

Caregiver Handbook

A Guide to Helping
Your Child



Mission Kids
Child Advocacy Center



Mission Kids **Child Advocacy Center**

*Serving Children & Families
in Montgomery County, PA*

484-687-2990

www.missionkidscac.org

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

Welcome to Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center. Your child is here due to concerns of possible abuse. Mission Kids offers an environment that encourages healing and provides a private and child-friendly place for your child to be interviewed.

The District attorney's Office, law enforcement officials, Office of Children and Youth (OCY) case workers, family advocates and Mission Kids staff work together as a Multi-Disciplinary Investigative Team (MDIT) to investigate allegations of abuse and to provide help and support.

Mission Kids offers support for you and your family to find and receive additional services. Our goal is to help make this process as easy as possible. Our dedicated team of professionals is here to answer questions you may have. We will work with you to ensure that you are well-informed throughout the process.

Please contact us if you have any questions at (484) 687-2990.



Thank you,
Mission Kids Staff

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Your Visit at Mission Kids

While your child is being interviewed, you will meet with a Family Advocate who will help guide you through this process. The Family Advocate will help make the process as comfortable as possible for you and your family.

Goals for Today:

1. Explain the role of Mission Kids
2. Help the Caregiver understand the child protective and legal systems
3. Provide referrals and information about basic services available to you in your county, including:
 - ✓ Mental Health/Counseling Referrals
 - ✓ Medical Evaluation: CHOP CARE Clinic Appointment
 - ✓ File for the Victim's Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP)
 - ✓ Information about Victim's Rights
 - ✓ Guidance for the next steps: You will meet the team of professionals after the interview and discuss the next course of action
4. Answer any questions and address any concerns the Caregiver may have before or after the child's interview.

What is the Interview Process?

When Child Abuse is suspected, it is important to determine whether or not the abuse has occurred. This requires a forensic interview of the child, which takes place at Mission Kids.

Our specially-trained interviewers provide child-friendly interviews.

The forensic interviewer asks **non-leading, open-ended** and **developmentally-appropriate** questions.



The interview involves the child speaking with **one forensic interviewer** while investigative team members observe via closed-circuit TV in an adjacent room. Caregivers are not present during the interview to make sure that the child's testimony is unbiased and will stand up in court.

A Forensic Interview at Mission Kids...

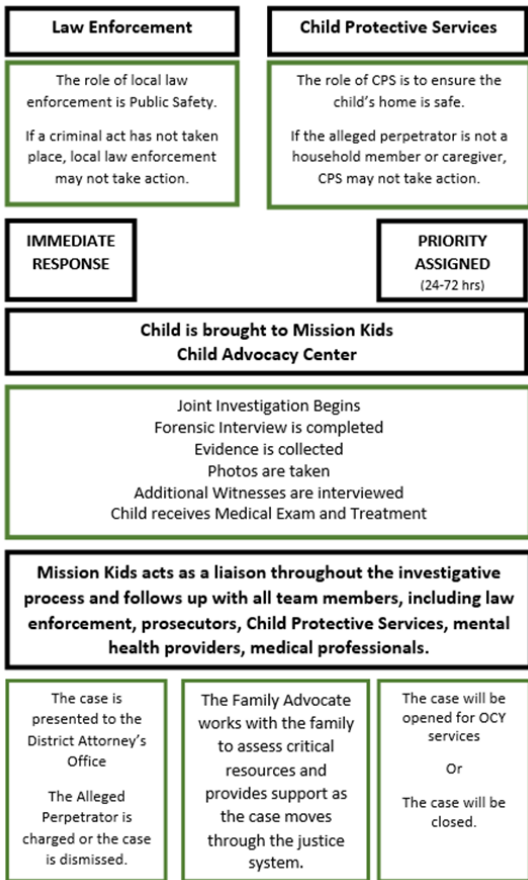
Minimizes the number of times, and people, to whom the child has to tell his or her story, and Allows Caregivers to meet with investigators, ask questions, and share concerns after the child is interviewed.

Depending on the age of your child, the interviewer will take the time to make sure he or she is comfortable without you by letting your child see the interview room beforehand, and making sure your child knows where you will be during the interview.



After the forensic interview, the team members will meet with you and inform you about what will happen next.

How does the Child Advocacy Center model work?



