

Strengthening Resources for Children and Youth Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse

In Prince George's County, children and youth who have experienced sexual abuse are typically seen at the Child Advocacy Center, which provides a safe and comfortable place for them to express what happened to them so that they can get help from the child protective system, the criminal justice system, and the mental health system. Prince George's County through its *Family Blossoms* program is partnering with local mental health clinics who have demonstrated skill in intervening early in sexual abuse cases to reduce the child and family's suffering as they come to terms with the abuse and the legal processes that may unfold as a result.

Sexual abuse is one of the most intimate and isolating forms of abuse that can happen. It can make children feel embarrassed, ashamed, depressed, worried, grossed out, and guilty. It can impact the child's view of themselves. It may bring up sexual urges that children are not ready or able to manage. Children and their families wish they had prevented the abuse, may initially think the abuse didn't happen, and they may question their relationship with the perpetrator and their overall ability to trust others.

Sometimes with sexual abuse, the perpetrator is a family member. When this happens, the family may feel a mixture of anger at the perpetrator while also wanting to help or cover up for the perpetrator so that he or she won't face legal consequences. Sometimes families may even be angry at the victim for bringing the abuse to light. Helping the family manage these complex responses while also helping them respond to the victim's suffering in a loving and helpful manner is the key to the child's and family's recovery. Good treatment is available to prevent long-term suffering.

If you suspect that a child or adolescent has been sexually abused, call Prince George's County Child Protective Services at 301-909-2450. For more information about child sexual abuse, please see the National Center for Traumatic Stress Network Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet at https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//child_sexual_abuse_fact_sheet_parents_teachers_caregivers.pdf.

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Maryland Family Resource, Inc., provides Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Systems Therapy, and trauma-informed play therapy.