

Caregiver Handbook



Healing Hearts
CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

5627 Getwell Road, Suite B3
Southaven, MS 38672
662-349-1555
www.healingheartscac.org

Contact Names and Numbers

COUNSELING REFERRAL:

Region IV Mental Health Services (DeSoto)	(662) 449-1808
Communicare (Tate)	(662) 562-5216
Child Protection Services (CPS) (DeSoto)	(662) 469-8012
Child Protection Services (CPS) (Tate)	(662) 562-4478
Bikers Against Child Abuse	(662) 278-0294
DeSoto County Domestic Violence Shelter	
House of Grace	(662) 342-1432
Family Crisis Services of NW MS	(662) 404-6030
Family Life Skills Classes	
Mississippi Dept. of Health	(877) 210-8513
MS Child Abuse Hotline	(800) 222-8000
www.reportabuse.mdcps.ms.gov	
National Suicide Lifeline	(800) 273-8255
National Runaway Hotline	(800) 621-4000

Welcome to Healing Hearts Child Advocacy Center

Your child is at Healing Hearts CAC because of concerns about possible abuse.

Our goals are to:

- **Do the best job possible in finding out if something happened**
- **Work with the child protective legal systems to help your child**
- **Help you understand the child protective and legal systems**
- **Help make the process as comfortable as possible for you and your children**
- **Help your child(ren) and family begin to heal**

We hope this handbook will help you understand more about child abuse and learn about the system we use to respond to a report of abuse.

Healing Hearts CAC phone # 662-349-1555

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Types of Physical Abuse

- ◆ Punching
- ◆ Kicking
- ◆ Shaking
- ◆ Stabbing
- ◆ Hitting with hand or object
- ◆ Poisoning
- ◆ Being held under water
- ◆ Beating
- ◆ Biting
- ◆ Throwing
- ◆ Choking
- ◆ Burning
- ◆ Suffocating

Signs of Physical Abuse

- ◆ Excessive Bruising
- ◆ Burns
- ◆ Cuts and Scraps
- ◆ Head Injuries
- ◆ Fractures
- ◆ Unexplained injuries
- ◆ Repeated injuries
- ◆ Unseasonal clothing to cover injuries
- ◆ Change in child's mood/emotional behavior, (i.e. aggression)

Types of Sexual Abuse

Non-Touching

- ◆ Exhibitionism
- ◆ Exposing children to pornographic material
- ◆ Using children to film, photograph or model pornography
- ◆ Exposing children to sexual acts
- ◆ Engaging children in prostitution
- ◆ Inappropriate sex play

Touching

- ◆ Fondling children's genitals or having children fondle an adult's breasts, genitals, or buttocks
- ◆ Use of an object for vaginal or anal penetration or fondling
- ◆ Vaginal, anal or oral sexual intercourse

Symptoms of Sexual Abuse

Behavioral Indicators

- ◆ Bed-wetting or soiling
- ◆ Sleep disturbances/nightmares
- ◆ Fire setting
- ◆ Excessive masturbation
- ◆ Fear of people or of being left alone
- ◆ Self-harm/self-mutilation (i.e. cutting)
- ◆ Returning to earlier behaviors
- ◆ Premature understanding of sex
- ◆ School difficulties
- ◆ Substance abuse
- ◆ Changes in child's mood/emotional behavior (i.e. aggression)

Physical Indicators

- ◆ Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- ◆ Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia
- ◆ Complaints of pain or itching in genitalia
- ◆ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ◆ Pregnancy, especially in early adolescence

Emotional Abuse

What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse, often referred to as psychological abuse, is generally defined as a pattern of behavior that impacts a child's social-emotional development and feelings of self-worth. Emotional abuse can involve words or actions.

Emotional abuse is typically the least reported type of child abuse, although experts agree that it often occurs along with other forms of child abuse and neglect.

Although the effects of emotional abuse may not be visible, they create serious and long-lasting psychological challenges.

Examples of Emotional Abuse

- ◆ Failure to Thrive-involves infants and young children not meeting appropriate physical, social and emotional development
- ◆ Exposure to violence in the home
- ◆ Rejection or ignoring a child
- ◆ Blaming a child for problems in the family or home
- ◆ Isolation - keeping a child from normal daily activities or interaction with friends or peers
- ◆ Excessively critical remarks creating feelings of worthlessness

Neglect

What is Neglect?

Neglect is often defined as an omission to provide appropriate care. However, varying explanations of “appropriate” leads to challenges in identifying this form of child abuse. Neglectful situations can occur over short or long periods of time.

