



**National
Children's
Alliance®**

*The Force Behind
Children's Advocacy Centers*

2023 NCA/CAC Style Guide

A guide to consistent terminology

Introduction & Purpose

This style guide is intended to clarify for the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) movement and related fields National Children's Alliance (NCA) preferred terminology and usage of language to describe child maltreatment-field specific concepts. While this guide is non-binding for NCA members, NCA uses it to determine the language it uses in its own materials and communications.

Included: **Key military terms for CACs.** [Go to the appendix.](#)

We encourage NCA members and partners to adopt this style guide as well as to send us new terms to consider for inclusion, feedback on preferred language, and questions about usage and rationale. Contact Director of Communications Blake Warenik at bwarenik@nca-online.org with questions or feedback on this style guide.

Glossary of Terms

501(c)(3) Refers to the section of the IRS code for charitable organizations. Acceptable preceding *nonprofit* to distinguish Children's Advocacy Centers and other nonprofits operating as public charities, private foundations, or operating foundations from other organization types, such as tax-exempt, government-based, or for-profit organizations. CACs may operate as independent 501(c)(3)s or as subsidiary programs under a 501(c)(3). Note the format and lack of spacing. Not all tax-exempt organizations are 501(c)(3)s.

abusive images NCA’s preferred terminology when referring to images (video, photos, etc.) of child abuse. It most often refers to images of sexual abuse but can be used for images of physical abuse. In some very specific—and limited—contexts, we may use the terms *child sexual abuse materials* or *child pornography*, but neither of those terms is preferred. See *child sexual abuse materials* and *child pornography* for more information.

Accredited Chapters meet each of the five Standards for Accredited Chapter Members. See *Chapters* and *Standards*.

Accredited Members Although *Chapters* can also be accredited, use *Accredited Members* only when referring to Accredited CACs. If you’re referring to both CACs and Chapters being accredited, make sure that’s clear.

Accredited CACs meet each of the 10 required *National Standards for Accredited Children’s Advocacy Centers*. As of January 2023, the *National Standards for Accredited CACs* includes three new optional standards. The various accredited and non-accredited membership types are [listed on our website](#). See also *Standards*.

acronyms Do not use acronyms on first reference except those specifically designated as acceptable on first reference within this style guide, regardless of expected familiarity of the intended audience with the work of Children’s Advocacy Centers. Acronyms are usually acceptable on second and subsequent reference with explanation.

adverse childhood experiences, ACEs Refer to potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (before age 18), such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home; or having a family member attempt or die by suicide. See the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) for more information, including information on the original study by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, published in 1988.

Affiliate Members Multidisciplinary teams that are working to improve services for abused children through a collaborative approach to intervention. The requirements for membership are [listed on our website](#).

Alternatives for Families: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, AF-CBT A common evidence-based treatment intervention to improve the relationship between children and caregivers. This intervention is commonly used to address physical or emotional abuse, neglect, child behavior problems, and family conflicts, and is provided by or through many Children’s Advocacy Centers. *AF-CBT* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference.

Alaska Native Use as the collective term for *Indigenous* people in Alaska.

Alaska Native/American Indian, AN/AI Use only in reference to the federal grant. *AN/AI* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. In other contexts, NCA prefers to be specific whenever possible. See *Native American* for more information on acceptable wording.

American Indian Can be used interchangeably with *Native American*. See *Native American*.

Associate/Developing Center Members Those that are working toward but have not yet achieved implementation of the 10 National Standards for Accredited CACs. The membership types are [listed on our website](#).

Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, APA APA is a provider of technical assistance and training to prosecutors. *APA* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. Do not precede with *the* in either form.

Black NCA follows Associated Press style on capitalizing *Black* when used as an adjective to describe race, ethnicity, or culture, such as when speaking broadly about Black people, Black culture, etc. In our field, it will often be used as a broad demographic category. *Black* is not interchangeable with *African American*. See also *white*.

body safety education When discussing body safety, avoid phrases such as “teaching children how to keep themselves safe” that might give the impression that it’s solely kids’ responsibility to protect themselves.

CAC, Child Advocacy Center, Children’s Interview Center, Children’s Justice Center, CIC, CJC See *Children’s Advocacy Center*.

CALiO, the Child Abuse Library Online Refers to National Children’s Advocacy Center’s (NCAC’s) Child Abuse Library Online, a digital library of scholarly articles related to child abuse and child welfare. Note capitalization, and the fact that this is NCAC’s library, not NCA’s.

Caucasian Do not use as a substitute for *white* except when absolutely necessary, such as when quoting demographic data in which the source agency used *Caucasian* as a category label.

