

Multi-Agency Investigation & Support Team

PARENT HANDBOOK

A guide to support you
in supporting your child



Government of Western Australia
Department for Child Protection
and Family Support



**Princess Margaret
Hospital for Children**



The George Jones Child Advocacy Centre (GJCAC) is a place where professionals from different agencies including doctors, police, child protection workers, psychologists, and child and family advocates form a multi-disciplinary team to provide services to care for all the needs of your child and yourself.



The Multi Agency Investigation and Support Team (MIST) is a joint initiative based within the GJCAC staffed by Western Australia Police (WA Police), the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS), Parkerville Children and Youth Care and The Department of Health. The team was established to respond to children, young people and their families who have experienced sexual abuse.

The service is referred to as 'the Team' throughout this handbook.

The role of the team is to provide a service that brings together all of the above agencies to work towards the best interests of children who have experienced abuse and their family.

As a parent, you have an important role in helping your child recover, and there are ways to help your child and yourself through this difficult experience.

The first section of this handbook provides information on the legal and investigative processes of the criminal investigation.

The second section provides guidance on how to support your child through the legal and investigative processes, including tips on how you can access support for yourself and your family. It is important to note that not all information contained within this handbook will be relevant to your individual circumstances.

A positive response from yourself and everyone involved can make a difference to the recovery of your child.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the team on 9391 1900.



WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual abuse occurs when a child has been exposed or subjected to sexual behaviours that are exploitative and/or inappropriate to his/her age and developmental level. Examples include sexual penetration, inappropriate touching, exposure to sexual acts or pornographic materials, using the internet for grooming, and soliciting children for sexual exploitation.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse often do not use physical force, but may use play, deception, threats, or other forms of coercion to engage children and maintain their silence. Abusers frequently employ persuasive and manipulative tactics to keep the child engaged.

These tactics – referred to as “grooming” – may include buying gifts or arranging special activities, which can further confuse the victim.

PART ONE: THE LEGAL AND INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES

ABOUT THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Disclosure of child abuse will usually result in your family coming into contact with agencies you may not have had contact with before.

Family members may be in a state of shock and are trying to cope with the after effects of the disclosure, making this contact with different agencies and people confusing and overwhelming.

The following information provides a brief explanation of the role of each agency and how the legal process works.

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT (CPFS)

One of the first agencies to become involved is the Western Australian Department for Child Protection and Family Support, commonly known as CPFS.

If a report is made about your child, it is the Department’s responsibility to undertake further steps to clarify, or assess the concerns reported in relation to your child’s safety or wellbeing. The Department’s preference is to work with you to meet the safety and care needs of your child.

Your child may be interviewed by a worker from CPFS, who may conduct a child

assessment interview (CAI) if a clear disclosure has not already been made. The purpose of this interview is to make sure your child is safe.

The CPFS worker may also speak to a number of people involved with your family, and will also be able to connect you with services that can help and support you through the process.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POLICE

WA Police are responsible for conducting investigations into criminal offences that have occurred in the state of WA. WA Police will often be one of the first agencies notified when your child makes a disclosure, as sexual abuse of children is a criminal act.

Depending on the circumstances it may be that WA Police may need to speak with you, or other members of your family as part of this investigation and they may request adults provide a written statement.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Department of Health is responsible for conducting any medical examinations that your child may require. Depending on the circumstance, this may be for forensic purposes or it may be to ensure your child is healthy. Further details medical examinations are provided on page 7 of this handbook.

THE CHILD AND FAMILY ADVOCATE

The role of the advocate is to help provide a voice and support for your family across all service interactions that occur from the point you enter the centre and for as long as you require.

The advocates can support you whilst your child is being interviewed. They will be with you in a private comfortable space and can answer your questions regarding the process, who may become involved with your child and family, and provide you with information on the services available to assist your child and family.

Following the interview an advocate will be in touch to see if you want ongoing support and provide you with information outlining services available to you and your family.