The Types of Neglect

- ◆ Physical neglect– includes failure to provide necessary food, shelter, protection from harm and/or lack of appropriate supervision.
- ◆ Medical neglect– includes failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment (i.e. not giving the child proper medication; over medicating)
- ◆ Educational neglect– the failure to educate a child or tend to special education needs.
- ◆ Emotional neglect– inattention to a child’s emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care.

Child Sexual Behaviors

Natural/Healthy

- ◆ Children may be curious about physical differences between boys and girls
- ◆ Children often look at their own bodies and the bodies of others
- ◆ Children may touch their genitals
- ◆ Children may engage in exploratory behavior with other children of similar age, size, and developmental status
- ◆ Child ends behavior when discovered or when child is told to stop
- ◆ As children grow older, they become embarrassed when exploratory behaviors are discovered by an adult

Problematic

- ◆ Child appears unable to stop him/herself from engaging in the sexual behaviors
- ◆ Child continues behavior in spite of consistent and clear requests to stop
- ◆ Behavior increases in frequency and intensity
- ◆ Child behaves in ways more consistent with adult sexual behavior
- ◆ Child forces or initiates sexual acts with adults or younger children
- ◆ Child puts a finger or object in another child's vagina or rectum
- ◆ Child tries to have sexual intercourse with another child or adult
- ◆ Child puts mouth on sexual body parts
- ◆ Child's behavior interferes with social, school, or family relationships
- ◆ Child's behavior results in complaints or negatively affects other children

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study examines how someone's childhood experiences can have an effect on many of the leading health and social problems experienced later in life.

The main focus of the ACE Study is to show how stressful or traumatic childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, growing up with alcohol or other substance abuse, mental illness, parental discord, or crime in the home can lead to social, emotional, or cognitive impairments.

Adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of:

- Chronic lung, heart, and/or liver disease
- Cancer
- Obesity
- High blood pressure and/or cholesterol
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Eating disorders
- Low academic achievement and high school dropout
- Delinquency and adult criminal behavior
- Smoking
- Illicit drug use, especially marijuana
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Intimate partner violence
- Multiple sexual partners
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Early initiation of sexual activity

Read Full ACE Study at: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

The Grooming Process

Some caregivers wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children. These include:

Seeking out an approachable child: Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.

Establishing a relationship with the child: Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendships with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteering for child duty, becoming their “buddy,” or buying them candy or presents.

Breaking down the child’s resistance to touch: Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.

Finding ways to isolate a child: Abusers find excuses to be alone with children so they can abuse them. For example, they may babysit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.

Blaming the child and keeping the secret: Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won’t tell. They use statements like:

- “You know you like the way I touch you.”
- “If you tell, people will think you are bad.”
- “If you tell our ‘special secret’ I will go to jail.”
- “If you tell your mother, she won’t love you anymore.”
- “If you tell, you will be taken away from your family.”

How to Act Toward Your Child

Provide safety, love, and support.

Let them know it is okay to cry or to be mad.

Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault.

Do not pressure your child to talk about things.

Some things you can say that will really help your child:

- ◆ **I believe you.**
- ◆ **It's not your fault.**
- ◆ I'm glad I know about it.
- ◆ I'm sorry this happened to you.
- ◆ I will take care of you.
- ◆ I'm not sure what will happen next.
- ◆ Nothing about YOU made this happen. It has happened to other children too.
- ◆ You don't need to take care of me.
- ◆ I am upset, but not with you.
- ◆ I'm angry at the person who did this.
- ◆ I'm sad. You may see me cry. That's all right. I will be able to take care of you. I'm not mad at you.
- ◆ I don't know why the person did it. S/he has a problem.
- ◆ You can still love someone but hate what they did to you.

Some Things You Can Do:

- **Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.**
- **See that your child receives therapy as soon as possible.** Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.
- **Find help for yourself.** You don't have to do it all on your own. Contact Healing Hearts CAC for assistance.
- **Teach your child the rules of personal safety.** Tell them what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable way.
- **Be careful not to question your child about the abuse.** If you question your child, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser. Specially trained professionals at Healing Hearts CAC will interview your child to obtain the necessary information without harming the case or causing further trauma. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.
- **Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse.** This is to protect you, that person, and the child.
- **Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.**
- **Never advise your child on how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators.** This could seriously damage the case. It is important that the story is in your child's own words.
- **Your child may need an extra sense of physical security.** Stay close, and assure your child that you will keep him/her safe.
- **Remember to give attention to your other children.**

How Caregivers Sometimes Feel When Abuse Has Been Reported

When abuse is reported, parents or caregivers sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal. The report can affect your life in many ways, and it takes time to adjust. The following are some of the common thoughts and feelings of caregivers. You may feel one or more of these, or you may move from one to another.

