

Parents and the Forensic Interview Process

This article reviews how referring team members and CornerHouse staff can be helpful to protective parents and caregivers as part of the interview process. A CornerHouse brochure containing much of this information is available to referring team members, who may give it to parents prior to the interview appointment. Because children may either be living with a parent or a non-parental caregiver at the time of the interview, we use these terms interchangeably.

Parents who bring their children for an interview may understandably be very anxious about what will happen at CornerHouse. Referring team members and CornerHouse staff can help alleviate some of this stress by providing information about the interview process and how parents can address their own and their children's needs. The physical layout of the facility can also impact on families' comfort level during the visit. For example, in addition to making our house "child friendly," we try to keep our small reception area as clear as possible during an appointment, so that parents don't feel that they are "on display" while at CornerHouse. Our expanded facility will have two separate entrances and reception areas, one for children and their families, and one for team members, trainees, and other business. This will help families have a greater sense of privacy and feel more assured of their confidentiality in the interview process.

Scheduling the Appointment

The referring team member (a law enforcement investigator or child protection professional) makes the interview appointment at CornerHouse and ensures transportation of the child to the appointment. We ask a referring team member to inform the caregiver of the scheduled appointment time, and to tell the caregiver to inform him/her if the caregiver is unable to keep the appointment. Because the interview appointment is part of a police investigation and must be kept confidential, we do not make or cancel appointments directly with caregivers. If a caregiver calls CornerHouse about canceling or rescheduling an appointment, we ask the person to contact the referring team member to do this. This also helps keep communication lines clean, avoids scheduling mix-ups among team members and families, and supports the relationship between the family and the referring team member.

Preparing Caregivers for the Interview Appointment

Prior to the appointment, we ask the referring team member to tell parents that they can plan to spend about 90 minutes at CornerHouse for each child interviewed. The CornerHouse interviewer will meet with team members, including the police investigator and/or child

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Training Updates

*For mandated reporters, "Effective Intervention in Child Sexual Abuse: A Pre-Assessment Model," teaches a brief, specific process for talking with a child about possible sexual abuse. Full-day or **new** one-evening format. Both formats have similar topics and a participant manual. The full day provides more depth of content and additional practice.*

Time & Dates: (Full Day, 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Tuition: \$85): **August 22 & October 22**
(One Evening, 6:30-9:30 p.m.; Tuition: \$45): **August 13, Sept. 10, & Nov. 12**

Orientation for interagency team members in Hennepin County is a three-hour session that includes: tour of CornerHouse, background information, interview protocol, videotaped interview, and team meeting demonstration. No tuition fee, but pre-registration is required.

Time: 8:30 a.m.- 11:30 a.m.
Dates: June 11, August 6, October 15, & December 3

Information/Registration for either training: Contact Kristi Thomson at (612) 872-6225.

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CORNERHOUSE STAFF

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protection worker and the assistant county attorney, before the interview. Then the interviewer will talk with the parent/s and ask if there is anything the interviewer should know about the child's feelings, language skills, and any special needs. After this, the interviewer will talk with the child. The interview itself will last 20-60 minutes. After the interview, a police investigator and/or child protection worker will meet with the caregiver regarding what they have learned, and what will happen next.

Parents want to know what they can tell their children prior to coming to CornerHouse. We suggest saying that CornerHouse is a place for children who said they were sexually abused. It is best for parents not to question a child before the interview. If a child wants to talk about what happened, the parent can listen and be supportive, and then say that CornerHouse is a safe place for children to talk about what happened. They can also tell their child that it is OK to talk to the people at CornerHouse, and that many children come there to talk.

Parents may also be concerned about what will happen to the interview information, including the videotape. We tell them that the videotaped interview is part of a police investigation and is protected by confidentiality laws. During the interview, only the interagency team watches over closed circuit television. While videotapes and a written report of the interview are sometimes used as evidence in criminal, juvenile or family court, CornerHouse does not release information except by court request.

Taking Care of Themselves and Their Children

Children express feelings with actions more than words. When children's actions change, they may need help from parents to talk about how they feel. Parents can respect children's feelings and remember that, whatever children feel, it is "normal" for them. Children need to hear that it is good to talk about safety and touch. Parents can tell children that they want to know their

questions and concerns. Because it can be hard for a child to talk to parents about things in her/his life that are personal, painful or embarrassing, parents can also let their children know that it's OK to talk to other trusted or helping adults. Parents should give both themselves and their children time feel safe and trust others again.

Caregivers can't always protect their children from harm. It is all right for parents to talk about their feelings with other *adults* who will listen. It is also important for parents to express feelings without confusing or frightening their children. For example, parents can say they are angry about what happened, not angry at their children. Families may find counseling helpful, and the CornerHouse interviewer or child protection worker can provide referrals. Financial help is available for victims of crime through the Minnesota Crime Victims Reparations Board in St. Paul (Ph. 612-282-6256). Parents who feel that their or their children's rights have been violated as crime victims may call the Office of Crime Victims Ombudsman (Ph. 612-282-6258). Both offices can also be reached by calling: 1-800-247-0390 (from outside the Twin Cities metro area), or TTY 282-6555.

[This article is based on a summary written by Mary Annette Venier, CornerHouse staff member.]

Staff Member Achievement

We congratulate our Clinical Supervisor, Judy Weigman, M.A., on passing the examination to become a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (L.I.C.S.W.). Judy has interviewed over 1000 children since she came to CornerHouse in 1990. She provides clinical supervision to the interview staff, continues to interview children, and conducts forensic interview training at both basic and advanced levels. She frequently presents at professional conferences and meetings, which most recently have included the National Network of Children's Advocacy Centers Advanced Training, and the National Symposium on Child Sexual Abuse in Huntsville, AL.