Chapter Chapter organizations are member organizations comprising CACs within a given state. Chapters serve as the leading resource within the state for CACs. A [definition of Chapters](#) and the [Standards of Accreditation for Chapter Members](#) are

available on our website. *Chapter* is acceptable in all references. See *State Chapter and Accredited Chapters*.

Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention, CFTSI A common mental health treatment for child trauma symptoms. An evidence-based early intervention, the goal of CFTSI is to decrease post-traumatic stress reactions and the onset of PTSD by increasing communication and family support. It is endorsed by National Children’s Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and provided by or through many Children’s Advocacy Centers. *CFTSI* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference.

child physical abuse Refers to a specific type of child maltreatment where the abuse is physical in nature.

child pornography Do not use, except in limited cases when referring to Domestic Trafficking Victims’ Act grants or other legislation in which *child pornography* is still part of the official language. Use instead *child sexual exploitation* or *abusive images*. *Pornography* does not automatically equal *crime* in people’s minds, and we want to be very clear that this is criminal activity in which the child is a victim. See also *child prostitute*.

child prostitute, child prostitution, child sex worker Do not use. For *child prostitute* or *child sex worker*, use *child trafficking victim, exploited child, or trafficked child*. For *child prostitution*, use *child sex trafficking, child sexual exploitation* or *commercial sexual exploitation of children*.

The language of *prostitution* incorrectly places the responsibility for sexual exploitation on the child instead of the adult trafficker, exploiter, or buyer. Neither can children legally or meaningfully consent to engage in sex work. When speaking with media and public officials on this topic, ensure that they understand why terms like *prostitution* and *prostitute* are problematic and incorrect. See *commercially sexually exploited children*.

child protective services, CPS Refers broadly to state and local child welfare authorities. *CPS* is acceptable on second and subsequent references. Capitalize *child protective services* only when referring to a specific agency. In cases where the agency is called by a different name, use the specific name of the agency, explaining as the jurisdiction’s *child welfare* or *child protection agency* (e.g., *the Department for Children and Families (DCF), the state’s child protection agency*).

child sexual abuse Refers to a specific type of child maltreatment where the abuse is sexual in nature. Do not use generally as a blanket term to describe all child abuse. Instead, refer specifically to the type of abuse, or generally as *child abuse* or

child abuse and neglect.

child sexual abuse materials, CSAM A general term for images (video, photos, etc.) of child images, most often used in academic contexts. NCA prefers to use the term *abusive images*.

When it is used, *CSAM* is acceptable on second and subsequent references when explained on first reference. Do not use *child pornography* except when necessary when referring to grants or laws that use that specific term. See also *abusive images* and *child pornography*.

child victim of abuse Preferred to describe children who have been victimized by maltreatment where a formal tone is appropriate within the field and to decision makers. *Child victim* is also acceptable. Note: Not all children served by CACs will be victims of abuse, so keep an eye out for those contexts in which it's appropriate to talk more generally about *children* instead of *child victims*. For example, if we're talking about mental health services, it's probably appropriate to refer to *child victims*. But for total numbers served by CACs, it's the total number of *children* who received services.

child who, children who Use *who*, not *that* when referring to kids.

Children's Advocacy Center, CAC Child-focused, facility-based programs with representatives from many disciplines working together to effectively investigate, prosecute, and treat child abuse. CAC locations are child-focused and designed to create a sense of safety and security for child victims. CACs undergo the accreditation process based on 10 standards established by NCA and reflective of best practices in the industry. Services typically include forensic interviewing, forensic medical evaluations, victim advocacy and support, specialized mental health services for child victims, and coordination of the multidisciplinary team (including law enforcement, child protective services, medical and mental health professionals, prosecutors, victim advocates, and CAC staff), and community education and outreach/prevention programs. *CAC* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained on first reference. The plural is *CACs*. *CAC's* is the possessive form (e.g., *the CAC's director*); do not use *CAC's* as the plural. Always capitalize.

Children's Advocacy Centers is the preferred name for this organizational structure and for NCA members. However, many CACs are called, by statute or charter, alternately as *Child Advocacy Centers*, *Children's Interview Center*, *Children's Justice Centers*, *Child Assessment Center*, or other names. For the purposes of a consistent, movement-wide identity, use *Children's Advocacy Centers*, *CACs*, or *the CAC movement* to describe Children's Advocacy Centers collectively regardless of the name of an individual CAC.

Multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) are teams of partner agency representatives mandated with the statutory authority to investigate and prosecute child abuse. While MDTs are the core of the Children’s Advocacy Center model and all CACs must include MDTs, do not describe standalone MDTs that do not provide the full array of CAC services as Children’s Advocacy Centers. See *multidisciplinary team*.

