**Aroostook County Children’s Advocacy Center (ACAC) Referral/Forensic Interview and Post Interview Protocol**

**REFERRALS:**

* At this time, referrals will only come to ACAC from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Law Enforcement (LE) or the District Attorney’s (DA) Office when there are concerns of sexual abuse.
* ACAC will serve children from the ages of 4 through 18 and, when deemed appropriate by referring agencies, younger children or older individuals that align developmentally with this age group.
* When a referral comes to the CAC, the Family Advocate or CAC designee will complete the CAC Intake form and will coordinate scheduling the interview with the appropriate MDT partners. At a minimum, the Family Advocate will contact the Victim Witness Advocate at the District Attorney’s Office, law enforcement and DHHS to inform them that an interview has been scheduled.
* Interviews will be scheduled with-in 72 hours, unless extenuating circumstances exists.
* The Family Advocate will also make contact with the non-offending caregiver to confirm the interview time; answer any questions; explain the process at the CAC; and ask about any special considerations for the child and/or non-offending caregiver, including need for an interpreter or transportation services and other cultural considerations.
* If interpreter services are needed, the referent will be responsible for ensuring they are in place for the child and non-offending caregiver throughout the process of the investigation per the referring agency’s policies. The referent will also be responsible for any financial obligations associated with the interpreter services.
* If transportation services are needed, the CAC will be responsible for making arrangements with (Not sure). In the event that transportation is not available, the Family Advocate and referent will make alternative arrangements.
* Every effort will be made by the CAC and the referring agent to ensure that the alleged offender is not accompanying the child to the interview and that they are not present during the visit at the CAC.

**PRE-INTERVIEW/FORENSIC INTERVIEW**

* Prior to the child interview, there will be a brief pre-interview meeting, in which, all MDT partners involved in the case participate, when possible. The purpose of the pre-interview meeting is to inform partners, including the forensic interviewer, about information relevant to the case. The information shared may include, but is not limited to: relevant history with MDT partners, nature of disclosure, special considerations (including interpreter services and cultural and developmental considerations) for the child and non-offending caregivers and an exploration of alternative hypotheses. This is also an opportunity for the MDT partners to inform the forensic interviewer about other concerns that they would like addressed during the interview, in order to minimize the likelihood that the child will have to be interviewed again.
* The Family Advocate or CAC designee will greet the child and non-offending caregiver at ACAC. The Family Advocate will accompany the family to the waiting area of ACAC. The Family Advocate will have the non-offending caregiver or legal guardian sign the Consent to Record and answer any questions that the child or the non-offending caregiver may have at that time.
* The Family Advocate or CAC designee will inform the family or non-offending caregiver that any information shared, that is relevant to the case, will relayed back to MDT members involved in the case. The Family Advocate or CAC designee will abide by all Mandated Reporting Laws while accompanying the non-offending caregiver and/or the child.
* Prior to the child interview, the non-offending caregiver will be invited to meet with the MDT members and to see the CAC space. The meeting with the MDT members is an opportunity for the non-offending caregiver to ask questions about the process and for the MDT members to gather additional information that may be helpful for the interview and/or investigation. Taking into account the best interest of the child, this meeting will be brief.
* The Family Advocate or CAC designee will accompany the child while the non-offending caregiver participates in the pre-interview meeting.
* The interview will be conducted by the CAC forensic interviewer unless there is a conflict of interest or other extenuating circumstances. If such circumstances exist, the MDT members involved in the case will determine if another trained interviewer will be selected to conduct the forensic interview.
* Forensic Interviews will only be conducted by MDT members who have documentation of satisfactory completion of a nationally recognized, research and evidence based training that includes a child development component, and is approved by the National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC).
* The forensic interview must be witnessed by at least one MDT member relevant to the case this may include: DHHS, Law Enforcement, Prosecution, mental health and medical providers. Witnesses to the forensic interview should be as limited as possible. Non-offending parents/caregivers or other interested parties on behalf of the child will not be allowed to witness the forensic interview as it takes place at the CAC.
* All interviews will be DVD recorded.
* The forensic interview will be conducted in a child centered, legally sound, neutral and fact finding manner (see the Forensic Interviewing Protocol).
* During the time the child is being interviewed, the Family Advocate or CAC designee will accompany the non-offending caregiver. The Family Advocate will provide the non-offending caregiver with information including, but not limited to: the process at the CAC, referrals to medical, mental health or confidential support/advocacy services, the Maine Crime Victim’s Compensation program and other social services or agencies that may be relevant. The Family Advocate or CAC designee with also ask if there are cultural/developmental considerations with regards to any referrals made by the CAC.
* The Family Advocate will make referrals (when necessary and appropriate) to outside agencies (non MDT member agencies) to assist the non-offending caregiver and /or the client of the CAC in their healing process. These referrals will be guided by the needs disclosed by the non-offending parent/caregiver and/or child during their interaction with the CAC.

**POST INTERVIEW:**

* Immediately following the forensic interview, the MDT will meet to discuss follow up actions. The MDT will decide what information will be shared with the non-offending caregiver, taking into consideration the safety of the child and the integrity of the investigation. Follow up actions may include making a recommendation for a medical evaluation with a board certified child abuse pediatrician through the Spurwink Child Abuse Clinic.
* Following the MDT post interview meeting the non-offending caregiver will be met with and provided with the agreed upon information. Additional information relevant to the case may be solicited by the MDT.
* The Family Advocate or CAC designee will accompany the child while the non-offending caregiver participates in the post interview meeting.
* Before leaving the CAC, the non-offending caregiver will be offered the opportunity to provide feedback using NCA’s Outcome Measurement Survey.
* The DVD of the forensic interview will be given to the lead investigator(s), a DHHS representative and/or Law Enforcement agent. No copies of the recorded forensic interview will be kept at the CAC site or in the possession of CAC staff members once the interview has concluded.
* The CAC will only keep records of the initial intake information acquired at the time of the referral, releases, consent to record, consent to use the DVD for peer review training purposes, and follow up referral forms for appropriate agencies.
* The CAC will be responsible for tracking each case from the beginning through final disposition and follow up plans as it relates specifically to the CAC case for the child and non-offending parent/caregiver. The Family Advocate is not a case manager or providing clinical support. This role purely serves as a coordinator for the scheduling of the forensic interview, support during the interview process and for the purposes of referrals to MDT partners. The Family Advocate will provide a follow up phone call with the non-offending caregiver at one week and one month post interview.