



# FORENSIC INTERVIEW

The forensic interview is a semi-structured, developmentally sensitive conversation between an individual and a neutral fact finder, which is designed to elicit information about the individual's experiences.

## Making a Referral

Referrals for a forensic interview can be made for any child age 3 and older. Referrals for adults can be made if it fits the best needs of the individual and team.

Interviews are requested by law enforcement, social services, or prosecution for suspicion of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, exploitation, domestic violence, or witnessing a crime.

It is critical that the caregiver be well informed about the interview process before arrival at the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Let them know the process takes approximately 90 minutes to two hours. If there are additional individuals being interviewed, the appointment will likely take longer.

## The Forensic Interview Process

A team meeting is held prior to the interview. The purpose is for the team to share information about the case with each other and make key decisions about the manner in which the interview should be conducted. At completion of the team meeting, the caregiver, if present, is brought into the observation room to fill out paperwork and ask questions they may have about the process.

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**If the caregiver has questions about how to talk to the child about the interview, these are some recommendations:**

### DO

- Tell the individual about their appointment. A caregiver may say, *"a person who talks to a lot of children will be visiting with you about ..."*
- Tell the child to be honest
- Reassure the child that you will be there to help no matter what happens and that they are not in trouble

### DON'T

- Discuss the investigation in the child's presence
- Ask questions about the allegations
- Tell children they are coming to play
- Lie to the child in any way about the allegations or scare them
- Offer the child a bribe or reward for telling about what happened

Only team members involved in the investigation of the case are present during the interview. However, a team agency may request a courtesy agency to sit in on the case if there is no possible way to attend.

Law enforcement and social services are required to be present for every interview. Medical, prosecution, and other team members involved in the investigation are encouraged to attend. Because of the sensitivity of the process, team members should come to the interview in plain clothes with no visible weapons showing. Two team members must be present in the observation room at all times to ensure proper evidence collection.

Caregivers are not allowed to observe the interview and are not allowed to be with the child during the interview.

Alleged perpetrators are not allowed at the CAC during the forensic interview process. If an alleged perpetrator accompanies the alleged victim to the CAC without prior knowledge, law enforcement will ask them to leave the premises during the interview.

Team members observing the interview communicate with the interviewer either by using an ear bud, or taking a break. The camera may be moved so that the child remains visible at all times.

Occasionally we interview youth who are suspected of problematic sexual behaviors. Under no circumstances will we knowingly trick



or coerce a child into incriminating themselves. The CAC will not interview these youth for the purpose of investigating them, but rather as possible victims. Because of the safety of other children at the CAC, care will be taken to ensure that kids with possible problematic sexual behaviors are supervised at all times.

The recording of the interview will be turned over to the appropriate law enforcement agency. The forensic interviewer will complete a written summary report following the interview. Forensic records are considered evidence and property of law enforcement and, therefore, cannot be given out to families at any time.

After the interview, the team will meet with the caregiver, when appropriate, to update them, answer questions and make recommendations.

An advocate will visit with the family to answer any questions they may have and to give them important information about the CAC.

*Children's Advocacy Centers in North Dakota are child-friendly settings that coordinate and provide services for children who may have been abused. The CACs help thousands of people each year using evidence-based practices.*



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