

CACHSC OF HIDALGO AND STARR COUNTIES

INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

INTERAGENCY WORKING PROTOCOL - HIDALGO COUNTY

EFFECTIVE

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INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC)

Memorandum

The UNDERSIGNED participating agencies agree to the following policy to support and maintain the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC), as identified in Texas Family Code Section 264, Subchapter E.

WHEREAS Hidalgo County continues to experience an increase in the reported incidents of child abuse—a trend also seen nationwide. In response to these reports, CACHSC and its partner agencies commit to working collaboratively to improve the response to child abuse cases and to provide appropriate interventions. The undersigned department heads and agency offices in Hidalgo County agree to support and sustain the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties.

WHEREAS Citizens of Hidalgo County have developed a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach for the investigation of child abuse and neglect cases to better protect children and provide services. To facilitate this MDT approach, CACHSC enhances cooperation and coordination among partner agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of crimes against children.

WHEREAS to better protect the children of Hidalgo County, the undersigned agencies agree to:

1. Minimize re-victimization of alleged abuse and neglect victims and non-offending family members throughout investigation, assessment, intervention, and prosecution.
2. Maintain a cooperative, team-based approach to ensure successful outcomes in both the criminal justice and child protection systems through shared fact-finding and collaborative case development.
3. Develop, support, and maintain the CACHSC as an environment that prioritizes the best interests of children by offering investigative and rehabilitative services.

Agreement

The undersigned agencies agree to support the concept and philosophy of the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties.

- All State and Federal confidentiality laws will be upheld in connection with this agreement.
- This agreement may be terminated by any party without cause by providing written notice to the other parties.
- The MOU must be reviewed, revised as needed, and re-executed at least every three years, or sooner if there are significant changes or a change in authorized signatories.

CACHSC OF HIDALGO AND STARR COUNTIES

INTERAGENCY WORKING PROTOCOL

MISSION STATEMENT

To reduce the emotional trauma of child abuse victims by facilitating a multidisciplinary team approach that supports the prevention of child abuse through community education and promotes the effective prosecution of those who perpetrate crimes against children.

GOALS

1. Strive to reach every child that meets the CACHSC case acceptance criteria.
2. Provide every service a child needs and recommend additional services based on a needs assessment.
3. Ensure all core CACHSC services are offered to child victims and their non-offending caregivers.

OBJECTIVES

1. The CACHSC will make a concerted effort to review all Hidalgo County Statewide intake reports generated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS), and will review referrals from the community, and partner agencies to recommend services through an MDT approach so every child can be reached.
2. The CACHSC will identify through a needs assessment and professionally recommend services to include: a forensic interview, a child abuse forensic medical evaluation, a mental health referral, involvement from a Victim Advocate Team Member, and conduct an MDT Case Review to ensure every service is provided to a child victim and their non-offending caregivers.
3. The CACHSC will ensure all core CACHSC services are evidence-based, meets, or exceeds Texas Family Standards and quality metrics identified for each CACHSC service.

SPECIFIC CRITERIA FOR REFERRAL OF CASES TO BE REFERRED FOR AN MDT RESPONSE AND SPECIFIC CRITERIA FOR THE REFERRAL AND PROVISION OF EACH SERVICE

TRAGET POPOULATON

The CACHSC overall target population consists of child victims for all types of maltreatment to include; sexual abuse, physical abuse, human trafficking, and witness to violent crimes as well as adults with substantial impairment (with the direction of the District Attorney's Office) referred by Law Enforcement Agencies or Texas Department of Family and Protective Services-Child Protective Investigations, Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services In-Home Investigations and Child Care Investigations. Services will also be provided for cases involving child fatality, child endangerment, neglect, or children at risk of abuse. In unique circumstances, CACHSC, along with MDT partner agencies, reserves the right to provide services outside of the target population (with the direction of the District Attorney's Office). Mental Health and Victim Advocacy services will also be provided to non-offending caregivers who meet the overall case criteria for an MDT response. In addition, Mental Health

Services will be provided on a case-by-case basis to children and/or family members from the community when approved by the Executive Director.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT)

COMPOSITION OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

The MDT consists of representatives from:

- Law Enforcement Agencies within Hidalgo and Starr Counties
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- *Health and Human Services*
- Hidalgo and Starr Counties Criminal District Attorney's Office
- Children's Advocacy Center of Hidalgo and Starr Counties
- Judge Mario E. Ramirez, Jr. Juvenile Justice Center (Juvenile Probation)
- Forensic Interviewers
- Victim Support & Advocacy
- *Medical*
- Participating mental health and medical providers with signed MOU agreements
- Other Collaborative Partners

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Alamo Police Department | • Judge Mario E. Ramirez Jr. Juvenile Justice Center |
| • Alton Police Department | • La Joya Police Department |
| • Doctor's Hospital at Renaissance Health System | • Driscoll Children's Hospital |
| • Donna ISD Police Department | • La Villa Police Department |
| • Donna Police Department | • McAllen ISD |
| • Driscoll Children's Hospital | • McAllen Police Department |
| • Edcouch Police Department | • Mercedes Police Department |
| • Edinburg CISD Police Department | • Mission Police Department |
| • Edinburg Police Department | • Palmhurst Police Department |
| • Elsa Police Department | • Palmview Police Department |
| • Hidalgo County District Attorney's Office | • Penitas Police Department |
| • Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office | • Pharr Police Department |
| • Hidalgo Police Department | • Progreso Police Department |
| | • San Juan Police Department |
| | • Sullivan City Police Department |

- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

- CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties

- Weslaco Police Department

AGENCY ROLES

Each partner agency agrees to participate as part of the MDT. Cases are addressed with a child-centered focus, followed by the needs of non-offending caregivers, and then legal or civil proceedings.

Each agency maintains its unique duties based on its discipline, with collaboration essential to:

- Shared case information
- Coordinated investigations
- Timely service referrals
- Consistent child- and family-centered support
- The individual needs of the child victim.
- The needs of supportive, non-offending caregivers whose concerns align with the best interest of the child.
- Law enforcement, criminal prosecution, and civil proceedings related to the case.

Law Enforcement

- Will refer maltreatment cases that meet the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response.
- Law enforcement investigators will investigate and determine whether a crime has been committed and present information to the proper authorities for prosecution.
- Will be present and collaboratively participate in the forensic interview process conducted at the CACHSC and satellite offices. In the event, an agency is not able to participate in the forensic interview, it is the responsibility of the assigned agency to make arrangements to receive a link of the forensic interview from the CACHSC or the District Attorney's Office.
- Contact the CACHSC in the event an emergency forensic interview is needed after hours and remain on the premises at the center or satellite offices until all services with the child victim and non-offending caregivers are completed.
- Will schedule a Sexual Assault Nurse Examination (SANE) with the CACHSC or a Safe Ready Medical Facility (SAFE) for any child or an adult with substantial impairment who has; made an outcry or there is a report (section 4. Article 56A.251, Code of Criminal Procedure) of suspected sexual abuse by a family member and/or meets the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response.
- Will refer physical abuse and neglect cases for an MDT response that meets the overall acceptance criteria to determine the need for further evaluation.
- Provide all relevant information/reports when appropriate (Texas Family Code 264.406); provide center staff with ongoing information pertaining to the direction and status of the criminal investigation.
- Facilitate, as necessary, the safe transportation of children and non-offending caregivers to the CACHSC, satellite offices, and other program services.