Collaborative Work Group, CWG *Collaborative Work Group* is the preferred term to use with members or the general public; use *CWG* only in internal NCA communications.

commercially sexually exploited children, CSEC Refers to the sexual exploitation (forced sex acts) of children under 18 for material gain, either for a trafficker, the child victim, or both. *CSEC* is acceptable professional language for second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. *CSEC* can also refer to the *commercial sexual exploitation of children*. This acronym can therefore either refer to the child victims or to the exploitation itself. *CSEC* or *CSEC victims* are both acceptable ways to refer to child victims when talking to others in our field.

However, for broad audiences outside the professional field, refer to child victims as *child trafficking victims*, *trafficking victims*, *exploited children*, or *sexually exploited children*; refer to *commercial sexual exploitation of children* as *child trafficking*, *child sex trafficking*, or *exploitation of minors*. Do not use *child prostitute*, *child sex worker*, or *child prostitution*. See *child prostitution*.

courtesy titles Refer to both adult men and adult women by first and last name without courtesy titles on first reference. On second and subsequent references, use last name only. When it is necessary to distinguish between two or more people who use the same last name, such as spouses or siblings, use the first and last name, without courtesy titles.

In biographies, professional courtesies such as *Dr.* may be used in place of *Mr.* or *Ms.* where a professional degree applies and according to that individual’s preferences. Suffixes such as *Ph.D.* may be used on first reference if preferred by the person described. *Miss* and *Mrs.* are deprecated and should be avoided except upon specific request.

Do not use courtesy titles or refer to real names of clients, caregivers, or alleged perpetrators. See *names of child victims*.

COVID Do not use. See *COVID-19*.

COVID-19 Short for *coronavirus disease 2019*, this is the common way to refer to that disease. It does not need to be spelled out. *COVID-19* is caused by the virus *SARS-CoV-2*, but it’s generally acceptable to call it *the COVID-19 virus*, *the coronavirus*, or *the virus that causes COVID-19*. Or refer to *the pandemic*.

Note: If you say *the coronavirus* when talking about the ongoing pandemic, be sure to include the word *the*. There are multiple coronaviruses, including some that cause the common cold. When the pandemic first started, most references were to *the novel coronavirus* to indicate they were talking about the new virus. That's shortened over time to *the coronavirus*, which is fine as long as the pandemic remains a major issue.

Crime Victims' Fund, CVF Refers to the fund established by the 1984 Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) to collect federal penalties, asset seizures, and other non-revenue funds from those convicted of federal crimes to provide resources to states, localities, local service organizations, and nonprofits to provide services to the victims of crime. These funds are collected and then authorized to be released by Congress to state administrators for disbursement to qualified victim service programs. See *Victims of Crime Act, VOCA*.

Department of Homeland Security, DHS Always spell out on first reference. *DHS* is acceptable on second reference.

evidence-based assessment Refers to tested, reliable methods of evaluating a client's symptoms. Assessment results are often used for treatment planning.

evidence-based practice, evidence-based treatment Mental health or other practices within a Children's Advocacy Center that are supported by a preponderance of peer-reviewed, published scientific research.

In regard to evidence-based mental health treatments, CACs should refer to treatments endorsed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) or included in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) list of empirically supported treatments as *evidence-based*. Always hyphenate compound modifiers including *evidence-based*. (*Evidence-based treatment* but *this treatment is evidence based*).

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, EMDR An evidence-supported psychotherapy treatment for trauma symptoms and emotional distress. This treatment has clients work with therapists to identify and reprocess traumatic memories and is provided by or through some Children's Advocacy Centers. *EMDR* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference.

dates and times Never use ordinal numbering, e.g., *December 31*, not *December 31st*. Times should generally be formatted as HH:MM a.m./p.m. (space permitting) and should always include a time zone and indication of Daylight Saving Time, e.g. *2:00 p.m. EST*. In time listings on schedules or agenda for in-person events,

the time zone information may be omitted. Daylight Saving Time runs from 2 a.m. on the second Sunday of March until 2 a.m. on the first Sunday of November (March 13–November 6, 2022).

Some parts of the U.S. do not use Daylight Saving Time, so it's helpful to write *EDT* or *EST* instead of *Eastern*.

family advocate A professional trained to support victims of crime, with a focus on working with the family. Advocates offer information, emotional support, and help finding resources and filling out paperwork. Sometimes, advocates go to court with victims. Sometimes used interchangeably with *victim advocate*.

family justice center Typically where a CAC and a domestic violence agency are housed in the same building with the intent to share case information and consolidate services for victims.

forensic interview A structured conversation with a child intended to elicit detailed information about a possible event or events that the child may have experienced or witnessed. *Forensic interviewers* provide these interviews in the Children's Advocacy Center setting to obtain information from a child that may be helpful in a criminal investigation; to assess the safety of the child's living arrangements; to obtain information that will either corroborate or refute allegations or suspicions of abuse and neglect; and to assess the need for medical treatment and psychological care. Do not refer to as *FI* in formal communication.

