



Caregiver Handbook



www.safespotwilkes.org

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Wilkesboro, NC 28697
(336) 838-9169

Non-Discrimination Statement

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Caregiver Handbook

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Welcome

Your child is being served by Safe Spot Child Advocacy Center because of concerns about possible abuse. We are...

- **PEOPLE** from different professions working together to help children.
- A safe, child friendly **PLACE** for children and families to get help.
- A **PROCESS** to help ensure justice and healing for children.

We will...

- Do our best to find out what happened.
- Help you understand the child protection and legal systems.
- Help keep the investigation on track.
- Help your child and your family heal.

Please call us at (336) 838-9169 any time you have questions or concerns.

Cindy Hartley

Executive Director, Safe Spot Child Advocacy Center

Meet Your Team of Professionals

In Wilkes County, a team of professionals works together to assure justice and help children heal after abuse.

The Law Enforcement Officer

Local law enforcement agencies have special investigators who gather evidence and conduct interviews with suspects and witnesses.



- North Wilkesboro Police Department, (336) 838-3158
- Wilkes County Sheriff's Office, (336) 903-7600
- Wilkesboro Police Department, (336) 667-7277

The Social Worker

Social workers from the Department of Social Services investigate reports of child abuse and neglect involving parents and other caregivers. Their goal is to keep children safe. They gather

information, develop safety plans and refer families to needed services.

- Wilkes County DSS, (336) 651-7490

The Interviewer

Safe Spot has several trained forensic interviewers. One of them may speak with your child one-on-one at the center. The interviewer will ask non-leading questions to find out exactly what happened to your child. This information will help the team know how to help your child. Information from the interview will also be used if the investigation leads to criminal prosecution of the offender. (Find out more about the interview on page 7.)

The Family Advocate

Safe Spot's family advocate will help link you and your child to counseling and other needed services. When you have questions about what is going on with your child's case, our advocate will help you get answers.

The Medical Examiner

A medical exam may be recommended for your child. Medical exams are provided by an experienced specialist at Brenner



Children's Hospital in Winston-Salem. The medical examiner will check your child's general health and look for injuries. The exam is not invasive or painful. The medical examiner will help you understand the findings of the exam and recommend follow-up care if needed. (Find out more about the medical exam on page 9.)

The Therapist

Jodi
Province
Counseling
Services is



Safe Spot's therapy partner. They have therapists in their Wilkesboro and Elkin offices who are specially trained to help children heal after abuse. Your child's therapist will conduct a trauma assessment to find out how the abuse may have affected your child. After the

assessment, the therapist will use an evidence-based treatment program to help your child recover. This help is available at no cost to you. Counseling is also available for non-offending family members. (Find out more about how counseling helps children heal on page 19.)

- Jodi Province Counseling Services, (336) 818-0733

The District Attorney

The District Attorney's office makes the final decision about whether charges will be filed in a criminal investigation. Many factors are



considered to determine the likelihood of a successful prosecution. If the case is accepted for prosecution, an assistant district attorney will

be assigned. The assistant district attorney and other members of the team help will help your child prepare for court if needed. Safe Spot's family advocate and the victim-witness legal assistant in the District Attorney's office will help you understand the legal process.

- 23rd District Attorney's Wilkes Office, (336) 651-4410

Steps in the Investigation

A report is made to law enforcement or DSS. Sometimes both agencies are involved and they will share information.

Your child may be interviewed at Safe Spot. Your child may also be referred for a medical exam.

DSS evaluates your child's safety in the home, and decides whether the allegations are substantiated.

Your child may be referred for counseling.

The Multidisciplinary Team regularly reviews the case to keep the investigation on track and be sure your child gets needed services.

The law enforcement investigator conducts additional interviews, gathers more information.

The criminal case is received by the DA's Office. Criminal charges are filed, or the case is closed due to lack of evidence. If charges are filed, you may be asked to complete a Victim Impact Statement.

Members of the team will help you and your child if the case goes to trial.

Counseling will continue as recommended by the therapist.

The Interview

As a part of the investigation process, your child may be interviewed at Safe Spot. Here's what you need to know about the interview.

The Interview Is One-on-One

Your child will be interviewed one-on-one by a trained interviewer in the interview room. You will not be allowed in the room once the interview has begun. This is to assure your child's responses are free and unbiased.