Your Team of Professionals



Office of Children and Youth (OCY) is responsible for the protection of children. The role of the OCY caseworker is to help protect children by providing services and support to resist conditions that are harmful to children. Caseworkers also work with the child's caregiver to develop a safety plan to help protect the child.

Law Enforcement Officials are responsible for investigating reports of crime and for determining whether a crime has been committed. They may ask questions to children, non-offending family members, suspects and other witnesses, and gather evidence from the scene of an alleged incident.

The District Attorney's Office is responsible for assessing the case for prosecution, filing charges and prosecuting cases of child abuse. Many factors are considered, including age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, whether the suspect has confessed, presence of medical evidence and availability of witnesses. The prosecutor has the final decision as to whether charges will be filed.

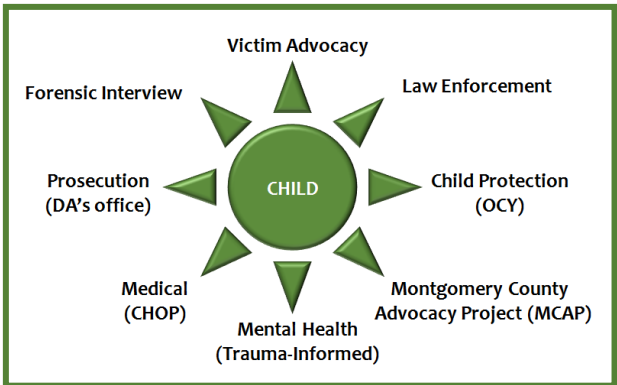
Forensic Interviewers are specially trained to interview children. They conduct non-leading, age and developmentally appropriate interviews using open-ended questions.

Family Advocates work to connect non-offending caregivers and family members with additional services in the community. The Family Advocate provides ongoing support and up-to-date information. You may be asked to sign a "Release of Information" form so that we can offer pertinent resources regarding your child's case, as needed.

Montgomery County Child Advocacy Project (MCAP) is a non-profit organization that provides free legal representation to children of Montgomery County who are victims of abuse and neglect.

Medical Doctors from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Child Protection Team who work with the Multi-Disciplinary Investigative Team are specially-trained to conduct a medical evaluation in cases of suspected physical and/or sexual abuse. The primary purpose of the medical evaluation is to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of the child.

Mental Health Therapists offer trauma-focused treatment to children and their families who become involved with Mission Kids.



What is Trauma?

Trauma can be any event that, when witnessed or experienced by a child or adolescent, is extremely distressing to them.

These events are often in situations where the children feared for their lives or the lives of others. Children may suffer negative effects of traumatic life events, such as: domestic, school, or community violence, death of a loved one, exposure to disaster or terrorist attacks, and sexual violence or physical abuse.

Symptoms of Trauma May Include:

- Nightmares or sleep problems
- Child seems distracted or distant
- Changes in eating habits
- Mood swings
- Struggles with body image
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, knowledge or language
- Regression (acting younger)
- Wetting or soiling accidents
- Self-injury and/or suicide attempts
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Depression/ Anxiety
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Drops in academic performance or attendance
- Overwhelming need for perfection
- *Some children exhibit no signs of abuse or trauma*

**It is important to remember that existence of any one or more of these signs does not necessarily mean the child was abused.*

Taking Care of Your Child

The experience of abuse may change the way your child thinks, feels and acts. Many children are scared or uncomfortable talking about abuse for various reasons. Let your child know that it is okay to talk when he or she feels ready and that you will be there to listen.

It is often helpful to set up counseling services for your child, which will act as an additional support and may provide help with behavioral and emotional changes that started after the abuse. **We recommend** trauma-focused, evidence-supported, mental health treatment, or **“Trauma-Informed” Therapy.**

Why choose Trauma-informed Therapy?

- Teaches children stress management and relaxation skills to help them cope with unpleasant feelings and physical sensations from trauma
- Corrects untrue or distorted ideas about what happened and why
- Changes unhealthy or wrong views that have resulted from the trauma
- Allows children to feel safe in their world again by helping them recognize and deal with their feelings about what has happened to them

How Can a Therapist Help?


- Help you and your child understand the complex and confusing emotions experienced while the abuse was taking place and after it ended
- Help you and your child learn to manage things that are most upsetting so that the whole experience is easier to handle and less frightening
- Help free you and your child from the effects of the past abuse so you can enjoy happier lives in the future

Your Family Advocate can make a referral to a provider in your area.

