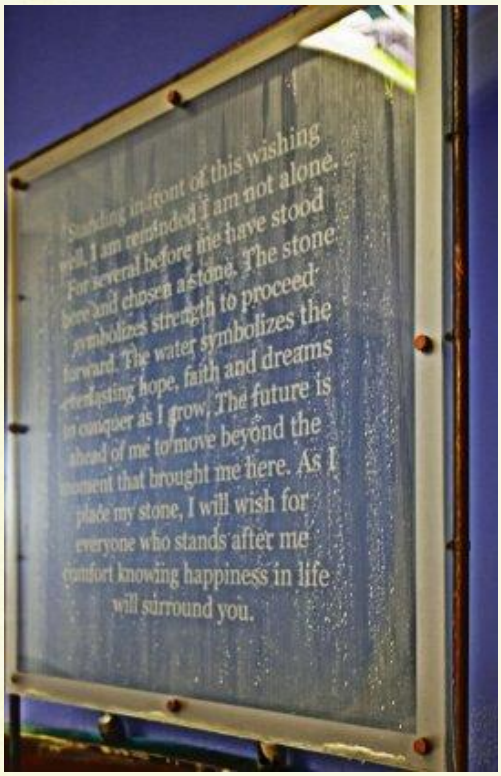
What to Expect

When Your Child Is Interviewed at Holly's House



What is a Forensic Interview?

A forensic interview is an interview method by which a neutral, trained professional (a forensic interviewer or detective) gathers factual information from a child/adolescent victim through a conversation that considers the young victim's emotional needs and developmental level.

The goal of the forensic interview is to gather as many facts as possible about the allegation of abuse in an unbiased, non-threatening, non-leading and child-friendly manner that causes no further trauma to the child/adolescent victim.

When you arrive at our child-friendly center, a staff member will greet you and help you to get settled in our waiting area. Our center has three waiting areas. Our goal is to ensure each family has private waiting areas and no two families share space. In one waiting room we have toys, games, and books for children of all ages. Another waiting room is for our teen and young adult clients. We have an adult waiting room too. We also provide drinks and snacks for you or your child.

While your child is being interviewed you'll receive support from one of our advocates who will provide emotional support, information about the system, education, referrals to therapists and any other services needed. Our partner agencies Lampion Center and Albion Fellows Bacon Center can be contacted to help with the needs of all involved. Family members are not allowed to observe the interview. Alleged perpetrators are NOT allowed on the premises.

While you're waiting, our Forensic Interviewer, who has advanced training in interviewing children of all ages, meets with your child. The interviews proceed at the child's pace and are conducted in a non-leading and developmentally appropriate manner. The interviews take place in a comfortable and child-friendly room, which minimizes the stress to the child and allows the interviewer to gather accurate information regarding the allegations.

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Preparing a Child for an Interview

If your child brings up the allegations to you, let them know that what they have to say is very important, and you will be taking them to a place to talk with a person more about what happened and that it is OKAY to tell that person everything.

Although as the child's caregiver, it is natural to want to ask your child questions about the details of the alleged incident, please try to refrain. Sometimes it can be more difficult to talk to a caregiver about the details of sexual abuse because the child may worry about making you upset, disappointing you, and embarrassment. In addition, speaking with young children about alleged incidents in a leading way has the potential to contaminate their statements.

How to Prepare Your Child

DO

- Tell your child they will be visiting a place and talking to a person whose job it is to talk with kids and teenagers.
- Give your child permission to talk with the interviewers.
- Tell your child it is a safe place to talk about anything, even if they have never told you.

DON'T

- Ask your child questions about the allegations.
- Tell your child what to say.
- Promise treats or rewards to your child for talking.
- Try to answer questions you don't have the answers for.

How should I explain the interview process to my child, especially if they have already made a disclosure to me or someone else?

Tell your child that they will be meeting with someone who talks with children about very difficult things. Tell your child that even though they have told things to you or someone else, it is important that the information is given to people who have jobs to protect children.

When should I tell my child the interview will be taking place?

Usually a day or two ahead is enough time. Give your child enough notice so they don't feel surprised, but also don't give them too long a time to worry about what they may have to do.

What if my child starts to ask me questions about what they have to say?

Tell your child that you don't know exactly what questions will be asked. Give your child permission to talk about what they have disclosed. Be general in what you tell your child: *"It is ok to tell the interviewer what you told me (or someone else) happened to you when you were..."* Do not repeat the details of what they have disclosed, and don't ask them anymore questions. Let the professionals do all the asking.

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Commonly Asked Questions

Prior to a Child's Interview

After the interview, you will have a post-interview discussion with the investigators involved. We encourage this meeting to take place with caregivers. At this time, they will outline the next steps. They will answer your questions, address your concerns, and let you know what you need to do next. Your Family Case Manager will follow up with you and continue to support you as needed.

For the follow-up investigation, all interviews are recorded on DVDs. This is done in an effort to minimize the number of people your child has to speak with regarding the concerns. The information obtained is kept by the Department of Child Services and/or law enforcement. The average length of a visit to Holly's House is approximately one to two hours per child.

What if my child asks if I will be in the room with them?

Assure your child that while they are talking to the interviewer you will be in the waiting room.

What if my child says they don't want to do this because they already told the story?

Tell your child that you understand their feelings of frustration, especially since it is a difficult story to tell. Yet, also tell them how brave they were for telling in the first place and how proud you are of their honesty and bravery.

How can I support my child?

Provide safety, love and support. Let them know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't coach or pressure your child to talk about things.

Some Things You Can Say That Will Help Your Child

- I believe you.
- I know it's not your fault.
- I am glad I know about it.
- I am sorry this happened to you.
- I will take care of you.
- I am not sure what will happen next.
- Nothing about YOU made this happen. It has happened to other children too.
- You don't need to take care of me.
- I am upset, but not with you.
- I am angry at the person who did this; I am not mad at you.

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Prior to a Child's Interview

May I watch the forensic interview?

No, only those people who are directly involved in the investigation are allowed to observe the interview. This is done for two reasons: The first is to create a neutral setting to reduce the possible stress that can be placed on a child. The second is to avoid any influence the child's statements may have on your own knowledge of the crime, as you may or may not have been a witness. This may come into question during the prosecution phase of the case.

You may bring a supportive person to wait with you during the interview. This person may then wait with the child when you have your opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns with the investigative team upon completion of the interview. Upon request, the staff may provide you with support during the interview.

May I watch the forensic interview from another room along with the forensic team?

You may not watch from another room, because the interview is part of the investigative process and will remain confidential while the case is still under investigation.

Why is the forensic interview videotaped?

A recording of the interview is made to reduce the number of times a child is asked investigative questions regarding allegations of abuse. A joint investigative interview is conducted and the interview is recorded. The interview is recorded onto a DVD in order to preserve the child's statement for future viewing by other investigative team members, the state attorney, or the court.

May I watch the video of my child's interview?

The recorded interview can't be watched unless there is a court order.

Who will watch the video of my child's interview?

The interview may be watched by other investigative team members, a guardian ad litem, the state attorney or the court.

Does the forensic interview take the place of testifying in court?

The interview does NOT take the place of testifying in court. There is a lot of stress and emotion surrounding testifying but there are multiple individuals and organizations to prepare for this situation if the case gets to that point.

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