The Interviewer Will Make Sure Your Child Is Comfortable

You and your child will meet the interviewer together, and you will be able to visit the interview room before the interview starts. The interviewer will take time to be sure your child is comfortable without you. Your child will know you are close by, and will be told that you are available if needed.

The Interview Will Be Recorded

The interview room has a camera, and the interview will be recorded. Investigators will observe from another room. This is done to reduce the number of interviews your child must go through. The recording of the interview is considered evidence and cannot be released to you or anyone else outside the investigation.

How to Prepare Your Child

Children are put at ease when they know what to expect in the interview. Be calm and reassuring. Tell your child:

- “Someone wants to talk with you about what was reported.”
- “You are not in trouble.”
- “Speak freely and tell the truth.”

What NOT to Do Before the Interview

- Please do not rehearse the interview with your child.
- Do not tell your child what to say or not say in the interview.

The Medical Exam

We may recommend that your child may have a visit with our medical partners at Brenner Children's Hospital. Here's what you need to know about the medical exam.

Why Do the Medical Exam?

- The medical exam is done to be sure your child is healthy. The visit can be reassuring to you and your child.
- The exam is part of the abuse investigation.

What Happens in the Medical Visit

1. The Caregiver Interview

The medical examiner will talk with you privately before she sees your child. She will ask you questions about how your child is doing. You know your child best, so be sure to tell her about any concerns you have about your child's physical or emotional health. The

medical examiner will also tell you about the examination process and answer any questions you may have.

2. The Child Interview

After the medical examiner talks with you, she will talk with your child. She will ask your child questions. She will also tell your child what will happen next and address any concerns your child may have.

The talks the medical examiner has with you and your child are a very important part of the medical evaluation. We encourage you and your child to share information, express concerns and ask questions.

3. The Physical Exam

Next comes the physical exam. It's a head-to-toe exam. During this part of your child's visit, the medical examiner will assess your child's overall health and look for any physical signs of abuse. She will also look for any conditions that might be confused for abuse or neglect.

The physical exam will include an examination of your child’s anogenital area. This is not an internal exam and is not painful.

4. Results and Recommendations

After the physical exam, the medical examiner will talk with you about the results of the exam and answer your questions. She will share her recommendations for follow-up care. In some cases, your child may be referred for further tests.

What to Tell Your Child about the Medical Exam



Let your child know what to expect in the medical exam. Be calm and reassuring. Tell your child:

- “We want to be sure you are healthy.”
- “You will have a head-to-toe exam like you get when you go to the doctor.”
- “There are no shots, and it won’t hurt.”
- “You can ask questions and share any concerns you may have.”

What Is Trauma?

Trauma can occur when a child or teen experiences something that is extremely distressing.

Physical abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to violence, loss of a loved one, accidents and disasters all can be traumatic to a child.

Bad Experiences Affect Different Children in Different Ways

Some children are immediately affected after going through a traumatic event. Others may seem fine at first, but will show signs of distress later. And some children are able to cope after a crisis with little emotional or physical distress.

Even if your child seems just fine now, please be alert to the signs of distress on pages 13 and 14, and seek help for your child if needed. Safe Spot offers free therapy for children and non-offending family members.

Signs of Trauma

As a parent or caregiver, you know your child best. If you have you seen any of these changes in your child, please let us know...we're here to help!

Changes in Eating

- Change in appetite
- Upset stomach

Changes in Sleeping

- Nightmares
- Can't fall asleep, stay asleep
- Not wanting to sleep alone

Changes at School

- Change in school performance
- Avoids school, fakes sickness
- Trouble concentrating

Emotional Changes

- Tearful
- Clingy
- Fearful even in safe situations

*Trauma signs
are often
misunderstood
when the
traumatic
event is a
secret*

- Irritable
- Angry

Changes in Thinking

- Can't stop thinking about what happened
- Suicidal thoughts
- Unable to recall any details of what happened
- Flashbacks

Behavior Changes

- Jumpy, nervous
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Risky and rebellious behaviors
- Withdrawal from others
- Re-enacts the trauma through play

How to Help Your Child Heal

You will play a vital role in your child's recovery from abuse. Here are some tips to help you support your child in tough times.

Face Up to the Problem

Well-meaning adults sometimes pressure children to forget traumatic events. This can cause bigger problems down the road. Ignoring the hurt won't make it go away. Be sure your child gets needed services as soon as possible...your child is depending on you.