For more information about Trauma-Informed Therapy, visit:

<http://www.med.upenn.edu/traumaresponse>

The CARE Clinic

 The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia®
Hope lives here.

The Child Abuse Referral and Evaluation ('CARE') Clinic at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia provides medical assessment and treatment for suspected child abuse victims. The CARE Clinic is staffed by a team of physicians, social workers and mental health clinicians. For many children, knowing their bodies are okay is a huge relief and can promote a path to healing faster mentally.



The Mission Kids Multidisciplinary Team may suggest that your child receive a specialized medical exam from the CHOP CARE Clinic.

Your Family Advocate can schedule an appointment for your child at either CHOP CARE Clinic site:

CHOP Specialty Care Center

550 S. Goddard Blvd
King of Prussia, PA

CHOP Main Campus

Buerger Center, 7th Floor
3500 Civic Center Blvd.
Philadelphia, PA

For more information about the CARE Clinic, visit:

http://www.chop.edu/services/child-abuse-referral-and-evaluation-care-clinic#.V_vhcY8rIdU

How Caregivers Sometimes Feel

Child abuse can cause serious physical and emotional pain for the child, non-offending caregivers, siblings, and other family members.

For caregivers and children alike, the



investigative process can be overwhelming and confusing and you may feel like you are being pulled into many different directions.

Caregivers may Experience One or More of these Feelings:

- Denial
- Anger
- Helplessness
- Hurt or Betrayal
- Shock or Numbness
- Repulsion
- Guilt or Self-Blame
- Lack of Assertiveness
- Concern over Money
- Fear of Violence

Counseling services act as an additional support for you and may provide help with behavioral and emotional changes that you may notice in your child.

Your Family Advocate can provide you with counseling referrals for yourself, your child and other family members.

Remember...in order to take good care of someone else, you must take good care of yourself.

How to Support Your Child

Provide Safety, Love, and Support.

Let your child know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault.

Some things you can say that will help your child:

“I believe you.”

“I’m sorry this happened to you.”

“Nothing about YOU made this happen.”

“I am upset, but not with you.”

“You can still love someone but hate what they did to you.”



Some important Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- ✓ Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- ✓ See that your child receives therapy.
- ✓ Teach your child the rules of Personal Safety.
- ✓ Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it all on your own.
- ✓ Give attention to your other children.

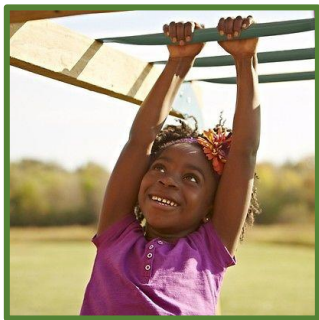
Don't:

- ✓ Question your child about the abuse. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.
- ✓ Discuss the case using adult terms in front of your child.
- ✓ Coach or advise your child on how to act or what to say to investigators.

Working with the System

The Criminal Justice System and the Child Welfare Systems are responsible for protecting children and holding offenders accountable for their actions.

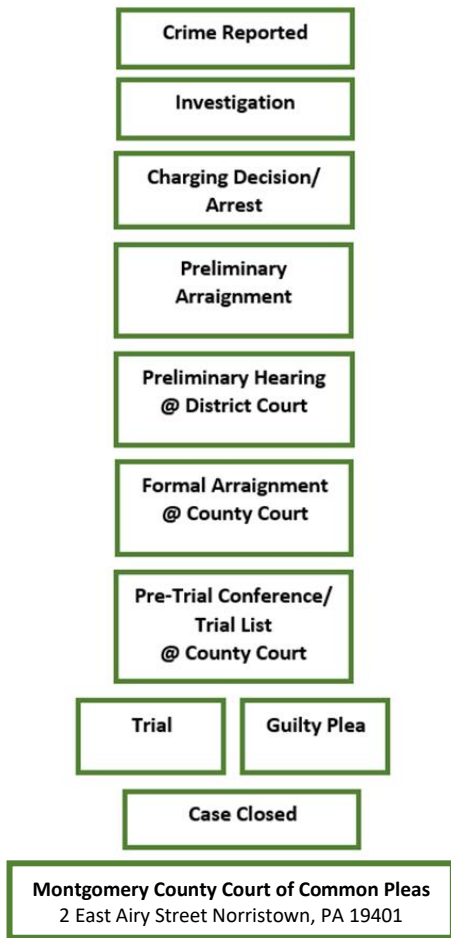
The more information and cooperation you are able to provide the team with, the better.