FBI Acceptable in all references for the *Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

gendered pronouns Use an individual's expressed personal pronouns, such as *he*, *she*, or *they*. Also: Be aware of your own choices for generic pronouns. For example, don't always default to *she* when referring to a generic victim. When collecting data, ask for *gender* instead of *sex* and use a blank line instead of giving the choice of *M* or *F*. See also *personal pronouns*.

health care Written as two words.

Hispanic A person who is from, or whose family is from, a Spanish-speaking culture. Some people prefer *Latino* or *Latina*. When talking about a specific person, follow their preference—and, if possible, be more specific. See also *Latino*, *Latina*.

Homeland Security Investigations Do not abbreviate.

Indian Although Native institutions and government entities may use this term, NCA only uses *Indian* to describe a person, community, or culture related to the country of India. See *Native American*.

Indigenous Acceptable when referring broadly to Native communities or Native culture, but use specific community or ethnic group names whenever possible. See also *Alaska Native* and *Native American*.

job titles Do not capitalize job titles unless they directly precede the name of the person who holds that title. Job titles should also include the name of the organization where the title is held. *Hightown CAC Executive Director Rachel Jones* is acceptable but not *Rachel Jones, Executive Director of Hightown CAC*.

Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, JVT Refers to the act passed by Congress in 2015 to provide resources aimed to serve domestic child or youth victims of sex trafficking.

Latino, Latina NCA follows Associated Press style in using *Latino* to refer to a person from a Spanish-speaking culture or from Latin America. *Latina* is the feminine form. *Hispanic* is acceptable when referring to people in the United States, and it's preferred by some people. If referring to a specific person, follow their preference—and, whenever possible, be more specific.

Some people now use *Latinx* as a gender-neutral term, but it hasn't gained widespread acceptance within the Hispanic/Latino communities. Use only in a quote or if referring to someone who prefers it.

law enforcement In external documents, do not abbreviate as *LE* or other forms. Abbreviated forms are acceptable in informal or internal documents.

LGBTQ or LBGTO+ Acceptable in all references for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer or questioning. It's best used as an adjective and as an umbrella term, such as *LGBTQ students*. Don't use it to describe individual people, and if it's possible, be specific. Note: NCA uses *trans* instead of *transgender*.

linkage agreement A formal agreement connecting the CAC and a partnering agency, or provider, outlining agreed upon expectations of both parties.

maltreatment Refers to all forms of child abuse and neglect. Academic and not widely recognized among audiences outside the field. Acceptable only in text solely intended for academic and advanced practitioner audiences. For other or broader audiences, use *abuse* or *abuse and neglect*.

membership types See also the individual types: *Accredited*, *Associate/Developing*, *Affiliate*, *Satellite*, and *Chapter*. The categories, definitions, and benefits are [available online](#).

memorandum of understanding, MOU Sometimes used interchangeably with *interagency agreement*. *MOU* is acceptable on second reference. *FBI MOU* specifically refers to the agreement between NCA and the FBI regarding the use of Accredited CACs by the FBI. See learn.nationalchildrensalliance.org/FBI2.

mental health screening is different than **mental health assessment**. *Screening* is used for early identification of the need for mental health services, is brief and narrow in scope, and can be administered by clinicians or non-clinicians. Mental health screenings are not diagnostic or definitive. *Assessments*, depending on the instrument, may be diagnostic and are comprehensive, providing a more complete clinical picture. Assessment results are often used for treatment planning.

minority, racial minority Be specific whenever possible. We follow AP Style, which considers *minority* acceptable as an adjective in broad references to multiple races other than white in the U.S. But in terms of population numbers, a racial minority might not actually be a minority in a specific location. If you can, use specific terms: *Black* families, *Latino* Americans, and so on.

mobile CAC A vehicle housing one or more functions of a CAC, such as an interview room and counseling room.

multidisciplinary team, MDT Refers specifically to the multidisciplinary team model upon which Children's Advocacy Centers are built. A multidisciplinary team is a group of professionals from specific, distinct disciplines that collaborate from the point of report and throughout a child and family's involvement with the CAC. MDTs coordinate intervention to reduce potential trauma to children and families and improve services overall, while preserving and respecting the rights, mandates, and obligations of each agency. Multidisciplinary teams at Accredited CACs must include, at a minimum, representatives from the law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical, mental health, victim advocacy, and Children's Advocacy Center fields.