Don't Overreact

Your child will look to you to know how to react. If you let anger, fear or disgust take over, you will be sending a negative message to your child. It's perfectly OK to have these feelings, but not in front of your child.

Assure Safety and Security

Keep your child away from the alleged offender. Stay close and reassure your child as needed.

Keep a consistent schedule, and promote healthy eating and sleeping habits. Routines help kids feel safe.



Say the Right Things to Your Child

Abusers often confuse children into thinking that *they* did something to cause the abuse. Here are some powerful messages your child needs to hear from you now.

*I believe
you.*

*It's not
your fault.*

*I'm sorry this
happened to
you.*

*I'm upset,
but not
with you.*

*Nothing about YOU made this
happen. It's happened to
other kids too.*

Teach Your Child Body Safety Rules

Rule One: It's Your Body!

Tell your child, “No one has the right to force you or trick you so they can touch your private body parts, or to force you or trick you to touch theirs. Touching on the parts of the body covered by a swimsuit is called sexual abuse.”

Rule Two: Follow Your Feelings

“If you get the ‘uh oh feeling’...feel confused, scared or sick...tell me or another adult you trust.”

Rule Three: It's OK to Say “No!”

“You are special and have the right to be safe. If anybody tries to hurt you or touch your private body parts, say ‘No!’ and get away.”

Rule Four: If Something's Wrong, Tell Someone

“Tell and tell until someone believes you. If you can’t tell me, there are other adults you can tell.”

Rule Five: Abuse Is Never Your Fault!

“It is never, ever a child’s fault if they are sexually abused.”

These rules are adapted from the Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® curriculum.

Ways to Help Keep Your Child Safe

- Provide proper supervision. Know as much as you can about your child’s activities and friends.
- Listen to your child. If he or she does not want to be with a particular person, find out why.
- Be aware of changes in your child’s behavior and attitudes. Be approachable and listen!

How Counseling Can Help

Good news! Children don't have to be haunted by traumatic events. There are proven therapies to help children bounce back from abuse, and help is available close to home. Here's how counseling can help your child.

Therapy Helps You Know How Your Child is Doing Right Now

Therapy begins with an assessment of how your child is doing in the “here and now”. Your observations are very important as the therapist seeks to understand how trauma may have affected your child. As therapy goes on, the therapist will track your child’s symptoms and will change treatment as needed to help your child heal.

Therapy Helps Your Child Open Up

In treatment, your child will have an opportunity to share personal thoughts and feelings privately in a safe, supportive setting.

Therapy Helps Your Child Heal

During the counseling process, your child's brain will replace traumatic memories with more helpful thoughts. Over time, the traumatic event will lose its impact on your child.

Here are some other benefits of therapy:

- Your child will learn how to identify, express and manage feelings.
- Your child will learn how to replace negative thoughts with more helpful ones.
- Your child will learn how to prevent a similar situation from happening again.

Therapy Is Good for You Too

By participating in your child's sessions, you'll learn how to improve family communication,

and you'll get to discuss how you feel about what your child is going through.

Counseling Q&A



How long will my child need counseling?

Length of time in counseling varies. Your child's therapist will assess your child's needs, develop a treatment plan and periodically review the progress your child is making.

How can I help?

You know your child best. Let the therapist know how your child is doing, and share any changes, good or bad, in your child's day-to-day functioning.

You may be invited to participate in therapy with your child from time to time. Be sure to participate if you're invited.

Taking Good Care of Yourself

Finding out that your child has been abused can be difficult. Here are some tips to help you take good care of yourself now.

Coping Comes in Stages

You may experience many different emotions as you deal with what has happened.

- **Denial.** It may be hard to accept that someone has hurt your child. At times it may seem like a bad dream.
- **Anger.** You may feel angry at the abuser, at yourself, even at your child.
- **Betrayal.** Oftentimes, the abuser is someone your child liked, loved or lived with. You may feel upset that you trusted someone who hurt your child.
- **Grief.** Sadness, fatigue and a sense of loss may set in.

All these feelings are normal, but they should pass with time. You should seek help if you feel like you are “stuck.”

Don't Play the “Blame Game”

It's normal to look back and think about things you could have done differently to prevent what has happened. You may be blaming yourself or your child for the abuse, but put responsibility where it belongs...on the abuser.