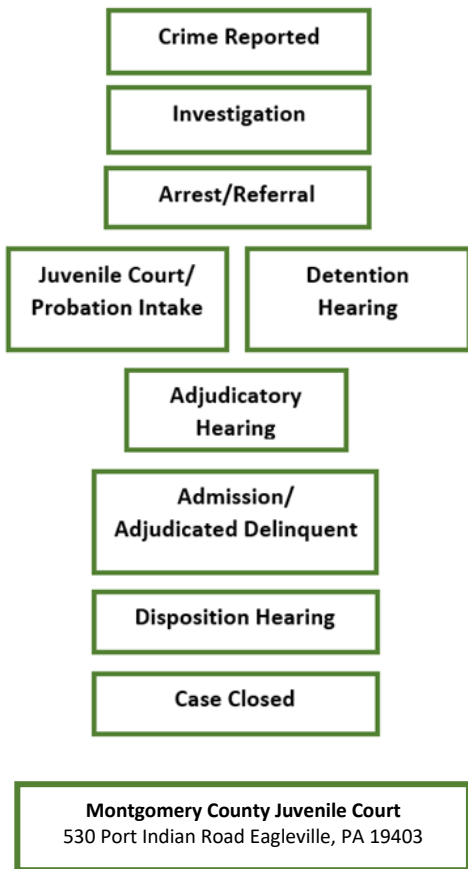
Here are some basic tips to work with the system:

- **Be calm and reassuring to your child.** Let your child know that it is okay to tell the truth, but do not coach your child on what to say. It is important for the story to be told in your child's words and in his or her own time.
- When you are asked for information, **try to give as many facts and details as you can.** If you don't know the answer to a question, do not try to guess. It is much better to say "I don't know."
- Cases are built on four W's: **Who, What, When, and Where.** Investigators may ask personal questions about your life. They ask personal questions because any information that you share with them may help the investigation.

The Steps of an Adult Criminal Case



The Steps of a Juvenile Criminal Case



How the Legal System Responds to Abuse

The legal system's response to abuse can be confusing to children and families. The legal process often moves at its own pace, different from your child's need to heal. Emotional wounds may be reopened by the various proceedings, which may be delayed repeatedly. Keep in mind that team members are working to gain the best outcome for you and your child.

Limits of the Legal System

While the legal system is very important to your child's case, it is only one step in the process and it is NOT essential to your child's recovery. Maintaining a focus on your child's wellbeing will help you prioritize your emotional energy and hopefully lessen the frustrations of the legal process.

What to Tell your Child about the Outcome

It is best to be honest and direct with your child, but how much you explain depends on your child's age and level of understanding about the case.

Some things you can say to your Child if the Alleged Offender is not held Legally Accountable:

"Just because they didn't find ____ guilty, that does not mean they didn't believe you. It's just that they have to follow the court's rules, and sometimes it's hard for other people to prove that it happened."

"It doesn't matter what the court process did. What matters is that you did what you needed to do-you told someone and you were very brave."

Celebrate when the investigation or court case has ended. No matter what the outcome, conviction or not, tell the child it is over. Acknowledge that you both did your best and worked hard. Recognize your efforts and the end of this stage of the process.

Victim's Rights



As a victim of crime in Pennsylvania you have the following rights:

You have the right to receive:

- Information about basic services available to you in your county
- Notice of certain court events, arrest of the offender, information on bail, escape of offender, release of an offender
- information about restitution and assistance with compensation
- Details of the final disposition of a case
- Accompaniment to all criminal proceedings by a family member, a Family Victim Advocate, or a support person

You have the right to provide input:

- into the sentencing decision and to receive help in preparing an oral and/or written victim impact statement
- into post-sentencing decisions

For more information about your rights as a victim of crime in Pennsylvania, visit www.pacrimevictims.com

Resources for Victims

Victim's Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP)

Helps victims offset the cost of crime, including Medical Expenses, Counseling Expenses, Loss of Earnings, Relocation Expenses, Transportation Expenses, and Childcare. Claims must be filed within 2 years of when the crime was first reported to police.

