Utah
Children's Justice Center
Program

HANDBOOK FOR CAREGIVERS

Children's Justice Centers provide a comfortable, neutral, child-friendly atmosphere for children to receive coordinated services during the child abuse investigative process.

www.utahcjc.org

NOTES

NAME	AGENCY/ TITLE	CONTACT INFO	CASE NUMBER
	CJC Coordinator		
	Child Protective Services		
	Law Enforcement		
	County/District Attorney		

Utah Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Line 1-855-323-3237

Crime Victim Reparations 1-800-621-7444
www.crimevictim.utah.gov

2-1-1: Local Information and Services 211
www.211utah.org

Primary Children's Hospital
Center for Safe and Healthy Families 801-662-3600

24/7 Crisis Line ..... (800) 273-TALK
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

VINE – Utah Department of Corrections ..... (877) 884-8463
Provides victims with information regarding the custody status of convicted offenders.

Other:_____

Your child is at the Children's Justice Center due to concerns of possible abuse, exposure to trauma, or as a witness to a possible crime.

Our goals are to:

- Bring together the team of professionals needed during the investigative process
- Make the process as comfortable as possible for your family
- Help you understand the child protective and legal systems
- Work with the child protective legal systems to help your child
- Help your child and family begin to heal
- Connect you to resources
- Provide support and a place to call with any questions or concerns moving forward

INSIDE THIS HANDBOOK:

What Is Child Abuse?	6
What Are the Impacts of Abuse?	10
How Do I Support My Child?	14
The Process: What Happens Now?	18
Team of Professionals	21
Crime Victim Reparations	26
Questions Asked by Caregivers	28
Protecting Your Child	34

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is non-accidental harm inflicted on children that includes sexual abuse or exploitation, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and children exposed to domestic violence or drugs. Children who are abused suffer physically and emotionally. Fortunately, there are people and agencies who can help.

SEXUAL ABUSE – a crime that occurs when a child is exposed to sexual acts or behavior. This can include sexual contact with a child and/or exposing a child to adult sexual activity. People who sexually abuse children are most often well known to the child (i.e. a relative, family friend, or neighbor).

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION – a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a person produces, possesses, distributes, or views child pornography. Commercial sexual exploitation of a child includes human trafficking – forced sexual exploitation that includes prostitution and trading sex for anything of value.

PHYSICAL ABUSE – a crime that occurs when a person causes physical injury to a child intentionally, recklessly, or negligently. This includes (but is not limited to) hitting, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or choking a child. Children who are physically abused may suffer emotional distress along with physical injury.

OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE

EMOTIONAL OR VERBAL ABUSE – treating a child in a manner that damages their emotional well-being or sense of self-worth. This may include repeated threats or insults that frighten, humiliate, or embarrass a child.

NEGLECT – failing to provide for a child's physical needs (medical care, food, clothing, shelter, and supervision).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED CHILD ABUSE – domestic violence between cohabitants in the presence of a child. Children exposed to violence are at risk of emotional and physical injury.

DRUG ENDANGERMENT – exposing a child to a controlled substance, chemical substance, or drug paraphernalia. Children exposed to these elements are at risk of physical harm and injury.

IMPORTANT: Utah law requires that anyone with reason to believe a child has been abused or neglected must report to the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) or local law enforcement.

HOW CAREGIVERS MAY FEEL

When abuse is reported, parents or caregivers sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal. Allegations of abuse and the report can affect your life in many ways. The following are some common thoughts and feelings caregivers may have. It is normal to experience a range of emotions during this time, such as:

- Guilt
- Self-Blame
- Confusion
- Disbelief
- Feeling Alone
- Shock Or Denial
- Helplessness
- Fatigue
- Relief
- Hurt Or Betrayal
- Fear
- Depression
- Blame Of Spouse
- Overwhelmed
- Denial
- Anger
- Failure
- Anxiety
- Grief
- Frustration

These emotions (and more) are natural responses to trauma. Remember to be patient with yourself.

