

## **When Child Sexual Abuse is Suspected**

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents/Caregivers

### **1. Why should my child have a medical exam?**

- The medical exam is an important part of the overall evaluation of possible sexual abuse. It can find both new and old injuries, test for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and sometimes collect evidence of sexual contact.
- Children and teens may worry about their bodies following sexual abuse. This exam should help answer questions your child may have. The exam can ease any worries that your child or you may have about their body.

### **2. Why can't my family physician/pediatrician do the exam? My child knows that physician and their office.**

- This exam requires special knowledge and skills concerning sexual abuse.
- There is a need to document the exam findings with a camera.
- If the matter comes to court, it helps to have an expert to testify.

### **3. My child told me about what happened. The last time they were touched was a long time ago. Is there still a need for an exam?**

- Yes. Even though the abuse may have happened long ago, your child may still worry about their body being normal or "damaged."
- Sometimes injuries heal in ways that can still provide evidence of the abuse.

### **4. Will I be able to be with my child throughout the physical exam?**

- Yes. We want you to be there to comfort your child.
- Some teens prefer privacy and we will respect their choice.

### **5. Will this examination be uncomfortable for my child?**

- The Maryland Child Abuse Medical Professionals (CHAMP) program trains medical providers to appropriately examine children. We understand this examination may be difficult or awkward for a child. We will talk to the child and make every effort to put them at ease. We will never force an exam.

### **6. What will the exam involve?**

- First, a general head to toe exam will be done. Sometimes problems related to abuse are found in other parts of the body. Unrelated medical problems may also be found.

- Then, a careful exam of the genital and anal areas is done.
- Most exams can be done externally, without putting anything into the internal genitals. No Pap smear is needed.
- The examination of the anus only involves looking at the outside.

**7. Will the medical provider be able to tell if my child was abused?**

- Most children who have been abused have normal exams.
- Occasionally, physical or laboratory findings will confirm the diagnosis of sexual abuse.
- It is important to know that even when the exam is normal, this does not mean that abuse could not have happened. The abuse may not have caused any injury. And, even if there was an injury, it may have fully healed without any scars.
- What your child says about what happened is the most important part.

**8. What if my child has a STI?**

- We will contact you with the results and recommendations for treatment.

**9. Will the medical provider provide a written report about the findings to Child Protective Services and law enforcement?**

- Yes

**10. What happens after the exam? Can the medical provider help me deal with my child's mental health needs?**

- Yes. The medical provider or CPS worker can help find a therapist for your child. Going through this process can be also hard for parents/caregivers. You may also want a referral for professional support.

**11. Who pays for the medical evaluation?**

- This is covered by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services and the Maryland Department of Health Laboratory. You do not need to pay for the exam or STI tests. However, you or your insurance may be billed for follow-up care, like repeat STI testing, and medications.