- Advise the prosecutors(s) on the outcome of the forensic interview and/or the sexual/medical assault exam in a timely manner following its conclusion.
- Provide direction when deemed appropriate regarding the sharing of case information/specifics with the victim's non-offending caregivers.
- Conduct and complete witness interviews and evidence collection pertaining to child abuse investigations by using the collaborating sheet (recommended).
- Attend all scheduled MDT Case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding current case status and plan for continued investigative activity with MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406). If unavailable, contact CACHSC in advance to provide pertinent information or send a representative from the investigative agency that is prepared to update the team.
- Participate in individual case review/staffing prior to and following the forensic interviews.
 - Coordinate with the CACHSC and report suspected child abuse to TDFPS.
 - Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community educational efforts, and team building programs.
 - Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT process.
- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

District Attorney (Prosecution)

- Will represent the state in prosecuting child abuse felony cases.
- Work with law enforcement officers in the investigation of criminal child abuse cases.
- Will present cases to the grand jury.
- Represent victims of violence in protective orders and represent the state in removing children from abusive households.
- Coordinate efforts for trial preparation and court accompaniment with CACHSC staff and conduct criminal prosecution proceedings.
- Attend all scheduled MDT case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding case status and plans for future court proceedings with other MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406).
- Share information with other team members concerning the status of child abuse cases as they move through the legal system.
- Prosecution, when appropriate, will assist CACHSC in the review of conflict cases prior to providing services at CACHSC.
- Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community education efforts, and team building programs.
- Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT process.
- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

Judge Mario E. Ramirez Jr. Juvenile Justice Detention Center

- Juvenile Justice Detention Center will provide CACHSC staff with information pertaining to the direction, scope and status of a case when deemed appropriate.
- Responsible for referring any allegations of child abuse in the juvenile system to local authorities and TDFPS as defined in Texas Family Code Sec. 261-101. PERSONS REQUIRED TO REPORT; TIME TO REPORT.
- Schedule services for the child victim that may include a Sexual Assault Nurse Examination (SANE), Forensic Interview, and/or a Medical Assessment for Physical Abuse and Neglect Cases.
- Facilitate, as necessary, the safe transportation of children to CACHSC.
- In cases where a mobile interview is being requested, it is the responsibility of the Juvenile Justice Detention Center to secure a location for the interview to be conducted.
- The location must be agreed upon by both parties. Additionally, when a mobile interview is requested, the forensic interview will be scheduled at the earliest time available.
- May observe forensic interviews where the alleged offender is a juvenile, so an informed decision can be made in cases where law enforcement plans to file a criminal case.
- Cooperate with law enforcement on those cases when the alleged offender will be placed in detention where a criminal offense will be filed.
- Solicits information to assist in making recommendations or treatment decisions during case disposition where the alleged offender/respondent is a juvenile.
- Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community educational efforts, and team building programs.
- Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT process.
- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS); Child Protective Investigations (CPI), Child Protective Services (CPS) Adult Protective In-Home Investigations (APS), and Child Care Investigations (CCI).

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM RESPONSE REQUIRED

- The department shall refer a case to a center and the center shall initiate a response by a center's multidisciplinary team appointed under Section 264.406 when conducting an investigation of:
 - **a report of abuse or neglect that is made by a professional as defined by Section 261.101 and that:**
 - alleges sexual abuse of a child; or
 - is a type of case handled by the center in accordance with the working protocol adopted for the center under Section 264.4031 [264.411(a) (9)]; or
 - a child fatality in which there are surviving children in the deceased child's household or under the supervision of the caregiver involved in the child fatality.
- Any interview of a child conducted as part of the investigation under Subsection (a) must be a forensic interview conducted in accordance with the center's working protocol adopted under Section 264.4031 unless a forensic interview is not appropriate based on the child's age and development or the center's working protocol adopted under Section 264.4031.

- Subsection (a) applies only to an investigation of abuse or neglect in a county served by a center that has executed an interagency memorandum of understanding under Section 264.403. If a county is not served by a center that has executed an interagency memorandum of understanding, the department may, if appropriate, directly refer a case to a center in an

- adjacent county to initiate a response by that center's multidisciplinary team [, if appropriate].

Child Protective Investigations (CPI)

- Child Protective Investigations will schedule a forensic interview of children who are listed as victims in the Statewide Intake for a Priority One and Priority Two, who meets the overall acceptance criteria in accordance with the working protocols, and the report is made by a professional reporter as defined by TFC Section 261.101.

- Will be present and collaborative participate with the forensic interview process conducted at the CACHSC and satellite offices along with any other program services.

- Contact the CACHSC in the event an emergency forensic interview is needed after hours and remain on the premises at the CACHSC or satellite offices along with any other program services.

- Facilitate, as necessary, the safe transportation of children and non-offending caregivers to CACHSC.

- Provide all relevant information/reports when appropriate (Texas Family Code 264.406).

- Participate in individual case review/staffing prior to and following the forensic interviews.

- Coordinate with the CACHSC, law enforcement, as well as medical staff if the children have made an outcry or there is a report (section 4. Article 56A.251, Code of Criminal Procedure) of suspected sexual abuse by a family member and/or meets the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response with the consent of the victim or an employee of TDFPS.

- Provide direction when deemed appropriate regarding the sharing of case information/specifics with the victim's non-offending caregivers regarding any placement of and protection of the child, advise CACHSC staff of any plans for mental, health, medical or other social services referrals for the child victim and/or family members.

- Report referrals to law enforcement and conduct of joint investigations as required by law.

- Attend all scheduled MDT Case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding current case status and plan for continued investigative activity with MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406). If unavailable, contact CACHSC in advance to provide pertinent information or send a representative from the investigative agency that is prepared to update the team.

- Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community educational efforts, and team building programs.

- Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT process.

- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

Adult Protective Services In-Home Investigations (APS)

- Adult Protective Investigations will schedule a forensic interview of elder and disabled individuals who are listed as victims on Statewide Intake for a Priority One and Priority Two, who meets the overall acceptance criteria in accordance with the working protocols; and the report is made by a professional reporter as defined by TFC Section 261.101.
- Will be present and collaboratively participate with the forensic interview process conducted at the CACHSC and satellite offices along with any other program services.
- Contact the CACHSC in the event an emergency forensic interview is needed after hours and remain on the premises at the CACHSC or satellite offices until all services with the child victim and non-offending caregivers are complete.
- Provide all relevant information/reports when appropriate (Texas Family Code 264.406)
- Participate in individual case review/staffing prior to and following the forensic interviews.
- Coordinate with the CACHSC, law enforcement, as well as medical staff if the children have made an outcry or there is a report (section 4. Article 56A.251, Code of Criminal Procedure) of suspected sexual abuse by a family member and/or meets the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response with the consent of the victim or an employee of TDFPS.
- Provide directions when deemed appropriate regarding the sharing of case information/specifics with the victim's non-offending caregivers regarding any placement of and protection of the child, advise CACHSC staff of any plans for mental health, medical, or other social services referrals for the child victim and/or non-offending caregivers.
- Attend all scheduled MDT case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding case status and plans for continued family involvement with other MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406). If unavailable, contact CACHSC Coordination Staff in advance to provide pertinent information or send a representative that is prepared to update the team.
- Report referrals to law enforcement and conduct joint investigations as required by law.
- Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community education efforts and team building programs.
- Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT Process.
- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings.*

Child Care Investigations (CCI)

- Child Care and Registered Child Care Investigations will schedule a forensic interview for victims of abuse and neglect in child-care operations, and child placing agencies, who are listed as on the Statewide Intake for a Priority One and Priority Two, who meets the acceptance criteria in accordance with the working protocols, and the report is made by a professional reporter as defined by TFC Section 261.101.
- Will be present and collaboratively participate with the forensic interview process conducted at the CACHSC and satellite offices along with any other program services.
- Contact the CACHSC in the event an emergency forensic interview is needed after hours and remain on the premises at the CACHSC or satellite offices until all services with the child victim and non-offending caregivers are completed.
- Facilitate, as necessary, the safe transportation of children and non-offending caregivers to CACHSC and satellite offices.

- Provide all relevant information/reports when appropriate (Texas Family Code 264.406).
- Participate in individual case review/staffing prior to and following the forensic interviews.
 - Coordinate with the CACHSC, law enforcement, as well as medical staff if the children who have made an outcry or there is a report (section 4. Article 56A.251, Code of Criminal Procedure) of suspected sexual abuse by a family member and/or meets the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response with the consent of the victim or an employee of TDFPS.
 - Provide direction when deemed appropriate regarding the sharing of case information/specifics with the victim's non-offending caregivers regarding any protection of the child, advise CACHSC staff of any plans for mental health, medical or other social services referrals for the child victim and/or non-offending caregivers.
 - Report referrals to law enforcement and conduct joint investigations as required by law.
 - Attend all scheduled MDT Case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding current case status and plan for continued investigative activity with MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406). If unavailable, contact CACHSC in advance to provide pertinent information or send a representative from the investigative agency that is prepared to update the team.
 - Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community educational efforts, and team building programs.
 - Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of CACHSC and the MDT Process.
 - *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

Medical Roles

- A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Physician's Assistant, who has met the training standards, has pediatric experience, and child abuse expertise will conduct a comprehensive medical exam to sexual/physical and neglect abuse patients to include photo and written documentation of injuries/and or other physical findings and collect evidence.
 - Acute SANE exams (less than 120 hours since the sexual assault occurred) will be performed at the nearest sexual assault forensic exam ready medical facility (SAFE) to ensure evidence is collected, the need for emergency contraception, and post-exposure prophylaxis for sexually transmitted infections (STI'S), pain management, and document evidence or complaint of anogenital bleeding or injury; and/or the need for a mental health evaluation.
 - **Non-Acute SANE** exams (more than 120 hours since the sexual assault occurred) will be performed through a scheduled appointment at the CACHSC or satellite offices by a CACHSC SANE Nurse and/or referred to the closest SAFE ready medical facility. The medical sexual assault examination will consist of history/narrative of the alleged incident, a full body and a detailed anogenital exam, collection of photographic evidence, and/or the need for a mental health evaluation.
 - They will actively and collaboratively participate with program services when appropriate.
 - Provide direction when deemed appropriate regarding the sharing of case information/specifics with the victim's non-offending caregivers regarding medical evaluation, advice CACHSC staff of any plans for mental health, medical or other social services referrals for the child victim and /or non-offending caregivers.

