



Middlesex District Attorney
Gerry Leone



Sexual abuse is one of the most traumatic injuries a child can suffer. Most children never tell anyone about what has happened to them. For those who do come forward, their crisis is often heightened by fear and confusion every time they are asked to speak of their abuse to someone new.

In the past, children coming forward with allegations of sexual abuse – some as young as four or five years old – were routinely questioned in numerous, separate interviews over the course of several weeks by a wide range of professionals involved in the investigation. In response to the difficulties faced by these children, the Middlesex Child Abuse Unit developed a more sensitive multi-disciplinary approach that recognizes the need to reduce the emotional burden on an already distressed young person while maintaining a high standard of forensic accuracy.

Through the Sexual Abuse Investigation Network (SAIN), a collaborative effort with the Department of Children and Families, local police, and our office, we are able to bring together all of the professionals involved in the investigation of alleged child sexual abuse for one recorded interview, conducted by a specially trained child interview specialist. Subsequently, the child's interview can be used for investigation and charging purposes. Frequently this interview is the only time during the investigation that the child has to share with a stranger the sensitive details of his or her abuse.

This brochure has been designed to give you an overview of the SAIN process as you enter what is surely a difficult time for your child and family. In addition, you are welcome to contact the victim witness advocate assigned to your case with any further questions or concerns you may have.

Sexual Abuse Investigation Network

To ensure the safety and protection of children, the law requires that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) investigate reports of suspected abuse of a child by a caretaker. The Sexual Abuse Investigation Network (SAIN) is a joint effort between the Middlesex District Attorney's Office and DCF to coordinate services for you and your family while your child's allegations of sexual abuse are under investigation. The SAIN Team's primary goal is to reduce the number of times your child will need to be interviewed by different professionals. The Team also coordinates services for your child and your non-offending family members at the earliest opportunity. The same team approach is used to investigate allegations of physical abuse.

THE SAIN INTERVIEW FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happens during the interview?

Your child will be interviewed in a child-friendly, private room. Only one member of the Team, the child interview specialist, will question your child. The remaining team members will observe the interview from an adjoining room through a one-way mirror. The interviewer will meet with you and your child before the interview. You will be asked to give permission for your child to speak with the interviewer about what has happened. You will then be asked to wait while your child is interviewed.

What is the advantage of having my child interviewed by the Team?

DCF is the agency responsible for receiving all reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. DCF is required to refer certain cases to the District Attorney's Office and the police for possible investigation. If the suspected perpetrator is a caretaker for the child, DCF also is required to investigate the matter. In these cases, a SAIN Team is convened so all the agencies involved can simultaneously investigate the matter and coordinate a single interview with your child. When a SAIN Team meeting is not arranged, all of these professionals may need to interview your child separately. By convening a Team meeting, services for your family will be better coordinated and you will have an opportunity to meet the professionals from each of the agencies involved in your child's case and ask any questions you may have.

Will this be the only time my child will have to speak about the abuse?

It is important to understand that participation in this program does not mean that your child will never have to speak about the abuse again. The assistant district attorney and victim witness advocate will consult with you on the District Attorney's decision whether to prosecute the case and will discuss your child's involvement in the court process. In addition, children may continue to speak about their experience in therapy as a means of working through their feelings.

Should I prepare my child for the interview in any way?

Children seem most comfortable when they have been told what to expect. It is important to explain to your child that he or she will be meeting with a professional to talk about what has happened. You can let your child know the person who will be asking questions is someone whose job it is to talk to children and make sure they are safe. You should not tell your child what to say, but simply to tell the truth. Some children may need reassurance that they are not in trouble and they are not going to this meeting because they have done something wrong. The interviewer will spend time with your child prior to the interview to explain the process and answer his or her questions.

Can I remain with my child during the interview?

It is important for the interviewer to talk with your child alone. It is typically difficult for children to talk about sexual abuse, and a parent's presence may distract or inhibit the child during the interview. Children may also look to the parent to answer questions for them. It is best if the child can provide information independently.

Can I watch the interview with the Team?

Team members need to carefully observe, assess and document the interview, which is a part of a criminal investigation. You also may be called as a witness in any subsequent prosecution, so parents are not with the Team during the interview.

Can I bring a friend or family member with me on the day of the interview?

We encourage you to bring a family member or friend to stay with you while your child is being interviewed and to remain with your child while you meet with the Team.

SAIN TEAM MEMBERS

Assistant District Attorney

The District Attorney's Office has the responsibility and discretion for deciding whether to prosecute criminal cases in Middlesex County. Prosecutors will decide whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed with criminal charges and, after consultation with the SAIN Team about whether a prosecution would be in your child's best interest, decide whether to seek criminal charges.

Victim Witness Advocate

This is your primary contact person at the DA's Office. The advocate will provide you with information about victim rights, address safety concerns, and assist you with appropriate support and resource information. If the case proceeds to court, they will explain the court process, provide updates, and accompany you to court.

Child Interview Specialist/SAIN Team Coordinator

This is a professional, specially trained to conduct forensic interviews of children who may have been abused or witnessed serious crimes after it is determined to be appropriate given the child's developmental level, mental health and current stressors in the child's life. The interviewer is also the person who coordinates with DCF, the police, and the Middlesex District Attorney's Office to organize and facilitate the Team interview.

DCF Investigator

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency entrusted with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse and neglect by their caretakers and strengthening families. An investigating social worker from DCF will attend the SAIN interview, conduct an investigation to determine whether to support the 51A report, and decide whether DCF should open a case with your family for support and services.

Police Officer

The police investigate allegations of criminal conduct. A police officer from the city or town where the alleged abuse occurred or a trooper from the Massachusetts State Police will be responsible for collecting evidence, interviewing witnesses and possibly the suspect[s], making arrests when appropriate, and helping ensure your child and family's safety.

THE CHILD ABUSE UNIT

OF THE

MIDDLESEX

FAMILY PROTECTION BUREAU

The Child Abuse Unit is a child-friendly department located within the Family Protection Bureau of the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, which was established in 1989 to ensure a sensitive, multi-disciplinary team response and approach to child abuse. The Child Abuse Unit handles all cases of sexual abuse and serious physical abuse of children under the age of 16, as well as cases involving the exploitation of children under the age of 18. The staff is made up of committed and caring professionals dedicated to working with and representing child-abuse victims and their families. Every child who comes forward with an allegation of abuse and his or her parent or guardian, are assigned a team made up of an assistant district attorney, a child interview specialist, and a victim witness advocate to assist them through the criminal justice system.

The Child Abuse Unit, working in collaboration with the Middlesex Children's Advocacy Center, is dedicated to speaking for those who otherwise would have no voice in the criminal justice system, and minimizing secondary trauma to child victims by streamlining the handling of cases of child abuse and exploitation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MIDDLESEX CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY CENTER
www.middlesexcac.com

DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
www.mass.gov/def

THE SAIN APPROACH



TO

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

MIDDLESEX DISTRICT ATTORNEY
GERRY LEONE

THE CHILD ABUSE UNIT
15 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE
WOBURN, MA 01801
(781) 897-8400

www.middlesexda.com

To report child abuse or neglect call the
Child-At-Risk-Hotline 1-800-792-5200