Children's Advocacy Center

Providing a safe and protected area for child victims, child witnesses, and their families who need the assistance of Chester County services and agencies.
The Chester County Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) is a child-focused center that coordinates the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse while helping children heal. The CAC emphasizes the coordination of investigation and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team (MDT) to create a child-focused approach to child abuse cases. The MDT consists of members representing the District Attorney’s Office, Department of Children, Youth & Families, Law Enforcement, The Crime Victims’ Center of Chester County, Inc., Chester County Juvenile Probation, Chester County Adult Probation, Department of Mental Health/Intellectual Development Disabilities, and experts in the medical field. The CAC was created to provide a private, safe, non-threatening environment in which to conduct interviews of child victims or witnesses.

The CAC facility is located within the District Attorney’s Office, and has a private waiting area for children, and those accompanying them, which is child-friendly and comfortably furnished. The CAC has an interview room; this area is utilized exclusively for interviewing children who are victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or who are witnesses to a crime. An observation room allows for MDT members to observe the interviews while they are being conducted. Access to the CAC is restricted through the use of a keycard system. Offenders are not permitted in this area. The CAC is designed to create a sense of safety and security for the children. Accreditation of the CAC through the National Children’s Alliance assures the highest standard of care is provided to victims.
The Crime Victims’ Center of Chester County, Inc. (CVC) is a nonprofit agency providing free, immediate, and confidential crisis response and compassionate support to children and adults impacted by crime and violence. We provide assistance through counseling, advocacy, resources, and education.

Office: (610) 692-1926     Fax: (610) 692-4959
Business Hours: Weekdays 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Hotlines (24 hrs):
Sexual Assault - 610-692-7273  Other Crimes - 610-692-7420
135-137 West Market Street - West Chester, PA 19382
WWW.CVCOFCC.ORG
CVC knows that the effects of crime are often intense and far-reaching. People may feel discouraged, isolated, and fearful.

For more than 45 years, CVC has provided a comprehensive range of services to assist victims of crime and their families. Our purpose is to help those in need of support through counseling, advocacy, resources, and education outreach.

CVC offers immediate crisis response and provides continuing assistance to help victims move through the healing process and regain control over their lives.

Victims are entitled to dignity and respect. CVC informs victims of their rights and provides assistance throughout this often difficult process.

How we support victims

- Two 24 hour crisis hotlines
- Information, advocacy and accompaniment through police and medical procedures for victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes
- Information, advocacy and accompaniment throughout adult and juvenile criminal justice proceedings including police interviews, preliminary hearings, etc.
- Assistance in filing for Crime Victims Compensation
- Assistance in preparing Victim Impact Statements and restitution claims
- Emotional support to the victim, family, and friends
- Individual and group counseling for survivors of sexual assault, homicide, and other crimes
- Referrals to appropriate resources
TO RECEIVE BASIC INFORMATION CONCERNING THE SERVICES TO ASSIST YOU;

TO BE NOTIFIED OF CERTAIN SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IN YOUR CASE, INCLUDING, PERSONAL INJURY CRIMES, THE ARREST OF THE SUSPECT AND ESCAPE FROM POLICE CUSTODY;

TO BE ACCOMPANIED AT ALL PUBLIC CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS BY A FAMILY MEMBER, A VICTIM ADVOCATE, OR ANOTHER PERSON;

IN CASES OF PERSONAL INJURY CRIMES, BURGLARY, OR DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE INVOLVING BODILY INJURY, TO GIVE INPUT TO THE PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A PLEA;

TO OFFER INPUT OR TO SUBMIT A WRITTEN VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE JUDGE’S CONSIDERATION AT SENTENCING;

TO RECOVER YOUR LOSSES, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THROUGH RESTITUTION, CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION, AND THE RETURN OF PROPERTY WHICH WAS HELD AS EVIDENCE WHEN IT IS NO LONGER NEEDED BY THE PROSECUTOR;

IN PERSONAL INJURY CRIMES WHERE THE OFFENDER IS SENTENCED TO PRISON, TO PROVIDE INPUT ON AND TO RECEIVE NOTICE OF RELEASE DECISIONS, AND TO BE IMMEDIATELY NOTIFIED IF THE OFFENDER ESCAPES;

TO RECEIVE NOTICE WHEN AN OFFENDER IS COMMITTED TO A MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY FROM A STATE PRISON AND OF THE DISCHARGE, TRANSFER OR ESCAPE OF THE OFFENDER FROM THE MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY; AND

TO HAVE ASSISTANCE IN THE PREPARATION OF, SUBMISSION OF, AND FOLLOW-UP ON THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CLAIMS TO THE CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION BOARD.

