services, Fairfield Medical Center, Fairfield County Sheriff's Office, Lancaster Police Department, Pickerington Police Department, County Prosecutor's Office, City Attorney's Office, Mid Ohio Psychological Services, New Horizons for Youth and Families, the CACFC and other involved agencies, who work together, with families, to help protect children.

Our goal is to minimize the trauma experienced by your child and family as the report of abuse is investigated and subsequently handled by the involved agencies. One way we achieve this goal is to reduce the number of times a child must tell his or her story. To accomplish this we have MDT members observe and record the conversation that the investigator has with your child. Your child will be informed that the interview is recorded and be introduced to the MDT members who will watch the interview. All of the investigators and other members of the MDT are specially trained in forensic interviewing techniques specific for child abuse victims. They take time to make sure each child is as comfortable as possible throughout their time in the center. While your child is being interviewed, you will meet with staff from the center, who will answer any questions you have.

Sometimes during an interview, children describe things that have happened to them that may have caused an injury or exposed them to an illness. If this occurs, the MDT will recommend that a forensic medical examination be conducted. If your child requires this care, arrangements will be made for the examination at no cost to you.

## Your Team of Professionals

There is a highly trained team of professionals who work together to respond to child abuse reports.

This is your team:

**The Prosecutor:** The prosecutor leads the team and has the final decision as to whether charges will be filed. A consideration is given to many factors which will affect the likelihood of success in court. Some of the factors considered are; age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, whether or not the suspect has confessed, presences of medical evidence, and whether or not there are other witnesses.

**The Victim Advocate:** The victim advocate, works out of the prosecutors office, coordinates court preparations, helps victims and their families understand the legal process, and provides other valuable services to victims and their families.

**The Law Enforcement Officer:** A detective will be assigned to your case, who may conduct the interview of the child, non-offending parents, suspects and other witnesses, and gather evidence from the scene of the alleged event.

**The Case Worker:** The role of the Fairfield County Child Protective Services case worker is to help protect your child. The FCCPS case workers conduct interviews and develop safety plans. They may refer you and/or your child to counseling.

**The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner:** Nurses working with the team have years of experience in examining children for possible abuse. The exam for sexual abuse involves a regular check-up with magnification of the genitalia. Magnification is done with an instrument called a culposcope, which is a big magnifying glass with a good light source. If the child is having discharge or other symptoms, cultures may be obtained by swabbing the genitalia with a Q-tip. This exam should be traumatic or painful, and most child are able to remain calm. Remember an exam may not indicate if the child has been abused. Eighty percent of all children who have been abused have normal exams, even with a history of penetration, so the team does not rely on these along to prove abuse. One definite advantage is that it allows the doctor to assure the child that his/her body is OK.

**The Therapist:** Mental Health professionals (therapist) on the team help decide how the abuse has affected the child and family and what can be done to assist them in healing from the experience.

## Tips During The Process

The system is responsible for protecting children and holding offenders accountable. The more information and cooperation you give to the team of professional working with the team, the better job they can do on the case.

- Be calm and reassuring to your child. Don't coach your child on what to say. It is important for the story to come out in your child's words and in your child's own time.
- When you are asked for information, try to provide as many facts as you can. Cases are built on the four W's who, what, when, and where. Don't try to guess if you don't know the answer to a question- it is much better to say you don't know.
- Your feelings are important. Feelings are valuable in giving the investigators insight, so tell how you feel and why you feel that way. Although only facts are allowed in court, feelings can help give investigators ideas for how to proceed.
- Always be honest, even though the truth may not seem favorable to yourself or other. In the long run, you will be much better. Off.
- Try not to overact. It is difficult time and emotions are probably running high. Losing control can hurt the case and overshadow the needs of the innocent victim, your child.
- Cooperate. You will probably feel as if investigators are prying into your personal life, but this is necessary and vital to the case and to your child's welfare. The sooner the facts come out, the sooner the case can be resolved and you can return to normal life.
- You may feel that investigators do not care because they avoid showing emotions. In fact, investigators do care, and part of that caring involves remaining objective and calm in the face of extremely emotional situations.
- Love, support, and protect your child at all cost. If the alleged offender is significant person to you, it can be very difficult to balance your feelings for him/her with the need to protect your child. Remember that your child has only you to make healthy and protective decisions.