- 1. Denial.** Your first reaction may be not to believe or accept the possibility that abuse really happened. You may believe it happened but that no real harm was done. Caregivers often experience denial because it is too overwhelming to accept that the abuse occurred and that there will be after-effects. For some people, it takes time to overcome denial and face the realities of abuse.
- 2. Anger.** At times, you may feel angry at yourself for not protecting the child. You may feel angry at the perpetrator for what s/he did. You may even feel angry at the child. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted person or group.
- 3. Helplessness.** You probably do not know what to expect and feel that things are out of your control. Some parents may fear that their children will be taken away. Your Family Advocate can help you to stay informed of how your child's case proceeds through the system.
- 4. Lack of assertiveness.** You may feel invisible and think there is nothing you can do to help the situation get better. We will help you learn what you can do to be an advocate for your child and yourself.

How Caregivers Sometimes Feel...

5. **Shock, numbness, repulsion.** You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to shock, numbness, and repulsion for the new situation you find yourself in. If so, you may need to seek therapy for yourself to recover from the abuse.
6. **Guilt, self-blame.** You may feel it is all your fault. The offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing you can do now is support your child and learn all you can about how to make things better. Reading this handbook is a good first step.
7. **Hurt and betrayal.** It is normal to feel hurt from the loss of your child's innocence. You also may have lost a spouse or partner if that person was the offender. You may even have lost friends. It is very important to take time to grieve for these losses.
8. **Concern about money.** You may be worried about finances because of lost income. A Family Advocate or CPS Social Worker will work with you to help you get on your feet.
9. **Fear of violence.** In homes where violence is common, you may fear the offender will try to harm you or your children. If so, call House of Grace, the domestic violence shelter, at 662-342-1432 or Bikers Against Child Abuse (662) 278-0294 or (866) 71-ABUSE.
10. **Fear of drug or alcohol abuse.** You may be afraid that you or the offender will abuse drugs or alcohol because of the stress or that one of you may relapse to an old addiction. If you need help, call Region 4 Mental Health Services at 662-449-1971 or Beth Storey at New Directions Counseling Center (662)253-8324.

Your Team of Professionals

We are fortunate to have a highly trained multi-disciplinary team of professionals that meet every month. They discuss each open case to ensure services are being provided.

The roles of team members are described below:

District Attorney/Prosecutor: The prosecutor decides whether charges will be filed. Consideration is given to many factors which will affect the likelihood of success in court. Some of the factors considered are age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, whether or not the suspect has admitted to the allegations, presence of medical evidence, and whether or not there are other witnesses.

Law Enforcement Officer: (LE) Police Departments from Hernando, Southaven, Walls, Olive Branch, Horn Lake, Senatobia and the Sheriff Department from Desoto and Tate County have investigators on the team. They investigate child abuse cases by speaking to children, non-offending caregivers, suspects, and other witnesses, about the incident reported and gather evidence from the scene of the alleged event.