ABOUT PA SAVIN

PA SAVIN is Pennsylvania’s automated victim notification system. You can register to be notified if the offender is released, transferred, or escapes from prison, by calling 1-888-PAVCTMS (1-888-728-2867) from a touch tone phone or online at www.PASavin.com

The PA SAVIN Service applies to offenders under the supervision of county jails, state prisons, and the State Board of Probation and Parole.
Restitution & Crime Victims' Compensation

PENNSYLVANIA CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VCAP)
If you or your family member are a victim of a crime, you may be eligible for compensation, provided:

- The crime occurred in Pennsylvania and was reported to the police within 72 hours.
- The victim cooperated with the authorities.
- The claim was filed within two years from the date of discovery.
- The loss requirements were met.
- The victim was not engaged in illegal activity.

Compensation May Cover
- Medical Expenses
- Counseling
- Loss of Earnings or Support
- Cash Loss of Benefits
- Funeral Expenses in the Case of Homicide
- Crime Scene Clean-Up
- Relocation Expenses

Compensation Does Not Cover
- Pain and Suffering
- Property Loss
- Certain Vehicle-Related Injuries or Deaths

COURT ORDERED RESTITUTION
If there are expenses that you incur due to the result of the crime, you may request repayment from the offender if he/she is convicted. Receipts and other information regarding expenses must be included with the restitution claim.

Restitution May Cover
- Medical Expenses
- Property Loss
- Insurance Deductibles

Restitution Will Not Cover
- Pain and Suffering
- Loss of Wages or Support
The Crime Victims' Center offers free and confidential counseling services to victims of crime, their family members, and significant others. CVC provides individual and group counseling services by professionals with a Master's degree or higher, who specialize in areas of abuse and victimization.

**Individual Counseling**
A safe space is provided for victims to process their emotions and regain a sense of control in their lives. Counselors assist clients with support, insight, and coping skills related to issues of victimization, ultimately promoting inner strength and healing.

**Group Counseling**
Groups offer a safe and controlled environment for clients to share their experiences. Clients gain support, skills, and self-awareness by working with others who have similar experiences of abuse and victimization. CVC offers support groups for those affected by various types of crime. Please call our hotline if you are interested in finding out which groups we are currently offering.

Counseling services available at offices throughout Chester County. Mobile Counseling available upon request.

CVC strives to maintain confidentiality for all who receive services. However, there are times where CVC Victim Advocates and Counselors may need to share information with other professionals to ensure the safety of individuals in the community (e.g. planning to hurt themselves or others, or child and elder abuse). If you feel you are being threatened or harassed, contact your local police department or Assistant DA assigned to your case. The media may also access details about criminal cases and try to contact the victim. It is the victim’s choice whether or not to speak to the media. CVC Victim Advocates are also available to discuss your options with you regarding the above.

If, as an individual utilizing the services at CVC, you believe you have a grievance for services you received or think you should have received, please (1) inform your Counselor or Advocate about your grievance and (2) attempt to resolve the grievance with your Counselor or Advocate. If you are not satisfied after the first two steps, ask to speak with a CVC Supervisor or request a meeting with the agency’s CEO. If after those steps you feel that your grievance has not been resolved, please contact the Office of the Victim Advocate at 1-800-563-6399 or www.ova.pa.gov. Please note that if you are uncomfortable with steps one and two, you may go directly to step three. CVC will inform you of your options and assist you if you decide to go through the grievance process.

CVC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or age; and will not retaliate against persons who file a discrimination complaint or lawsuit who complain about discrimination; or who participate in a discrimination proceeding, such as being a witness in a complaint investigation or lawsuit.
Interviews at the CAC are conducted by investigators who have received extensive training in child forensic interviewing techniques from various professional organizations or agencies in order to conduct interviews that are legally sound, non-leading, and neutral.

