

What does the medical examination involve?

Your child will be asked to lie on the couch. The genital area (private parts) will be covered with a sheet. The doctors will then look at the genital area and anus (bottom). They use an item of equipment called a colposcope (shown above). It has a bright light and magnifying lens. This helps the doctors see the area under examination. It also records the examination. **The colposcope does not touch your child. This is not an “internal” examination. There is no vaginal speculum instrument used for girls.**

A doctor gently parts the outer lips of the genitalia (in girls) and looks. The doctor may gently take some cotton tip swabs for forensic purposes (DNA) and to check for infection. The swabs are taken by touching 3 areas with the cotton tips: the outer skin of the genital area, the anus and throat. If at any point you or your child become distressed the examination will be stopped. An iPad is sometimes used to distract a child to help them relax. If your child has their own tablet with favourite videos/ games it may be a good idea to bring it with you. In some cases, we ask your child for a urine sample or may ask to take a blood sample. The police may send the swabs to be tested for DNA or other evidence.

You will then be asked to return to the waiting area with your child. The doctors review the information and discuss this with the police and social worker. You will be told of the outcome of the examination before leaving the Rowan.

The doctors will tell you if there is any injury/ abnormality visible to your child’s anus/genital area. In some cases it may be a skin condition or infection which is causing the signs seen. **If the examination is normal the doctors will not be able to say whether or not sexual abuse has taken place.**

This is because sexual abuse often leaves no signs/ injuries or if any signs/injuries had occurred they can heal quickly. It may be important for you or your child to know that no persisting physical damage is there if your child was abused. Medical assessment is only one part of the investigation. Doctors work alongside other agencies such as police and social services to try and work out what has happened and what is in the best interest of your child.

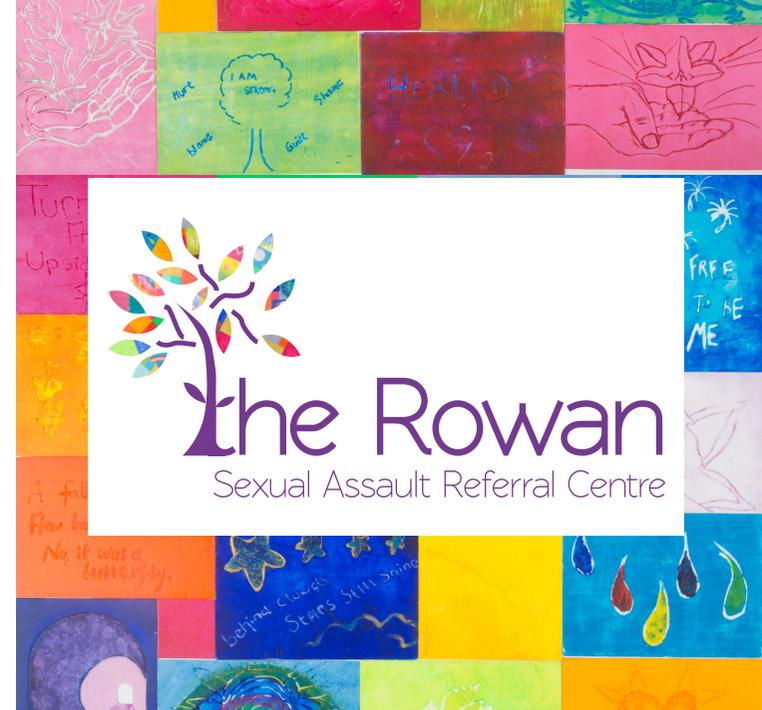
What happens next?

A Rowan nurse will contact you within the next few days to check how you and your child are doing and to offer advice or support if needed.

Will my child be seen again at the Rowan?

If an incident has occurred within the last 2 weeks you may be asked to bring your child back for a further appointment. This takes only 15-20 minutes. The main reason is to repeat infection swabs. Infections take about 2 weeks to be detected on swabs. When coming for review you arrive at a different (front) entrance. In the small waiting area there may be a few other people (patients or professionals) waiting also.