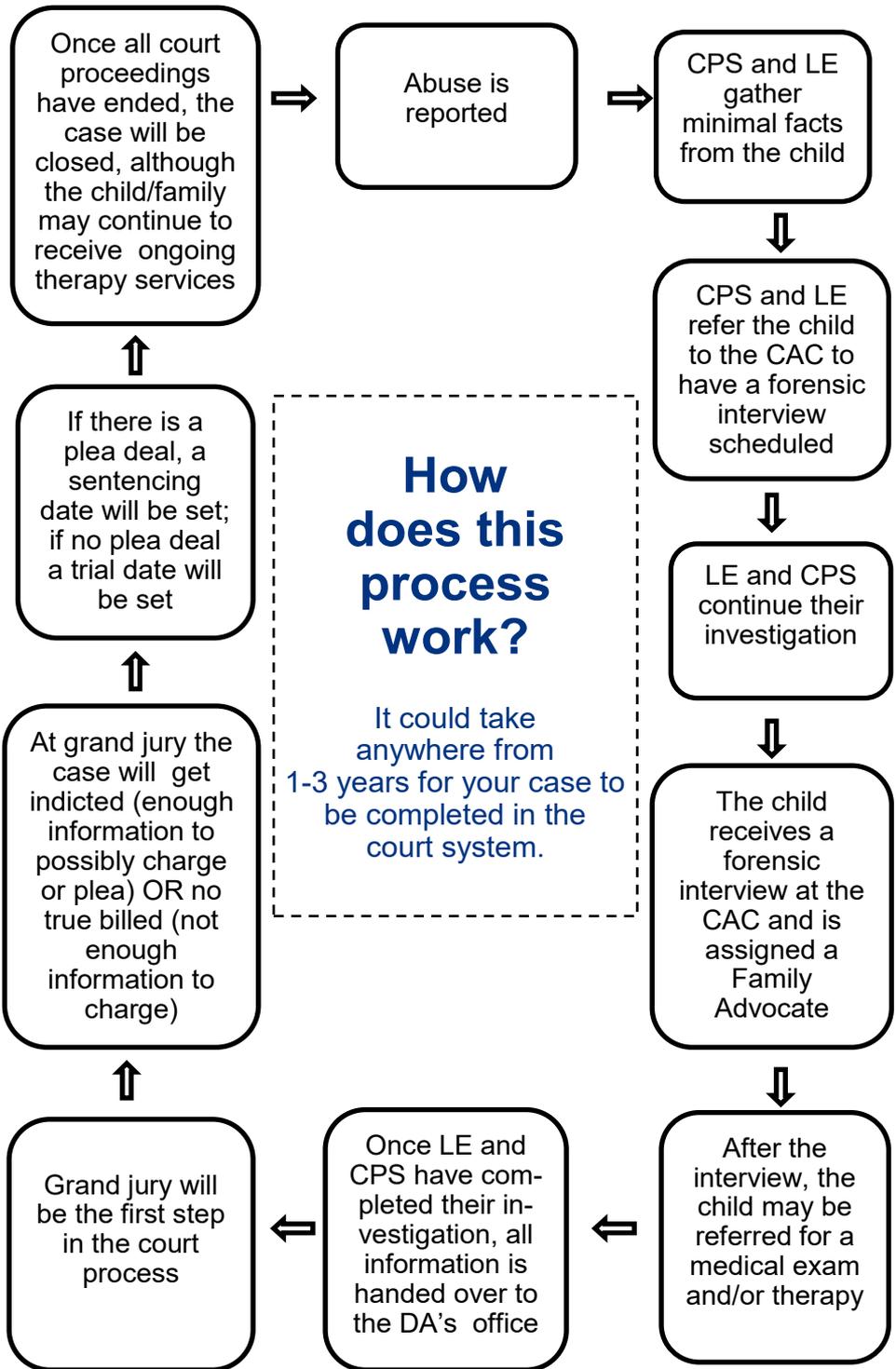
The Social Worker: Child Protection Services (CPS) social workers conduct assessments and develop safety plans. They may refer you and/or your child to counseling.

Forensic Interviewer: The forensic interviewer is a trained professional who is responsible for providing legally defensible forensic interviews of children and adolescents when there are suspicions of abuse or when the child has been a witness to violence against another person. The forensic interviewer will meet with your child so that your child can tell their story one time in a child friendly, safe environment.

Therapist: Mental health professionals (therapists) provide one on one sessions to work with your child and family to help children move from victim to survivor.

Family Advocate: The Family Advocate helps connect the child and caregiver with services in the community, provides resources, child abuse education and emotional support for the child and his/her caregiver.

Medical Team : CARES Clinic located in Memphis in the Outpatient Doctors Building next to LeBonheur Hospital provides medical exams for children that have an open case with Law Enforcement or Child Protection services from DeSoto or Tate County. Your Family Advocate can provide you with further information to access their services.



The Forensic Interview Process

Interviews are conducted in a separate room. They are video-recorded and professionals involved observe the interviews from another room through closed circuit television. Caregivers are not permitted to observe the interviews.

During interviews, caregivers will have the opportunity to talk with a Healing Hearts CAC Family Advocate who provides support and resources.

Following Healing Hearts CAC interviews, someone from law enforcement and/or the Child Protective Services (CPS) will generally meet with you, the caregiver, to explain what they can about the investigation and what will happen next. In some instances, a medical examination will be recommended.

Unless told otherwise, you and your child are free to leave after talking with law enforcement or the CPS case worker.

The team will meet to develop a plan, and Healing Hearts CAC family advocate, law enforcement investigator or the CPS case worker will contact you at a later date with more detailed information.

After your child's interview

Child abuse can be traumatizing for children and it is important that they are not pressured to repeatedly talk about their experience.