Forensic interviews are observed by members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) collectively. This practice avoids multiple interviews of the child. The interviews are audio and visually recorded.

Upon entering the Chester County Justice Center the child, and those accompanying the child, will be met at the main entrance and escorted directly to the CAC by a representative from The Crime Victims' Center, Inc. (CVC) and/or the investigating police officer.

Due to the high level of security within the Justice Center, prisoners or individuals in custody are not exposed to the general public. There are special hallways and elevators used to transport these individuals from location to location within the Justice Center, reducing the possibility that a child would see or be exposed to possible offenders. The alleged offender is not permitted on the premises of the CAC while the child victim is present. All the entry points of the CAC are locked with badge authorized access only. Only CAC members and Law Enforcement have access into the CAC. All other visitors to the facility must be coordinated by the CAC Coordinator.

The CAC is a comfortable, child-friendly atmosphere equipped with toys, games, coloring books and other engaging materials. This environment allows the Victim Advocate and the child to interact and have a positive experience.

Following the interview, the forensic interviewer will take the child to the waiting room to be reunited with the non-offending caregiver. The forensic interviewer will return to the observation room to collaborate with the team to determine the next steps to be taken.
What is a non-acute forensic medical exam?

A non-acute forensic medical exam is similar to the regular well-child visit your child has had with his or her pediatrician, assessing the child from head-to-toe. The purpose of the exam is to assess and identify injuries and give parents and children an opportunity to discuss and address any concerns they may have with the specialist. The medical provider(s) are experts with advanced training in identifying possible findings related to child maltreatment.

This examination also includes a genital exam, which will differ depending on the gender and sexual maturity of the child. The medical provider will speak with you and your child in more detail about the type of genital examination that may be performed and the purpose of completing this type of examination.

The examination may also include lab and radiology tests depending on the reason your child has been referred for a forensic examination.
What is an acute forensic medical exam?

An acute forensic medical exam is an examination that is recommended up-to 120 hours or 5 days after an individual has been sexually abused or assaulted. This type of examination is usually completed by going to an emergency department and may involve the collection of evidence. Like the non-acute examination, the acute medical exam gives parents and children an opportunity to discuss and address any concerns they may have with the specialist. The medical provider(s) are experts with advanced training in identifying possible findings related to child maltreatment.

This examination also includes a genital exam, which will differ depending on the gender and sexual maturity of the child. The medical provider will speak with you and your child in more detail about the type of genital examination that may be performed and the purpose of completing this type of examination.

The examination may also include lab and radiology tests depending on the reason your child has been referred for a forensic examination.

If your child was physically assaulted or injured during domestic violence, has clinical signs or symptoms related to an injury, and/or is under the age of 2 years, you should take your child to the emergency department immediately. Older children or those without obvious physical injury or symptoms may be seen in an outpatient clinic. If you are unsure whether to take your child to the emergency department or schedule an outpatient clinic appointment, call Nemours for counseling on next steps.

In certain circumstances, diagnostic testing (labs, x-rays) and forensic evidence collection may be performed (swabbing of bite marks or bruises for DNA evidence); injured children may require medical treatment including pain management, burn or wound care. Siblings of physically injured children, or those who reside in unsafe environments (exposure to violence) should also have comprehensive, precautionary medical evaluations.
Can my child have someone with them during the exam?

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to participate in the examination and be present throughout care. A patient under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult chaperone during the examination. If a child is 12 or older, he or she may choose to have a support person (family member, friend, or advocate) in the room during the exam, but there will always be an accompanying chaperone.

Are photos obtained during the exam?

Photodocumentation may be performed during the examination for a variety of reasons to assist in the medical management of the child and for the documentation of injuries for investigating agencies when applicable. Photos are stored in a secured database, separate from the medical record. Your medical provider will discuss the recommendation for photodocumentation prior to the examination and discuss the purpose and use of the photos before they are taken.

What if my child or I do not want to complete part(s) of the examination?

