



Practice Alert

Medical Examinations in Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations

The purpose of this Practice Alert is to provide guidance for staff regarding the need to balance our efforts in gathering all essential evidence in the completion of a Child Abuse/Neglect Investigation with our obligation to use the least intrusive practices possible with children and families. There are times in which it may be necessary to request that an alleged victim child be provided with a Sexual Abuse Forensic Examination (SAFE) or other type of medical examination in order to assure safety or collect essential evidence.

Consent from a parent with the legal capacity to consent must be obtained prior to conducting any medical examinations, unless the child has been placed in the legal custody of the Division. A parent's legal capacity may be obtained by reviewing any current divorce decree or custody order in which the court has set out that parent's ability to authorize medical procedures for their child. Staff should document their efforts to ascertain a parent's legal capacity to consent for all cases in which a medical examination is deemed necessary.

The following questions should be considered prior to requesting a parent to consent for their child to undergo a SAFE or other medical examination:

- ✚ Has the alleged victim child disclosed a form of alleged perpetration which may warrant a SAFE or other medical examination (e.g., sexual abuse related disclosures involving penetration, physical abuse disclosures involving an injury to the child's body, etc.)?
- ✚ Does the child present a physical indicator of the alleged perpetration which may warrant a SAFE or other medical examination (e.g., observed physical injury, symptom of a sexually transmitted disease, etc.)?
- ✚ Has a medical practitioner or other member of the multidisciplinary team provided a statement of concern related to an injury or disclosure or alleged perpetration which may warrant a SAFE or other medical examination?

- ✚ Has the alleged perpetration occurred recently enough, or to such a degree, that it would be reasonably foreseeable to anticipate physical findings as a result of the medical examination?
- ✚ Is the child's emotional well-being such that it would further traumatize the child to undergo a SAFE or other medical examination, or do they appear stable enough to proceed?
- ✚ Is there a medically necessary reason for the child to undergo a SAFE or other medical examination?

Staff should consult their supervisory channels when the decision to request a medical examination of a child is in question.

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