Express Your Feelings

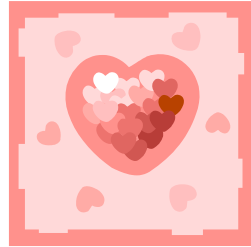
Turn to adults you can trust and express your feelings. All of us at Safe Spot are here for you when you need to talk. It's good to talk about it...but *not* to your child.

Focus on What You Can Control

You can't do anything about what's already happened, but you *can* control what you do going forward. Focus on how you can make things better for yourself and your child.

Take Good Care of Yourself

Eat right, get plenty of rest and find healthy ways to keep your stress level under control. Take a walk, spend time with a friend, watch a movie or do something else just for you. Taking good care of yourself isn't selfish...it helps you stay strong for your child.



Safety First

You may fear the offender will try to harm you or your child. We can help you make a safety plan and assist you with a protective order to help you feel safe.

Deal with Your Own Past

Millions of adults in the U.S. were abused as children. If you are an abuse survivor, your child's experience may bring up unpleasant memories from long ago. We encourage you to seek help if you feel overwhelmed by issues from your past.

Be Patient...Healing Takes Time

Recovery after abuse takes time. If the courts are involved in your case, expect delays. It can take years for a case to be resolved.

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Anger, second guessing and family infighting won't help. Keep your eye on the ball...the safety and well-being of your child.

Your support is the single most important factor affecting your child's recovery

Consider Counseling and Support Group

Many adults in your situation have found it helpful to consult with a counselor. If you want help for yourself, let us know. We can refer you to caring counselors and help you with the cost if you are unable to pay. Safe Spot also offers a free parent support group.

What to Say to Others

One challenge you and your family may face is what to say to others about the abuse. Here are some tips to help you handle this difficult situation.

Privacy Is Important

You have the right to ask people not to discuss this topic with others. If you think someone won't honor this request, don't tell them anything. Do not discuss the situation on social media or respond to anyone who does.



It's Your Call Who to Tell

You don't "owe it" to anyone to explain what has happened to your child. Share this

information only with people who need to know. If you know someone will react in an unhelpful way, it's OK not to tell them.

It Helps to Have a Response Ready

"I'd rather not talk about it" is a very acceptable answer. Other possible responses include:

- "I appreciate your concern."
- "This has been a very difficult time for all of us."
- "Thank you for respecting our privacy."

Prepare Your Child

Adults and peers may ask your child about what happened. Here's how you can help:

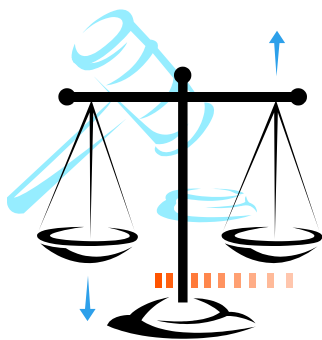
- Explain to your child that there is no shame in being a victim. Abuse is *never* a child's fault.
- If someone expresses concern, teach your child to respond with a simple "Thank you."
- Tell your child it's OK not to talk about it. One response: "My mom and dad told me not to talk about it right now."
- Let your child know that it's OK to talk to law enforcement officers, social workers, counselors and other adults who are here to help.

What You Need to Know About the Legal Process

Many, but not all, cases of child abuse result in criminal prosecution of the offender. Here are some things you need to know about the legal process.

It Takes Time

It can take months, even years, for a criminal case to be completed. Expect delays.



Not All Offenders Are Charged

Before a case can go trial, the prosecution must have evidence that a child was abused,

and be able to prove who did it. Sometimes when abuse has taken place, a criminal charge cannot be filed because there isn't enough evidence or the child is too young to testify.

It's About Justice, Not Healing

Sometimes the opportunity to testify is an empowering experience for a child, even if the abuser is not convicted. In other cases, talking about the abuse can be upsetting. Either way, the legal system's focus is on the guilt or innocence of the accused, *not* your child's recovery. If your child has to testify, members of our team will help your child get ready.

How You Can Help

- Be sure the investigator and district attorney's office have your current phone number and address.
- Submit the Victim Impact Statement promptly. Safe Spot's family advocate can help you with this.

Your Child's Recovery Can't Wait on the Outcome of the Case

You will have no control over whether the case goes to trial, how long it might take to complete or what the final outcome will be. Focus on the things you *can* control...like making sure your child feels safe and supported.