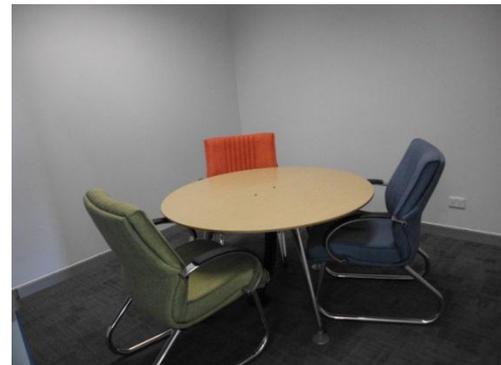
MULTI-AGENCY INVESTIGATION AND SUPPORT TEAM

The team is staffed by Western Australia Police (WA Police) detectives, CPFS child protection workers, specialist child interviewers from CPFS and WA Police, medical doctors, Parkerville child and family advocates and Parkerville psychologists.

The interviewers are specially selected for their roles – all have completed rigorous training and have regular quality assurance

assessments to maintain and develop their skills.

The team may gather information from CPFS, Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), and/or other relevant agencies to assist them in their work.



ARRANGING THE FORENSIC INTERVIEW

The specialist child interviewer who made contact with you to arrange an interview time, is usually the same officer who will meet you and your child when you arrive at the GJCAC. You will also be introduced to a child advocate when you arrive.

The interview rooms and family waiting room are designed to be welcoming and provide a safe and relaxing environment for your child.

YOUR CHILD'S INTERVIEW

The purpose of the forensic interview is to electronically record any disclosures of abuse. This can be used by the WA Police to determine what charges, if any may be laid against the alleged perpetrator.

When it is time for your child's interview, the interviewer will be introduced to you. The interview usually involves only one interviewer (either a WA Police officer or a CPFS child protection worker), however occasionally, two interviewers may be required.

The interview will usually take the form of a normal child-friendly conversation, using age-appropriate language. The interview will be video-recorded; however the recording equipment is not visible. If charges are laid, then this recording may be played in Court.

Other WA Police officers or interviewers may be listening to the interview in a separate room, to make sure that key questions are not missed.

The interview may take some time, so we thank you for your patience.

Parents are not present during the interview; however, you can meet with the interviewer before and after the interview. The interviewer will tell you what will happen next and how best to support your child.

If your child is not ready or able to talk at the interview time, another time can be arranged. No one will force your child to do anything they don't feel able to do.



SOME COMMON QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

Why can't I be present when my child is being interviewed?

Your presence during the interview is likely to inhibit or influence what your child discloses about the abuse.

Also given the legal nature of the criminal process, the defence may use your presence during the interview to undermine the child's evidence.

As a result, you may also be called as a witness to your child's interview.

How long will the interview with my child take?

This depends on how old your child is and how much information your child shares with the interviewer.

If your child has a lot to say, then additional appointments for interviews may be arranged.

Can my child choose the gender of the interviewer?

Yes. All of our interviewers are professional and compassionate, however if your child is more comfortable talking to an interviewer of a specific gender, then this will be arranged.

You can mention a preference for a male or female interviewer when you are contacted by the team for the initial interview.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO TELL THE INTERVIEWER BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

It is important that the interviewer is aware of information relating to your child's wellbeing to enable follow up services and support where necessary. If your child is engaged with community Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), please advise the interviewer so appropriate support can be facilitated for your child.

MEDICAL AND FORENSIC EXAMINATION

A medical or forensic examination will be considered to determine if physical injuries can be identified, to gather forensic evidence, and to provide for the overall safety and wellbeing of your child. Your child's medical needs are prioritised as part of the investigation.

MEDICAL AND FORENSIC SERVICES WITHIN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Princess Margaret Hospital Child Protection Unit (CPU) and the Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) are the services primarily set up in Western Australia for forensic examinations of child abuse. CPU

see children up to 16 years of age and SARC see children 13 years of age upwards.