MDT is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. In certain states, the acronym *MDT* refers to a different legal or investigative process and therefore the term *case review team* is favored. Other CACs use *multidisciplinary investigative team*, abbreviating as *MDIT*. *Case review team* and *MDIT* are acceptable to refer to specific teams so styled. However, for the purposes of a consistent, movement-wide identity, use *multidisciplinary team* or *MDT* to describe the model or the function of teams across the CAC movement.

names of child victims The real first or last names of child victims, their caregivers, family members, and alleged abusers should never be publicly shared by Children's Advocacy Centers. Do not share information that may make victims

identifiable to community members. When sharing client stories anonymously for marketing or advocacy purposes, always use pseudonyms, ask permission of caregivers before sharing the story, and never include identifiable information or unusual case details that may reveal the identity of victims or families.

National Children’s Advocacy Center, NCAC The world’s first Children’s Advocacy Center in Huntsville, AL, which provides leadership to Children’s Advocacy Centers in the areas of training, prevention, and treatment services. Not to be confused with *National Children’s Alliance*. NCAC maintains the *Child Abuse Library Online* (CALiO), offers training for key CAC and MDT skills through the NCAC Training Center, and hosts the International Symposium on Child Abuse each March.

National Children’s Alliance, NCA The accrediting body and national association for all *Children’s Advocacy Centers* and *multidisciplinary teams* in the U.S. and abroad. NCA also collects national statistics on services provided by CACs, maintains data platforms including *NCAtrak* and the *Outcome Measurement System (OMS)*, offers CAC training and networking opportunities through *NCA Engage*, and hosts the National Children’s Alliance Leadership Conference each June. *NCA* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. Do not precede with *the* in either form. NCA is based in Washington, D.C.

National Corporate Partner Corporations, businesses, academic institutions, nonprofits, and others that are interested in supporting and sustaining the work we do. Contact development@nca-online.org for more information.

Native Do not use as a noun when referring to *Native Americans*. Acceptable as an adjective in general reference to a *Native American* person, community, or culture. See *Native American*.

Native American Acceptable as a general reference to *Native* people, tribes, nations, communities, or cultures. Whenever possible, be specific, and use the person’s or group’s preferred terminology. NCA will review and may update usage in 2021. See also *Alaska Native/American Indian*, *Indian*, *Indigenous*, and *tribe*.

NCA CAC Census Our bi-annual survey of CACs on their organizational structures and the services they provide, conducted in even-numbered years. NCA also conducts a *Chapter Census*. Be sure it is clear which census you are talking about. Use *NCA CAC Census* on first reference; *CAC Census* or *census* (not capitalized) are acceptable in subsequent references.

NCA Chapter Census NCA released its first Chapter Census in 2021. Be sure it is clear which census—Chapter or CAC—you are talking about. Use *NCA Chapter*

Census on first reference; *Chapter Census* or *census* (not capitalized) are acceptable in subsequent references.

NCA Engage NCA's professional networking and learning tool. Available to NCA members, their multidisciplinary team partners, and their board members, NCA Engage provides instant access to a peer community, informative document libraries, online training, and focused online discussions. Go to ncaengage.org to learn more.

NCAtrak The proprietary case-management software platform developed specifically for Children's Advocacy Centers by National Children's Alliance. A majority of all U.S.-based CACs use NCAtrak as their case management system of record. All NCA membership categories that are required to submit statistical data also use NCAtrak to submit such records. Note capitalization. Do not insert a period in the name—NCA.trak is incorrect. Go to NCAtrak.com to learn more.

NCTSN Acceptable on first reference for the *National Child Traumatic Stress Network* only in communications intended for audiences in the CAC field. For any outside audiences, spell out on first reference. NCTSN is a congressionally chartered network focusing on intervention in childhood trauma. It receives federal funding through various agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and through a congressional initiative. It is jointly coordinated by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and Duke University.

NCTSN endorses certain evidence-based trauma treatments for children that are provided at any of its member sites or affiliate sites. Some of these sites are Children's Advocacy Centers.

nonprofit Not *non-profit* or *not-for-profit*.

offender Acceptable only for adults implicated in cases of child abuse. When referring to specific individuals, refer to as *alleged offenders* unless convicted. Do not use to refer either individually or collectively to children who have acted out against other children. For purposes of statistical analysis, it is acceptable to refer to all people investigated by CACs regardless of age as *offenders* within one statistical category. If broken out by age group to include children who have acted out against other children, use *people investigated* instead of *offender*. However, many state statutes specifically refer to *juvenile offenders*. In specific reference to those statutes or in communication with government agencies that require it, *juvenile offender* may be used for accuracy, but such wording should be avoided in any other public communication. See *youth (or children) with problematic sexual behaviors*.