- Attend all scheduled MDT Case review meetings and participate in the sharing of information regarding current case status and plan for continued investigative activity with MDT members (Texas Family Code 264.406). If unavailable, contact CACHSC in advance to provide pertinent information or send a representative from the investigative agency that is prepared to update the team.

- Participate in CACHSC activities including professional education, community educational efforts, and team-building programs.

- Provide feedback and suggestions regarding procedures and operations of the CACHSC and the MDT process.

- Cases of child victims of alleged abuse who receive medical care from a non-MDT medical provider and/or a medical provider who does not specialize in child abuse will be reviewed by the designated MDT Medical Provider to assess the need for further evaluation/and or treatment.

- A medical facility who will be providing services as part of a multidisciplinary approach for the purpose of child abuse cases will have an additional linkage agreement detailing their roles and responsibilities.

- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

Training Requirements for SANE Nurses Providing Services to Children Under Chapter 264

SANE nurses providing services to children under Chapter 264 must adhere to the following training and documentation standards. They are responsible for submitting evidence of the following:

Advanced Medical Consultant in Sexual Abuse Evaluations with Findings

A medical provider who offers expert review of sexual abuse evaluations deemed abnormal or “diagnostic” of trauma must meet one of the following training and eligibility standards:

- **Child Abuse Pediatrician;** or
- **Physician or Advanced Practice Nurse with the following qualifications:**
 - Meets the minimum training standards required for a CAC medical provider.
 - Has performed at least **100 child sexual abuse evaluations;** and
 - Is **current with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)** requirements (see below).

Supporting Documentation:

Documentation must be attached to verify the above training and eligibility standards, including proof of continuing education.

Exception: A signed attestation **without** supporting documentation is acceptable only when confirming the completion of 100 child sexual abuse evaluations.

Definition of an Advanced Practice Nurse (APRN)

For the purposes of this protocol, an APRN includes a Nurse Practitioner (NP) or Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (PNP) who has completed:

- An undergraduate degree,

- Two years of graduate-level education,
- A clinical certification exam, and
- A minimum of **16 hours of formal didactic training** in the medical evaluation of child sexual abuse.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Requirements

To maintain eligibility, the medical provider must:

- Be familiar with **current research** on findings in abused and non-abused children, including the **sexual transmission of infections** in children (if performing evaluations in alleged sexual abuse cases);
- **Stay current with guidelines and recommendations from national professional organizations such as:**
 - The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect,
 - The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children,
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and
- **Provide documentation of participation in CQI activities, including:**
 - Continuing education, and
 - Expert review of positive findings (in alleged sexual abuse cases) with an

Advanced Medical Consultant.

Accuracy in interpreting medical findings is critical to the integrity and effectiveness of the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT).

Mental Health Providers

- Off-site participating Mental Health Providers, who have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC), will share pertinent case-related information. This may include treatment progress, attendance, and other clinically relevant data appropriate for sharing with MDT members.
- Off-site Mental Health Providers are encouraged to attend MDT Case Review meetings where their client's case will be discussed.
- Mental Health Providers will submit a Clinical Tracking Form outlining treatment goals, progress or lack thereof, and any concerns needing MDT attention. This form must be submitted during the initial treatment month and every three months thereafter, in accordance with MHP-MOU requirements.
- *Attend New Team Member orientation regarding CACHSC services, the multidisciplinary process, and other relevant cross – discipline trainings*

CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC)

- CACHSC will serve as the interagency coordinated response center, facilitating a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) approach involving Law Enforcement, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS), Juvenile Justice Center, Doctor's Hospital at Renaissance

Health System, Driscoll Children's Hospital, the District Attorney's Office, and off-site Mental Health Providers.

- Will help to coordinate through a multi-disciplinary approach the investigation, prosecution, and intervention efforts of child abuse cases.
- Provide a child-focused setting designed to provide a safe, comfortable, and neutral place for victims and their non-offending caregivers.
- Provide trained Forensic Interviewers to conduct legally sound, non-leading, neutral interviews for the purpose of investigations.
- Provide Victim Support and Advocacy services to the children and families who are referred to our center.
- Assist families with Mental Health and Medical Referrals.
- Provide a place for MDT Members to meet with the child and non-offending caregivers.
- Provide a facility at which a Multidisciplinary Team can meet to facilitate the efficient and appropriate disposition of child abuse cases through the civil and criminal justice systems on a monthly or as needed basis.
- Will receive and review TDFPS Statewide Intakes for acceptance criteria and collaboration between MDT members.
- Track each case as it moves through the investigative and legal process until final disposition.
- Advocate and provide support for the children and families served by the CACHSC.
- Assist families with crime victim applications, as needed, and maintain contact to monitor the progress of any victim services provided.
- Provide continued support to clients and non-offending caregivers.
- Provide medical evaluations for allegations of sexual abuse in cases that meet the guidelines for non-acute SANE exams. In certain situations, if necessary, CACHSC may conduct medical examinations for acute cases when it is in the best interest of the child.
- Provide Mental Health Therapists who meet the qualifications to conduct trauma-based counseling services.
- The CACHSC will serve as a clinical consultant and will support and monitor the treatment progress and outcomes of any child victim and their non-offending caregivers.
- Mental health professionals participating in the MDT will share only information deemed relevant to case coordination, treatment planning, or safety concerns, in accordance with HIPAA and professional ethics. When possible, consent to share mental health information will be obtained from the client/caregiver using an agency-approved release of information. All shared information will be documented and transmitted using secure, confidential methods.

Conflict Resolution

In the event of a conflict arising between team members regarding management of cases, conducting interviews, staffing of cases, etc. the CACHSC Executive Director shall

contact the agency supervisors who have authority over the individuals involved in the conflict/complaint. The Executive Director will provide in writing specific information about the nature and context of the conflict/complaint. Each agency supervisor will have sole authority in determining what, if any, action will be taken toward the individual team members involved, to resolve the conflict. In the event either agency involved deems greater urgency, a called meeting of all agency supervisors may be requested, scheduled, and conducted.

Confidentiality

The files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in providing communications, and working papers used or developed in providing services under this Chapter are confidential and not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may only be disclosed for purposes consistent with Chapter 264. All State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement.

Permitted disclosures may include:

Disclosure May Be To:

1. **The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS)**, department employees, law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, medical professionals, and other state agencies that provide services to children and families.
2. **The attorney for the child** who is the subject of the records, and a court-appointed volunteer advocate appointed under Section 107.031. Information related to the investigation of a report of abuse or neglect under Chapter 261 and services provided as a result of the investigation is confidential per Section 261.201.
3. **TDFPS, a law enforcement agency, and a prosecuting attorney** may share confidential information with the center under Section 261.201 as needed to provide services under this Chapter. Confidential information remains the property of the agency that originally shared or provided it.
4. **Courtesy services** will be provided to other federal and state law enforcement agencies other than those identified in this protocol when appropriate. These agencies will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality prior to participating in any programming service.
5. **The video and audio interview** of a child made at the center will become property of the prosecuting attorney involved in the criminal prosecution of the case involving the child. If no criminal prosecution occurs, the video recorded interview is the property of the attorney involved in representing the department in a civil action alleging child abuse or neglect. If the department is not investigating or has not investigated the matter, the video recorded interview is the property of the agency that referred the matter to the center.

Facility

Alleged Perpetrators

The CACHSC will provide a safe, neutral, child-focused facility for children and their non-offending caregivers.

No alleged or confirmed perpetrators will be allowed in the facility and/or the CACHSC premises. Only caregivers/family members who are directly involved with a case will be allowed in the facility and the CACHSC premises. Involvement is defined as a

caregiver/family member who is supportive of the child victim and/or caregiver/family member. The CACHSC staff may limit the number of caregivers/family members in the facility.

No interviews of alleged or confirmed perpetrators (adult or child) will be conducted at the CACHSC facility. Juvenile (ages 10 years or older) will be allowed in the facility when services are provided to them as child victims. CACHSC coordination staff will ensure that the victim is scheduled on a different day and/or time from their alleged juvenile's perpetrator's appointment. Consideration will be given to allow alleged confirmed perpetrators in the facility, if their participation in mental health and *medical services* is conducive to the victim's treatment.

