Bought and Sold

RECOGNIZING AND ASSISTING YOUTH VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKING

Revised May 2016

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Family and Youth Services Bureau

Bought and Sold

RECOGNIZING AND ASSISTING YOUTH VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKING

Domestic minor sex trafficking refers to the commercial sexual exploitation of any American citizen or legal resident under the age of 18. Victims include girls, boys, and transgender youth as young as 12–or even younger. They are recruited, exploited, and victimized by traffickers or pimps within the United States.

Young people whose bodies are bought and sold for sex are **not criminals**. They are **victims** of **physical, psychological, and emotional violence.**

The impact of commercial sexual exploitation on young victims is often devastating. They face violence, disease, and jail. Before they are even old enough to vote, they lose their dignity and their freedom. They suffer trauma that may never go away.

Identifying and providing services to young victims of commercial sexual exploitation should be a top priority of communities and professionals serving families across the nation.

This brochure is for youth and family services professionals who come in direct contact with young people who may be sexually exploited or trafficked. By reading it, you'll learn who is most at risk, what to look for, what exploited and trafficked young people need, and where you can get additional resources and support.

Some Youth Are More at Risk

Victims come from cities, suburbs, and small towns across the country, from all races and ethnic groups. Still, there are certain factors that increase the risks of victimization:

- a history of abuse and neglect at home, particularly sexual abuse
- involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- a history of running away and homelessness
- poor family connections

Young people experiencing one or more of the above factors may be more vulnerable than other youth to the coercion of traffickers. Often, traffickers manipulate other exploited youth to help them recruit teens at runaway shelters, group homes, bus stops, shopping malls, or other places where vulnerable youth tend to be.[1]

Where does commercial sexual exploitation of minors occur?

- Peep shows or strip clubs
- Erotic massage services
- Streets (Prostitution)
- Online (Pornography)
- Escort services
- Truck stops

1 Hay, M. (2006). Commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. BC Medical Journal, 46(3), 119-122.

No One Chooses to Be Sexually Exploited

Sex trafficking of minors is a form of child abuse. It's important to remember that no one chooses to be exploited. Many young victims are lured by exploiters and traffickers with the false promise of a better life, love, or affection. Later, traffickers use violence, threats, and manipulation to control their victims psychologically and financially.

Signs of Sex Trafficking

Identifying victims can be difficult. Even though trafficking doesn't require movement, some victims are moved frequently. They have been told by their exploiters to mistrust adults, particularly law enforcement. They have been trained to lie about their ages or activities. And often, they don't think of themselves as victims.

However, some signs may include:

- Over-sexualized behavior
- Controlling older companion, "boyfriend," or "girlfriend"
- Highly controlled or restricted schedule, money, or communications
- Unidentifiable source of income, large amounts of cash, or unexplained source of new clothing and personal items
- Bruises or other physical signs of abuse
- A tattoo that the young person is reluctant to explain (for instance, being "branded" with an exploiter's name on the neck, chest, or arms)
- Gaps in life story or defensiveness in response to questions or concerns
- Malnourishment
- Untreated health and dental problems

This list is not complete and more questions must be asked to determine if sex trafficking has occurred.

What Victims of Sexual Exploitation Need

Young victims of sex trafficking have experienced intense violence and psychological abuse. They need trauma-informed services that prevent them from experiencing additional harm to their safety and well-being while helping them to recover and heal.

A safe and secure environment. For exploited and trafficked young people, a major barrier to getting help is fear of reprisal from their exploiters. When reaching out to victims on the street or in other public places, talk to them away from others, particularly someone who seems controlling. Establish code words or signals they can use to let you know when to leave immediately or not approach.

Similarly, during intake into a program and case management sessions, talk one-on-one and discuss safety issues upfront. Victims often know the best ways to keep themselves safe. Service providers must build a rapport with the youth in order to understand their needs and address emergency and basic needs first.

If a young person is being placed into a housing program, don't assume that your facility or neighborhood shelter is secure. Pimps and other exploiters may hang out near homeless youth shelters and group homes, aiming to recruit new victims. Discuss safety concerns with your supervisor or the manager of your local shelter or transitional living program. Work to create a facility-wide safety plan for all victims of commercial sexual exploitation and relationship violence. The plan should include how to respond to internal security risks and therapeutic response to these incidents.

Extensive medical and dental care. Victims are often prevented by their victimizers from getting proper care. Many have injuries from beatings and rapes that were never properly treated. They also are at extremely high risk for sexually transmitted infections and should have a complete medical screening as soon as possible. You may want to accompany youth to appointments to ensure trauma-informed services are provided and that

1 in 6 endangered runaways reported to NCMEC in 2014 were likely **sex trafficking victims**[2]

70% to 90% of commercially sexually exploited youth have experienced sexual abuse **at their homes**[3]

In October 2015, FBI and local law enforcement conducted a four-day operation in 135 cities nationwide[4]:

149 child sex trafficking victims were **recovered**

150 traffickers were **arrested**

In a 2013 study, The Institute of Medicine found that

HOMELESSNESS is the **largest risk factor**

for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and sex trafficking of minors.[5]

youth are comfortable disclosing their experiences of exploitation to health care providers.

Mental health services. Victims may have mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder and complex PTSD. They may also have "traumatic bonding" with their exploiters, also known as Stockholm syndrome. Find professionals trained to deal with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and the impact of trauma and physical or sexual abuse. You might start by contacting members of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

An honest, nonjudgmental listener. Victims of sexual exploitation are often fearful, mistrusting, and ashamed. To open up, they need someone who can listen to the details of their life compassionately and respond without judgment.