PARENTS WHO WERE ABUSED AS CHILDREN – you may experience the resurfacing of your own memories of childhood abuse. If this is the case, you may want to consider counseling for yourself to help you deal with the trauma of your past. This can help you better support your child during this time. Ask us if you need referrals for yourself.

IF THE ALLEGED OFFENDER LIVES IN YOUR HOME – your main responsibility is to ensure your children are protected. But you may feel torn by concern for the alleged offender. It will seem overwhelming to take charge under these circumstances, but it is up to you to put a stop to the abuse and work toward getting help for your family.

HOW MY CHILD MAY FEEL

Every child is unique in how he/she responds to abuse. The circumstances of the abuse – severity, relation to the alleged offender, duration of the abuse, as well as the child's individual personality – can influence how he/she will cope with the abuse. Some possible emotions include:

Anger	Worry	Relief (because they told)
Depression	Guilt	Powerlessness
Confusion	Shame	Loneliness
Feeling Alone	Fear	Embarrassment

COMMON FEARS – afraid the family will be upset or break up, they won't be believed, they will be rejected by others, they will be removed from their home, they will be punished for telling, they will experience retaliation, or concerns about how the family will make an income.

PHYSICAL OR BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS – some of the following may be a result of the abuse or the trauma surrounding the disclosure, or could also be due to other stressors in your child's life:

- Nausea/upset stomach
- Nightmares or insomnia
- Withdrawal from others
- Irritable mood/angry outbursts
- Avoidance of school and friends
- Lack of interest in activities
- Drop in school performance
- Non-compliance
- Negative attention seeking
- Low self-esteem
- Clinging to parents
- Change in appetite
- Excessive sleep
- Sexually acting out
- Aggressive behavior
- Fears and phobias
- Lying or manipulation
- Rebellious conduct
- Regression to earlier stages of behavior
- Thoughts about death

If your child is experiencing the emotional or physical reactions listed above, please have him/her evaluated by a mental health professional.

The response of the family is one of the most important factors in determining how a child will recover from the abuse. Feeling supported and believed is crucial to every child's recovery.

HOW DO I SUPPORT MY CHILD?

Whenever child abuse occurs, it may disrupt your family balance and cause drastic change.

The following may help you restore a safe, supportive, and comforting environment.

TAKE THINGS ONE DAY AT A TIME. Sometimes a crisis feels like it is consuming your whole life. Do your best to focus on today and try not to worry about tomorrow.

LET YOUR CHILD KNOW YOU ARE AVAILABLE IF THEY WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT. Be supportive and avoid questioning your child about the abuse. If information is volunteered, listen and allow your child to tell you in his/her own words. If new information is revealed, please notify the investigators.

REASSURE CHILDREN THAT WHAT HAPPENED IS NOT THEIR FAULT AND YOU ARE GLAD THEY TOLD. Supportive caregivers and therapy are important factors in healing.

RESPECT YOUR CHILD'S SILENCE REGARDING THE ABUSE. Children oftentimes do not tell everything that happened to them in the beginning. This can be due to fear, shame, or because the impact of trauma can create barriers in accessing memory. They may also be afraid of how their abuse is affecting you or others, or they may feel responsible or at fault.

BE AN EXAMPLE OF COURAGE, HOPE, AND RESILIENCY. Children look to you for cues on how to respond and react in difficult situations. Teach them that although bad things happen, people are strong and can recover.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD BY NOT ALLOWING CONTACT BETWEEN HIM/HER AND THE ABUSER. Any questions regarding activities involving the alleged offender should first be reviewed by the professionals involved in your case.

MAINTAIN FAMILY ROUTINES. You may be tempted to relax family rules or give your child special privileges. Children feel most secure and stable in a predictable environment.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO COOPERATE WITH THE INVESTIGATORS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED WITH YOUR CASE. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Children's Justice Center.