Every effort will be made to avoid the presence of known perpetrators on site at the CACHSC whenever possible. In some situations, it may be allowable for a parent/guardian or caregiver that is an alleged or confirmed offender of neglectful supervision, but not for sexual/physical abuse to bring the child to the center for a forensic interview or SANE exam concerning sexual abuse or a medical evaluation concerning physical abuse or neglect.

Presence of Other Individuals

Every effort will be made to avoid the presence of any known defense attorneys and/or lawyers representing a caretaker/alleged perpetrator on-site at the CACHSC facility/premises. CACHSC will seek further advisement from the Hidalgo County District Attorney's Office.

Agencies Other than Hidalgo County Utilizing CACHSC Services

Upon request from our signature agencies, CACHSC will extend program services to other agencies of Hidalgo County.

When services are scheduled by TDFPS for a Law Enforcement agency outside of Hidalgo County, TDFPS will coordinate the appointment with a local Law Enforcement agency as a courtesy when available. Should a local Law Enforcement agency not be available, TDFPS may assign a Special Investigator to be present for the scheduled appointment.

Intake and Case Coordination

The CACHSC of Hidalgo County, Inc. receives case intakes in any of the

following manners:

1. Direct referral from local law enforcement partner agencies via phone, email etc.
2. Direct referral from local TDFPS partner agency via phone, email, etc.
3. Referral from TDFPS Statewide Intake/Hotline via email

Regardless of method of receipt, the CACHSC Coordination Staff will work to assist in coordination of joint investigations for all cases that meet the agreed upon case criteria within these MDT Protocols. The CACHSC will strive to communicate with and connect the appropriate investigative agencies with one another and assist, as requested, with the scheduling of any and all of the following core CAC services/activities appropriate for the respective cases: Forensic Interview, Victim Support and Advocacy, Medical Evaluations, Mental Health Evaluations and/or MDT Case Review.

For Intakes received via the TDFPS Statewide Intake/Hotline System

The CACHSC MDT Coordination Staff will read, review, and log all SWI reports received to determine if the Intake meets the agreed upon criteria for a multidisciplinary response and/or CACHSC services, the MDT Coordination Staff will check to determine whether or not the case has already been referred by local law enforcement and/or TDFPS. For cases that have not yet been referred to the CACHSC for a multidisciplinary team response and/or CACHSC services, the MDT Coordination Staff will contact the appropriate investigatory agencies to:

- Alert them about the intake.
- Communicate how the case appears to meet agreed upon case criteria for an MDT response and/or CACHSC services.
- Inquire as to what actions the investigating agencies wish to take at that time.

This outreach to the investigating agencies will be conducted through email, phone and/or text within 72 hours.

Coordination Staff will assist with communication and coordination among investigating agencies regarding the Intake and also offer to assist with scheduling services, as directed by the agencies. The MDT Coordination Staff will log details of the Intake through Collaborate (Pre-Intake function) as well as any actions determined to be taken at that time.

In the event an Intake meets the agreed upon case criteria for an MDT response and/or CACHSC services, but the investigating agencies, for whatever reason, advise that no further action is needed/will be taken, the Investigator will provide the reason for dismissal of the Intake and that information will also be logged into the case record for future reference, as needed.

CACHSC's role in reviewing the reports is to review and identify Statewide Intake reports within the overall case acceptance criteria as defined by the CACHSC's Working Protocol and facilitate CACHSC's multidisciplinary team services related to case investigation, assessment, and intervention. In addition, we understand that the CACHSC's access to the Statewide Intake reports shall not be construed to change, reduce, or expand the authority or jurisdiction of the CACHSC or any multidisciplinary team partner agency as it relates to initiating and conducting investigations, assessments, and/or interventions.

CACHSC will store, retain, and destroy all Intake Reports in accordance with the CACHSC Records Retention Policy.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAM SERVICES

SPECIFIC CASE CRITERIA FOR SERVICES FOR FORENSIC INTERVIEWS, MEDICAL EXAMS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND VICTIM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC) is committed to providing collaborative activities and program services in alignment with the overall criteria outlined in these MDT Protocols.

The following cases that meet the overall criteria will be referred for an MDT response:

Priority One Criteria

1. Sexual Abuse allegations to include, but not limited to (as defined in the Texas Penal Code):

- a. Aggravated Sexual Assault (Sec. 22.021)
- b. Sexual Assault (Sec. 22.011)

- c. Continuous Sexual Abuse of a child (Sec.21.02)
- d. Indecency with a Child (Sec.21.11)
- e. Prohibited Sexual Conduct (Sec. 25.02)
- f. Indecent Exposure (Sec.43.25)
- 2. Possession of promotion of Child Pornography (Sec.43.26)
- 3. Sexual Performance by a child (Sec.43.25)
- 4. Trafficking of Persons (Sec.20A.02)
- 5. Human Smuggling (Sec.20.05)
- 6. Solicitation of a child (Sec.22.06)
- 7. Injury to a Child (Sec.22.04)

Priority Two Criteria

- 1. Allegations of Physical Abuse
- 2. Child Fatality
- 3. Child Witness to a Crime
- 4. Allegations of Neglect
- 5. Child at Risk of Abuse

Collateral/Witness Interviews by Partner Agencies

Partner Agencies are encouraged to conduct all interviews of non-offending caregivers/siblings at the CACHSC whenever space and schedule permits.

After Hours Overall MDT Response

The CACHSC will be available during business hours from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM and after business hours to respond to TDFPS cases related to a report of abuse that is made by a professional reporter and that alleges sexual abuse of a child; or is a type of case handled by the center in accordance with the case criteria outlined in these working protocols; or a child fatality in which there are surviving children in the deceased child's household or under the supervision of the caregiver involved in the child fatality.

FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

TARGET POPULATION

The CACHSC target population for forensic interviews consists of child victims of maltreatment to include sexual abuse, physical abuse, human trafficking, and witness to a violent crime ages 2- 17, as well as adults with substantial impairment (with the direction of the District Attorney's Office).

A forensic interview is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse and/or exposure to violence using a semi-structured narrative process and are coordinated to avoid multiple interviews. Interviews are conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process.

All interviews shall be conducted by a trained CACHSC Forensic Interviewer with specialized training in conducting forensic interviews at CACHSC, satellite offices, or approved mobile site via

scheduled appointments in a CACHSC interview room. All forensic interviews will be conducted utilizing the CAC of Texas Semi-Structured Narrative Interview Process or a Nationally Recognized process. A CACHSC interview room is defined at any location that has been established by the CACHSC.

Appointment/CACHSC Intake Process

MDT members requesting a Forensic Interview are required to schedule an appointment with CACHSC Coordination Staff. Coordination Staff will gather pertinent information from the referring agency necessary to complete the intake process.

Appointment will be scheduled at the CACHSC location closest to the victim's residence when possible.

Information Required at Intake:

1. Allegations.
2. Identifying information for victims, non-offending parents, and alleged perpetrator.
3. Known victim's disability.
4. Individual transporting the victim and their date of birth.
5. Victim's address/city.
6. Information regarding additional investigative agency involved (TDFPS or Law Enforcement) case number and investigator assigned.
7. Contact phone number for investigator(s) involved.

Joint Investigation Coordination and MDT Notification

It is a policy that victims be exposed to a minimum number of interviews and interviewers pursuant to Section 264.403 of Texas Family Code. Interviews conducted with victims of sexual abuse and serious physical abuse will be conducted jointly by an Investigator from the appropriate TDFPS, and Law Enforcement Agency, pursuant to Section 261.301 of the Texas Family Code. CACHSC Coordination Staff will follow-up and notify team members prior to the forensic interview of a child victim to ensure all investigative agencies involved are present. The investigative team (TDFPS or Law Enforcement) scheduling the appointment is responsible for all communication with and/or non-offending caregivers/guardian and /or agency responsible for the transportation of the victim to the appointment.

Individual Conducting the Interview

Forensic interviews will be conducted by a CACHSC trained Forensic Interviewer who has completed the required trainings. Only the alleged victim, a forensic interviewer, as well as an interpreter when needed, will be allowed in the interview room.

Forensic interviews will be conducted based on the outlined overall acceptance criteria for Program Services and a trained Forensic Interviewer will be selected for each specific case that fits appropriately to the child victim's needs.

Forensic Interviewers will have successfully completed documentation of timely progress towards or satisfactory completion of the CACHSCs of Texas, Inc., Forensic Interviewer Core Curriculum; and/or a curriculum that is a national; and/or state recognized forensic interview trainings and adheres to current research and best practices.