## What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual Abuse occurs when a person forces a child to have any form of sexual contact or makes a child perform sexual acts. Sexual abuse may involve touching private parts (clothed or unclothed), penetration using an object, forced sexual acts between children, or making a child view, read, or participate in pornography. These acts are abuse even when offenders say they were gentle and did not harm the child.

Sexual abuse is also known as molestation or exploitation. Sexual molestation does not always mean sexual intercourse. Sometimes older children molest younger or smaller children. Sexual acts between children become molestation when one child uses coercion, force, or violence to get the other child to do the acts.

Sexual molestation is overwhelming to children, especially when an adult is involved. Most children are taught to trust adults. They tend to believe what adults tell them is true rather than to rely on their own feelings. This works against them in two ways. If the molester tells them what is being done is OK, they may doubt their own feelings that is not. If a parents' initial reaction when they hear the child's molestation report is "This can't be true!", the child may wonder if his or her own feelings are mistaken. Child almost never tell about abuse "to create problems." More often, they fear that telling will make people angry at them.

**It is extremely difficult for children to report abuse.**

## Facts About The Investigation

Following are the basic steps to an investigation of child sexual abuse:

1. Someone reports suspicion of abuse to authorities, either law enforcement or Fairfield County Child Protective Services.
2. Interviews with the child are conducted, usually at the Child Advocacy Center. Interviews are conducted by specially-trained forensic interviewers, with the participation of local law enforcement and if deemed necessary, a representative of the Fairfield County Prosecutor's Office.
3. Medical exams are conducted, if necessary.
4. Law Enforcement and CPS will continue the investigation, which will include and interview with the alleged offender, if possible.
5. A team of professional will meet to discuss the case and decided how to manage it. The team consists of medical professionals, prosecutors, lawn enforcement offices, social works, and mental health professionals. Meeting participants agree to abide by the Fairfield County CAC's confidentiality agreement to keep all information from meetings private.

## How Parents Sometimes Feel When Abuse Has Been Reported

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. Following are some of the common thoughts and feelings parents have. You may feel one or more of these, or you may move from one to another.

**Denial-** Your first reaction may be to not believe or accept the possibility that it really happened. Or you may believe it happened, but that no real harm was done. Parents often experience denial because it is too overwhelming to accept that the abuse occurred and that there will be after-effects. For some people, it takes time to overcome denial and face the realities of abuse.

**Anger-** At times, you may feel angry at yourself for not protecting the child. You may feel angry at the perpetrator for what he/she did. You may even feel angry at the child. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted person or group.

**Helplessness-** You probably do not know what to expect and feel that things are out of your control. Some parents may fear that their children will be taken away. Try to stay aware of how cases proceed through the system in which you are involved.

**Lack of assertiveness-** You may feel invisible and think this is nothing you can do to help the situation get better. We will help you learn what you can do

## Facts About The Interview

At times, you may be asked to wait while child is being questioned. Being left out of some of the proceedings can make you feel as if you are not very important to the process or to your child. Please be assured that you are very important. In fact, you may be the key to understanding what has happened. Many interviews, however, prefer that the parents not be present during the interview because they believe that more accurate information can be obtained if you are not there. In your presences, your child may be unwilling to tell important details because he/she wants to spare you from hearing them. Sometimes parents can't control their emotions at what they hear, or they may place pressure on the child to tell in a way that can complicate the legal process.

Most interviewers will take the time to make sure your child is comfortable without you. This means letting your child see you with the interviewer and making sure that your child knows where you will be during the interview. It should be made clear to the child that you are available, if necessary.