FOCUS ON THE THINGS YOU CAN DO. You may have mixed feelings about consequences for the alleged offender, but you may not have control over this particular area. It will be more beneficial to focus on your child's healing, where you can make a difference.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. Schedule time to relax or do something you enjoy. If you are emotionally and physically drained, it is far more difficult to support your child. Process your feelings with trusted adults, your support system or a therapist, not your child.

THE PROCESS - WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The Children's Justice Center strives to help the investigative process flow smoothly, with as little discomfort to the child as possible.

STEP 1: The allegations are reported to the authorities (police and/or the Division of Child and Family Services).

STEP 2: Your child is interviewed at the Children's Justice Center. Crisis intervention, support and referrals are provided by staff.

STEP 3: Your child is referred for counseling, and a medical exam may be scheduled (if deemed necessary).

STEP 4: The detective attempts to interview the alleged offender and gather more evidence. The caseworker will work closely with the caregivers to ensure the child is safe from further harm.

STEP 5: The case is staffed with a team of professionals from different agencies to review safety of the child and discuss evidence. The prosecutor will determine if there is enough evidence for criminal charges.

OR - The case is closed if there is insufficient evidence. (Please note: this does not mean your child was not believed. A criminal conviction requires "proof beyond a reasonable doubt," which is sometimes difficult to achieve.)

STEP 6: If charges are filed by the prosecutor, your child may or may not be called to testify in court. The county victim advocate will orient your child to the courtroom if the case goes to trial.

HOW DOES THE INTERVIEW PROCESS WORK?

A detective, caseworker, or forensic interviewer will interview your child at the CJC in a special interview room designed to make children feel comfortable. Their role is to listen to your child's concerns and learn what happened through a fact-finding conversation. The team of professionals will assess the situation, formulate a plan of action, provide emotional support, and address your child's physical and emotional needs. After the interview, they will make recommendations regarding what should happen next. Please call them with any questions or concerns, or if your child provides more information that would be helpful to the case.

TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS

There are many professionals who respond to child abuse allegations, each with their own unique role within the team. This section explains what each agency does and how they can help serve your family's needs. Not all agencies will be involved in every child abuse investigation. Agency involvement depends on the circumstances of each individual case.

CHILDREN'S JUSTICE CENTER (CJC) – provides a comfortable, safe place for you and your child to come for your child's interview. We are here to support your family during the investigative process. We also try to minimize the trauma experienced by your family. One way this is accomplished is by recording your child's interview, thus preserving his/her statements and decreasing the need for multiple interviews. A coordinator at the CJC may meet with you while your child is being interviewed to provide crisis intervention and referrals to other helpful services. The CJC will coordinate communication and teamwork with all involved agencies to represent the best interest of the child, advocate for the child's needs, provide access to services and resources, answer your questions or concerns regarding the investigative process, and provide ongoing support services to your family as needed.

CASEWORKER – an individual through Child Protective Services (CPS) that assists in the protection of your child, particularly if the suspected offender lives in the home

or has unsupervised access to the child. The caseworker also offers support services tailored to meet the child and family's individual needs. He/she will assist you by coordinating referrals for counseling and other services that will help your family.

DETECTIVE – a specialized law enforcement officer who investigates the alleged crime. As part of this process, he/she will gather evidence by interviewing the alleged suspect and any other witnesses. If there is sufficient evidence to move forward, the detective will screen the case with a prosecutor who will determine if criminal charges can be filed. This process is required by law to protect the community.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL – a highly specialized medical provider who administers a medical exam (if needed) to ensure your child's physical well-being and check for injuries or infections. The medical team is trained in child abuse matters and understands the importance of sensitivity with abused children. The providers at the CJC work closely with the medical team at Primary Children's Hospital - Center for Safe and Healthy Families. Bringing a favorite blanket or toy may add a sense of security and be comforting for your child.

