



Considerations for Child Abuse Investigations

NCJTC promotes working together with child advocacy centers as part of a multidisciplinary team approach in your community.*

After Receiving a Referral

- Always consider the possibility of child abuse and talk with children at the scene when responding to a domestic dispute.
- Identify any personal or professional biases you may have with child abuse cases.
- Develop the ability to desensitize yourself to those issues and remain objective.
- Understand your department's guidelines and state statutes.
- Know the investigative resources that are available within your department or the law enforcement community (e.g., medical examiner's office, child protection team personnel, forensic interviewers).
- Know what resources are available to the victim and family in the community (e.g., therapy, victim compensation) and provide this information to them.
- Introduce yourself to the victim and other team members present. Explain your role and the focus and objective of the investigation.
- Ensure the best treatment is provided for the protection of the child.
- Schedule a forensic interview with a trained professional.

Obtaining Information for the Preliminary Report

- Inquire about the history of the abusive situation. An accurate timeline of events is crucial to the successful investigation and prosecution of all types of child maltreatment.*

- Obtain any elements of the crime necessary for the report.
- Inquire about the instrument of abuse or other items at the scene. Check the scene for potential instruments of abuse.
- Do not discount children's statements about who is abusing them, where and how the abuse is occurring, or what types of acts occurred.*
- Highlight the atmosphere of disclosure and the mood and demeanor of participants in the complaint.

Preserving the Crime Scene

- Treat the scene as a crime scene (even if the abuse occurred in the past) and not as the site of a social problem.*
- Secure the instrument of abuse or other corroborative evidence that the child identifies at the scene.
- Photograph the scene in detail from all angles of each room.
- Photograph injuries noted on the victim; always include a scale in the photographs.
- Rephotograph injuries as needed to capture any changes in their appearance.

Conducting a Follow-up Investigation

- Be supportive of the child and family.
- Arrange for a medical examination and transportation to the hospital. Collect a change of clothes for the victim, if needed.
- Use appropriate investigative techniques.*

- Ensure that the child and family are linked to support services or therapy.
- Provide your contact information so that the family can report further information, if necessary.
- Contact other agencies, such as child protective services, as appropriate.

During the Court Phase

- Bring the child to court before the first hearing to familiarize him or her with the courtroom setting and atmosphere. The prosecutor or a victim/witness service provider may assume this task.
- Prepare courtroom exhibits (e.g., pictures, displays, sketches) to support the child's testimony.
- File all evidence in accordance with state and court policy.
- Update family members (other than those who are suspects) about the status and progress of the investigation and maintain contact with them throughout the court process. Use caution when providing information to the family because they may share it with others.*
- Provide court results and case closure information to the child and family.
- Follow up with the probation department to prepare the presentence report and victim impact statements.

*** For advanced training and skillsets, contact the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC).**

U.S. Department of Justice. (2014). *Law Enforcement Response to Child Abuse*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/243907.pdf>