



## Children's houses

**Children who have been exposed to violence and sexual abuse often experience that assistance is not available, arrives too late or must be obtained from several different instances. To ensure these children better assistance and treatment services, the Norwegian government has established a nationwide scheme of children's houses. In the children's houses, interviews, examinations and treatment are carried out at the same location.**

### Coherent service

The establishment of children's houses is one of fifty measures in *Turning point*, the Norwegian government's action plan against domestic violence. The service is nationwide and children's houses are located in Bergen, Kristiansand, Hamar, Trondheim and Tromsø. In the course of the year, arrangements will be made to establish a children's house in Oslo.

The idea behind children's houses is to see that children who have been exposed to violence and sexual abuse are ensured good, coherent assistance and treatment services, located in one place. By bringing professionals together under one roof and allowing them to cooperate, children receive better support and care.

### Taking children seriously

A child who is a victim of sexual abuse or has witnessed violence shall feel that he or she is taken seriously. The child shall experience adults who show that they will protect the child and see that the abuse is stopped.

The children's houses are equipped for both judicial and medical examinations, and have rooms for conversation and therapy. Thus, interviews, examinations and treatment of the child can take place in the same place. The child and any parents or caretakers can receive additional counselling and support. In addition, the children's houses will be able to notify the local assistance and care services of the need for help.

### Cooperative measures

The children's house is not simply a physical place, but a cooperative measure across the sectors that will coordinate the relevant instances' tasks with regard to children that have been subject to sexual abuse. The children's houses are run by a team covering several professional fields and with expertise on sexual and physical abuse. At the same time, the police, healthcare services, child welfare services, courts, counsel, defence attorneys and municipal authorities can cooperate with the children's houses.

### Supplemental measures

The children's houses shall function to supplement public officials who deal with children. All public instances may apply to the children's houses to discuss anonymous cases where there is concern that children and young persons may be subject to abuse and violence. Day care institutions, the municipal child welfare services and schools may get in touch with the children's houses to

obtain the assistance necessary to handle these cases in a manner that is in the children's best interests.

### Increased sentences

The new criminal code extends the sentencing framework for domestic abuse from three to six years, and for cruel and abusive treatment from six to fifteen years. There will also be significant aggravating factors for punishment within these sentencing frameworks. If children are witness to the violence, this will be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. The pain and feeling of powerlessness that children experience when they see someone they love subjected to violence can be at least as great as that of the physical abuse itself.

In parallel with changes to the criminal code, the government is compiling an amendment to the Children Act that expressly makes all forms of violence against children as a disciplinary measure in the context of their upbringing forbidden. Children shall be protected against all forms of mental or physical punishment – including slapping or smacking.

