



## What Families Should Know...

### **General Information**

Most parents and other caregivers come to our clinic and hope for answers to many questions they are unsure about. Our team would like to be able to provide answers to all of your questions, but unfortunately, this is not always the case.

The medical evaluation of your child by our team is done by very skilled staff who are experienced in this type of examination. First, we will gather information from you, your child and other helpful sources. The next part of the exam is a head-to-toe check up, followed by an exam of your child's private parts. The exam of your child's private parts, called "genitals," is usually done externally. The exam is not hurtful, but sometimes stressful. Force is never used to complete an exam. During the process of the evaluation, our team will pull together all the information gathered from every part of the exam. When our evaluation is completed, one of the members of our team will sit down with you and talk to you about the outcome of our exam.

Even after a very complete medical evaluation for sexual abuse, many questions may remain unanswered...

- Most of the children do not have changes in the way their genitals look when they have been sexually abused.
- Fondling and other sex acts may not leave any changes in the way that the genitals look.
- Your child may be too young to clarify what happened.
- Sometimes children do things that may worry parents and caretakers, but do not end up directly being related to the finding of sexual abuse.
- Some of the time, even when there are changes seen on the genital exam, these changes may have been caused by things other than sexual abuse.
- If your child is older, he or she may also have participated in sexual activity they have consented to with similar age children. In this case, it is not usually possible to sort out what changes occurred as a result of the sexual abuse, from what may have occurred from other sexual activity.
- At certain ages, due to hormones, a girl's vaginal opening becomes very stretchy like a rubber band and something could go inside, either part of the way or completely and have the opening stretch out when this happens. Afterwards, like elastic, the opening goes back into the original shape. This is also true of the rectal opening in both boys and girls during all their life, not just with hormone changes.
- Sometimes, little girls do not understand what it means to have something "inside" their vagina, since this is a place they cannot see. In this case, someone may have touched them inside the outer vaginal lips, but it felt to them like it was "inside".

### **What should I do if someone tells about sexual abuse?**

Stay calm. Do not show anger, panic or hysteria. Find a private place and reassure the child that it is good to tell. Let the child know that you believe them, that it is not their fault, they are not bad and have done nothing wrong. Children do not usually lie about things like this and it takes a great deal of courage to tell. Many children do not tell, so when they do, adults need to listen. Make sure of the child's safety in their current situation. Report the incident to your local child protection agency or police department.

If you suspect injuries, take the children to an Emergency Room or contact a doctor. Your report may be the single action that stops abuse. You do not have to "prove" something is happening to make a report, which is for the investigators to do. You may give a report without giving your name if you wish.

REMEMBER: We cannot prevent all abuse to children. The most important thing we can do for children is to teach them about abuse. Also, parents and caregivers should know how to respond if abuse occurs.