Remember that relationships between victims and exploiters are often complex. Never badmouth the exploiter or tell the victim to "just leave." Don't expect the victim to tell you the full, true story right away, and never take it personally if they lie. You may want to ask a survivor advocate–someone trained in crisis intervention and working with victims of sexual violence–to take on this role of listener or to be there when you talk to youth about the details of their exploitation.

Culturally appropriate services. Enlist the help of others who speak the victim's language and understand his or her culture when providing services. Make sure that the organizations you refer victims to are culturally competent as well. Culturally competent services include the ability to meet victims where they are by providing services tailored to their needs.

2 The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)
3 Guidance to States and Services on Addressing Human Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States
4 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
5 Institute of Medicine Report

Educational services and vocational and life skills training. Exploited youth often need a whole host of basic skills to help them make a new start. Discuss and plan educational and vocational opportunities with youth. Contact your local transitional living program, GED, or vocational training program. (Transitional living programs funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau are listed on the FYSB website.)

Community ties. Because victims have been so isolated from their families, friends, and communities, they often feel that going back to their exploiters is the only option. Reestablishing healthy social connections is crucial. Consider creating community connections with faith-based and housing organizations, schools and mentors to ensure healing and restoration of young victims.

Time. It can take months or even years for young people to understand their victimization and recognize that help is available. Victims can leave their trafficking situations and go back multiple times before finally making a permanent break, so don't give up on them. And don't expect victims to suddenly be "fixed." They might need a very long time to begin to heal and establish stable lives for themselves. Let them know that you will offer support as long as they need it.

Help navigating the legal system. Trafficking victims may have criminal records or may be asked to testify against their traffickers. You can get more information about meeting victims' legal needs from your local Legal Aid Society, the American Bar Association or the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime.

Considerations for Involving Law Enforcement and Family

If the young person gives permission, you can involve police and family any time. As you are building the young person's treatment plan, you may need to include steps that will involve the appropriate law enforcement agencies, family members, and the courts. Work with family and law enforcement to take a victim-centered approach that holds exploiters–not victims–accountable.

Work closely with the young person to understand his/her relationship with their family. You may want to discuss with them the possibility of informing family members if you believe their involvement would aid the young person's recovery. However, it is important to involve the youth while making these decisions. If possible, please work with a multidisciplinary team to ensure a victim-centered approach while dealing with law enforcement. This team can include mental health providers and legal and victim advocates.

If the young person does not give permission, what you do may depend on his or her age. If you are a "mandated reporter," you may be legally required to inform the police about a victim who is a minor if you have enough information for local law enforcement to file a report. Remember to develop a plan before contacting law enforcement to ensure a trauma-informed approach will be used while working with law enforcement. For older youth who don't want law enforcement to get involved, it may be hard to get police or the courts to help. However, youth still can receive services and assistance from your organization.

If contacting family is part of the agreed-upon treatment plan or a condition for a youth to receive services from your agency, getting in touch with family members who could aid the young person's recovery may still be necessary. Explain what information will be shared with the family. If you have only had a short relationship with the young person or he or she will only stay in your shelter for a few days, you might choose not to contact family or to wait until you have a stronger relationship with the victim and he or she has committed to a treatment plan.

Final Thoughts on Aiding Young Victims of Sex Trafficking

When working with a trafficked or exploited young person, don't go it alone. The complete healing of a young survivor of trafficking requires collaboration. Be sure to communicate with your supervisor or program manager as well as with law enforcement, victims services professionals, and medical and mental health practitioners. Local task forces can provide additional support and increase capacity to serve victims.

Some Terms Used in Sex Trafficking

When working with victims of sexual exploitation, it helps to understand the language they may use. Definitions here are taken and adapted from "Domestic Sex Trafficking: The Criminal Operations of the American Pimp" by Polaris Project and "Renting Lacy: A Story of America's Prostituted Children" by Linda Smith (via Shared Hope International).

Bottom: One of a group of victims under the control of an exploiter or pimp, the bottom helps the trafficker exert control over other victims.

Daddy: The term a pimp will often require his victim to call him.

Dates, johns, tricks: Pays or trades something of value for sex.

Facilitators: People or businesses that enable traffickers to exploit victims. Includes taxi drivers, hotel owners, and newspapers or websites where traffickers advertise.

Family or folk: Group of victims under the control of one exploiter or pimp.

The life: The experience of being used as a victim in prostitution.

Trafficker: (also known as pimp) Someone who receives money or something of value for the sexual exploitation of another person.

Stroll or track: Places where street prostitution occurs.

Wife in law: Women or girls under the control of one pimp.

If you feel unprepared to help sexually exploited youth, consider finding training. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center offers training, online resources, and technical support to local communities.

Learn More

Reports

"Child Welfare and Human Trafficking," Child Welfare Information Gateway

"Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: What Do We Know and What Do We Do About It?" (PDF, 293KB), National Institute of Justice

"Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States," Institute of Medicine and National Research Council

"Guidance to States and Services on Addressing Human Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States," Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

"Study of HHS Programs Serving Human Trafficking Victims," Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Resource Centers

National Human Trafficking Resource Center

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

Federal Bureau of Investigation's Innocence Lost Initiative

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Get Help or Report the Exploitation of a Young Person

National Human Trafficking Hotline
1-888-373-7888
Or text BeFree (233733)

Children of the Night 24-Hour Hotline
1-800-551-1300

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE

National Runaway Safeline
1-800-RUNAWAY

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, or RAINN
1-800-656-HOPE

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

Bought and Sold: Recognizing and assisting youth victims of domestic sex trafficking was developed for the Family and Youth Services Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by JBS International, Inc., under a contract to manage the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY).

For more information, please contact NCFY.

NCFY
5515 Security Lane, Suite 800
North Bethesda, MD 20852
Phone: (301) 608-8098
Fax: (301) 587-4352
Email: ncfy@acf.hhs.gov