

What To Expect When Visiting Shining Star CAC

What happens at Shining Star Children's Advocacy Center? Shining Star CAC (SSCAC) is a safe, child friendly location for children to come speak with a trained interviewer or see our medical provider. We know this can be an anxious time for you and your family. If you have questions or concerns before coming to SSCAC, please call and talk to someone from our staff. We would rather you call than worry.

At Shining Star CAC, we work with a team of professionals from law enforcement, the State's Attorney's Office and the Department of Children and Family Services. When you come to SSCAC, you will be able to meet the professionals working on your child's case and ask them further questions.

Will I be able to watch my child's interview? No. Only professionals directly involved in the investigation are allowed to observe the interview in an observation room on a closed circuit television. This is done to reduce the possible stress that can be placed on a child and to provide a neutral setting for the child and the investigation. The only person in the actual interview room with your child will be the interviewer.

Most of us working at Shining Star CAC are parents just like you. We understand how having a parent in the same room with the child may influence what the child says or doesn't say. If a child doesn't answer quickly enough, a parent may answer for them. It's hard for us as moms and dads to sit quietly or not influence the interview with a concerned look or an emotional reaction. Parents are also not allowed in the observation room during their child's interview. Only the professionals involved in the case will be in the observation room during an interview. All of the interviews at SSCAC are recorded to minimize the number of times your child will have to talk about what happened. The DVD recording of the interview is turned over to law enforcement as part of evidence in a potential criminal case.

What do I tell my child about coming to the Child Advocacy Center?

You might tell your child:

*"We are going to Shining Star Children's Advocacy Center. It is a special place where kids go to talk. The person you will be talking to talks to lots of kids about what might have happened to them. They need to know everything that you remember so that we can make sure you are safe and okay. It's important that you tell the truth and only talk about what really happened. It's okay to tell them everything. **YOU ARE NOT IN ANY TROUBLE.**"*

Should I talk to my child about the abuse before the interview? No, not unless your child brings up the subject and wants to talk about it. In that case, listen to your child without commenting or questioning. Be sure to tell your child that it's not their fault and that he/she hasn't done anything wrong. While you want to be open and available to your child if they need to talk, you should not question your child about it, or suggest things to your child concerning the interview. The goal of a forensic interview is to make sure your child does not have to repeatedly discuss a traumatic experience, and that your child's disclosure is as complete, accurate and free of outside influences as possible.

Who will my child talk to? Your child will be talking to one of our trained Forensic Interviewers. They have attended basic and advanced training on how to talk to children about difficult subjects. It's important that any details about the alleged abuse come from the child. Our interviewers are trained to not ask suggestive questions and to move at a pace that is comfortable for your child. They never force a child to talk to them.

What will I be doing while my child is talking to someone? You will be meeting with SSCAC's Family Advocate. Please feel free to ask her any questions you may have. If she doesn't know the answer, she will try to find the answer for you. She will listen to your worries and concerns and provide resources to help you through this difficult time. Our advocates are not therapists, but they can listen and get you the help you need.

What happens after the interview? You will be able to talk to members of the investigative team. They will tell you in general terms what they learned from the interview. You will have an opportunity to ask questions and voice your concerns. Remember, your child's interview is just the first step in the investigative process. There may be other witnesses that need to be interviewed. There may be physical evidence that needs to be photographed or collected. The alleged offender will be interviewed. So, at this point in the process, it's often difficult to predict what will happen. All of the information will be turned over to the State's Attorney's Office and they will decide whether or not to prosecute. Your Family Advocate will keep in regular contact to let you know what is happening on the case. If you have questions at any point during the investigation or prosecution of your child's case, please feel free to contact your advocate.

Parents and children are often worried about whether they will have to testify in court. It's really way too early to know. If this happens, your advocate will be with you every step of the way.

Will my child need a medical exam? Based on the allegation or the interview, the members of the investigative team may decide a medical evaluation is needed. For many children, knowing their bodies are okay is a huge relief. If seeing one of our medical providers will make them less worried or anxious, then be sure to let us know. That is always an option. We work with a physician and a nurse with specialized training in child abuse who conduct the medical evaluations here at SSCAC. If a medical exam is needed, our Advocate will arrange a time with you and the doctor. The exams are provided at no cost to the families and are done in a child friendly exam room at SSCAC. Our medical providers use a tool to help them see the genital area more clearly. This tool is called a colposcope and it is a magnification device with a camera. The medical provider can take a picture of what they are seeing. If they need a second opinion, your child doesn't have to have another exam. They can consult with a medical peer utilizing the photographs taken during the evaluation.

When the medical evaluation is over, the medical provider will be able to tell you what he or she has learned. It's important to realize that in most cases of child sexual abuse, there are no medical findings and the medical provider can help explain this to you more fully.

Will my child need counseling? Some children do and some don't. Every child is unique in how they cope. Some may not need counseling now, but will need counseling in the future. Maybe you need counseling more than your child to help you cope with everything that has happened. Your Advocate will listen and provide referral information. What we do know is that children who are believed and protected from continued abuse are able to do quite well. It is very important to your child's recovery that you work with a therapist specifically trained and experienced in trauma and abuse. This is a field with special expertise.

In most instances, it is important to provide your child with an opportunity to talk with a professional. Too often parents just want their child to "forget" about the abuse and "move on." That's easier said than done. Counseling can help your child and family through this very difficult time. It's best to address issues and concerns now, rather than years later. We have a therapist available at SSCAC or we can also provide you with referrals to therapists in the community. These services are also provided at no cost to the families.



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