Forensic Interviewers who conduct forensic interviews will participate in a structured peer review process for forensic interviewers a minimum of two (2) times per year. In addition, all

Forensic Interviewers will participate in ongoing education in the field of child maltreatment consisting of 8 contact hours annually.

Case assignments for scheduled forensic appointments will be reviewed to ensure the most appropriate interviewer is selected based on training and expertise, aiming for the best possible outcome whenever possible.

Interpreter

In the event the victim and/or a non-offending caregiver require the use of an interpreter, the referring agency will coordinate services. The CACHSC will assist with the coordination of those services when needed. The interpreter will provide a copy of their credentials, a valid identification, and participate during the forensic interview when needed.

Additionally, the interpreter will be required to read and sign the “Guidelines for Interpreters During an Interview” form as well as a confidentiality agreement.

Availability/Presence of MDT Members on Joint Interviews

MDT members with investigative responsibilities must observe the forensic interview(s) to ensure necessary preparation, information sharing, and MDT/interviewer coordination throughout the interview and post-interview process.

Law Enforcement and/or a TDFPS investigator must be present for the observation of the forensic interview; however, in the event one is unable to be present, the case investigator or their immediate supervisor must give approval for the forensic interview to be conducted in his or her absence.

No interview will be conducted at the CACHSC when not observed by at least one Law Enforcement or TDFPS Investigator. CACHSC staff will allow 15 minutes after scheduled interview time for all agencies involved to arrive before making alternative arrangements. Should an investigative agency not arrive within 15 minutes and/or CACHSC is unable to make contact, the CACHSC may proceed with the scheduled interview if they were previously notified of the appointment.

Who Observes the Interview

All CACHSC interviews shall be observed by at least one authorized investigative team member (TDFPS, Law Enforcement (local, state, or federal) and a designated/assigned prosecutor from the District Attorney’s Office) to ensure privacy for the victim and minimize the number of witnesses involved directly with the investigation and prosecution.

Those who may observe the forensic interview may include:

- Other CACHSC staff such as the Sexual Assault Nurse and CACHSC Mental Health Counselor may observe the forensic interview when appropriate.
- Off-site agency (e.g., Medical, Mental Health, etc.) may observe a forensic interview by court order or with the approval of the District Attorney or the designated prosecutor whenever feasible.

Those who may not observe the forensic interview:

- Caretakers, lawyers representing caretakers(s), therapists, social workers, advocates, and/or significant others shall not be allowed to be present in the interview room or observation room during a forensic interview.

- An Ad Litem Attorney may not observe the interview.
- A partner agency intern and/or volunteer shall not be allowed to be present in the observation room during the forensic interview unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director of the CACHSC.

Pre-Interview Procedures

TDFPS and/or Law Enforcement Investigators should introduce themselves to the non-offending caregivers of the child victim and explain their roles in the investigation process prior to the beginning of the interview.

The Forensic Interviewer, when feasible, will introduce themselves and explain the interview process to the non-offending caregivers. In the event the interviewer is unable to do so, the Victim Advocate may explain the process.

The Forensic Interviewer will introduce the room to the child. When possible, the Forensic Interviewer and Victim Advocate should assess the child's developmental level and inquire about any known disabilities the child may have with the non-offending caregivers.

The Forensic Interviewer will meet with the case team prior to beginning an interview to discuss any pertinent information regarding the case or alleged victim. Should an audio/video recording and/or written statement have been conducted by TDFPS or a Law Enforcement Agency with the victim(s), the audio/video recording and/or written statement will be provided to the jurisdiction involved in the joint investigation (pursuant to Section 261.301 of the Texas Family Code) case prior to a forensic interview. If the interview is agreed upon by the case team, the case team should agree upon the parameters of this interview.

In the event a child is present for multiple CACHSC services, the case team will discuss and determine which service should be completed first (i.e. medical, interview, etc.).

During the Forensic Interview

The case team will observe and take notes as the forensic interview is being conducted. If the case team has any questions during the interview process, they may communicate with the Forensic Interviewer at the time of the interview. In the event the Forensic Interviewer needs to communicate with the case team, the interviewer may step out of the interview room (taking into consideration the victim's age/and or demeanor) to discuss their questions or concerns with the case team.

The Forensic Interviewer may use aids during the interview process which may include male and/or female anatomical drawings and dolls, assessment tools, as well as any other aids deemed necessary by the case team. In some cases, it is necessary for the Forensic Interviewer to introduce evidence when deemed necessary by law enforcement and/or TDFPS.

The case team may request for the Forensic Interviewer when deemed necessary to introduce evidence during the interview. All information to include photographs, and or documentation must come from Law Enforcement and/or TDFPS. The CACHSC will not print, copy, or create documentation. All work products will become part of the forensic interview and will be stored accordingly to policies and procedures and a copy will be provided to law enforcement.

Post Interview Procedure

After the interview, the interviewer, victim advocate, law enforcement, and/or TDFPS (case team) (when applicable) will meet to discuss the outcome of the interview, clarify any questions or concerns regarding the case and identify any additional services.

Law enforcement will provide, if any, an offense category for CACHSC record keeping. A Victim Advocate may share information gathered through their assessment of the non-offending caregivers with the case team. Following that meeting, law enforcement/and or TDFPS should meet with the non-offending caregivers to explain the outcome of the interview and answer any questions they may have.

When relevant, the case team will discuss and determine the need for a SANE exam or a medical evaluation. If a SANE exam or medical evaluation was completed, CACHSC will document when and where it was done, if one has not been done, and one is needed, CACHSC staff may facilitate scheduling the SANE exam or medical evaluation with the CACHSC or an approved Safe Ready Medical Facility (SAFE).

Subsequent Forensic Interview

A subsequent interview is an interview to supplement the initial, completed forensic interview.

While it is CACHSC's goal to minimize the number of interviews per child, if an MDT member believes that a subsequent interview is necessary, the procedure shall be as follows:

1. The Case Team should confer and discuss the need for a subsequent interview and reach a consensus.
2. If an audio/video recording and/or written statement interview has been conducted by TDFPS or a Law Enforcement Agency with the victim(s), the audio/video recording and/or written statement will be provided to the jurisdiction involved in the joint investigation (pursuant to Section 261.301 of the Texas Family Code) case prior to a subsequent interview.
3. If the follow-up repeat interview is agreed upon by the case team, the case team should agree upon the parameters of this interview.
4. CACHSC will seek the assistance of the District Attorney's Office when a consensus is not met with the case team.
5. A subsequent interview will be conducted by the same Forensic Interviewer when possible.

Multi-Session Forensic Interview (MSFI)

A multi-session forensic interview is one forensic interview completed over multiple sessions for children and cases with special considerations. Special considerations include:

1. Children with disabilities
2. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds
3. Preschool children
4. Children who have experienced extreme trauma
5. Children who are victims of human trafficking

The case team should make the decision to have an MSFI conducted in place of a traditional interview. A MSFI should only be conducted with unanimous case team support for the initial Forensic Interviewer.

Prior to scheduling a MSFI for a courtesy law enforcement jurisdiction, the partner agency scheduling the appointment, or CACHSC staff should consult with the designated investigative agency for MSFI approval.

All MSFI successive sessions will be coordinated through the Forensic Interviewer and will be scheduled promptly.

Multi- Session Forensic Interview Work Product

The original interview will be created and uploaded to GuardifyNyx Software after each successive session of a MSFI. The Interview (s) will be uploaded by the forensic interviewer and stored in the GuardifyNyx software cloud-based system until the MSFI sessions have concluded. A link will be sent to the investigative agency when all sessions have been completed.

The forensic interviewer will make a full color copy of the original work product completed during the MSFI for each successive session. All work products will be stored by the forensic interviewer in the GuardifyNyx software cloud-based system until the sessions have concluded.

Video Recordings

Interviews conducted at the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties with victims will be video recorded pursuant to Texas Family Code Section 261.302.

Forensic Interviewers will upload all forensic interviews to a secured software cloud-based system called GuardifyNyx. A link to view and/or download the interview will be provided to each investigative agency.

Each Interview will be stored in the GuardifyNyx software cloud-based system identifying the following:

- Interviewees (victim (s))
- Date when interview was created
- Interviewee name
- Custodian
- Name of the forensic interviewer
- CACHSC case ID number
- Law enforcement case number
- Law enforcement agency
- DFPS case number
- CPS agency
- Jurisdiction if known
- County
- Language

- Interview observers
- Interview type
- Assigned investigator (s)
- Name of the forensic interviewer
- Alleged perpetrator if known
- GuardifyNyx (video) history
- Work product copy (attachments)
- Shared access with details
- Downloads

TDFPS and Law Enforcement Investigators will acknowledge that an original interview recording was provided through the GuardifyNyx system. The chain of custody ensures the interview is safe and only accessed by those who need access.