Outcome Measurement System, OMS National Children's Alliance's system for benchmarking outcomes for Children's Advocacy Centers to measure the success of both individual CACs and states as well as the efficacy of the CAC model

overall. *OMS* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained on first reference. *OMS* measures CAC outcomes through a system of survey responses. At CACs participating in *OMS*, caregivers of children served by the CAC are asked to complete a satisfaction survey and to provide feedback at two time points: both at the initial visit (or within two weeks) and in follow-up approximately two months after the initial visit. Multidisciplinary team members are also asked to submit surveys twice a year, approximately six months apart. Youth aged 10-17 who are served by CACs are surveyed after their forensic interview.

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, PCIT A common evidence-based treatment for addressing child trauma symptoms, typically in cases of physical abuse and neglect, and improving the quality of parent-child interactions. It is endorsed by NCTSN and provided by or through many Children’s Advocacy Centers. *PCIT* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference.

people of color Acceptable when referring in broad terms to multiple races other than white, but be specific whenever possible. Don’t use *person of color* when talking about an individual; be specific.

perpetrator See *offender*.

personal pronouns Use an individual’s expressed personal pronouns, such as *he*, *she*, or *they*. The singular *they* has been in use since the 1300s, and it’s already commonly used in generic references, or if we are talking about an unknown person. Like singular *you*, singular *they* takes a plural verb: *I am* here, *she is* here, *you are* here, *they are* here.

More people are beginning to indicate their own personal pronouns (such as *she/her*, *he/him*, *they/them*) in email signatures, Zoom screen names, and other contexts. While NCA doesn’t require this, staff are welcome to adopt the practice. Avoid saying “preferred pronouns.” See also *gendered pronouns*.

predator Avoid using this and other terminology that might be seen as menacing or sensationalizing. A predator sounds like a powerful person, and we’re not here to give offenders power. NCA has sometimes used *predator* in the past when talking about online grooming, but we’ll avoid using it in the future. See *offender*.

problematic sexual behaviors, PSBs Use on first reference to describe sexual behaviors among children under 18 that are developmentally inappropriate, illegal, or traumatic to other children. *PSBs* or *PSB* (for the singular *behavior*) is acceptable on second and subsequent references for problematic sexual behaviors if explained on first reference. The act of abuse itself may be described as *child sexual*

abuse, but do not refer to the youth who committed the abuse as the *abuser* or other deprecated term. See *youth (or children) with problematic sexual behaviors*.

Problematic Sexual Behavior-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, PSB-CBT An evidence-based treatment for children and youth exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors. It is endorsed by NCTSN and provided by or through many Children's Advocacy Centers. *PSB-CBT* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. See *youth (or children) with problematic sexual behaviors*.

PTSD Acceptable on all references for post-traumatic stress disorder. Take care to differentiate between PTSD symptoms and common related problems (e.g., sleeplessness, reactive behaviors), and to address common misconceptions that PTSD is only caused by combat-related stress. Do not use *PTS* to refer to post-traumatic stress.

Regional Children's Advocacy Center, RCAC Specifically refers to one of four organizations: *Northeast Regional Children's Advocacy Center, Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center, Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center, or Western Regional Children's Advocacy Center*. *RCAC* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained on first reference. The plural is *RCACs*.

The *RCACs* provide training and technical assistance to Children's Advocacy Centers and Chapters in their respective regions of the country. Some *RCACs* also offer resources available to *CACs* across the country. Each *RCAC* receives a federal grant through the Victims of Child Abuse Act for a three-year period to serve in this capacity. Each one must operate out of a functioning local *CAC*, and all work in partnership with National Children's Alliance.

Satellite Members Child-friendly facilities offering on-site forensic interviews and victim advocacy services under the sponsorship and oversight of an NCA Accredited *CAC*. The requirements are [listed on our website](#).

sexual assault forensic exam Also known as a rape kit. Exams are conducted by forensically trained medical personnel. See *sexual assault nurse examiner*.

sexual assault forensic examiner, SAFE Used for qualified medical professionals who have completed specialized training in the medical forensic care of patients who have experienced sexual assault or abuse. While *sexual assault nurse examiner* is the more familiar term, *sexual assault forensic examiner* indicates that examiners may be physicians or physician assistants. See *sexual assault nurse examiner*.

sexual assault nurse examiner, SANE Registered nurses who have completed specialized education and clinical preparation in the medical forensic care of patients who have experienced sexual assault or abuse. See the [International Association of Forensic Nurses website](#). These nurses may go on to become board certified as sexual assault nurse examiner-adult/adolescent (SANE-A) or sexual assault nurse examiner-pediatric (SANE-P).

space after periods Use single spaces after periods. While both single and double spaces after periods are technically correct, modern digital display of documents and text can render double spaces as a “broken” return, appearing as incorrect formatting.

Standards NCA sets standards that CACs and Chapters must meet to receive accreditation. See *Accredited Members* and *Accredited Chapters* for more information.

For CACs, use *National Standards for Accredited Children’s Advocacy Centers* on first reference—it is acceptable to use “CAC” as an abbreviation in subsequent references—and *Standards for Accredited Chapter Members*.