VCAP forms are available online at www.dave.state.pa.us or in hard copy at the Mission Kids office.

For assistance in completing your compensation form contact VCAP at 800-233-2339 or (717) 783- 5135.



Pennsylvania Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (PA SAVIN):

A free, 24/7 automated service that allows you to track the custody of offenders in jail via the phone or internet.

To access offender information:

Call 1-866-972-7284

Visit www.pacrimevictims.com

Internet Safety

5 Tips to Protect Your Children in the Digital Age:

1. Educate Yourself and Your Children

Learn how kids use the Internet by spending time with them in the digital world. Remember, unlike conventional media, the Internet is interactive, giving us all the opportunity to interact with anyone. Remind kids that "virtual" safety is just as important as "real world" safety.

2. Create a Safe Environment

If possible, keep the computer in a common area of the house and set reasonable limits on computer usage. Show kids the value of privacy. Encourage them to protect their passwords and personal information, as they would with something like a diary or journal. Help them use privacy settings to restrict who has access to or can post on their social networking profiles, blogs and other accounts. Use monitoring and filtering software that restricts what websites they can visit and tracks where they've been.

3. Know and Enforce Age-Appropriate Online Experiences

Children under 8 should have direct supervision while online. Tweens (kids from 8 – 12) should have more freedom, but an adult should still be close by, with privacy settings at their highest level. Teens, due to smart phones, school computers, etc. will have more Internet access, which is why it's important to set rules early and encourage ongoing conversations.

4. Discuss Expectations for Appropriate Conduct

Ongoing, frequent communication is vital to keeping your kids safe. Discuss what appropriate online conduct looks like – how much of it mirrors safe, responsible real-world behavior. Encourage a "think before you post" attitude – and discuss consequences. Write down the rules and keep them near the computer. Encourage their questions and invite conversation.

5. Get Involved and Stay Involved

Share your Internet safety plan with other parents as a means to set expectations and offer and gain support. Stay alert to changes in your children's behavior – are they becoming secretive about computer time? Understand how, when and where to report suspicious behavior online.

Other Resources We Suggest

Books

For Parents:

- *Helping Your Child Recover from Sexual Abuse* by: Caren Adams & Jennifer Fay
- *What's Happening in Our Family? Understanding Sexual Abuse through Metaphors* by: Constance M. Ostis, MSW
- *No Secrets, No Lies: How Black Families Can Heal from Sexual Abuse* by: Robin D. Stone
- *Straying Towards Truth* by: Karen E. Fennell

For Teens:

- *How Long Does It Hurt?* By: Cynthia L. Mather & Kristina E. Debye
- *Back On Track* by: Leslie Bailey Wright & Mindy B. Loiselle (Specifically for boys ages 10 and up)

For Children

- *Telling isn't Tattling* by: K.M. Hammerseng & D. Garbot
- *A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children Who Have Witnessed Violence or Trauma* by : M.M. Holmes
- *You Touch I Tell* by: Chi Hosseinion
- *Please Tell: A Child's Story about Sexual Abuse* by: Jessie
- *Lily Lightning Bug and Her Stolen Glow* by: Jeannette M. Adkins

Websites

www.missionkidscac.org (Child Advocacy Center of Montgomery County)

www.nationalchildrensalliance.org (a child advocacy organization that empowers communities to provide children's advocacy services to victims of child abuse.)

www.darkness2light.org (Information and resources for parents and families)

www.stopitnow.com (Provide support, information and resources to keep children safe and create healthier communities)

www.1in6.org (for male victims)

www.malesurvivor.org (for male victims)

www.rainn.org (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

www.laurel-house.org (Helping Victims of Domestic Violence and their Children) **24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-642-3150**

www.wcmontco.org (The Women's Center of Montgomery County) **24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-773-2424**

www.vscmontcopa.org (Victim Services Center of Montgomery County) **24 Hour Hotline: 1-888-521-0983**

Montgomery County Team Agencies

Contact List

Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center (484) 687-2990

Family Advocate Responsible for your case:

Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Law Enforcement

Police Department responsible for your case:

Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth (OCY)

