

Helping your
Child Heal
From Abuse



NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
ALLIANCE®





Helping Your Child Heal From Abuse

When a child is abused, he or she experiences serious harm that is often difficult for a caring adult to understand and respond to. With treatment and support, a child can overcome these experiences, and as a parent or caregiver, your role is essential in helping your child heal. This guide is designed to help you process and handle this difficult time and to share with you how a Children's Advocacy Center and their Multidisciplinary Team can help you and your child. The CAC provides services to help you keep your child safe and, if your child was abused, to help your child heal.

How Is My Child Affected?

We know from research that children may experience anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from past normal activities in response to a potentially traumatic event. Children also often develop behavior problems, as they have difficulty managing their feelings and thoughts about what happened to them. Some problems may be very specific to the abuse. He or she may avoid locations where the abuse occurred (such as a bathroom, bedroom, or school) to avoid a feeling of re-experiencing the abuse. In addition, a child may attempt to cope by using drugs and alcohol or engaging in other “risky” behaviors. The consequences of untreated

traumatic stress can affect a child’s success in school or their relationships with friends and family, and this can continue to impact an individual throughout his or her life. The good news is that treatment can help, and children can heal from abuse.

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What Can I Expect?

You and your child do not have to manage these difficulties alone. In fact, the best way for you to support your child is to make sure you both have the support of a larger network to help you navigate the healing process.

When there is a concern that your child may have experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse, or domestic violence, the CAC first coordinates a Forensic Interview to help investigators determine whether or not abuse occurred.

If it is determined that your child has experienced abuse, it is important for your child to have a mental health assessment by a mental health professional. Abuse affects each child differently and this assessment will help determine what, if any, impact the abuse has had on your child. Additionally, you will be asked to provide information about your child and family including what you see as the strengths and needs of your child as well as any problems your family may face. The therapist will also ask that you fill out several questionnaires that will provide information helpful in deciding what evidence-based treatment might be the best fit for you and your child.

The CAC uses many evidence-based treatments that reduce common problems of children who have experienced abuse. For example, many children who have completed these treatments report reduced sadness and anxiety and understand that they are not responsible or to blame for the abuse.

As you deal with the impact of the abuse of your child, it can also be helpful for you to receive support through the CAC. Our Family Advocate and mental health professionals can help connect you. CACs are dedicated to providing the best services to you and your child and are committed to matching you with the most qualified therapists in working with child abuse victims and their families.

Evidence-based treatments (EBTs) are therapies that have been extensively studied and repeatedly shown to work in reducing problematic symptoms, such as nightmares, feeling “on-edge,” and losing interest in activities.



Moving Forward

The CAC will help guide you through managing your child's abuse and treatment, but it is important that you be a knowledgeable advocate for your child. Although there are now evidence-based treatments available, not all mental health professionals use these treatments.

Questions for Caregivers to Ask Therapists

How familiar are you with evidence-based treatments for child trauma symptoms?

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Do you have specific training in an evidence-based treatment model? If so, what is it?

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How do you approach therapy with children and families who have been impacted by trauma?