When providing a link to either of our published standards or the *Putting Standards into Practice* book, [link to the webpage with our current standards publications](#). Do not link directly to the PDFs. The shortcut link is nationalchildrensalliance.org/standards.

When talking about the three new optional standards for CACs, be clear about the fact that these are optional. There is a separate publication for the optional standards.

states Spell out when a state name it stands alone, e.g., *Colorado CACs* or *advocates in North Carolina* but never *CO CACs* or *advocates in N.C.* Use two-letter postal abbreviations for states as part of a location with a specific city, e.g., *Kansas City, MO*.

State Chapter Specifically refers to one of the 50 Chapters of NCA. *Chapter* is acceptable on all references. See *Accredited Chapters* and *Chapters*.

subaward, subgrant NCA follows current U.S. government style and has stopped hyphenating these words.

survivor compared to **victim** Generally speaking, we use the term *victim* when we’re referring to someone who currently needs the services of a CAC. The abuse may be ongoing or recently concluded. We use *survivor* when we’re talking about someone for whom the abuse is in the past, someone who—although the effects of abuse can be lifelong—doesn’t need a CAC’s services now. *Survivor* is also

the term we use when we're talking about adults who were the victims of child abuse in the past. Note that a child can become a survivor and then be revictimized.

target, tackle, combat, and other terms with violent connotations

Be careful about using this kind of wording. There are many potential substitutions that don't sound violent. For example, instead of *targeting* or *aiming at* a particular population, *prioritize* or *serve* them. A *target* audience is an *intended* audience. We don't need to *combat* abuse; we're *working to end* child abuse. We *prevent* abuse. We're not banning the use of any of these words, and there may be contexts in which they are appropriate. We just want you to be thoughtful about their use and consider alternatives when it is reasonable to do so.

telehealth, telemental health Refers to using technology (such as videoconference software) to deliver health care services to clients.

Trafficking Victims Protection Act, TVPA Refers to [a 2000 law](#) that provides tools to combat human trafficking both worldwide and domestically.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, TF-CBT A common evidence-based treatment for child trauma symptoms. It is a conjoint child and parent psychotherapy, appropriate for children and adolescents suffering from trauma symptoms. It is endorsed by NCTSN and provided by or through many Children's Advocacy Centers. *TF-CBT* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference.

tribe, tribal Acceptable when referring broadly to *Indigenous* communities in the lower 48 states. Whenever possible, refer to a specific tribe, nation, or community. See *Native American*.

victim advocate A professional trained to support victims of crime. Advocates offer victims information, emotional support, and help finding resources and filling out paperwork. Sometimes, advocates go to court with victims. Sometimes used interchangeably with *family advocate*.

Victims of Child Abuse Act, VOCAA The Victims of Child Abuse Act, administered by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which provides annual federal funding for the development of Children's Advocacy Centers and for the training and technical assistance for CACs, law enforcement, prosecutors, and child abuse professionals. Reference as *VOCAA* is not recommended due to the potential of confusing this funding source with the *Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)*.

Victims of Crime Act, VOCA The Victims of Crime Act, which endows the Crime Victims Fund. *VOCA* is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained on first reference.

Washington, D.C. Note punctuation and difference from state abbreviations.

Washington Use *Washington state*, not *Washington State*, if you need to distinguish between the state and Washington, D.C.

white NCA follows Associated Press style by not capitalizing *white* when referring to people or communities. See *Black*.

youth (or children) with problematic sexual behaviors Preferred to describe children under the age of 18 who have demonstrated sexual behaviors that are developmentally inappropriate, illegal, or traumatic to other children, or who have otherwise acted out sexually or sexually abused against other children. In Children’s Advocacy Center settings, this term is usually used to describe children against whom allegations of child sexual abuse have been made, and not simply to describe children with sexual behaviors that may become problematic. *Youth with PSB(s)* or *children with PSB(s)* is acceptable on subsequent references if explained on first reference.

The word *youth* specifically describes adolescents 13-17. While children in that age range constitute a larger proportion of children investigated at CACs for acting out other children, a significant number of cases involve children under 13 acting out sexually. Use *youth and children with problematic sexual behaviors* or simply *children with problematic sexual behaviors* when communicating generally about all such cases.

Do not use *YPSB* as an acronym or otherwise include *youth, child, or juvenile* as a part of shorthand. Only the behavior itself—not the child who displays it—should be shortened.

When describing children under 18 who have sexually abused other children, do not use terms used to describe adult sexual abusers including *pedophile, perpetrator, molester, predator, criminal, abuser, rapist*, etc. However, many state statutes specifically refer to *juvenile offenders*. In specific reference to those statutes or in communication with government agencies that require it, *juvenile offender* may be used for accuracy, but such wording should be avoided in any other public communication. Never use derogatory terms including *monster, pervert*, etc.