PROSECUTOR – an attorney from the county/district attorney's office who makes the decision of whether charges will be filed against the alleged offender. Consideration is given to the likelihood of success at trial (such as the probability of a guilty plea or conviction by a jury) and the prosecutor evaluates the following factors:

1. Age and maturity of the child
2. Ability of the child and family to participate in the prosecution
3. Statements or confession given by alleged offender
4. Any physical or corroborating evidence
5. Other witnesses who can corroborate your child's statement

When charges are filed on a case, the alleged adult offender may be arrested (depending on the specific charges). If booked into jail, three things may happen at the discretion of the judge:

1. He/she remains in jail until the case is completed
2. He/she posts bond and is released pending trial
3. He/she is released under the court's supervision with conditions.

The alleged offender is usually ordered to have no contact with the victim. **If he/she violates this court instruction or in any manner threatens the victim or family members, please promptly contact the police or county/district attorney's office immediately.**

VICTIM ADVOCATE – an advocate appointed by the court if criminal charges are filed against an alleged adult offender. The advocate will support you and your child throughout the court process. He/she will meet with you to orient your child to the courtroom and answer any questions, as well as keep you informed on the progress of the case. There may be a need for your child to testify in court. Your victim advocate will coordinate with the prosecutor to help prepare your child and family for this experience.

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL – a therapist who can help determine what impact the abuse had on your child and family members. He/she can also help your entire family recover from the experience. Although your child may seem just fine, it is a good idea to have your child evaluated by a mental health provider trained to work with children who have experienced trauma. Many children have delayed reactions to the abuse or have strong feelings but do not know how to talk about them.

COURTS:

Juvenile Court – a court for alleged offenders under the age of 18. If this is the case, the assistant district/county attorney with the juvenile court may file charges. Juvenile court officials place an emphasis on getting the alleged juvenile offender help and treatment for his/her behavior. Treatment for those under 18 is shown to reduce the likelihood of future illegal activity.

Criminal Court – a court for alleged offenders who are adults (over 18). The case could proceed to trial if a plea bargain is not reached.

Crime Victim Reparation (CVR) Program – a fund designed to help victims of crime with specific, crime-related costs for which they have inadequate or no other sources. CVR can assist with the costs of medical care, counseling, and other specific needs in relation to the crime.

CVR Application Process:

1. First the application must be submitted to the CVR office.

2. Next you will be mailed an initial letter informing you that your application was received. It often takes between 30-45 days for your application to be processed.

3. CVR will then request a copy of the police report from the investigating detective to verify the crime occurred and then your application will be reviewed for approval.

4. You will then receive a second letter in the mail stating whether your claim has been approved.

If approved, you will be given a claim number and assigned a CVR officer who will work directly with you to disburse funds as needed.

Please note: CVR applications are available on the basis that a crime occurred, and that the family is cooperating with the investigation. The funds are not determined by your legal status. CVR funds are not based on personal income and do not need to be reimbursed. **Once approved, your claim remains open for a three-year period.**

If you have questions regarding CVR, please call Utah Office for Victims of Crime directly at 801-238-2360 or toll-free at 1-800-621-7444.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: HOW WILL THE ABUSE AFFECT MY CHILD EMOTIONALLY?

A: Children react differently depending on their age, emotional maturity, extent of abuse, amount of support received from others, and their relationship with the offender. Watch for changes in behavior and discuss them with your mental health professional or caseworker to get suggestions on how to support your child. He/she can heal from the abuse and go on to lead a wonderful life.

Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NORMAL CHILDHOOD EXPERIMENTATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE?

