

Making Appropriate Referrals for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and Minor Sex Trafficking

Youth survivors of sex trafficking need comprehensive services to assist with everything from immediate and emergency needs, to ongoing and long-term needs. Not every organization or program can meet every need of every survivor. Understanding various needs for youth and building inter-agency connections can help youth survivors have access to, and to receive comprehensive care and services.

Resources that can be useful for trafficked and/or commercially sexually exploited children and youth to connect with include:

- Local organizations specialized in services for survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault;
- Child Advocacy Centers (CACs);
- Immigrant and refugee organizations;
- Health services (general practice, reproductive health, hospital services, etc.);
- Mental health services (inpatient, outpatient, and crisis stabilization);
- Counseling services and trauma-focused therapy;
- Housing (short term, long term, and transitional);
- Legal services;
- Immigration services;
- Services provided by home country's embassy;
- Translation services;
- Faith-based community support;
- Educational and/or vocational training;
- Social service navigators and advocates;
- Peer support groups;
- LGBTQ services;
- Disability services

When a referral needs to be made, practitioners should first consider the particular expertise of other agencies in the community, and their understanding of trauma and CSEC. Youth survivors will need to trust that this new agency will be able to meet their needs in a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate way. In order to prevent causing more harm to a youth it is important to vet other agencies before making a referral.

Factors that should be considered include the agency's:

- Awareness and experience around commercial sexual exploitation and domestic minor sex trafficking;
- Level of professionalism and quality of care;
- Non-discrimination policies
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity;
- Confidentiality policies;
- Procedures for obtaining informed consent;
- Security and safety of the agency location and premises;
- Language capacity;
- Experience with trauma-informed care;
- LGBTQ services; and
- Location and accessibility.

Youth Hesitation

If a youth seems hesitant about a particular referral, explore this. It may be that the youth is fearful about the location of the service provider or has transportation issues. Perhaps the youth has

received services from this provider before and it didn't go well, or maybe he or she has heard rumors about this provider. Allow youth the space to explore these concerns rather than forcing him or her into accepting a referral.

When a referral is in the best interest of a youth, take the following steps¹:

- Identify those client needs that cannot be met through your agency or would be better met through specialized service provision elsewhere.
- Find trauma-informed, culturally appropriate services by reaching out to local anti-trafficking task forces and coalitions who provide services to survivors of child trafficking or CSEC.
- Ask new contacts for details about their experience and service options. Contact the provider in the presence of the youth so that s/he can ask questions.
- Discuss each referral option with your client. Weigh each option with the youth, giving consideration to any potential risks to safety.
- Establish contact with a representative from the agency chosen by your client who has familiarity with trauma and child trafficking or CSEC.
- Provide information on the youth's need, special considerations in relation to the trauma they have already experienced, and any relevant paperwork that the service provider will require to offer services. **Do not share details with outside providers without the informed consent of the survivor.**
- Visit the agency with your client before arranging services. This is called a “**warm hand-off.**”
- Continue to escort the youth to appointments if desired by the youth.

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center operates a National Contacts Referral Database, which contains more than 3,000 unique contacts for anti-trafficking practitioners and organizations in the field. **Call 1-888-373-7888 or text “INFO” to BeFree (233733)** for direct assistance from an NHTRC representative.²

If a Referral will Not Be Made

- Maximize your impact on the survivor at each encounter. Offer empathetic support and aim to meet his or her basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, safety) whenever possible.
- Provide information about the crime of trafficking, available support services, including hotline numbers, and information on whom to call in the future should the youth decide to access services later.^{3,4}

¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services (2016) *Responding to Commercially Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Youth: A Handbook for Child Serving Professionals*, 26.

² Accessed at The National Human Trafficking Resource Center at <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>

³ National Association of Case Management (NACM). (2014). NACM definition of case management and service coordination.

⁴ Zimmerman, C. & Watts, C. (2003). WHO ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.