Please inform staff at reception if you are not comfortable with that. We are very aware of confidentiality. **We encourage you to contact the Rowan at any time if you have questions about your child’s health in relation to this area. If you have queries specifically regarding a police investigation or forensic samples you will need to contact the police officer directly.**



Information for parents & carers of children & young people under 13 years

Tel. 028 9442 4340

Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm

0800 3894424 (24/7)

Support is available 24 hours a day,
365 days a year.

What is the Rowan?

It is the Regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Northern Ireland situated on the Antrim Hospital site. People of all ages can attend here. Children and young people may be referred here for a number of reasons:

- Children who have made an allegation of sexual abuse.
- Children in whom sexual abuse has been witnessed.
- When carers/professionals have a reasonable cause to suspect sexual abuse because of a child's physical signs or symptoms but where these could also be due to other conditions such as accidental genital injuries, skin conditions or infections.

Children are referred for medical assessment by Social Services and/or Police. When a child comes for assessment to the Rowan both Police and Social Services will be informed routinely.

We understand this is an anxious time for all involved. This leaflet aims to provide information on what will happen next if your child has been referred to the Rowan for a medical assessment.

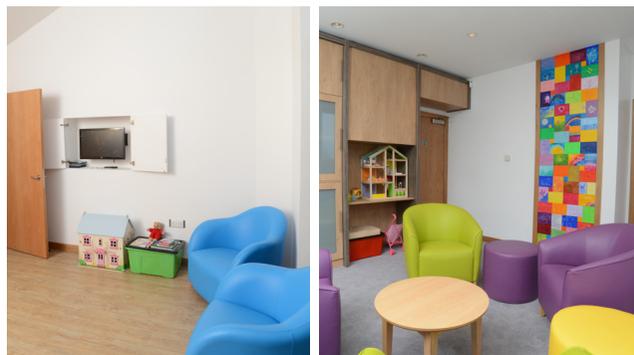
What do I tell my child?

That depends on the circumstances. It is usually enough to say they are going to see some doctors who will check them over to make sure they are well. If your child has made an allegation or is complaining of symptoms in the anal or genital area, it may be appropriate to say the doctor will be checking that area to see if anything is needed to help them.

What happens when we arrive?

You will be met by a Rowan nurse (specially trained nurse). They will guide you through what happens at the Rowan. They will record some of your child's general details and take you to the Paediatric Pod.

This is a private part of the building where you will wait with your child prior to the medical assessment. There are tea and coffee facilities, toys, TV and there is a private garden should you wish to go outside.



How long will we be at the Rowan?

The assessment may last for 2 or 3 hours. Most of this time is spent talking to professionals and taking a detailed history from yourself. Your child's medical assessment will usually only take about 30 minutes.

What does it involve?

You may be spoken to by the police officer or social worker involved. Depending on the circumstances they may also wish to speak to your child.

The doctors will take details from the police and social worker before seeing you or your child.

What does the medical assessment involve?

You will be seen by the doctors who will assess your child. There will usually be a forensic medical officer (FMO), who is a specially trained doctor who works for the police, and a Paediatrician (specialist children's doctor). They work together.

They will explain the consent process and request your written consent for the assessment. They will record any information provided as well as their examination findings.

Your child will usually wait in a separate area with family or other professionals involved with your child's care whilst this information is gathered.

It is not the role of the doctors to take a detailed history from your child regarding any incident.

You will then move to the assessment room with your child. It is really important for your child to be as relaxed as possible so we ask that you try to remain relaxed and informal. If your child sees your anxiety they may well become anxious too.

The FMO and Paediatrician will be there along with the Rowan nurse. The Social Worker or Police Officer will wait in another room. It is only health professionals present in the examination room.

The doctors will carry out a general assessment from head to toe including weighing and measuring your child. They will make careful notes of any injuries or abnormalities seen whether they are of concern or not.