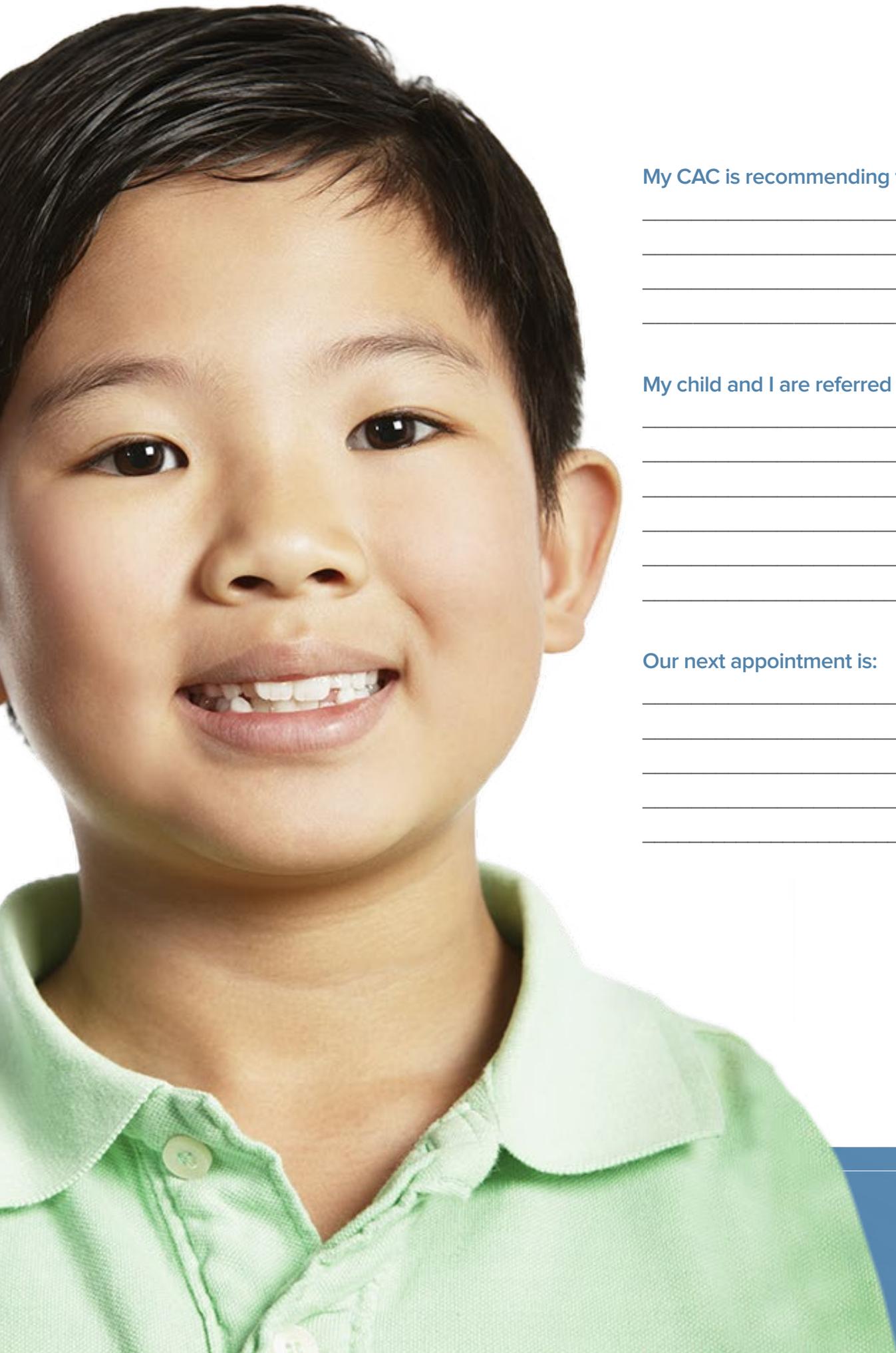
To be a good advocate requires that you ask the right questions, from who your child's therapist will be to what treatment your therapist provides. Therapists who are trained in evidence-based trauma treatments for children will be willing and able to describe the components and their qualifications in providing this treatment. Like any child with a physical illness, children with traumatic stress need and deserve the most appropriate and effective treatment available.

Summary

If your child has been abused, a mental health assessment provided by the CAC can provide you information about how the abuse has impacted your child, and what next steps to take towards healing. If your child experiences traumatic stress, he or she deserves evidence-based treatment services, or services that are shown to be effective in reducing harmful symptoms of traumatic stress. You, the caregiver, are critical to the healing of your child, and you also deserve to have help in dealing with this experience.

CACs are a resource for you to receive support, information and services for your child. The CAC will link you to mental health professionals for assessments and evidence-based treatments to reduce difficulties you or your child may be having as a result of the abuse, and our Family Advocate will support you through whatever treatment is needed. This support and the services of the CAC are designed to help you, your child, and your family move forward in your lives with hope and healing.

For information regarding effective mental health treatment for traumatic stress, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network at www.nctsn.org or the California Evidence-Based Clearing House for Child Welfare at www.cebc4cw.org. Both are excellent resources for learning more about evidence-based trauma therapies available to you and your child.



My CAC is recommending follow-up:

My child and I are referred to:

Our next appointment is:
