

Forensic interview



The forensic interview is a structured, developmentally sensitive conversation with a child that is designed to elicit information that either corroborates or refutes allegations of abuse.

Making a referral

Referrals for a forensic interview can be made for any child under the age of 18 and older than 3. Referrals for adults 18 and older can be made if it fits the best needs of the victim and the team.

Interviews are requested by law enforcement, social services, or prosecution for suspicion of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or witnessing a crime. It is law enforcement's role to notify prosecution and invite them to the interview.

It is critical that the caregiver be well informed about the interview process before arrival at the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Let them know the process takes approximately 90 minutes.

The forensic interview process

A team meeting is held prior to the interview. The purpose is for the team to share information about the case with each other and CAC staff and make key decisions about the manner in which the interview should be conducted. At completion of the team meeting, the parent/guardian, if present, is brought into the observation room to fill out paperwork and ask questions they may have about the process.

If the parent has questions about how to talk to the child about the interview, these are some recommendations:

Dos:

- Tell the child about their appointment. A caregiver may say, *"People who talk to a lot of children will be visiting with you about ..."*
- Tell the child to speak the truth.
- Avoid asking questions about the abuse allegations.
- Reassure the child that you will be there to help no matter what happens and that they are not in trouble.

Don'ts:

- Discuss the investigation in the child's presence.
- Tell children they are coming to play.
- Lie to the child in any way about the allegations or scare them.
- Offer the child a bribe for telling about what happened.



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knowledge, law enforcement will ask them to leave the premises during the interview.

Professionals observing the interview communicate with the interviewer either by using an ear bud, or taking a break. The image/camera that is focused on the child may be moved/focused only when the child does.

Under no circumstances will we knowingly trick or coerce a child into incriminating themselves. Occasionally, young offenders are suspected or alleged to be victims of child sexual abuse. The CAC will not interview alleged child offenders for the purpose of investigating them. Because of the safety of other children at the CAC, care will be taken to schedule suspected juvenile offenders at a time when no other children are at the CAC.

The recording of the interview will be turned over to the appropriate law enforcement agency. The forensic interviewer will complete a written summary report following the interview. Listed agencies involved in the investigation will receive a copy of the report. Forensic records are considered evidence and property of law enforcement and, therefore, cannot be given out to families at any time.

After the interview, the team will meet with the caregiver, when available, to update them, answer questions and make recommendations.

An advocate will visit the family prior to their forensic interview or medical exam to answer any questions they may have and to give them important information about the CAC.

Only team members involved in the investigation of the case are present during the interview. However, a team agency may request a courtesy agency to sit in on the case at their request if there is no possible way to attend.

Law enforcement and social services are required to be present for every interview. Law enforcement is asked to notify prosecution of the date and time of the forensic interview. Medical, prosecution, and other team members are encouraged to attend. Because of the sensitivity of the process, team members should come to the interview in plain clothes with no visible weapons showing. Two team members must be present in the observation room at all times to ensure proper evidence collection.

Caregivers are not allowed to observe the interview and are not allowed to be with the child during the interview.

Alleged perpetrators are not allowed at the CAC during the forensic interview process. If an alleged perpetrator accompanies the alleged victim to the CAC without prior

Children's Advocacy Centers in North Dakota are child-friendly settings that coordinate and provide services for children who may have been abused. The CACs help hundreds of North Dakota children each year using evidence-based practices.



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Northern Plains Children's Advocacy Center

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Minot, ND 58701
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Red River Children's Advocacy Center

100 S 4th St #302
Fargo, ND 58103
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