We understand that this may be a stressful time for you and your child. Care is taken to discuss the exam before it is completed to prepare you and your child. It is important that you have the opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns you might have. The medical providers will explain every part of the examination before and as it is performed. The providers will seek feedback from you and your child about how you are feeling throughout to minimize anxiety and answer any questions. If there are parts of the examination that you or your child are uncomfortable with, please do not hesitate to speak with the provider(s) about those concerns.
How do I have my child seen at Nemours?

Emergency Department: The emergency department is open 24/7, including holidays and weekends. To be seen in the emergency department, simply go to the hospital and the staff will guide you through your visit.

The Nemours Alfred I duPont Hospital for Children is located at:

1600 Rockland Road
Wilmington DE 19803
www.Nemours.org
Phone: 302-651-4000

Outpatient clinic: In some instances, children can schedule an appointment with the outpatient forensic team. To discuss options for appointments please contact The Crime Victims' Center of Chester County, Inc. (CVC).

Nemours is just one of many places that cares for children who are in need of medical attention after physical or sexual abuse. To obtain information for additional medical providers contact CVC or the child’s primary care physician for further information.

What happens after the exam?

The medical provider will review with you and your child (if age-appropriate) the findings from the examination and any results of testing available during a post-exam debriefing. The medical provider will call you with any test results that may not be immediately available. Referrals to counseling, supportive services or other subspecialty medical providers may be made at that time if needed.
The Criminal Justice system can be confusing to victims and their families. Members from the MDT are always happy to answer any questions you may have. The flowchart below, and the written steps on the following page, may help guide you in the meantime.
1. **Arrest**: The police file charges against the defendant alleging a violation of criminal law.

2. **Preliminary Arraignment**: The Defendant is advised of charges which have been filed against him/her and is advised of future hearing dates. Bail is set in order to secure the presence of the defendant at trial.

3. **Preliminary Hearing**: Commonwealth must establish that a crime has been committed and that the defendant more than likely committed the crime. There will be no determination of guilt at this phase. A Victim Advocate can accompany you to this hearing and all future hearings.

4. **Formal Arraignment**: Defendant is formally advised of the charges that have been filed against him/her by the District Attorney's office. This hearing is a formality and victims often do not attend.

5. **Pre-Trial Hearings**: If pre-trial motions, such as a Motion to Suppress Evidence are filed, then a hearing is held prior to the trial where the court will rule on the motions.

6. **Pre-Trial Disposition**: A defendant may be placed on a pre-trial diversionary program or may choose to enter into an open plea or negotiated guilty plea.

7. **Trial**: The Commonwealth has the burden of proving the Defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The trial can take place before a jury of 12 people or before a judge.

8. **Sentencing**: If a defendant is found guilty after trial or pleads guilty, the defendant will appear before a judge for sentencing.

9. **Appeal**: The Defendant has the opportunity to appeal his/her conviction to a higher court.

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Not every case will move forward in the criminal justice system, however the members of the MDT are working hard to achieve the best outcome, keeping your child's well-being a priority.
Chester County Department of Children, Youth & Families (CYF) has the responsibility, under the requirements of the Child Protective Services Law, to investigate reports of alleged child abuse. Upon receipt of a report, the CYF Intake Specialist is responsible to ensure the safety of the child/children involved and to ensure that the child is not at risk of further abuse. The child involved must be seen within 24 hours of the report being made. CYF has up to 60 days to complete the investigation, but priority is placed on completing the investigation within 30 days. With cases of alleged sexual abuse and serious bodily injury, CYF and Law Enforcement make every effort to work as a team and conduct a joint interview of the child to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed.

When an interview occurs at the Children's Advocacy Center, typically you will have met the assigned Intake Specialist prior to the interview. The Intake Specialist will not be conducting the interview, but will observe the interview from a separate room. Upon conclusion of the interview, the Intake Specialist, along with other representatives from the Children's Advocacy Center and The Crime Victims' Center, will be available to answer any questions you might have, and will explain the next steps in the process.

At the conclusion of the investigation, you will be notified of the outcome. A decision will also be made, with your input, regarding the need for ongoing CYF agency services. If it is determined that your child was abused, this does not necessarily mean CYF must remain involved. In some cases, CYF does not maintain involvement with the family upon completion of the investigation.
The disclosure of child sexual abuse can impact the entire family system. If you are a parent or caregiver of a child who has survived sexual abuse, you may want to seek support from family, friends, or a counselor at your local rape crisis center. You may even want to connect with other parents or caregivers who are going through a similar experience. If you are able to work through your own feelings, you will be better able to support your child.