CACHSC will not store any video recording of interviews on local servers. If a case team member is not present for the recording of the forensic interview, a link of the video recordings(s) will be shared with law enforcement and/or TDFPS and/or Prosecutor present at that time of the recording. Interviews will be transferred to the Hidalgo County Criminal District Attorney's office through the GuardifyNyx System.

A video recording of an interview of a child that is made is the property of the prosecuting attorney involved in the criminal prosecution of the case involving the child. If no criminal prosecution occurs, the video recording is the property of the attorney involved in representing the department in a civil action alleging child abuse or neglect. If the matter involving the child is not prosecuted, the video recording is the property of the department if the matter is an investigation by the department of abuse and neglect. If the department is not investigating or has not investigated the matter, the video recording is the property of the agency that referred the matter to the center (TFC Sec.264.408).

After-Hour Forensic Interviews

On a case-by-case basis MDT members will assess whether it is in the best interest of the child to conduct a forensic interview after hours (e.g., night and/or weekends). CACHSC on-call staff will consider the following when scheduling after-hour interviews.

1. Allegations
2. Time of requested interview
3. Child's health and emotional state at the time of request
4. Availability of staff
5. Case details

MDT members will contact CACHSC through the 24-hour, seven day a week answering service at telephone number 956-287-9754 for emergency Forensic Interviews. When the interview cannot be conducted after hours, priority will be given to the case, and it will be scheduled at the earliest date and time, feasible and agreeable to all agencies involved.

On call CACHSC staff will be available in the event of an emergency 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. On call staff include, but is not limited to, a Forensic Interviewer, a Family Support Specialist, a SANE nurse, a Counselor and or Therapist.

Off-Site Interviews

Off-site forensic interviews will be available on a case-by-case basis using CACHSC portable equipment. These interviews will be conducted in an appropriate environment conducive to audio and video recording, utilizing a secure, HIPAA-compliant platform such as Zoom. CACHSC Coordination Staff and MDT members will ensure the location of where the interview will be conducted will be to the best of their ability and appropriate for the child to be interviewed. CACHSC staff may include, but it's not limited to: A Forensic Interviewer and a Family Support Specialist.

Equipment

A portable laptop, camera, and microphone will be taken to an off-site approved location. The off-site location will be approved by the Executive Director and/or assigned supervisor of CACHSC. The equipment will be operated by a trained Forensic Interviewer.

The following guidelines will be used when choosing a site:

- o Interview Room
- o Observation room
- o Waiting room

The following guidelines will be strictly enforced when conducting interviews using mobile equipment:

- o Maintaining Confidentiality
- o Signs on doors when necessary
- o Location of site
- o Monitoring of parents
- o Confidentiality agreements signed with interview site

Tracking Portable Forensic Interviews

CACHSC Coordination Staff will document the location of the forensic interview in the CAC's database as well as on the GuardifyNyx system. When an interview is recorded a link to the interview will be shared with Law Enforcement and TDFPS Investigator. After 30 days all interviews stored in the GuardifyNyx System will be transferred to the District Attorney's Office.

No copies of the mobile interview will be stored in the mobile laptop hard drive.

Victim Support and Advocacy

The CACHSC target population for victim support and advocacy consists of child victims of maltreatment to include sexual abuse, physical abuse, human trafficking, and witness to a violent crime ages 2-17, as well as adults with substantial impairment (with the direction of the District Attorney's Office). Victim Advocacy services will also be provided to non-offending family members who meet the overall case criteria for an MDT response. In addition, Victim Support and

Advocacy Services will be provided on a case-by-case basis to children and/or family members from the community when approved by the Executive Director.

The focus of victim support and advocacy is to help reduce trauma for the victim child and non-offending caregivers and to improve outcomes. Coordinated victim advocacy services encourage access to and participation in investigation, prosecution, treatment, and support services through the life of the case and thus are a necessary component in the MDT's response.

Victim Advocate

A Victim Advocate or trained MDT member who has specialized training in victim advocacy will provide victim support to child victims and their non-offending caregivers.

A Victim Advocate or trained MDT member will demonstrate that they have successfully completed a minimum of 24 hours of instruction within 6 months of hire. The training must consist of specific criteria as outlined by the CAC of Texas and/or appropriate training requirements specific to the services they provide, if an individual provides victim support and advocacy services as part of the CACHSC/MDT response.

A Victim Advocate or trained MDT member will demonstrate participation in ongoing education in the field of Victim Advocacy and Child Maltreatment consisting of eight (8) contact hours annually.

Greeting and Orientation

The Victim Advocate will greet and provide an orientation to children/and their non-offending caregivers and will be available during the forensic interview to provide support to non-offending caregivers and may participate in pre and post interview case staffing when applicable.

Assessment

A Victim Advocate will conduct an assessment with the parent/legal guardian present to determine the need for services relating to the investigation of abuse of their child and or parent/legal guardian. They will also assess the child(s) and non-offending family caregiver's/family's mental state and feelings about participation in the investigation/prosecution.

Crisis Intervention

A Victim Advocate may provide crisis intervention and support at all stages of the investigation and prosecution process of the victim and their non-offending caregivers.

Information and Referral

The Victim Advocate will provide relevant educational literature/information, which may include:

- o Information about the CACHSC
- o Educational literature/information related to child abuse and services provided
- o Off-site available resources
- o Referrals for counseling services on-site or off-site
- o Victim's Rights

- o Assistance with procuring services (housing, protective orders, domestic violence intervention, food, transportation, public assistance)
- o Provide information about the investigation process
- o Texas Crime Victim's Compensation as well as assistance with the completion and submission of the application.
- o Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) as well as assistance with the registration process

MDT Case Review Meetings

The Victim Advocate will attend and/or coordinate MDT case review meetings. They will provide updates to non-offending caregivers on case status, continuances, dispositions, sentencing, and offender release from custody when appropriate. The Victim Advocate will also provide MDT updates regarding the victim and/or the caregiver/family status during case review meetings.

Family Follow Up

The Victim Advocate and/or other CACHSC staff will conduct a follow-up telephone calls with the victim or the victim's protective family member/caregiver after their visit to the CACHSC and thereafter.

Accompaniment

The Victim Advocate may be available to the victim and/or non-offending caregivers for accompaniment to court, medical and/or other types of accompaniments related to the investigation or prosecution of their case.

Confidentiality

The files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in providing communications, and working papers used or developed in providing services under this Chapter are confidential and not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may only be disclosed for purposes consistent with Chapter 264. All State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement.

Mental Health Services

Evidence-based, trauma-focused mental health services, designed to meet the unique needs of the child and caregivers, are consistently available as part of the multidisciplinary response.

The CACHSC target population for mental health services consists of child victims of maltreatment to include sexual abuse, physical abuse, human trafficking, and witness to a violent crime ages 2-17, as well as adults with substantial impairment (with the direction of the District Attorney's Office). Mental health services will also be provided to non-offending caregivers who meet the overall case criteria for an MDT response. In addition, mental health services will be provided on a case-by-case basis to children and/or family members of the community when approved by the Executive Director.

Mental health services are provided by professionals with training in, and who deliver, evidence-supported, mental health treatment specific to child abuse and/or child trauma.

Onsite Providers at CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC) must demonstrate that its mental health providers meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. A student currently enrolled in an accredited graduate or doctoral program in a mental health-related field.
2. A minimum of a master's degree completed in a mental health field and a license to practice.
 - i. *If not licensed to practice independently, a requirement to attend supervision with a licensed mental health professional on a consistent basis and in accordance with the rules of the licensee's discipline.*

Appropriate Offsite behavioral health treatment providers include the following:

- licensed counselors (LPC-associate, LPC, and LPC-S),
- licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFT-associate, LMFT, and LMFT-S)
- Licensed Psychologists
- licensed social workers (LMSW, LCSW, and LCSW-S)

Mental health services to include debriefings, Mental Health Screening Assessments, crisis intervention, and specialized trauma-focused and evidence-based treatment are eligible to child victims of abuse and their non-offending caregivers. Priority will be given to victims that have received other CACHSC services; however, outside referrals will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, all mental health services to child victims and their non-offending caregivers will be free of charge for clients referred to the CACHSC as part of an MDT response.

Mental health services are separate from the forensic process of gathering evidentiary information. Child victims and their non-offending caregivers are eligible to receive a mental health screening assessment to assess and mitigate the long-term impacts of trauma or other diagnosable mental health conditions.

