

The Carousel Center - Frequently Asked Questions

Appointment Scheduled: _____

Families referred to The Carousel Center often have concerns about what will happen during their visit. The following information has been provided to answer common questions families have about coming to our Center for a child medical evaluation.

Why do children come to The Carousel Center?

The Carousel Center, a facility affiliated with The National Children's Alliance, provides medical evaluations for children to address concerns about sexual or physical abuse and/or neglect. The Department of Social Services (DSS), law enforcement agencies, medical doctors, or hospitals may refer children for these services. A child medical evaluation includes: (1) gathering child's medical/social history, (2) a taped interview of the child, and (3) a physical examination of child. The Carousel Center also offers ongoing family support and mental health services.

What happens when I come to The Carousel Center?

First, the child's legal guardian will register at the front desk and complete the necessary consent forms. Please note that if the legal guardian is not the biological parent of the child, he/she will need to provide valid court papers demonstrating current legal guardianship. A Case Manager will greet the family and offer a tour of the facility. Then, a Medical Provider and a Case Manager will meet with the DSS worker and/or the detective assigned to your child's case.

Next, the legal guardian will meet with the Medical Provider and the Case Manager. It is also common for DSS workers and law enforcement officials to participate in this interview. Medical history, behavioral history, and current concerns will be discussed. Parents/caregivers are valuable resources for learning more about children and our staff appreciates your willingness to discuss sensitive information.

The Medical Provider will then meet individually with your child to conduct an interview. This interview is a taped interview and is available to DSS and/or law enforcement. If DSS and/or law enforcement are present, they will be able to watch the interview from another room. A Case Manager will also observe the interview to ensure the equipment is operating. It is our goal to make children as comfortable as possible with the interview process. Children can end the interview at any time. For issues of interview integrity, parents do not watch or participate in child interviews.

Following the interview, your child will receive an exam. The Medical Provider and the Case Manager will meet with you afterward to discuss the visit and make recommendations.

Why is the medical exam important?

The medical evaluation can identify if your child has an injury, infection, or other physical problem. Most children have a normal physical exam and our staff can reassure these children

The Carousel Center is committed to providing a child-friendly environment to meet the needs of the abused and neglected child and to supporting child abuse prevention in Southeastern North Carolina.

that their bodies are healthy. However, if there are signs of injury or infection, these can be documented and treated.

Will the exam show whether or not my child has been abused?

Not necessarily. If physical injuries or scarring are present, the Medical Provider will assess whether or not these injuries indicate that abuse has occurred. Photographs will be taken during the exam to document findings. Most children have no physical injuries to their genital or anal areas. This does not mean that no sexual abuse has occurred. It is possible that children who have been involved in sexual activity will not suffer injury to their bodies in a way that leaves lasting signs. After your child has been examined, the Medical Provider will explain the results of the exam to you. Any questions or concerns that you have will be discussed.

Who will examine my child?

A family physician or a nurse practitioner will conduct the interview and examination of your child. The Carousel Center's Medical Providers have received training in the medical evaluation of sexual and physical abuse. A Certified Medical Assistant will also be present to assist with the exam.

What happens during the medical exam?

Initially, your child will be asked to undress and put on an oversized t-shirt. Also, a blanket will be provided for your child to use for covering up. After the exam, your child can take both the t-shirt and blanket home.

Your child will receive a thorough checkup that may include looking at his or her eyes, ears and mouth, listening to the heart and lungs, feeling the abdomen, and checking reflexes. Examination of the child's genital and anal areas involves looking at them to make sure they appear normal. Girls will be examined using a colposcope. This instrument allows the examiner to see a child's genital and anal areas more closely, but it does not touch your child's body. The colposcope has a camera attached to it and photographs may be taken during the exam to provide an accurate record of what the child's body looks like. This instrument may also be used to examine boys, but is used less often for completion of their evaluations. A high-magnification digital camera may also be utilized during the exam in addition to or instead of the colposcope. Any digital pictures taken will be stored on a disk and kept in a secure place. If at any time during the examination your child expresses discomfort, necessary steps will be taken to reassure and comfort your child.

Rarely, teen and older girls require a pelvic examination involving insertion of an instrument called a speculum into the vagina. Younger girls do not receive speculum exams at our Center. If your child's evaluation requires a speculum, you will know this information prior to entering the exam room.

Your child may also be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. This is done by touching your child's throat, genitals, and/or anus with small cotton swabs or with a urine test. A blood test

may also be needed. No blood is drawn at The Carousel Center, but our staff will assist you in arranging any necessary testing.

May I stay with my child during the examination?

Many children want a parent or supportive adult in the exam room with them for comfort and reassurance. Other children prefer to do the exam on their own, with no parent in the room. We will ask your child what he or she prefers. Only one person can accompany each child in the exam room.

Does the exam hurt?

For most children, the checkup is not painful. Children may feel worried or embarrassed about their checkup. Few children report any discomfort from the examination.

Will the exam cause trauma to my child?

It is normal for children to feel anxious about their examination. Most children report that the exam was less stressful than they had expected. Our staff utilizes as much time and creativity as necessary to help children through the medical evaluation. Each step of the checkup will be explained. These efforts typically reduce children's distress during the evaluation.

Who will be given information about the examination?

Our staff shares information with legal guardians about the child's evaluation. If requested by a guardian, we will also follow-up with other individuals (i.e. family members, pediatricians, your child's school, and/or therapists). Our Center routinely shares information with DSS and law enforcement. A full report of your child's visit to our Center is sent to DSS and law enforcement when appropriate. If an additional party, including parents, would like a copy of our written record, a court order signed by a judge must be received by our agency.

What should I tell my child about coming to The Carousel Center?

Children are often less worried and more cooperative with medical procedures when they have been prepared in advance for what they will be experiencing. It is important that children have accurate information about their visit. Children should know what to expect at the visit and should feel comfortable asking questions and expressing their feelings.

A few days before your appointment, explain to your child that he/she will be coming to our Center for a checkup. Children should be told that they will talk with a person who will ask questions about their body and their health, and that a nurse or doctor will look at their body to make sure they are healthy. Reassure your child that the staff wants him/her to feel comfortable with every part of the evaluation and that no procedures will be forced. Children should be encouraged to bring along a stuffed animal, blanket, or other comforting object when they come for the checkup if it will help them feel more at ease.

What should I bring to the appointment?

- Past medical records: If your child has been seen by a medical professional in regard to allegations of abuse in the past, please bring any information that you have about this examination.
- Medical insurance card
- Child's Social Security Number
- Support: Many parents find it helpful to bring an adult friend/relative. Our staff requests that you only bring one additional person for support. Please note that individuals who have been identified as an alleged perpetrator are not allowed on our premises when a child is being evaluated. Our Center aims to create a sense of safety and support for your child.
- Favorite toy: Some children bring a favorite toy to ease their anxiety.

How long will the appointment take?

The entire visit usually lasts 2 to 3 hours. We will be happy to provide a note of excuse for missing school or work upon request.

Where do I take my child for the evaluation?

The Carousel Center is located at 1501 Dock Street, Wilmington, NC 28401. If you have questions about traveling to our center, please call our staff for directions at 910-254-9898.

Whom should I call if I have questions about my appointment?

We encourage legal guardians to call one of the agency's Case Managers, Alyson or LaToya, to further discuss our services or any concerns. They can be reached at 910-254-9898. Typically, parents do receive a call from a Case Manager prior to their child's scheduled appointment.