Main Office - Norristown (610) 278-5800

Eastern Office – Willow Grove (215) 784-5486

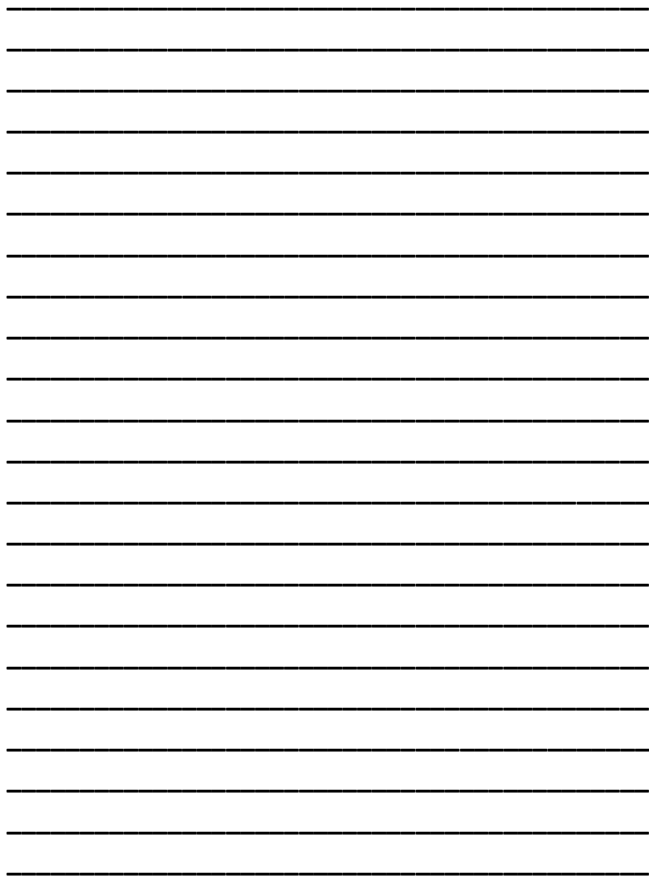
Western Office - Pottstown (610) 327-1588

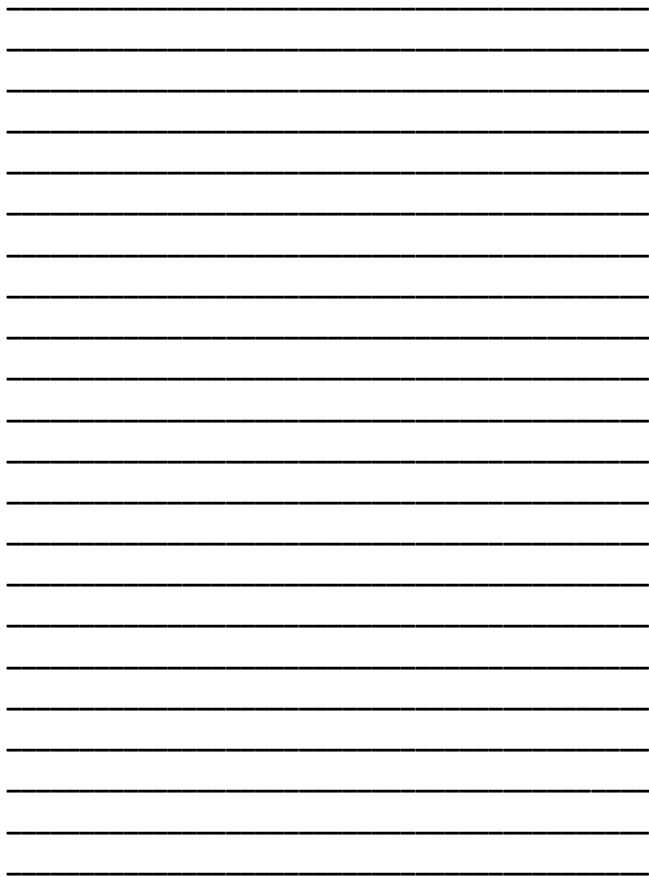
District Attorney's Office (610) 278-3090

Montgomery Child Advocacy Project (610) 279-1219
(MCAP)

CHOP CARE Clinic (215) 590- 4923

Press "1" for appointments







Healing Begins Here

Contact Us:

180 W. Germantown Pike
Suite 1

East Norriton, PA 19401

Phone: 484-687-2990

Email: info@missionkidscac.org

Web: www.missionkidscac.org

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