

The Tree House

United Family Services' Tree House is the only collaborative effort of community partners involved in child sexual abuse cases in Union County. It is built on the premise that no single child abuse professional or agency can solve the problem of child abuse alone.

The Tree House provides a child-friendly facility where child abuse professionals medically examine, interview, and provide counseling intervention, advocacy and comprehensive case management services. To minimize the trauma an abused child can suffer, the Tree House enhances the coordination between agencies and professionals involved. The Tree House Children's Advocacy Center is a program of United Family Services, a non-profit organization that has been serving children and families since 1909.

United Family Services offers:

- Individual, family and couples counseling
- Play therapy for younger children
- Support groups for teens, adult survivors and for non-offending caregivers
- Comprehensive case management
- Court advocacy, court education and court accompaniment
- A specially-designed child/teen interview room
- A child-friendly room for medical exams by specially trained physicians
- Professional training and community education/awareness regarding child abuse prevention and intervention
- Consumer credit counseling
- Parenting classes

United Family Services

The Tree House Children's Advocacy Center

604 Lancaster Avenue (200 South)

Monroe, NC 28112

704.226.1352 Phone

704.283.7770 · 24-Hour Rape Crisis Hotline

Tree House participating agencies include:

20th - B Judicial Guardian ad Litem

20th - B Prosecutorial District Attorney's Office

Carolinas Medical Center – Union

Community Mental Health Providers

Marshville Police Department

Monroe Police Department

Stallings Police Department

Union County Department of Social Services

Union County Health Department

Union County Public Schools

Union County Sheriff's Office

United Family Services

Wingate Police Department

Waxhaw Police Department



United
Family
Services

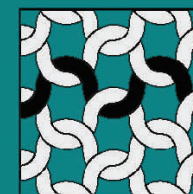
www.unitedfamilyservices.org

The Tree House Children's Advocacy Center

Where Healing Takes Root



United Family Services is proud to be a United Way member agency and accredited member of the National Children's Alliance



United
Family
Services

The Tree House provides a home-like environment for children who may have been abused and their loved ones.

How is a child referred to The Tree House?

Only law enforcement and child protective services personnel can refer a child for an evaluation.

What is included in the evaluation?

- An interview with the parent or guardian
- An individual interview with the child
- A complete head-to-toe medical exam

The evaluation process takes approximately two to three hours. Parents should make sure the child has eaten and feels rested prior to coming.

Who can attend the evaluation?

A supportive parent or legal guardian may accompany the child. **Any person suspected of having abused a child cannot attend.**

If a sibling attends the evaluation, he or she must be supervised by an adult or guardian in another room.

What happens in the interview?

Specially trained personnel conduct the interview. It is the Tree House's policy to interview the child alone to minimize stress and allow the child to describe events from his or her point of view.

The information obtained is shared with the doctor to assure the child's best possible care. Members from the multi-disciplinary team may observe the interview through closed circuit television to minimize the number of interviews.

Questions are open-ended and appropriate for the developmental age and abilities of the child. The interview is recorded on DVD to preserve his or her experiences.

What does the medical exam include?

A physician on the roster with the North Carolina Child Medical Evaluation Program conducts a head-to-toe medical exam. A special camera called a medscope is used to allow the doctor to conduct a more thorough exam with its bright light and magnification lens. *This is not a pelvic exam, and the medscope does not touch the child's body.* Testing for diseases is done if the doctor feels it is necessary to protect the child.

What happens after the evaluation?

- Medical and counseling options are discussed with the parent or legal guardian.
- The Tree House provides evaluation results to the referring agencies.

Appointments are very important!

Every effort should be made to arrive on time for an appointment. The Tree House only serves one individual at a time for privacy and confidentiality considerations. The Tree House must inform the referring agency (DSS or law enforcement) when a child fails to arrive or the appointment must be rescheduled. There may be a wait of several weeks for appointments that need to be rescheduled.

Preparing Your Child

Preparation of your child depends on:

- His or her age
- An understanding of the events that may have occurred
- The child's comfort with doctors

A young child could be told that he/she will be speaking with someone "who talks to children a lot." Urge the child to "talk about true things that really happened."

Do not tell your child what to say or coach her/him in any way.

Steps that you can take to help your child:

Things to say:

- I know it's not your fault.
- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- I will take care of you and keep you safe.
- I'm not sure what will happen next, but I'll do my best to support you and protect you.

Things to do:

- Create a safe environment for you and your child, and make changes to keep your child safe and away from the accused offender.
- Normalize life as much as possible. Maintain routines that are safe and appropriate, avoid discussing the suspicions of sexual abuse in the presence of the child, and avoid placing blame on anyone. Children often blame themselves and may confuse your anger toward the possible perpetrator as anger toward them.
- Begin counseling as soon as possible.
- Avoid over-indulging your child's wishes because of guilt.
- Take care of yourself, too.

