

# Medical evaluation

The medical evaluation serves the purpose of detecting traumatic or infective disorders which may require treatment, collecting forensic evidence and reassuring the child in order to begin the process of recovery. Medical Services are available to all Dakota Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) clients .

## Making a referral

Referrals must be made by law enforcement, social services or a medical provider. It is critical that the caregiver be informed about the process before arrival at the DCAC. Let them know the process takes approximately 90 minutes. In addition, caregivers are urged to talk with their children to tell them what to expect. The child can be told, "You are going to see a special doctor who is going to check your whole body to make sure it's OK. They are going to listen to your heart and lungs and check everywhere there is skin."

There is really nothing that needs to be done to prepare for the evaluation. However, if the sexual abuse occurred within the past 72 hours, it is recommended that the child victim does not bathe or brush their teeth until after the medical evaluation is completed. There may be times where the child's clothing will be collected. Caregivers are welcome to be in the room with the child, **if that is the child's preference**. While most children want their caregivers with them during an evaluation, some children, especially teenagers, prefer privacy. The medical evaluations are specifically tailored to the nature of the allegation and sensitive to each child's emotional and physical state.

## When is a medical evaluation needed?

Any child who discloses abuse needs a medical evaluation by a specialized provider. Regardless of how long ago the assault occurred, it is important that child receive a check up to ensure they are healthy. It is also important that child attend all follow-up appointments. Timely evaluations are particularly important for sexual abuse that occurred within the past 72 hours. In these cases, the medical provider may use a special kit to obtain evidence gathered during the evaluation if appropriate.



## The medical evaluation process

Prior to the evaluation, a staff member will show the patient and family the evaluation room and will discuss any questions about the process. At this point, the patient and family can relay any pertinent information regarding the child's feelings, emotional/ mental development, language skills or special needs (including medication) to the medical professional. The medical professional will meet with the child and caregiver to take a complete history and evaluation. Tests may also be conducted to yield additional information or evidence. The medical provider may use a colposcope during the evaluation. A colposcope will simply magnify the area to allow for photo documentation of the evaluation. The child may be referred for treatment , if necessary. The medical provider will discuss the results of the evaluation with the caregiver and age-appropriate child, and may schedule a follow-up appointment if necessary.

An advocate will contact the family prior to their medical exam to answer any questions they may have and to give them important information about coming to the center. **When scheduling an appointment for the family, please let the DCAC know if it is OK to contact them directly.**



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