The CPU and SARC provide medical, forensic, social work and therapeutic services. The CPU is staffed by paediatricians, social workers and therapists.

The GJCAC is able to offer some medical examinations within the centre, however, suitability of where the medical and forensic examination for your child should take place

will be discussed at the outset of the investigation and will depend on your child's individual needs.

Except in medical emergencies, a booking is required for your child to attend a medical examination.

MEDICAL CLINIC APPOINTMENT

A medical clinic appointment involves a social worker and a doctor meeting with you to discuss the concerns that you have for your child medically.

In most cases, a medical clinic appointment will include a medical examination of your child. The nature of the examination will depend on the nature of the abuse that has been disclosed, and the likelihood that physical evidence will be detected.

The appointment usually takes about an hour, but may take longer if any further testing is required, such as a blood test or an x-ray.

It is a good idea that you bring a supportive adult to the clinic appointment to look after your child while you speak with the staff.

Adolescents are given the opportunity to talk with the CPU or SARC social worker and doctor on their own if they wish.

The CPU and SARC do not conduct formal evidentiary child interviews - this responsibility lies with CPFS and/or the team.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Your child may have already had a medical examination prior to their first interview with the team.

If not, we may suggest that your child has an examination by a specially trained doctor at the CPU or SARC. You can also ask that your child be referred for this, or you can make an appointment yourself by contacting the CPU on 9340 8646 or SARC on 9340 1828.

SOME COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION

What is the purpose of the medical examination?

- To find out whether your child has any injuries.
- To make sure that all parts of your child's body are healthy.
- To determine if any medical treatment or follow-up is required.
- To collect forensic samples (in some cases) for possible criminal proceedings, this is provided to the WA Police.

The CPU/SARC doctor will record any medical findings.

Please note the doctor will not proceed with a medical examination if your child is distressed or is unwilling to be examined.

Do I need to give permission for my child to be examined?

Yes. It is preferable that a child is examined in the presence of their parent or an accompanying adult. However, if a child does not want their parent or other adult present, this will be respected.

What do I tell my child about the examination?

You should provide age appropriate information to your child. This might include explaining that the examination is a 'top to toe' health check by a doctor, who may look at their private parts, to make sure everything is

healthy and well.

You can also assure your child that you will be there with them during the examination.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CLINIC APPOINTMENT?

The CPU or SARC will pass on any relevant information to the team, and can also provide a range of therapy services to your child and family to assist with the healing process. These services can include individual, group and family therapy and are all provided free of charge.

All information about your child's involvement with CPU or SARC is treated as confidential, except in cases where there is current or ongoing risk to your child or to other children. On these occasions, referrals are made to other agencies to help keep children safe.

If there is any legal involvement, the Courts can request CPU or SARC records through a subpoena. Parents may have access to reports under Freedom of Information laws. PMH has a Freedom of Information Officer to help with this process.

CPU or SARC information will only be released if it is believed to be in the best interests of the child.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IF CHARGES ARE LAID?

Once the WA Police lay charges against an accused person, criminal court proceedings will begin.

The proceedings usually start in the Magistrates Court and then proceed to the District Court. When this happens, the Office of the Director for Public Prosecutions (ODPP) becomes responsible for the Court proceedings.

The ODPP is the independent prosecuting authority for the state of Western Australia, responsible for the prosecution of all serious offences committed against state criminal law.

If the accused person enters a plea of “guilty” at a Court appearance, they will be sentenced without the need for your child to give further evidence in court.

You can contact the WA Police investigator or local Detective at any time during the process for updates on the case.

Your child is also entitled to write a Victim Impact Statement and the Child Witness Service (CWS), see below, can support your child to write this.

CHILD WITNESS SERVICE - CWS

Once charges are laid against an accused person, your child will be referred to the CWS which is part of the Department of the Attorney General.

