

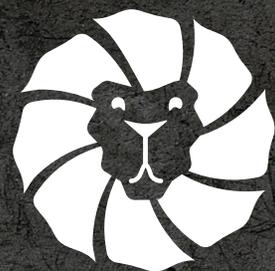


Helping your child

*Heal*



**care**  
center  
EDUCATE & ADVOCATE



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*You are not alone*

You have just discovered that your child may have experienced abuse. It can feel overwhelming. We are here to help. We have prepared this book to answer some of your questions and guide you and your family.

## YOUR CHILD'S CARE TEAM

Family Advocate \_\_\_\_\_

Forensic Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Law Enforcement Investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Child Welfare Worker \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT IS THE CARE CENTER?

We are Oklahoma County's child advocacy center. We empower children to use their voice. This principle is the core of our services to prevent abuse through education and help children heal after abuse.

## OUR MISSION

Every child has a future, we educate. Every child has a voice, we listen.

## OUR PARTNERS

Today and throughout your case, our team will work within a coordinated and joint approach. Our team consists of not only our staff, but many partners, including law enforcement, child protective services, medical and mental health professionals, and others working on your case.

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## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD *today*

Today may be a difficult day for your child. It is important to provide positive affirmations. Below are several suggestions of what to say to your child:

- You are brave.
- I'm proud of you.
- We will get through this together.
- I'm here for you.

### **Below are tips to support your child today and beyond:**

- Follow your child's lead. If they don't ask questions, there is no need to discuss the details. If they do ask questions, don't engage in a long conversation. Tell your child you will let the right people know.
- Allow your child to use their own words to describe the incident as they feel comfortable. They may not want to talk to you about it, and that is okay.
- Do not question your child about what they said during the interview.
- Set healthy boundaries and discuss healthy behaviors.
- Report any additional disclosures to your law enforcement/child welfare investigator. Their contact information is listed on page 2.
- Refer to page 11 for additional information about talking to your child.

## YOUR VISIT TODAY

Welcome to The CARE Center. We serve as a child-friendly location for professionals to provide services to child abuse victims and families. We are a highly trained team providing a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach to the response and evaluation of child abuse investigations.

While on our campus, you and/or your child will participate in the following services:

1. Play Orientation
2. Forensic Interview
3. Family Advocacy
4. Medical Exam (if requested)

During your time here today, our Family Advocate will assist you throughout the entire process.

## YOUR ADVOCACY SESSION

The purpose of your advocacy session is for you to receive the support you need to help you and your child heal. During your session, you will learn what the forensic interview will be like for your child. Your Family Advocate will answer questions about your investigative process, provide supportive resources, and provide ongoing support for the life of your case.



## YOUR CHILD'S *forensic interview*

The Forensic Interview is your child's opportunity to tell the story of his or her suspected abuse for the case investigation. The interview is audio and video-recorded and conducted in a child-friendly, developmentally appropriate setting with an emphasis on your child's comfort and mental health. Our highly trained interviewers will work to help your child feel they can express themselves freely. They will let your child know that what they experienced is not their fault, and they are not in trouble for what happened.



Investigators and CARE Center staff will watch your child's Forensic Interview in real time via a closed-circuit television in another room. They will hear your child's story first hand and be able to utilize the recording of the interview in their case investigation.

By participating in a Forensic Interview, we are reducing the number of times your child has to relive their story by preserving the statements for future review by agencies or the court. While we hope the interview will be all the evidence needed by your child, unfortunately, **this does not mean that your child will not testify if there is a trial.**





## RESOURCES FOR YOUR CHILD & FAMILY

Children can and do heal from the trauma of victimization. One of the most important factors in your child’s healing is the sense of support and safety you can provide. Your Family Advocate will provide resource opportunities for your family including assistance with Victim’s Crime Compensation, clothing, transportation, food, and other needs or information.

### Counseling

We highly recommend counseling as part of the healing process for your child and family. The effects of abuse can be difficult for a child to process, and counseling is a tool to help heal. We will provide you with a referral for a qualified counselor that fits your needs and can be of help to you and your child.

### Medical Exam

A medical exam provides reassurance to you and your child that their body will physically be okay after abuse. The exam is non-invasive and helps with your child’s well-being and healing. Medical exams are provided by The CARE Center’s medical team or the Child Protection Team at OU Children’s Hospital.

You or your investigator may request a medical exam. If a medical exam is requested, a medical professional will meet with you to explain the process in more detail.

CARE Center services are all free of charge. Some outside referrals may request a co-pay with insurance. We will always ask your permission before making a referral for these services.