Evidence-supported, trauma-focused mental health services for children are consistently made available at CACHSC and include the following:

1. Trauma-specific assessment of traumatic events and abuse-related trauma symptoms to determine the need for treatment.
2. Use of standardized assessment measures initially to inform treatment and periodically to assess progress and outcomes.
3. Individualized treatment plans based on assessments that are periodically reassessed.
4. Individualized evidence-supported treatment appropriate for the child and other family members.
5. Child and caregiver engagement in treatment.
6. Monitoring trauma symptom reduction.
7. Referral to other community services as needed.
8. All services should be culturally informed and responsive.

Post Debrief

CACHSC personnel will conduct debriefings with victims and non-offending caregivers after a forensic interview and medical exam. This will allow the victim to express their experience and feelings about the forensic interview and/or medical exam. During the process, CACHSC personnel

will identify the needs for mental health services, evaluate the need for immediate crisis intervention, and formulate recommendations for additional services.

Crisis Interventions

Trained CACHSC personnel will evaluate the victim and/or non-offending caregivers for risk of self-harming or suicide when appropriate. CACHSC trained personnel will discuss findings, concerns and/or action plans with the non-offending caregivers and/or investigators present. If applicable and a safety plan is needed, CACHSC trained personnel will follow up as needed with the victim and guardian/parent to ensure the child's mental health concerns are addressed and take the necessary steps if additional intervention is needed.

On-site Counseling

Referrals

A request for mental health services must be made by completing a Counseling Referral Form. Internal referrals will be made by the Family Support Specialists or support personnel and a Mental Health Screening Assessment will be utilized to determine the needs. Partner agencies wishing to make outside referrals can contact a member of the CACHSC Mental Health Department to make a referral. Information required to indicate a referral:

1. Victim name, date of birth, home address.
2. Legal guardian name and phone number.
3. Identified symptoms/behavior changes.
4. Contact information for TDFPS and Law Enforcement investigators (if applicable).
5. Date of CACHSC Interview (if applicable).
6. Alleged Offense

Referrals for Caregivers

CACHSC accepts referrals for non-offending caregivers to participate in a variety of services for caregivers, such as Parent Classes, Parent Seminars, Support Groups, Individual Counseling etc. to address:

1. Safety and well-being of the child.
2. Caregiver involvement in the child's treatment when appropriate.
3. Emotional impact of abuse allegations.
4. Risk of future abuse.
5. Issues or distress that the allegations may trigger, including own history of trauma and/or current experience of abuse, violence, and/or other trauma.
6. CACHSC may provide these services directly and/or through linkage agreements with other appropriate agencies or providers.

Supervision of Onsite Mental Health Providers

Clinicians providing mental health treatment to children and families must participate in ongoing clinical supervision and/or consultation to ensure appropriate and quality service is delivered to children and families they serve. Consultation may be facilitated by a senior clinician

on-staff at the CACHSC, a senior clinician in the community with experience treating families impacted by abuse and/or trauma, or participation in formalized peer review meetings with other CAC mental health providers.

Best practices for clinical supervision include monthly consultation meetings for independently licensed clinicians, and weekly consultation meetings for student interns and provisionally licensed clinicians.

Training Requirements for Employed Mental Health Providers and Contract Providers

Regular employees of CACHSC and contracted providers must show timely progress toward the completion of forty (40) hours of training. Training programs that include fewer than forty (40) hours (including attached consultation calls) may be supplemented with contact hours in evidence-based assessment. Note that employees/contract providers who are currently enrolled in training to deliver evidence-supported treatment may provide services to children as part of this training.

If the mental health provider is not licensed to practice independently, both the provider and the supervisor must meet the forty (40) hour training requirement.

Upon completion of core training, clinicians providing mental health treatment to children and families must demonstrate completion of continuing education in the field of child abuse, trauma, clinical practice, and/or cultural applications consisting of at least eight (8) contact hours every two (2) years.

Student Intern Requirements:

- To attend supervision with a licensed mental health professional, in accordance with the rules of the discipline, that meets the forty (40) hour training requirement.
- Student interns who are anticipated to provide services to CAC clients for a period of six (6) months or less must complete ten (10) hours of training within the first three (3) months of CAC affiliation.
- Student interns who are anticipated to provide services to CAC clients for more than six (6) months must show timely progress toward completion of forty (40) hours of training. Note that students who are currently enrolled in a training to deliver evidence-supported treatment may provide services to children as part of this training.

MDT Case Review Meetings

CACHSC Mental Health Personnel will be involved with case management and case review (i.e., referral, follow-up, communication with Mental Health Providers, and continued communication with Multi-Disciplinary Team Members) to ensure clients' needs have been met.

Mental Health Records

CACHSC will keep clinical/mental health records in accordance with state and federal laws and board policy regarding Retention of Records. Client's Mental Health records are kept confidential. CACHSC will not release client information without the proper authorization by the client/client's guardian. Mental Health records may be legally available to other medical providers for the purpose of needed treatment of the patient and to those agencies mandated to respond to a report of alleged child abuse. A log of all disclosures will be maintained with the medical record, in accordance with federal privacy rules.

Record requests will be reviewed in accordance with CACHSC record retention policies.

Confidentiality

The files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in providing communications, and working papers used or developed in providing services under this Chapter are confidential and not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may only be disclosed for purposes consistent with Chapter 264. All State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement.

Mental health professionals participating in the MDT will share only information deemed relevant to case coordination, treatment planning, or safety concerns, in accordance with HIPAA and professional ethics. When possible, consent to share mental health information will be obtained from the client/caregiver using an agency-approved release of information. All shared information will be documented and transmitted using secure, confidential methods.

Medical Evaluation Services

The CACHSC will recommend and facilitate SANEs and medical referrals for physical and neglect cases as part of the multidisciplinary response medical treatment for child victims of alleged abuse. CACHSC provides a 24-hour, seven day a week answering services telephone number (956-287-9754) for partner agencies (MDT members) to call for emergency medical evaluations. The investigative agency will set up an appointment, preferably after the child forensic interview. The MDT members discuss and agree to the need for medical exams to be scheduled on the same day as the interview (when feasible). MDT (Law Enforcement and TDFPS Investigators) members will inform the parents that a medical examination is needed. The victims will be seen at the CACHSC, satellite offices, or at a SAFE ready medical facility. Calls received by the CACHSC that are classified as an acute case will be recommended to be scheduled with a SAFE ready medical facility.

MDT members should schedule a SANE exam/medical evaluation when a child has disclosed sexual, physical or neglect abuse, or is suspected of being sexually abused by a family member and meets the overall acceptance criteria for an MDT response; however, children should never be forced to undergo the examination.

MDT members requesting a sexual assault or medical examination are required to schedule an appointment with CACHSC Coordination Staff. The CACHSC Coordination Staff will gather pertinent information from the referring agency necessary to complete the intake process.

Information Required at Intake:

1. History of the incident.
2. Identifying information for victims, protective family members, and alleged perpetrators.
3. Type of exam requesting.
4. Individual transporting children.
5. Victim's address/city.
6. Additional investigative agency involved (TDFPS or Law Enforcement), case number, and investigator assigned.
7. Contact phone number for investigator (s) involved.
8. Case priority.
9. History of mental health for the victim.

On-site Sexual Assault Exam

A CACHSC SANE Nurse who is trained and meets the eligibility requirements will conduct all non-acute SANE examinations on a scheduled basis and will seek guidance from the CAC's Medical Director and/or someone who is part of the multidisciplinary response team who meets the eligibility standards. In the event the CACHSC SANE Nurse is not available, the investigative agency with legal jurisdiction will be responsible for coordinating with a SAFE medical ready facility who employs a provider who is trained and meets eligibility standards.

MDT members requesting a sexual assault examination are required to schedule an appointment with CACHSC Coordination Staff. The CACHSC Coordination Staff will gather pertinent information from the referring agency necessary to complete the intake process.

Non-Acute Examinations

A sexual assault incident occurring more than 120 hours from the incident will be scheduled through the CACHSC and conducted by a SANE Nurse at the CACHSC or satellite offices. In the event the CACHSC's schedule cannot accommodate a SANE, the investigative agency with legal jurisdiction in the case will schedule the exam with a SANE Nurse at a SAFE ready medical facility.

Acute Examinations

A sexual assault incident occurring less than 120 hours will be performed at the nearest sexual assault forensic exam ready medical facility (SAFE).

CASES PRESENTING INITIALLY TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES:

The agency receiving the initial report will refer the child to a SAFE ready medical facility for immediate assessment and treatment. When necessary, law enforcement will transfer the child to the hospital for treatment.