Referrals are normally made by the WA Police, however you can contact the CWS for help directly on 9425 2850.

The CWS can provide you and your child with detailed information about the court process. They will also keep you informed about each Court appearance made by the accused person. These early appearances are called “hearings” and do not require you or your child to be present.

The CWS will help prepare your child to give evidence in Court, will advocate to make sure your child’s individual needs are acknowledged, and will support your child on the day they give their evidence.

COURT AND TRIAL PROCESSES

If the accused person pleads “Not Guilty” your child will have to give evidence at trial. They will be prepared and supported by the Child Witness Service and their recorded interview may be used as part of their evidence and then they will be cross examined by the defence lawyer.

WHAT HAPPENS IF NO CHARGES ARE LAID?

If the team tells you and your child that they will not be charging the accused person, this does not necessarily mean that they do not believe a crime has been committed.

It is usually because they have not been able to gather enough evidence to charge the accused.

If at any time, more evidence becomes available; your child’s case may be re-opened and allocated to WA Police Detectives for further investigation.

Even if charges are not laid CPFS may still need to undertake a child protection assessment if the accused person has a caregiving role. The purpose is to ascertain the level of safety for the child or children who come into contact with the accused person,

and whether further actions need to be taken to address the issues.

SOME COMMON QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK ABOUT THE COURT AND TRIAL PROCESS

Does my child have to get a lawyer once the accused person has been charged?

No. The ODPP will allocate a prosecutor. A prosecutor is a state-appointed and state-funded lawyer whose job it is to present the state's case in a criminal trial.

The prosecutor will meet your child at least once before any trial.

Will I have to give evidence?

This will depend on the individual circumstances of the case.

You may be required to give evidence if your child disclosed the abuse to you, or if you witnessed the abuse.

The WA Police Investigator and CPFS workers involved in your child's case can be contacted at any time during this process, and they will stay in touch with you until the trial is over.

ONGOING SUPPORT AVAILABLE THROUGH THE MIST TEAM

Advocate and Therapeutic Services:

The advocate and therapeutic staff recognise that each child and family's experience will be

unique to them and their situation. At the centre staff are available to listen to your concerns and views and will assist you to identify any physical, social and emotional needs as you go through this process.



Service options available to your child and family may include:

- Ongoing supportive and therapeutic counselling
- Information and support in relation to your child's experience of trauma and how you can support them
- Answer or seek answers on your behalf for questions or queries you may have
- Liaise with services involved with your child and family
- Provide information and support referrals to local services such as counselling, parenting supports, mediation services and legal aid
- Protective behaviours parent workshops and programs
- Paediatric assessments
- Parent workshops including: the impact of trauma, helping my child and family cope, circle of security

An advocate can be made available to you or your child at any stage of this journey and can remain as a support throughout the investigation, court and healing process.

PART TWO: HELPING YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

The discovery that your child may have been sexually abused can be extremely stressful and can bring up intense feelings of shock, rage, confusion, denial, disbelief, and guilt.

Dealing with these reactions – and helping your child recover from the abuse – requires time. You may benefit from support that is offered by a range of sources including family, community, law enforcement, child protection, and mental health services.

Often parents do not know that their child is being abused, even if the abuse is occurring in their own home. If the perpetrator is a close relative, family friend, or person in authority, your child may have mixed feelings about what to do. Often the perpetrator will make threats to the child such as “the family will break up”, or “I will go to jail and it will be your fault”.

You may go through a painful period of doubting your child, particularly if the abuser is someone you love or depend on, such as a spouse, sibling or grandparent.

Some common questions which may arise include:

- How did I not notice that my child was not OK?
- How could this person I know and trust have harmed my child?
- I suspected that something was wrong – why didn't I check it out properly?
- Why didn't my child tell me what was happening (sooner)?

Sometimes children will not feel comfortable telling anyone about the abuse because they

are worried that others will not believe them or accuse them of lying.