## VICTIM’S CRIME COMPENSATION

The Crime Victims Compensation Act provides a method of compensation for victims of crime. Funds come from federal and state offenders through fines and penalty assessments. An arrest of the offender does NOT have to take place to be eligible to file a claim and your Family Advocate can assist you with any questions you may have regarding filing a claim.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Lion’s Den:** We provide clothing, hygiene products, and other items to make this process easier on you and your family. We understand your investigation may come with unexpected costs and we want to lift some of the burdens from you during this time.
- **Abuse Prevention/Education:** Teaching your child empowerment and personal body safety is important to their healing process and helping protect them from further abuse. See page 16 for our Rules of ROARing, a simple acronym for teaching children body safety. Your Family Advocate can also provide information on common age-related behaviors and safety.

## YOUR RESOURCE REFERRAL CONTACTS

Organization	Resource Type	Contact Info	Hours

## YOUR CASE

### Follow up today with law enforcement and/or child welfare

After your child's interview, you will have an opportunity to speak with the investigator(s) on your child's case. Depending on the case, investigators may be limited in the amount of information they can share. Don't be discouraged if their answers seem vague.

### Future legal steps

Future legal steps may include interviews of other family members or witnesses by law enforcement and child welfare, as well as court obligations. If your case goes to court, we will make sure that you are sufficiently notified and prepared by working with the Victim Advocates at the District Attorney's Office. If charges are filed, there is no legal cost to you, and you will be represented by the state.



Investigative and legal processes move at their own pace and separate from your child's healing. Be patient and remember people are working to gain the best outcome for you and your child.

## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD *Beyond today*

One of the most important factors in your child's healing is your acceptance and support. Your child will be looking to you for reassurance and comfort.

Be sensitive to your child's needs. They will need a great deal of encouragement. Here are some tips on how to respond to your child if he or she tells you they have been abused:

- Stay calm, and tell your child that you are glad he or she told you.
- Believe your child. Tell them you believe them. Children seldom lie about abuse.
- Listen to your child without judging them or questioning them.
- Acknowledge what your child is feeling and how difficult it must be for him/her.
- Reassure your child that he or she is not to blame and that he or she is okay.
- Respect your child's privacy. Do not pressure them for information, and do not share information with others about the situation.
- Protect your child from any further contact with the suspected abuser.
- Never confront the suspected abuser!

## YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO HEAR:

- I believe you.
- It is not your fault.
- I am happy you told me.
- I will take care of you.
- Sometimes we love someone but hate what he or she does.
- I am sorry this happened to you.
- It is okay to cry or be mad.
- You don't need to take care of me.



The single most important factor affecting your child's recovery is the level of support from you.

## FEELINGS YOUR CHILD MAY EXPERIENCE:

- Ashamed
- Embarrassed
- Confused
- Betrayed
- Angry
- Fearful of being re-victimized
- Distrustful of other adults

After abuse, children exhibit many different emotions and behaviors, even toward people they are close with, including parents/caregivers. Continue providing acceptance, reassurance, and comfort using the above statements that your child needs to hear.

## HELPING YOUR CHILD HEAL

### The following steps will help your child heal:

- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- Be careful not to question your child about the abuse. If your child wants to talk about their experience, listen supportively but do not probe.
- See that your child receives counseling as soon as possible. Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.
- Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it all by yourself. Your Family Advocate can provide you supportive resources.
- Teach your child the rules of personal safety and empower them to speak up when they feel unsafe. See page 16 for our Rules of ROARing.
- Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse to protect you and your child.
- Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.
- Your child may need an extra sense of physical security. Stay close and assure your child you will keep them safe.
- Remember to give attention to your other children, too.

## WHY DIDN'T MY CHILD TELL ME?

It is common for children not to disclose abuse immediately. Secrecy is a usual element of abuse. There are many reasons why children do not tell. Children may feel:

- Embarrassed/ashamed
- They are to blame
- Threatened by the abuser
- Like they will get into trouble

## FEELINGS I MAY EXPERIENCE:

When abuse is reported, parents sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. Below are some common thoughts and feelings parents may experience:

1. **Denial.** Your first reaction may be not to believe or accept the possibility that abuse happened. Parents often experience denial because it is overwhelming to accept that the abuse occurred, and there will be after-effects.
2. **Anger.** You may feel angry at yourself for not protecting your child, and angry at the perpetrator for what happened. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted person, group, or counselor.
3. **Helplessness.** You probably do not know what to expect and feel things are out of your control. Try to stay aware of your next steps as your case proceeds through the system.
4. **Lack of assertiveness.** You may feel invisible and think there is nothing you can do to help the situation. A counselor can help you learn what you can do to change the situation and take appropriate action.
5. **Shock, numbness, and repulsion.** You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to shock, numbness, and repulsion. If so, seek counseling to recover from the abuse. Your Family Advocate can assist you with counseling referrals.
6. **Guilt and self-blame.** You may feel it is all your fault. Remember, the offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing to do is support your child and help him/her heal.
7. **Hurt and betrayal.** It is normal to feel hurt from the loss of your child's innocence. You also may have lost a spouse or partner if that person was the offender. You may have even lost friends. It is important to grieve these losses.
8. **Concern about money.** You may be worried about finances because of lost income. Don't be afraid to talk your Family Advocate about resources that may be available.
9. **Fear of violence.** In homes where violence is common, you may fear the offender will try to harm you or your child. If so, your Family Advocate can help with resources to keep you and your child safe.

A photograph showing the lower legs and feet of a person wearing blue denim jeans and tan canvas sneakers. The person is walking on a paved surface, possibly a playground or schoolyard, with white chalk drawings of a person and a car visible on the ground. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the paved area and some colorful objects.

Remember to focus on providing a safe environment for you and your child. Your feelings are valued, and with counseling and time, you will heal, too.



## LEARN THE RULES OF ROARING™

### HOW CAN I PROTECT MY CHILD FROM FUTURE ABUSE?

Open communication between you and your child is one of the biggest ways to safeguard against abuse. It is important that your child feels comfortable and safe talking to you. When they are talking, be a good listener, hear what your child is telling you and what they may be trying to tell you but don't know how.

The CARE Center has an abuse education program for children ages 4-8. No matter the age of your child, these key principles can be adapted to the needs of any age. The primary principles of the ROAR program are:

**R: Remember, Privates are Private**

**O: Okay to Say No**

**A: Always Talk About Secrets**

**R: Raise Your Voice and Tell Someone**

For older children, refer to our website for tools and resources.

Contact your Family Advocate for a copy of our children's book, Rex Finds His ROAR!, if you did not receive one while at The CARE Center. The book will help you have the conversation about personal body safety with your child.

**Stranger Danger is rare in child abuse cases. Over 90% of the time, the abuser is someone the child knows and trusts.**



#### REMEMBER, PRIVATES ARE PRIVATE.

Parts of your body covered by a swimsuit or underwear are private. No one should ask to see or touch them. Sometimes, doctors or family members have to, but they should always explain why and ask if it's okay with you first.



#### OKAY TO SAY NO.

You have the right to say NO even to a family member or someone you love. You are in control of your body and your feelings are important.



#### ALWAYS TALK ABOUT SECRETS.

Secrets shouldn't make you feel sad, upset, or tell you to hide something. You shouldn't get in trouble for sharing a secret that upsets you.



#### RAISE YOUR VOICE AND TELL SOMEONE.

Talk about stuff that makes you upset. Think about three safe grown-ups you trust and can always talk to.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Will we come back to The CARE Center?**

Generally, no, but sometimes children are not ready to discuss what happened to them at their initial visit. They may return when they are more comfortable or after spending time in counseling, per the investigator's request. If your child discloses additional information after the interview, he or she may need to return for a follow-up interview.

Your family may also return to The CARE Center campus for counseling or additional support services.

### **Who has access to my child's Forensic Interview?**

Only the investigators who were part of your child's case receive a copy of today's forensic interview. The interview will be considered evidence in your child's case. Depending on the investigators' findings, the interview recording may be shared with the District Attorney's office during the prosecution process.

### **When will we know if charges will be filed?**

Each investigation is different. Keep in touch with your law enforcement and child welfare investigators to be updated on your case progress. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact your Family Advocate.

### **Will the suspected abuser go to jail?**

Your law enforcement investigator will have more information regarding charges filed.

### **Will my child have to testify in court?**

A Forensic Interview cannot be used in place of a child's testimony in court, but every case is different, and many factors go into the court process. There is a chance your child will be asked to testify in court. The District Attorney's office will keep you updated on court information, and your Family Advocate is always available for support.



### **Will I have to pay for any services from The CARE Center?**

You will not be billed for any services you receive on our campus. This includes the forensic interview, medical exam, resources provided, and counseling services.

If you have any questions or need assistance, do not hesitate to contact your Family Advocate at **405-236-2100**.



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NATIONAL  
CHILDREN'S  
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If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, you have a legal responsibility to report it.  
Call the Oklahoma Child Abuse Hotline at **1.800.522.3511**  
to make a report or call 911 if you believe the child is in immediate danger.

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