CASES PRESENTING INITIALLY TO THE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM:

Personnel should attempt to contact SANE staff, and if available, request their participation in the examination.

Off- Site Sexual Assault Exams

When a CACHSC Sexual Assault Nurse is not available, assistance by CACHSC will be provided for an off-site SAFE ready medical facility.

In the event a child victim of alleged abuse is treated by a non-MDT medical provider and/ or a medical provider who does not specialize in child abuse a designated MDT medical provider will review and assess the need for additional evaluation and/or follow up care if deemed necessary.

Medical evaluations for child victims of alleged physical/neglect abuse

The CACHSC Nurse will review information about a case for signs of maltreatment (physical/neglect abuse), medical conditions, and mental health concerns and will take the following steps.

- If the victim child has sustained physical injuries or there are signs of neglect and/or physical abuse, the CACHSC SANE Nurse will refer the victim child to a SAFE ready medical facility for immediate assessment and treatment by ER personnel. When necessary, law enforcement will transfer the child to the hospital for further evaluation and medical treatment.

- If the victim child is thought to have a medical condition, the CACHSC SANE Nurse will refer the victim child to their Primary Care Physician and/or the nearest SAFE ready medical facility for further evaluation and medical treatment.

- When necessary, the CACHSC staff will notify the appropriate agencies if there is knowledge or suspected signs of abuse and neglect.

- The CACHSC SANE Nurse and/or CACHSC staff will conduct a 72-hour follow-up phone call with a non-offending caregiver to ensure the victim child received the necessary treatment and there are no concerns.

Documentation of Medical Findings

All medical findings to include medical history and physical evaluation will be carefully, thoroughly recorded, and legibly documented by the CACHSC SANE Nurse and CACHSC staff. The medical record will include a statement as to the significance of the findings and treatment plan. The CACHSC SANE Nurse is responsible for all photo documentation and will be completed in all cases when the SANE or a medical evaluation is conducted at the CACHSC.

In the event a SANE or medical evaluation is conducted outside of the CACHSC, it is the responsibility of the investigative team who has jurisdiction over the case to ensure all documentation is obtained and shared with all investigatory agencies, who are mandated to respond to a report of alleged child abuse and be made available to other medical providers for the purpose of needed treatment of the patient.

Record Keeping, Confidentiality of SANE Exams, Medical Evaluations, and Subpoenas

Medical records will be maintained in compliance with federal rules governing the protection of patient privacy. Medical records may be legally available to other medical providers for the purpose of needed treatment of the patient and to those agencies mandated to respond to a report of alleged child abuse. In some circumstances a written consent or court order will be required. A log of all disclosures will be maintained with the medical record, in accordance with federal privacy rules.

All medical records will be stored under double lock and key and only authorized CACHSC staff will have access to the records. Medical records will be labeled with the child's first, middle (if applicable), and last names. Photos/ videos will be stored in a separate protective sleeve to ensure no damage occurs.

MDT Case Review Meetings

CACHSC Medical Health personnel will be involved with case management and case review (i.e., referral, follow-up, communication with Mental Health Providers, and continued communication with Multi-Disciplinary Team Members) to ensure clients' needs have been met.

MDT Case Review Meetings

MDT case review meetings are required by the Texas Family Code Section 264.408 and CAC of Texas Standards. The purpose of case review meetings is to ensure that each case is worked from its onset through a cooperative and effective effort by the signatory agencies and CACHSC staff.

Location of Meetings

MDT case review meetings will be conducted at the CACHSC or other announced locations, such as CACHSC satellite offices, or District Attorney's Office. Case review discussions will also be facilitated with the aid of technology (conference calls or video conferencing).

Coordination and Facilitation

Case review meetings will be coordinated and facilitated by CACHSC Coordination Staff Members.

Attendees

The following MDT members will attend and participate during the stating of their case or have someone sit in with knowledge of the case:

- o Law Enforcement
- o Child Protection
- o Prosecution
- o Medical
- o Mental Health
- o Victim Support and Advocacy
- o Forensic interviewing
- o CACHSC

Case Criteria Selection Categories

Cases will be selected for review based on offense/outcry after a forensic interview, SANE exam and/or a medical referral. The CACHSC MDT will review every open case to identify and initiate the need for an MDT review.

Special Case Review Meetings referred to by MDT

An MDT member recommending a case for case review will contact CACHSC and provide the details of the case. CACHSC Coordinating staff will gather all pertinent information and schedule a Case Review. The timeline for when the Case Review will happen will be based on MDT's recommendation.

Frequency of Meetings

Case review meetings will typically be scheduled biweekly, however, no less than once a month.

Agendas

The CACHSC will prepare an agenda with identified cases to be reviewed and distributed to identified MDT members involved with those cases. The agenda will be distributed only to those identified MDT members through a secured business e-mail.

Case Review Recommendations

Designated CACHSC staff will follow up on MDT recommendations identified during MDT case review meetings.

Case Tracking

CACHSC monitors and tracks each case progress throughout the multidisciplinary interagency response. A database has been put in place to connect pertinent information for decision making and service provision to children and families at the CACHSC. Information is maintained in a case log and can be retrieved by the CACHSC Coordination Staff for the purpose of reporting statistical information to be shared with oversight agencies, CACTX, and/or state funding.

MDT partners wishing to access the database will contact CACHSC and request in writing details of the information needed and a timeline of when the information is needed.

Court Accompaniment and Court Preparation

CACHSC Victim Advocate who is familiar with the victim and their family may be available to accompany victims to court and provide them support during trials and/or hearings. The prosecuting attorney assigned should notify the CACHSC Victim Advocate when the case is scheduled for a trial/and hear that the child victim will be required to attend.

CACHSC will promote the highest levels of performance and integrity. They will provide services to a diverse population regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or any other cultural descriptions.

Cultural Competency and Diversity

Cultural competency is defined as the capacity to function in more than one culture, requiring the ability to appreciate, understand and interact with members of diverse populations within the local community.

Volunteer and Internship Program

A CACHSC volunteer/intern must be 18 years of age or older to provide direct services. Volunteers under the age of 18 may assist with duties that do not include direct services to victims or the non-offending caregivers.

The CACHSC Executive Director may approve the volunteer/intern candidate upon completion of the following:

1. Completed CACHSC volunteer/internship application
2. Successfully pass a Child Abuse/Neglect registry and DPS Criminal History Check
3. Reference check
4. Personal interview
5. Current Resume/Curriculum Vitae
6. Signed Pledge of Confidentiality
7. Sex Offender Registry Check
8. National Sex Offender Data Base

Once accepted as a CACHSC Volunteer/Intern, they will participate in a CACHSC orientation and training.

We, the undersigned, have reviewed and accepted the CACHSC of Hidalgo and Starr Counties Interagency Memorandum of Understanding.

EXECUTED this ____ day of September 2025.

REVIEW, REVISION, RE-EXECUTION OF MDT INTERAGENCY WORKING PROTOCOL

To maintain compliance with the Texas Standards for the CACHSCs, the CACHSC Interagency working protocol must be reviewed, revised, and re-executed by partner agencies, at a minimum every three years or upon significant changes to the document or upon a change of authorized partner agency signatories. This agreement can be terminated by any party without cause by giving written notice to the other parties.

All partner agencies, MDT members and CACHSC staff will be notified of the review and revision process.

We the undersigned have read and understood the interagency protocols for case processing and management for the CACHSC of Hidalgo County, Inc. as partner agencies to fully execute the Interagency Working Protocol.

EXECUTED THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 2025 and will be in force for three (3) years.

Agency Signature Page

*Children's Advocacy Center of Hidalgo and Starr Counties (CACHSC)
Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) & Working
Protocol (WP)
Effective: [Insert Date]*

The undersigned agencies commit to the collaborative responsibilities outlined in the MOU and WP for the Children's Advocacy Center of Hidalgo and Starr Counties. Each agency affirms its role in the coordinated MDT response under Chapter 264 of the Texas Family Code and CACTX Standards.

By signing below, each agency agrees to uphold the shared mission of protecting children, reducing trauma, and ensuring coordinated services.

Agency: Alamo Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Alton Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Doctor's Hospital at Renaissance Health System

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Donna ISD Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Donna Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Agency: Hidalgo Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Judge Mario E. Ramirez Jr. Juvenile Justice Center

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: La Joya Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: La Villa Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: McAllen ISD

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: McAllen Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Mercedes Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Mission Police Department

Printed Name / Title: Cesar Torres, Chief of Police

Signature: CL

Date: 8-15-25

Agency: Palmhurst Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Palmview Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Penitas Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Pharr Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Progreso Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: San Juan Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Agency: Sullivan City Police Department

Printed Name / Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____