It is important to remember that children do not usually make up stories about abuse.

Believing your child and being there for them during this difficult time is not only important, it is essential.

Don't let your natural and understandable feelings of confusion and doubt override the need to believe your child and act protectively, because your child's safety is the paramount consideration.

If you were sexually abused as a child, the discovery that your own child has been abused can bring up painful and unresolved feelings and memories. Getting help for yourself is an important part of being able to provide support for your child.

You can help your family to heal and protect and nurture your child so that he or she can grow into a healthy, successful adult.

Believe your child: Your child needs to feel that they can trust you, particularly if they have been betrayed by another adult. Once the secret is made public, it is much more difficult for the abuse to continue.

Listen to your child: Listen to what your child has to say and respect their feelings. Many children who have been abused may feel shameful, disgusting and dirty – help your child to understand that they are still beautiful inside and out and help them to increase their self-esteem.

Praise your child: For having the courage to tell you, and others what has happened. Reassure your child that they have done the right thing by disclosing the abuse.

Never, ever ask them “Why didn't you tell me (before now)”: Focus on the fact that your child has disclosed the abuse. Remember that the perpetrator may have worked hard to keep

your child silent through threats, coercion, tricks and promises.

Protect your child: Let them know they can always rely on you. Prevent any contact between your child and the alleged offender and explain to your child that they should tell you immediately if the offender attempts any contact.

Most importantly, make sure your child knows that they are not responsible for the abuse.

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR SLEEPING

Night-time fears are fairly common for children who have been sexually abused. These fears can cause younger children especially to have trouble:

- Getting to sleep at night;
- Staying in their own bed;
- Waking up throughout the night; and
- Sleeping through the night because of nightmares.

Talk to your child about their night-time fears. Some helpful questions to ask your child include:

- When do you feel scared or worried at night? (After a late night, watching TV, before going to bed?)
- How long have you been feeling scared or worried at night?
- Who are friends of night-time fears? (Children may say: “the dark”, “being alone”, “funny noises”, “scary thoughts”, etc)
- Who are the enemies of night-time fears? (Children may say: “the light, “parents”, “soothing music” etc.)

Help your child to conquer their night-time fears by:

- Leaving the bedroom door open.
- Putting a night light on.
- Drawing or painting a poster for the bedroom wall that tells night-time fears to “keep out”.
- Reading books together about conquering fears.
- Establishing a peaceful evening routine that includes, for example, a warm bath, a quiet story, and a few minutes of you sitting quietly by your child’s bed while they settle.

It can take time for your child to get over these fears, so be patient, understanding and supportive.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – SOME MYTHS AND SOME FACTS

Many of these common myths are actively promoted by perpetrators, to escape detection and/or to put the blame on others.

MYTH: Partners only abuse children when their adult partner refuses to give them enough sex, or has ‘let themselves go’.

FACT: The only person responsible for the abuse is the abuser. No one has the ‘right’ to have their sexual needs met by anyone. Many people who sexually abuse children continue to have ongoing sex with their partners or other adults, at the same time.

MYTH: Children often lie about sexual abuse.

FACT: Research indicates that children seldom lie about sexual abuse. It is important to know that children who have not been abused do not usually have explicit knowledge or intimate knowledge of sexual behaviour.

MYTH: Children hate the abuse and the abuser.

FACT: This is often very complicated. Children may hate what is being done to their bodies, while at the same time experiencing normal sexual arousal. If the abuser is known to the child, they may also experience feelings of betrayal, shame or confusion.

MYTH: Children often encourage, or allow, the sexual abuse to take place.

FACT: Not being able to stop an older person or adult is not the same as 'allowing'. The child is always the victim. The responsibility for the abuse lies solely with the perpetrator. In the case of child sexual abuse, many offenders try to shift the blame for their actions by accusing the child of being seductive or promiscuous.

MYTH: Children who have been sexually abused go on to abuse other children.