A: Sometimes children sexually abuse other children. Determining the difference between developmentally appropriate sexual exploration and sexual abuse can be difficult. When distinguishing sexual abuse from age-appropriate curiosity, it is important to look at the following factors:

1. **Age and developmental differences between children.** If one child is substantially older (three or more years), developmentally superior over another who has developmental delays, or physically stronger than the child they are engaged in sexual contact with, there is the danger of one child being in a position of power over the other.
2. **The degree of force or coercion used.** If a child is physically forced, tricked, or bribed into engaging in sexual contact, it is not playful curiosity.
3. **The type of sexual activity.** Young children, particularly between the ages of three and five,

look at and sometimes touch each other's private parts. However, penetration of the vagina or anus, motions that mimic sexual intercourse, or mouth-to-genital contact are examples of sophisticated sexual activity that go beyond the developmental level of young children and are likely learned through observation or experience.

4. **Frequency of the behavior.** Although most children are curious and enjoy games of "doctor" or "show and tell," these behaviors usually lose their interest after a few encounters. Repetitive or compulsive sexual behavior is a sign that sexual abuse or exposure to sexually explicit materials may be involved.

Q: WHY DID MY CHILD WAIT SO LONG TO TELL ABOUT THE ABUSE?

A: Most children do not talk about abuse right away. Some never tell due to fear, shame, or embarrassment. They might let you know by their behavior that something is wrong, or they may hide the secret so well that no one can tell something is bothering them. Many children talk about the abuse to someone outside of their family first. Some children may worry about their family's reaction and fear losing emotional support from family members.

Q: WILL MY CHILD GO ON TO SEXUALLY ABUSE OTHERS?

A: Just because your child was sexually abused does not mean that he/she will abuse others. Studies show that most people who are molested as children do not grow up to sexually abuse others. It is helpful to have age-appropriate discussions with your child about body boundaries and safety, as well as work together with your child's therapist or caseworker.

Q: CAN MY CHILD BE TRUSTED TO BABYSIT OTHER CHILDREN?

A: This is something you may have to assess based on your child's maturity, level of independence and responsibility. If your child has adjusted well after the abuse and does not show signs of concern, he/she is not likely to act out on other children.

Q: WILL WE HAVE TO SEE THE ALLEGED OFFENDER IN COURT?

A: The alleged offender has the right to be present at all court hearings. If your child has to testify, your victim advocate will explain the court process, answer questions, be present during court proceedings, and work to minimize the anxiety of seeing the alleged offender in court.

Q: DO CHILDREN MAKE UP THAT THEY'VE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED?

A: Research regarding false allegations of sexual abuse confirm that it is unusual for children to lie about abuse (particularly younger children). Studies have shown that children who were found to be untruthful in their accounts of sexual abuse tended to minimize the extent of the abuse. For any allegation of abuse, a thorough and complete investigation is important to attempt to establish what actually happened.

Q: IF CHARGES ARE FILED, WILL WE HAVE TO GO TO COURT?

A: It depends because each case varies. A child may not have to go to court, but it is important for the case that the child is willing to go, if necessary. A representative from the county/district attorney's office can help you understand the particulars of your child's case. **Please remember that a videotaped interview of your child may not take the place of your child testifying in court.**

Q: WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD AND FAMILY HEAL FROM THE ABUSE?

A: Let your child know it is okay to cry or be mad, and show that you respect his/her feelings. Reassure your child that he/she is not to blame for the abuse. Some caregivers may find themselves focusing on the past, looking for things they could have done to prevent the abuse. By focusing on the present and working towards a new normal, families can heal from the trauma of abuse. Caregivers can help children by engaging in the process, encouraging open communication, being supportive, and seeking extra help when needed.

PROTECTING YOUR CHILD FROM REPEAT ABUSE

One of the best ways to protect your child from further abuse is to engage in therapy. Therapy will help you to teach your child how to assert their boundaries.

Talk openly with your children about how they can protect themselves. Caregivers who teach and model healthy boundaries in relationships decrease their child's risk of abuse.

Reassure your child of his/her right to be safe, to speak up, to ask for help, to trust their feelings, and to not keep secrets from caregivers.

Report suspected cases of abuse, watch for signs of abuse, keep open communication with your child, teach your child to keep you informed, say "I love you" to your child often, and tell your child you are proud of him/her.

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