

When Sexual Abuse Is
Suspected: Common Concerns
About the Medical Exam





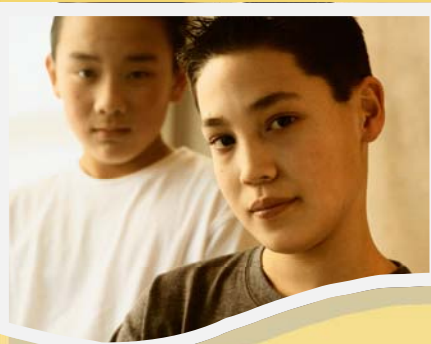
The CARES Institute is a specialized facility that provides both medical and mental health examinations and treatment for children suspected of experiencing sexual abuse.

Our pediatricians are specialists who:

- Are sensitive and caring to children and their caregivers;
- Understand the unique needs of children who might have been sexually abused;
- Have special training to sensitively examine children who might have experienced sexual abuse;
- Use state of the art techniques to talk to and examine children.

Examinations:

- Can reassure the child and caregivers about the child's well being;
- May help understand what the child may have experienced;
- May identify medical issues after the abuse;
- Provide an opportunity for the child and caregivers to ask questions and discuss concerns;
- Provide an opportunity to learn about normal child and adolescent development



The following information will help answer questions that parents often have about the medical exam. Institute doctors and our pediatric nurse are always available to answer any specific concerns that are not addressed below.

Frequently asked questions:

1. Why does my child have to get a medical exam?

Your child has been referred to CARES for a medical examination to help address any health concerns because of possible inappropriate experiences. Children and adolescents often express worries about their bodies following sexual abuse. The physical exam will address concerns about your child's health and well-being, will identify any injuries that might be present, test for sexually transmitted infections and collect physical evidence of sexual contact when indicated.

2. What will happen at this appointment?

First, the pediatrician will meet with you, the parent/caregiver, to explain what will happen, review the child's past medical history, answer questions and hear your concerns regarding what your child might have experienced. The pediatrician will then meet separately with your child to talk about the sexual abuse they might have experienced and any worries or concerns they might have. Then the pediatrician will conduct a head-to-toe physical exam of the child with the parent/caregiver or an assistant in the room. Finally, the pediatrician will review the examination results with you, discuss any follow-up recommendations, and answer any additional questions.



3. What if it happened a long time ago; does my child still need an exam?

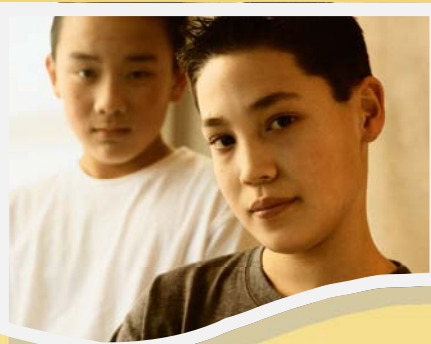
All children can benefit from an exam regardless of when the last incident occurred. A very important part of the appointment is helping your child express what happened to them. The exam is conducted in a way that can be reassuring and therapeutic for your child by addressing worries and concerns they have about their body. Some children have injuries that have healed but are still able to be seen.

4. Will this exam be uncomfortable for my child?

The physical exam should not cause any physical discomfort for the child. Our pediatricians understand the fears and worries that children may have when going to the doctor. The physical exam affirms for children that every part of their body is important. We make every effort to explain exactly what will happen as well as answer all their questions to address any worries. We want the physical exam to be a positive experience for your child. The parent/caretaker or assistant will be there during the exam to comfort the child as well.

5. Is this exam the same as an exam done by a gynecologist?

For girls who have not got their period yet, the genital exam is an external only look and does not involve the use of a speculum. For girls who have started their periods, the exam typically does not involve the use of a speculum. However, on rare occasions, there may be the need to use a speculum that is especially made for young females.



6. Why can't my family doctor/pediatrician or gynecologist do the exam? My child is comfortable with that doctor and is familiar with their office.

The exam is best done by someone who has both the experience in caring for children suspected of being sexually abused and the special skills necessary to examine your child and document findings. CARES pediatricians have been specially trained in how to examine children who might have experienced sexual abuse.

7. Will the doctor be able to tell if there was vaginal or anal penetration?

There are many types of inappropriate sexual contact a child may have experienced, which might include touching, fondling, oral contact and vaginal or anal penetration. There may or may not be physical findings resulting from inappropriate sexual contact that a doctor can see on your child's physical exam, even when vaginal or anal penetration has occurred. Several factors must be considered, such as the child's age and stage of puberty, the timing of the incident(s), and the body's capacity to heal. Even when the last contact was a long time ago, the doctor will be able to provide helpful information addressing any concerns about a child's physical well-being.



8. How is the exam of a boy different from that of a girl?

Boys have many of the same concerns that girls do when touched inappropriately. Boys are examined with the same sensitivity and concern for their well-being. Their exam includes identifying injuries to the penis and/or anus, evaluating for sexually transmitted infections and the collection of physical evidence when indicated.

9. Will my child be sedated for the exam?

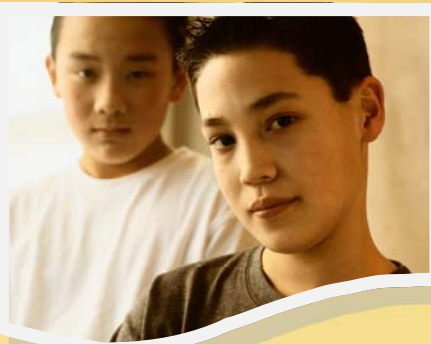
No. Children are never sedated for the exam. Some children are emotionally not ready for the exam. If this happens, the exam will be delayed until the child is ready. An exam will only be done with the consent and cooperation of the child and the child's legal guardian.

10. Will they test my child for sexually transmitted infections?

Each child is assessed individually for the need to test for sexually transmitted infections. Fortunately, the likelihood of a child contracting a sexually transmitted infection is quite low.

11. Will the child abuse pediatrician testify in court if needed?

Yes. Our pediatricians will testify in any civil or criminal matter as required.



12. Will the doctor provide a written report to DCP&P and law enforcement about their findings?

After seeing your child, a full and detailed report will be completed. This report will recommend next steps in addressing any continued medical care and appropriate mental health assessment and treatment services.

13. What happens after the exam? Can the CARES Institute help me deal with my child's mental health needs?

Although addressing the medical concerns of your child is very important, it is equally important that your child see a mental health specialist who can help your child recover from the sexual abuse. The Institute has professionals who evaluate and treat children and adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse, as well as help parents deal with their child's experience.

The CARES Institute's pediatricians and all of our professional staff are committed to providing the best care for your child during this difficult time. We hope that the FAQ's will help you better understand your child's experience when visiting the CARES Institute. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask one of our staff members.



As required by law, any person who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected must report it immediately to the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency by utilizing the 24-hour hotline: 1-877-NJABUSE (652-2873).

Martin A. Finkel, DO, FAAP
Co-Director, Professor of Pediatrics

Esther Deblinger, PhD
Co-Director, Professor of Psychiatry

**42 East Laurel Road
Suite 1100
PO Box 1011
Stratford, NJ 08084-1504**

**1051 West Sherman Avenue
Building 5, Unit A
Vineland, NJ 08360**

For more information: 856-566-7036
Fax: 856-566-6108

Visit our Web Site: caresinstitute.org