

Welcome to Robin's Nest Child Advocacy Center

Your child is at Robin's Nest due to concerns of possible abuse. This is done to respect the privacy of you and your child. Others will not know of your affiliation with Robin's Nest unless you choose to share that information.

Our Goals:

- ◆ Work with the child protective legal system to help your child
- ◆ Help you, as a caregiver, understand these processes
- ◆ Help your child and family begin to heal

Contact Information

Robin's Nest Children's Advocacy Center.....	828-754-6262
Caldwell County Sheriff's Dept.....	828-758-2324
Granite Falls Police Dept.....	828-396-3358
Hudson Police Dept.....	828-728-5021
Lenior Police Dept.....	828-757-2100
District Attorney's Office.....	828-759-3510
Department of Social Services.....	828-426-8200
Family Resource Center.....	828-757-8632
Shelter Home of Caldwell.....	828-758-0888
Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Line.....	828-758-7088

For information on Crime Victim Compensation, scroll to bottom of handbook

How you may be Feeling

When abuse is reported, caregivers may experience confusion and/or conflicting, painful emotions. It is important to remember that these emotions are normal and that the staff at Robin's Nest are prepared to assist you in this process. The following are examples of common thoughts and feelings typically displayed by caregivers:

- 1) Denial, anger
- 2) Helplessness
- 3) Lack of assertiveness
- 4) Shock, numbness, repulsion
- 5) Guilt, self-blame
- 6) Hurt, betrayal
- 7) Concerns about financials
- 8) Fear of violence

9) Fear of drug or alcohol abuse

How Your Child May be Feeling

After experiencing intense trauma, children often display certain atypical behaviors. These behaviors can be upsetting for the child, you, or your family. It is important to remember that the healing process takes time, and that Robin's Nest Staff will do their best to support you in these difficult times. Some behaviors typically displayed by abused children include:

- ◆ Nausea/upset stomach
- ◆ Change in sleep patterns
- ◆ Withdrawal from family and friends
- ◆ Unusual attachment/clinging to parents
- ◆ Change in school performance/grades
- ◆ Hypersexual behaviors
- ◆ Increased lying
- ◆ Change in appetite
- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Anger/aggressiveness
- ◆ Avoidance of school and/or friends
- ◆ Rebelliousness
- ◆ Increased anxiety/fears and phobias
- ◆ Attention-seeking

Children react differently depending on age, extent of abuse, support from others, and their relationship with the alleged offender. The single most important factor in a child's recovery is the support they receive from their caregiver.

How to Act Toward Your Child

Some Things You Can Say

- ◆ "I believe you"
- ◆ "I'm sorry this happened to you"
- ◆ "I will take care of you"
- ◆ "This was not your fault"
- ◆ "It's okay to cry"

Some Things You Can Do

- ◆ Teach your child body safety rules
- ◆ Return to a normal routine as soon as possible
- ◆ Keep your child away from the alleged offender
- ◆ Do not coach or advise your child on how to act or what to say during the forensic interview
- ◆ Stay close to your child and provide support when needed
- ◆ Consider therapy or an assessment for your child.

How to Act Towards Others

One challenge your family may face during this time in your lives involves the words and actions of others. Many people may have many different opinions on the subject, and it is important to prepare for certain comments you may receive. Reactions may include horror, disgust, and concern, but it is also not uncommon for people to ask questions, or to even seem unphased by the subject. It is important to remember that people process sensitive topics in different ways. It is even more important to remember that you are not obligated to answer questions you feel are too personal, and you are not obligated to explain yourself to anyone, even loved ones.

Some Things You May Hear

How You Can Respond

- ◆ “What exactly happened to your child?”
- ◆ “Are you sure your child isn’t lying?”
- ◆ “How did you not know?”
- ◆ “If it were my child, we’d just move away.”
- ◆ “Your poor child must feel so guilty.”
- ◆ “I don’t feel comfortable talking about it right now.”
- ◆ “It’s been a very difficult time for all of us.”
- ◆ “I appreciate your concern.”
- ◆ “I would prefer to respect my child’s privacy.”

Taking Care of Yourself

This new chapter in your family’s life brings about major trauma, stress, and overwhelming emotions. Your child is going through a lot, and so are you. While it is very important to make sure your child is getting everything they need to heal, it is just as important to help yourself. Your wellbeing is important.

During this time, it is important that you find time for yourself. Suggested activities include going for a walk, going out for a nice meal, seeing a movie, etc.

