

## Forensic Interviews at the Denver Children's Advocacy Center



Forensic interviews are of vital importance in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault and other crimes against children. When an allegation of child abuse is made, a forensic interview is the best way to gather information about the allegation.

The Denver Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) is at the heart of the multidisciplinary team that responds to allegations of child abuse and cases where children have witnessed homicide or other crimes. The program operates under an agreement with Denver Police Department, Denver District Attorney's Office, Denver Department of Human Services and Denver Health.

### **What is a forensic interview?**

A forensic interview is an objective, non-leading interview of a child conducted in a child friendly manner and setting. It is a semi-structured conversation intended to elicit detailed information about a possible event that the child may have experienced or witnessed. The interview will be recorded. The investigative team may watch the interview in a separate observation room so that they can gather evidence without the child being distracted or frightened by their presence.

### **What is the purpose of a forensic interview?**

- To obtain information from the child that may be helpful in a criminal investigation.
- To assess the safety of the child and his or her living arrangements.
- To obtain information that will either corroborate or refute the allegations or suspicions of abuse.

### **How should I prepare my child for a forensic interview?**

Parents are encouraged to prepare their child for a visit to DCAC by explaining that this is a friendly and welcoming place where children come to talk about what may have happened to them. Children should be instructed to tell the truth and that it is OK to talk with the interviewer. You should not tell your child what to say. Please do not question your child multiple times as this can traumatize the child and may also confuse the information the child gives.

### **How long will a forensic interview take?**

The length of the interview is determined by the child's needs. On average, interviews last about 30 minutes depending upon the child's age and development. Interviews with adolescents generally last longer than 30 minutes. The interviewer may take breaks and meet with other multidisciplinary team

members throughout the interview. This allows team members who are observing the interview to ask additional questions that can clarify information and reduce the number of times a child must be interviewed. As a result, all members of the multidisciplinary team obtain the information they need to proceed on behalf of the child.

### **Who will conduct the interview?**

Your child will be interviewed by one of DCAC's highly qualified and experienced interviewers, who are trained in forensics, child development, and linguistics. Our interviewers are trained to ask questions in an objective, non-leading and developmentally appropriate manner for the age of the child. Interviews may be conducted in Spanish if that is the child's most comfortable language. Interpreters are available for children speaking languages other than English or Spanish and DCAC can accommodate children with disabilities.

### **Can I watch my child's interview?**

Only the child and the interviewer are allowed in the interview room. This ensures the interview will be objective and non-threatening. Only members of the multidisciplinary team are allowed in the observation room. Team members meet with parents or caregivers after the interview to explain the process and discuss what will happen next.