It is important NOT to question your child about what they said in the forensic interview.

What to Expect from Counseling Services

What is therapy?

Therapy is a unique opportunity for a child to meet with a trained professional who is willing and able to work together to establish goals for treatment and a pathway toward achieving those goals. For children who are coming to therapy for a history of abuse, this process also uses research-based treatment proven effective in helping children with the trauma.

How will counseling help my child?

The counseling relationship is a safe place for your child to label and express feelings and thoughts related to the abuse, such as anger, fear, and sadness. Your child will also be assisted in re-establishing the personal boundaries and sense of self-worth taken away by the abuser. Through this trusted relationship your child will learn that the abuse was not his/her fault. Your child should feel a connection with the counselor, if not, referrals can be made by Healing Hearts CAC family advocate for other counseling centers.

How long will my child need to come to counseling?

Length of time in counseling varies. Your child's counselor will help your child set goals to be reached in therapy. An individual treatment plan will be developed and reviewed periodically. Your child may need to seek counseling in the future when leaving home, getting married, or having a child.

How do I request counseling for my child?

You can request for a referral to be made for your child through any of the professionals dealing with your child's case.

What to Say to Others

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know with which relatives or friends you will be discussing the abuse, and let your child have some choice about who is told.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way than s/he could.

If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about your child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. Their reactions may include hysteria, horror, obvious distress, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest, or unnecessary questioning for intimate details. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy, self-control, and dignity. On the other hand, be careful not to make it seem like a "dirty secret", as this could cause more shame in your child.

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested*, by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case

Comments You Can Expect from Others About the Abuse

“What exactly happened to your child?”
“Are you sure your child didn’t make it up?”
“Why didn’t you know it was happening?”
“If it were my child, I’d just move away.”
“Your poor child must be feeling really guilty.”

Remember, you do not owe anyone an explanation. It may be easier to just nod as an acknowledgement of what someone says. However, some acceptable responses include:

“I’d rather not talk about it.”
“It’s been a very difficult time for all of us.”
“I appreciate your concern.”
“I would prefer to respect my child’s privacy.”

Keep in mind that most people have very little knowledge about sexual abuse. For example, in response to the comment about your child feeling guilty, you could say that children always feel unnecessary guilt in these cases until they are assured that they are not responsible in any way for what happened. As a caregiver, you might also be experiencing some guilt, and as a result, you may feel defensive. In that case, a good response is, “Parents do their best, but we’re only human.”

Adults are the people most likely to say something to your child. You may want to tell your child that if someone says, “I’m sorry about what happened to you,” respond with a simple, “Thank you.” Let your child know that s/he does not always have to respond to comments or questions. Your child could say, “My mom and/or dad told me not to talk about it now.”

Reference: *When Your Child Has Been Molested*, by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case

Court Preparation

If there is to be a trial, your Healing Hearts CAC Family Advocate can take your child to the courtroom for a tour. You will also be involved in this process.

Giving the child an early look at the courtroom and preparing him/her on what to expect can ease some of the child's fears, which may include the following:

- Seeing the abuser again
- Not wanting to go
- Wanting it to be over
- Wondering where you will be

If you are a witness, you will not be allowed in the courtroom when your child is testifying. In some cases, it might be easier on your child not to have you there.

However, your child should never be in the courtroom without a trusting, friendly face, so make sure your Healing Hearts CAC Family Advocate, a best friend, or a relative stays with your child at all times.

COURT SCHOOL IS AVAILABLE

Contact Healing Hearts CAC family advocate when you secure your court date to arrange time for your child to receive a brief court orientation to help prepare them for their court experience.

Taking Care of Yourself

You are going through a very difficult time, and you probably feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of other people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important, so you need to find time to do something just for you and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult to do, but it is in the best interest of you and your child.

Some suggested activities include: take a walk, have lunch with a friend, go to the movies, go out to dinner, join an exercise class, take a drive, and last, but equally important, join a support group.

Research studies have indicated that it is just as important for the child's recovery that their parents or caregivers get counseling about the abuse as it is for the child.

Family Life Skills Class

The Family Resource Center offers free 10 week family life skills class that covers a variety of topics including positive discipline, conflict resolution, effective communication, financial planning and child development among others. Classes are presented in a confidential and small group setting and are designed to provide parenting education and support. They also offer **Free GED classes** and many other resources and classes.

Contact the Family Resource Center for more information
Southaven at 662-404-6030
Hernando at 662-912-5900