Robin’s Nest staff will be happy to provide you with any additional information or resources they may have and can also answer any questions you have. Please do not hesitate to ask for help. We want to do anything we can to help both you and your child heal from these experiences.

Your Team of Professionals

In Caldwell County, we are very fortunate to have a highly trained team of professionals that meets regularly to respond to child abuse. The roles of team members are listed below.

Social Worker: The role of the Department of Social Services, DSS, is to keep your child safe. Your DSS Social Worker will conduct interviews with all parties involved and develop safety plans. Your social worker may also refer you and/or your child to therapy.

Law Enforcement Officer: The Police Departments in Granite Falls, Hudson, and Lenoir, as well as Caldwell County’s Sheriff’s Department have investigators on their team that interview non-offending caregivers, suspects, and any other eyewitnesses. They will also gather evidence from the scene of the alleged event.

The Child Forensic Interview Specialist: Our forensic interviewer at Robin’s Nest is a trained professional who is responsible for providing legally defensible interviews of children when there are suspicions of abuse. Forensic interviews may also take place in instances where a child was a witness to violence against another person. The interviewer will meet with your child so that your child can provide a statement on the case.

The Child Advocate: Our child advocate is a trained professional available to help you, the caregiver, when abuse is reported. They can help you connect with community resources and can

provide educational and emotional support while you protect your child in this process. The child advocate may also work with you to assist through any legal processes involved.

The Medical Examiner: A child medical exam may be requested by the investigative team to assure the health and safety of your child. This exam is not invasive or painful, but simply looks for physical signs of abuse on your child. Exams help provide evidence for a case and further reassure a child involved that his or her body is okay.

The Therapist: The Mental Health professional at Robin's Nest helps to assess the impact of a child's abuse and find what can be done to assist in the child's healing. The therapist provides a trauma assessment as well as counseling, if necessary. The therapist will also use Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, TF-CBT, an evidence-based treatment designed to help children overcome the impact of their trauma. Children who have developed emotional and/or behavioral difficulties as a result of their experience especially benefit from this form of therapy.

The District Attorney/Prosecutor: The Prosecutor on your case will lead the team that decides which charges, if any, can be filed. Consideration is given to many factors that affect the likelihood of a conviction in court. The prosecutor will work towards getting your child the justice he or she deserves.

Working with the System

The system is responsible for protecting children and holding offenders accountable. Cooperation is essential in maintaining both of these goals throughout your time in the system.

Below are suggested tips for working with professionals during this time:

- ◆ Let your child use their own words for their own experience. Helping your child find the best way to explain their story can often damage their credibility.
- ◆ Try to provide as many facts as possible. Cases are built on The Four W's: who, what, when, and where. If you do not know the answer to a question, that's okay.
- ◆ Tell professionals how you feel. Your feelings are valid and valuable in giving investigators insight.
- ◆ Remain calm and level-headed. You are experiencing a lot emotionally and this is a very stressful point in your life. Losing control, though, can hurt the case and overshadow the needs of the innocent victim, your child.
- ◆ Love, support, and protect your child. If the alleged offender is someone close to you, it can feel impossible balancing your feelings between them and your child. Remember that you are all your child has. In order to heal and make healthy decisions, they need your support.

The Interview

Once abuse has been reported, your child will be interviewed at Robin's Nest. You may be asked to wait while your child is interviewed. This is essential in ensuring that your child's testimony is unbiased and able to be held up in court.

Interviewers will take the time to ensure your child's comfort in your absence. Should your child need you, you will be made aware. At the end of the interview, you may speak with DSS or Law Enforcement to discuss the next steps of the case, and a medical exam may be recommended.

Therapy

After your child's interview, you and your child will be given the option of utilizing therapy services at Robin's Nest. Therapy is a unique opportunity for you or your child to meet with a professional trained in overcoming trauma. The therapists at Robin's Nest use TF-CBT to identify and track trauma symptoms in order to direct the response to treatment.

The TF-CBT therapy model provides your child with an opportunity to discuss details about their trauma in a supportive and nurturing environment. Research demonstrates that 80% of children who complete therapy will show a significant decrease in trauma symptoms.

The TF-CBT model typically includes between 18-20 sessions. Your child's therapist will help your child set goals to be reached throughout the process. Your child may require additional therapy, depending on their needs.