You may be experiencing many emotions right now. Often parents or caregivers will have feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt about what has happened to their child. You may have clear feelings of anger at the person who abused your child, or you may feel confused, especially if the person who abused your child is also someone that you love and trust.

Recognize your own feelings; they are likely a very typical response to the trauma your child has experienced. Also know that your child may have different feelings than you, and that's okay. They may be experiencing feelings that are very overwhelming for them. Let your child know that whatever feelings they are experiencing are okay and that there are many ways to safely express these feelings.

1 in 10 children experience sexual abuse and 90% of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser. You are not alone.
What can I say after my child discloses to me or after the interview at the child advocacy center?

• Thank you so much for telling me. That must have been a really hard thing to do.

• I believe you and what happened is not your fault.

• You’re a really brave kid for talking about what happened.

• I bet you have a lot of feelings about what happened; all of those feelings are okay.

• I’m always here to listen when you need to talk; do you feel like talking now?

Effects of child sexual abuse may be similar to those reactions experienced by adults after a sexual assault. Changes in behavior are perhaps the most important thing to note in children, since this is how they primarily communicate. Children may be irritable or have outbursts of anger, experience nightmares or have difficulty sleeping, display regressive behavior such as thumb sucking or bed wetting, and have trouble concentrating or have a drop in grades at school.

Caring for a child after a disclosure of sexual abuse can be challenging. The disclosure of sexual abuse creates a crisis for many families.

Parents and caregivers may assume that once a child has disclosed that they will feel safe and return to everyday functioning. While children are very resilient and can heal from abuse, this healing process takes time and patience.

What can I do to help my child moving forward?

• Maintain consistent rules and structure to increase feelings of safety.

• Give choices whenever possible to allow a greater sense of control.

• Allow children to express ALL feelings; assist them in expressing those feelings in safe ways.

• Recognize your child’s strengths and help her/him to see her/his own resilience.

• Listen, believe, and support your child; your support is more important than anything else right now.
The Crime Victims’ Center of Chester County  ..........  (610) 692-7273
(Victim Services for adult and child victims of all crimes)
www.cvcofcc.org

Child Abuse Hotline (Childline) .......................... 1-800-932-0313
(To report child abuse)

211 SEPA ....................................................... 2-1-1
(Homeless shelter and housing resource/Health and Human Srvs)

Family Court ................................................... (610) 344-6405
Custody ......................................................... (610) 344-6075
Protection from Abuse ....................................... (610) 344-6405
www.chesco.org/567/Family-Court

Home of the Sparrow ......................................... (610) 647-4940
(Housing stability program for single women and mothers)
www.homeofthesparrow.org

La Comunidad Hispana ....................................... (610) 444-7550
(Health and Community Services)
www.lacomunidadadhispana.org

Legal Aid ......................................................... 1-877-429-5994
(Legal Representation for low income and vulnerable individuals)

Suicide Prevention Hotline .................................. 1-800-273-8255

Valley Creek Crisis ............................................ 1-877-918-2100
(27/7 comprehensive crisis care system)
www.chimes.org

PA’s State Automated Victim Information and Notification System
(SAVIN) ....................................................... 1-888-PAVCTMS
www.pasavin.com
THE CRIME VICTIMS' CENTER (CVC)

Victim Advocate responsible for your case:
________________________________________
Phone number: (____)____-_______ Ext. ______

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Police Department responsible for your case:
________________________________________
Phone number: (____)____-_______

CHESTER CO. DEPT. OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES (CYF)

CYF Caseworker responsible for your case:
________________________________________
Phone number: (____)____-_______ Ext. ______

Department of Children, Youth & Families (610) 344-5800
District Attorney's Office (610) 344-6801
The Crime Victims' Center (CVC) 24/7 Hotlines (610) 692-7273 (610) 692-7420
Children's Advocacy Center of Chester County (610) 344-5369
A.I. duPont Hospital for Children (302) 651-4000