YPSB, YSBP, youth with sexual behavior problems Do not use. See *youth (or children) with problematic sexual behaviors*.

Zero Abuse Project, ZAP An NCA partner that receives funding from the Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCAA). ZAP is acceptable on second and subsequent references if explained in the first reference. Do not precede with *the* in either form.

Appendix

Key Military Terms for CACs

See also our publicly accessible webpage, [Support for Military Families](#), and [Learning Center page on NCA Engage](#) for more information about CAC-military partnerships, including fact sheets summarizing key military programs involved in child abuse response in each branch of the military. If you have an NCA Engage account, log in to access webinars and the Military Partnership Community.

active duty Refers to a person who is in the military full time. They work for the military full time and can be deployed at any time. Persons in the Reserve or National Guard are not full-time active duty military personnel, although they can be deployed at any time should the need arise. Not all active duty personnel live on a military base.

Department of Defense, DOD The part of the executive branch of the federal government that provides military forces to deter war and ensure national security. The *Army*, *Marine Corps*, *Navy*, *Air Force*, and *Coast Guard* are the armed forces of the U.S., although the Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security. See the *United States Armed Forces*, *National Guard*, and *Reserve* entries.

Family Advocacy Program, FAP Congressionally mandated, FAP serves as the policy proponent for, and a key element of, the DOD's Coordinated Community Response system to prevent and respond to reports of child abuse/neglect and domestic abuse in military families. FAP is located at every installation with command sponsored families, within and outside the continental United States. Support, clinical, and case management services are provided to individuals who are eligible for care in military medical treatment facilities. FAP is focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and family well-being, with over 900 licensed clinicians who provide case management and treatment.

Judge Advocate General's Corps, JAG Corps The branch of a military service responsible for military justice, operational law and command advice, and legal assistance to members of the military and their families. The chief attorney of each branch is the *Judge Advocate General*, while other JAG Corps officers are

typically called *judge advocates*. However, individual JAG Corps officers are colloquially known as *JAGs*.

military criminal investigative organization, MCIO MCIOs conduct criminal investigations involving military personnel. Special agents assigned to MCIOs are considered sworn federal law enforcement officers. MCIOs include the *Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID)*; the *Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)*, for the Navy and Marines; the *Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI)*; and the *Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS)*.

CONUS/OCONUS The continental U.S., or CONUS, is the 48 connected states and District of Columbia. OCONUS is outside the continental U.S.

Military OneSource A confidential Department of Defense-funded program that is both a call center and a website providing comprehensive information on every aspect of military life at no cost to active duty, Guard, and Reserve members, their families, and their survivors. Information includes deployment, reunion, relationship, grief, spouse employment and education, parenting and childhood, and much more. Military OneSource has policy and programmatic information, helpful resources, products, articles, and tips on topics related to military life. Confidential services are available 24 hours a day by telephone and online.

military treatment facility, MTF A military facility established for the purpose of furnishing medical and dental care to eligible individuals.

National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA The name for each of a series of federal laws specifying the annual budget and expenditures of the U.S. Department of Defense.

National Guard Consists of the Army National Guard and the Air Force's Air National Guard. While federally funded, the National Guard is organized and controlled by the states. However, in times of war, the National Guard may be federalized and deployed. Guard units assist local communities endangered by storms, floods, fires, and other disasters. The National Guard requires training drills one weekend a month and two weeks per year. Members are given veteran status if they have served for 30 consecutive days in a war zone.

permanent change of station, PCS The relocation of an active-duty service member to a different duty location. PCS is often used as a verb: "Service members may PCS every few years."

Reserve Refers to a component of each branch, under the command of that military branch (e.g., the Army Reserve is under the command of the Army). The purpose of the Reserve is to provide and maintain trained units and qualified persons to be available for active duty in the armed forces when needed. This may be in times

of war, in a national emergency, or based on threats to national security. The Reserve may be called upon to serve either stateside or overseas, but the primary job is to fill gaps in stateside service positions when active duty forces ship overseas. Members of the Reserve (known as *reserves* or *reservists*) must participate in training drills one weekend a month and two weeks per year.

temporary duty station, TDY A temporary assignment at a location other than a service member's permanent duty station. Active duty military partners may refer to being TDY when they are out of the office at an extended training.

TRICARE Military health care program. TRICARE provides health benefits to service members, retirees, and their families.

United States Armed Forces Collectively, the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. The Coast Guard is unique because it falls under the Department of Homeland Security, not the Department of Defense. However, the Coast Guard is considered a military service because, during times of war or conflict, the president can transfer any or all assets of the Coast Guard to the Department of the Navy.