FACT: Many children who are abused do not harm children themselves when they grow up. With support and counselling many children will go on to live productive lives and parent their own children safely.

UNDERSTANDING LEGAL TERMS

Acquittal: A judge or jury finds a charged person not guilty of a crime.

Arrest: To take a person into custody under the authority of the law.

Bail: When a person is released from WA Police custody after being charged with an offence, they are often released on bail. This means they are released on the condition that they will appear in court at a later date to answer the charge(s).

Bail conditions: When a person has been charged with sexual offences against a child they will almost always have conditions put on

their bail forbidding any contact with the child; and sometimes forbidding contact with any children under 16 years. If they break bail conditions they can be re-arrested.

Beyond reasonable doubt: The highest standard of proof known to the law and the standard to which the prosecution in a criminal trial must prove that an offence has occurred before an accused can be convicted of that offence.

Complaint: A specific statement of the crime for which a person is accused. When a person is charged with a crime, this begins the opening of a criminal case, and the beginning of the legal process.

Complainant: The person (child or adult victim) against whom the alleged offence has been committed.

Defendant/accused: The person accused of a crime in a criminal case.

Defence lawyer: The lawyer who represents the accused person in court.

District Court: The Court which tries serious offences such as sexual assault or robbery. Almost all sexual offences against children are heard by a Judge and jury in the District Court.

Evidence: Statements made by a witness under oath during legal proceedings.

Hearing: A Court date to determine what will happen next in the court process. There may be many hearing dates between charges being laid and the commencement of a Criminal trial.

Hung jury: When a jury cannot decide whether a person is guilty or not guilty.

Jury: A panel of citizens who look at evidence and determine the outcome of a trial.

Juvenile: A person under the age of 18 years.

Prosecute: To take the case to trial.

Prosecutor: A person (lawyer) who starts the prosecution of a crime in the name of the government.

Supreme Court: The Court which tries the most serious offences, including murder.

Suspended sentence: A sentence given after the formal conviction of a crime that the convicted person is not required to serve.

Summons/subpoena: An order issued by a Judge that instructs a person to appear in court, or to bring documents to a Court proceeding.

Trial: A legal proceeding that is open to the public and overseen by a Judge. A trial occurs when a defendant pleads “not guilty” to a criminal charge.

Visually Recorded Interview (VRI): A recorded interview of a child complainant disclosing sexual or physical abuse. A VRI can also feature an interview with a child about another child experiencing sexual or physical abuse.

PHONE COUNSELLING:

Family Helpline	9223 1100
Kids Helpline www.kidshelp.com.au	1800 551 800
Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au	13 11 14
Mensline Australia www.menslineaus.org.au	1300 789 978
Parenting Line and Parent Help Centre	1800 654 432
Salvo's Care Line (24 Hrs Crisis Counselling)	9227 8655

SERVICES PROVIDED FREE OF CHARGE:

Anglicare Child Sexual Abuse Therapy Service www.anglicarewa.com.au	9394 9200
Child Protection Unity Therapy Service, Princess Margaret Hospital -	9340 8646
George Jones Child Advocacy Centre – Armadale	9391 1900
Parents and Children's Therapeutic Service – Mirrabooka	9349 9180
Wheatbelt Therapeutic Family Services – Northam	9622 8371
Manguri Aboriginal Family Counselling Service	9350 6735
Ruah Community Services	9485 3939
Sexual Assault and Referral Centre (13+ years)	9340 1828
Yorgum Aboriginal Counselling Service	9218 9477

FEE ACCORDING TO USERS INCOME:

Centacare	9325 6644
Incest Survivors Association www.isa.asn.au	9227 8745
Lynks - YMCA (counselling for 15-25 year olds) www.perth.ymca.org.au	9328 3522
Spectrum Counselling (victims and perpetrators of sexual assault)	9480 5724

OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS:

Child Protection Unit, Princess Margaret Hospital	9340 8646
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