



# THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER OF LOWNDES COUNTY, INC.

## GUIDELINES FOR FORENSIC SERVICES

### REFERRAL:

- ✓ The goal of The Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) is to minimize trauma to children who may have been abused by providing multiple services in one location. The CAC specializes in providing forensic interviewing services to children who have been sexually abused, severely physically abused and who have witnessed violent crimes. The CAC serves as a neutral party in the investigative process.
- ✓ The CAC accepts referrals for forensic services from the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) who are conducting a joint investigation with law enforcement. The CAC also accepts referrals for forensic services from law enforcement and the district attorney's office. Only DFCS in conjunction with law enforcement and the district attorney's office may request a forensic interview (FI). Please contact the CAC Director of Forensic Services if you would like to discuss a potential case.
- ✓ The CAC must have a completed "**CAC Referral Form**" prior to calling to make an appointment for a FI. The referral form must be filled out completely and faxed to the CAC. All referrals must be screened by the CAC Director of Forensic Services prior to scheduling to ensure that services requested are appropriate for a FI. Screenings will be based on the information provided on the referral form and the CAC protocol.
- ✓ On the referral form, all referral sources must provide the CAC with specific information regarding the allegation of abuse which is gathered, for the most part, through briefly talking with the child and the non-offending caregiver. Critical information that should be gathered includes the child's safety, the child's developmental stage and/or mental/physical disabilities or abilities, alleged perpetrator's name and his or her relationship to the child (e.g. stranger, parent, uncle, cousin, etc.) and jurisdiction where the incident occurred. This means conducting a general assessment of the initial allegation to help determine how to move forward.
- ✓ **Appropriate referrals** are those with a specific allegation of sexual abuse or severe physical abuse that meets the **level of criminality**. Law enforcement is the best agency to make this determination; therefore, all such allegations should first be reported to law enforcement and/or DFCS.
- ✓ The CAC conducts FI for six key counties, courtesy interviews for many other counties as well as out of state requests by law enforcement and/or DFCS.
- ✓ The CAC will schedule FI in the order of priority based on the circumstances and urgency of each referral. The CAC will make every effort to accommodate everyone.

### FORENSIC INTERVIEW/INTAKE:

- ✓ **Once a referral is screened and accepted**, the CAC Director of Forensic Services will contact the referral source to schedule the FI.

- ✓ It is important that prior to scheduling the FI, the referral agency speaks with all parties involved (i.e. DFCS, law enforcement, district attorney's office and non-offending caregiver) to determine the day and time everyone will be available and/or a time that is convenient for everyone to be present for the FI. The district attorney's office must be contacted by the referring agency and made cognizant of the FI.
- ✓ The CAC prohibits any person (s) who is alleged to have abused a child, past or present, on the property of the CAC. **Alleged perpetrators or offenders are not allowed on CAC property at anytime.**
- ✓ Non-offending caregivers and children must be accompanied by the referring agency to the FI. The CAC will not conduct a FI in the absence of the referring agency. In the event that this occurs, the FI will be rescheduled.
- ✓ Only CAC staff and investigating agencies (i.e. law enforcement, DFCS and the district attorney's office) are permitted to observe the FI.
- ✓ **The day of the FI.** The referring agency is responsible for filling out the, **Referral Form, Sign-In Sheet, Victim Information Form (VI Form)** and the **Interview Summary**. Law Enforcement must complete the **Forensic Medical Exam Form**, if needed, and the **Chain of Possession of DVDs**. The interview summary must be legible, detailed, and signed. It is pertinent that all completed original forms remain with CAC staff. A copy of the completed forms will be provided to the investigating agencies. Only the district attorney's office and law enforcement will be provided a DVD copy of the FI. FIs are the property of law enforcement, not the CAC.
- ✓ **After the FI**, law enforcement, DFCS and the CAC will discuss the results of the interview as well as the next steps in the investigation. The non-offending caregiver will be briefed by law enforcement and DFCS regarding the FI, and pending case expectations or follow up.
- ✓ The CAC offers clinical services free of charge. This information will be discussed with the non-offending caregiver by the CAC staff after the FI. If warranted, the CAC will make every effort to schedule an intake appointment for therapy before the non-offending caregiver leaves the FI appointment. If not, the CAC Clinical Director will be notified and follow up with the non-offending caregiver regarding clinical services.
- ✓ *In accordance with the CAC's Protocol, the multi-disciplinary team members which include law enforcement, DFCS, assistant district attorneys, and the medical director are required to meet twice a month at the CAC to review all forensic cases until a disposition is determined.*
- ✓ It is very difficult and traumatic for a child to be re-interviewed or interviewed more than once. In most cases, the CAC will conduct only one interview. A second or an additional interview will be conducted, at the request of law enforcement and DFCS, if there is a new disclosure or new information has come forth. In this case, law enforcement and DFCS must be notified of the new information or new disclosure.

## **Conclusion:**

Finally, after conclusion of the FI, an **Exit Survey Questionnaire** should be completed. The CAC asks that the "**Exit Questionnaire**" be completed by the referral agency and/or non-offending caregiver upon discharge.