

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITED MEMBERS MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT)

STANDARD: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM FOR RESPONSE TO CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS INCLUDES REPRESENTATION FROM THE FOLLOWING:

- LAW ENFORCEMENT
- CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES
- PROSECUTION
- MEDICAL
- MENTAL HEALTH
- VICTIM ADVOCACY
- CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

Rationale

A functioning and effective multidisciplinary team approach (MDT) is the foundation of a CAC. An MDT is a group of professionals who represent various disciplines and work collaboratively from the point of report to assure the most effective coordinated response possible for every child. The purpose of interagency collaboration is to coordinate intervention so as to reduce potential trauma to children and families and improve services, while preserving and respecting the rights and obligations of each agency to pursue their respective mandates. This interagency collaboration is based on a system response and not just on the facility. Collaborative response begins with case initiation and is promoted through understanding and exploring case issues. Insight from each MDT representative provides the environment for a coordinated, comprehensive, compassionate professional response. Quality assurance is a necessary component of this joint response to review the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts.

Six disciplines; law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical, mental health, victim advocacy, together with CAC staff, comprise the core MDT. Some CACs, including those in small, rural communities, may employ one person to fill multiple roles. For example, the CAC Director may also serve as the Victim Advocate or a CPS worker may function as an interviewer and a case worker. Community resources may limit personnel and require some to wear multiple hats. What is important is that each of the above-mentioned functions be performed by a member of the MDT while maintaining clear boundaries for each function. MDT's may also expand to include other professionals, such as guardians ad litem, adult and juvenile probation, dependency (civil) attorneys, out-of-home care licensing personnel, federal investigators, school personnel, domestic violence providers and others, as needed and appropriate for that community.

Generally, a coordinated, MDT approach facilitates efficient gathering and sharing of information, broadens the knowledge base with which decisions are made by including information from many sources, and improves communication among agencies. From each agency's perspective, there are also benefits to working on an MDT. More thorough and shared information, improved and timely evidence gathering, and the involvement of the prosecutor from the beginning stages of the case may contribute to a more successful outcome. An

MDT response also fosters needed education, support and treatment for children and families that may enhance their willingness to participate and their ability to be effective witnesses. MDT interventions, particularly when provided in a neutral, child-focused CAC setting, are associated with less anxiety, fewer interviews, increased support, and more appropriate and timely referrals for needed services.

In addition, non-offending parents are empowered to protect and support their children throughout the investigation and prosecution and beyond. Law enforcement personnel find that a suspect may be more likely to cooperate when confronted with the strength of the evidence generated by a coordinated MDT approach. Law enforcement personnel also appreciate that support and advocacy functions are attended to, leaving them more time to focus on other aspects of the investigation. They work more effectively with CPS on child protection issues and benefit from other MDT members' training and expertise in communicating with children and understanding family dynamics. As a result of effective information sharing, CPS workers are often in a better position to make recommendations regarding placement, visitation and can assist the MDT by monitoring the child's safety and parental support, and evaluating non-offending parents. Medical providers benefit from the MDT's complete history taking and, in turn, are available to consult about the advisability of a specialized medical evaluation and the interpretation of medical findings and reports. Mental health professionals can provide the MDT with valuable information regarding the child's emotional state and treatment needs and ability to participate in the criminal justice process. A mental health professional on the MDT helps ensure that assessment and treatment and related services are more routinely offered and made available to children and families. Victim advocacy personnel are available to provide needed crisis intervention, support, information and case updates, and advocacy in a timely fashion. This helps the MDT anticipate and respond to the needs of children and their families more effectively, lessens the stress of the court process, and increases access to resources needed by the family which may include access to victims of crime funding.