The Legal System

It is very difficult to predict the outcome of your child's case after the report is received. Different children have different needs, and it is important to prepare for the complexities of the legal system.

The legal process often moves at its own pace, different from your child's need to heal. Emotional wounds may be reopened by the various proceedings. Court dates may be delayed repeatedly, and the legal process may take up to two years. It is crucial to remember that there are numerous staff working towards getting the best legal outcome for you and your child.

Once an investigation is completed and your case is received in the District Attorney's office for prosecution, the District Attorney will assign a Victim Witness Coordinator to help guide you through the legal process. This person will be available to answer any questions and explain what types of victim assistance you may qualify for. Contact your Victim Witness Coordinator as soon as possible for more information.

How the Legal System Responds to Abuse

There are two different court systems that your case may encounter: Criminal Court and District Court. Despite working on the same case, these court systems serve different functions and are not dependent on one another:

Criminal Court: Criminal Court is primarily concerned with whether an alleged offender is guilty or innocent, often determined via trial. A trial may focus on the specific jurisdictions, or rules, that your case falls within to gain a conviction. A trial may also focus on the amount of

evidence present within your case, the presence of a confession from the alleged offender, or the specific punishment that the alleged offender would receive if proven guilty.

District Court: District Court is primarily concerned with the safety of your child. This court focuses on issues related to custody, supervised visitation, and counseling for the child.

Again, decisions in District Court may not line up with decisions in Criminal Court, and you may have to prepare for any outcome.

Limits of the Legal System

While the legal system is very important to your child's case, it is only one step in the process. The legal system is not essential to your child's recovery. You must always focus on your child's wellbeing before anything else.

Therapists who talk with adult survivors of child abuse typically hear them say:

“My family didn't do anything about it.”

“Nobody believed me.”

By remaining supportive and strong for your child, they will never have to feel alone.

Getting Ready for Court

If there is to be a trial, your Victim Witness Coordinator will bring you and your child to the courtroom for a tour. This will help prepare them and reduce any of your child's fears relating to court.

If you are a witness, you will not be allowed in the courtroom during your child's testimony. However, your Victim Witness Coordinator, Child Advocate, or trusted relative may remain close by to ensure the child's safety and comfort.

It is best to be honest and direct with your child about the outcome of the legal case. When the case is completed, you may feel exhausted and/or experience depression, even if the proceedings had a positive outcome. This is normal, as you and your child have just gone through an extremely difficult experience. Remember you have done your best in keeping your child safe.

Celebrate the end of your court case, regardless of the outcome. You and your child made it through a difficult process, and it is over now!

NC Crime Victim Compensation

The N.C. Victims Compensation Services Program reimburses citizens who suffer medical expenses and lost wages due to being an innocent victim of a crime committed in North Carolina. In this case, child victims of sexual and/or physical abuse can apply for financial help.

Since 1987, Victims Compensation Services has assisted innocent victims and their families in healing from the devastating effects of criminal violence with payments for a variety of needs,

including medical care, counseling, lost wages, and funerals. The program does not compensate victims for damaged/stolen property, or for pain and suffering.

While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this program works towards helping victims regain their lives and their financial stability.

Who is Eligible for Compensation?

- ◆ The innocent victim
- ◆ The dependent of a deceased innocent victim
- ◆ A legal representative of an innocent victim
- ◆ A third party who provided benefit to the innocent victim and their family (in situations unrelated to employment)

How Can I Apply for Compensation?

- ◆ Applications may be accessed online at www.ncdps.gov.
- ◆ Eligible parties can also contact Victim Services at (919)733.7974 or at the number listed below
- ◆ Applications must be notarized and must include itemized medical/counseling bills as well as a copy of the victim's police report

Victims Compensation Services

4232 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-4232
1(800)826.6200

Resources & Recommended Websites

National Children's Alliance. "Homepage - National Children's Alliance." *National Children's Alliance*, 1 Apr. 2024, www.nationalchildrensalliance.org.

CACNC. "Who We Are." *Children's Advocacy Centers of North Carolina*, <https://cacnc.org/about/>

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina. "Positive Childhood Alliance NC | PCANC." *Positive Childhood Alliance North Carolina*, 4 Apr. 2024, <https://preventchildabusenc.org/>.

"Stop It Now." *Stop It Now*, www.stopitnow.org.

"Home | W5thpower | Support for Reporting Child Abuse in North Carolina." *W5thpower*, www.w5thpower.com.