## How To Act Towards Your Child

Provide safety, love, and support. Let them know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't coach or pressure your child to talk about things.

Some things you can say that will really 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 will take care of you.
- I'm not sure what will happen next.
- Nothing about YOU made this happen. It has happened to other children too.
- You don't need to take care of me.
- I am upset, but not with you

## Some Things You Can Do

- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible
- See that your child receives therapy as soon as possible. Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.
- Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it all yourself.
- Teach your child the rules of personal safety. Tell them what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable way.
- Be careful not to question your child about the abuse. If you do, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser. Specially trained professionals at the Advocacy Center will interview your child to obtain the necessary information without harming the care or further traumatizing him/her. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.
- Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect you, that person and the child.
- Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.
- Never coach or advise your child or how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators. This could seriously damage the case.
- Avoid the suspect.
- Your child may need an extra sense of physical security. Stay close, and assure your child you will keep him/her safe.

## How Parents Sometimes Feel When Abuse Has Been Reported

Shock, numbness, repulsion- You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to shock, numbness, and repulsion for the new situation you find yourself in. If so, you may need to seek therapy for yourself to recover from the abuse.

Guilt, self-blame- You may feel it is all your fault. But the offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing you can do now is support your child and learn all you can about how to make things better. Reading this handbook is a good first step.

Hurt and betrayal- It is normal to feel hurt for the loss of your child's innocence. You also may have lost a spouse or partner if that person was the offender. You may even have lost friends. It is very important to take time to grieve for these losses.

Concerns about money- You may be worried about finances because of lost of income. An advocate or social worker from Child Protective Services or Job and Family Services will work with you to assist you.

Fear of violence- In homes where violence is common, you may fear the offender will try to harm you or your children. If so, call The Light House, the domestic violence shelter, at 740-

Fear of drug or alcohol abuse- You may be afraid that you or the offender will abuse drugs or alcohol because of the stress, or that one of your may have a relapse to an old addiction. If you need help call the, Recovery Center, 740-

## The Grooming Process: Steps The Abuser Takes To Set Up Children

Some parents wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children.

These include:

1. Seeking out an approachable child: Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship attention.
2. Establish relationship with the child: Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteer for child care duty, become their “buddy,” or buy them candy or presents.
3. Breaking down the child’s resistance to touch: Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch because sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.
4. Finding ways to isolate a child: Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won’t tell. For example, they may babysit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.
5. Blaming the child and keeping the secret: Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won’t tell. They use statements like these:
  - a. “You know you like the way I touch you.”
  - b. “If you tell, people will think you are bad.”
  - c. “If you tell our ‘special secret,’ I will go to jail.”
  - d. “If you tell your mother, she won’t love you anymore.”
  - e. “No one will believe you.”

## Signs Sometimes Shown By Abused Children

Children may have some of the following symptoms as a result of abuse:

- \*Nausea/upset stomach
- \*Change in appetite
- \*Crying
- \*Nightmares
- \*Change in school performance
- \*Anger and mood changes
- \*Withdrawal from others
- \*Avoidance of school/friends
- \*Sexually inappropriate behavior
- \*Pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections
- \*Clinging to parents
- \*Aggressiveness
- \*Rebelliousness
- \*Changes in sleep patterns
- \*Fears and phobias
- \*Lying
- \*Attention-seeking
- \*Self-Mutilation
- \*Running away
- \*Substance abuse

The Fairfield County CAC and other community agencies offer services to help your child overcome the effects of trauma. Children react differently depending on age, extent of abuse, support from others and their relationship with the offender. The single most important factor affecting the child’s recovery is the level of support from their parent(s) or caregiver. If you do everything you can to support your child, the chances of recovery are much greater. If you feel torn between loyalty to your child and loyalty to the offender, the Fairfield County CAC has services available to help you sort it out.