Crime Victim Compensation



The N.C. Victims Compensation Services Program reimburses citizens who suffer medical expenses and lost wages as a result of being an innocent victim of a crime committed in North Carolina. Victims of rape, assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and drunk driving, as well as the families of homicide victims are eligible to apply for financial help.

Since 1987, Victims Compensation Services has assisted innocent victims and their families to heal 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 or stolen property or for pain and suffering.

While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this aid can be crucial in the recovery process. By paying for care that restores victims' physical and mental health, and by replacing lost income for victims who cannot work and for families who lose a breadwinner, the program helps victims regain their lives and their financial stability.

Who Is Eligible?

Except as excluded by law, a claim may be payable to:

- The innocent victim; or
- The dependent of a deceased innocent victim, such as a child, spouse; or
- A legal representative of an innocent victim; or
- A third person who provided benefit to the victim or his/her family other than in the course or scope of his employment, business or profession.

Who Is Not Eligible?

- The offender
- A victim who is participating in criminal activity or contributory misconduct
- A victim who is a prisoner in any state, county or city confinement facility

How Much Can Be Paid?

A maximum of \$30,000 may be paid for any award for medical expenses related to treatment of injuries as a result of the crime. A maximum of \$5,000 may be paid for funeral expenses when the victim dies as a result of the crime. Benefits for approved claims are paid directly to a service provider with the exception of out-of-pocket expenses paid by the victim or claimant.

Compensation is reduced or denied if the expense can be recouped by any other source, including, but not limited to health insurance, auto or disability insurance, public funds such as Medicaid, worker's compensation, or restitution paid by an offender.

Keep Tabs on Offenders with N.C. SAVAN

N.C. SAVAN is a free automated system to help you keep track of an offender's custody status before and after trial.



The system tracks offenders in N.C. county jails and the N.C. Department of Corrections.

Once you are registered, SAVAN will let you know if there is a change in the offender's custody, parole or probation status. You can choose to receive offender notifications through automated telephone calls or e-mail notifications. (The e-mail option provides the most complete information.) There is also a free smart phone app called VINEmobile for Apple and Android phones.

The offender will not know you are registered with N.C. SAVAN.

Call 877-NC SAVAN, (877-627-2826), to learn about an offender's status and register for offender notification. You can also register for this service online at www.ncsavan.org. Safe Spot's family advocate can help you sign up.

North Carolina Crime Victim Resources

Victim Compensation Services

(800) 826-6200

www.ncdps.gov

N.C. SAVAN

(877) 627-2826

www.ncsavan.org

Legal Aid of North Carolina

(919) 856-2564

www.legalaidnc.org

North Carolina Victim Assistance Network

(800) 348-5068

www.nc-van.org

Web Resources

Safe Spot website

www.safespotwilkes.org

At our website, you and your child can take a virtual tour of the center, meet our staff and find out more about our services. You'll also find links to all the websites on this page and many more!

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers

There's great advice here for parents and tons of free information you can download and share with your child.

Helpguide

www.helpguide.org

Learn about mental and emotional health conditions and find ways to live a healthier life.

Stop It Now!

www.stopitnow.org

Stop It Now has free sexual abuse prevention information for parents and organizations that care for kids. Stop It Now also has an online help center and advice service.

How to Find Us



Safe Spot is located just off School Street at 1260 College Avenue, Suite 5, Wilkesboro, NC

Directions from US 421 Northbound

- Take Exit 286-B (NC 268 Wilkesboro exit).
- Turn left at the foot of the exit ramp.
- Turn left at the first traffic light onto School Street.
- Drive 4/10 mile. Turn right onto College Avenue at the UPS sign.
- Go around the sharp curve. Safe Spot will be on your right.

Directions from US 421 Southbound

- Take Exit 286-B (NC 268 Wilkesboro exit).
- Go straight at the foot of the ramp onto School Street.
- Drive 4/10 mile. Turn right onto College Avenue at the UPS sign.
- Go around the sharp curve. Safe Spot will be on your right.

Please Call Us... We're Here to Help!

Child Protection

- Wilkes County DSS, (336) 651-7490

Law Enforcement

- North Wilkesboro Police Department, (336) 838-3158
- Wilkes County Sheriff's Office, (336) 903-7600
- Wilkesboro Police Department, (336) 667-7277

Prosecution

- District Attorney's Office, (336) 651-4410

Mental Health

- Jodi Province Counseling Services PLLC, (336) 818-0733



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