

UNDERSTANDING COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

MY LIFE
MY CHOICE

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is an egregious form of child abuse. CSEC, also known as sex trafficking, is any sexual activity involving a child for which something of value is given, exchanged, or promised. It is a human rights issue that is integrally connected to racism, classism, sexism, and gender-based violence.

WHO IS AT RISK?

While all youth are at risk of exploitation, there are populations of youth at disproportionate risk, including:

- *Adolescents who have been abused, neglected, or exposed to family violence or addiction*
- *Youth involved in the child welfare system*
- *"Runaway" and homeless youth*
- *LGBTQIA+ youth*

HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

Exploiters or traffickers systematically target vulnerable youth. The four main tactics used by exploiters to "recruit" their victims are:

FORCE. May include kidnapping or use of a weapon. This is a tactic seen in many movies, however it is not all that common.

COERCION. Once an exploiter knows what makes a youth vulnerable (new clothes, threats to a loved one, a place to stay, etc.), they will use that to manipulate them.

BEFRIENDING. An exploiter may use another victim to "befriend" vulnerable youth, or an exploiter may pose as a friend themselves.

SEDUCTION. The exploiter makes the youth believe they are in love, then leverages that love to convince the youth to do what he or she asks.

"WHEN I WAS A FRESHMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL, MY MOM WAS GOING THROUGH A LOT AND WAS NOT HOME MUCH. I WANTED SOMEONE TO TAKE CARE OF ME. I MET SOMEONE WHO PROMISED THAT HE WOULD. HE WOULD PICK ME UP FROM SCHOOL, HE WOULD TAKE ME OUT, HE WOULD TAKE CARE OF ME. WHEN YOU HAVE SOMEONE WILLING TO DO EVERYTHING THAT YOU ALWAYS WISHED FOR, YOU AUTOMATICALLY THINK, 'THAT PERSON LOVES ME.' BELIEVING HE LOVED ME, I WENT MISSING FOR OVER A YEAR. HE TOOK ME TO FLORIDA AND I HAD TO DO THINGS THAT PEOPLE WHO LOVE YOU DON'T MAKE YOU DO."

- WENDY, SURVIVOR OF CSEC, AGE 20

RED FLAGS

Some common indicators of CSEC include:

- *Has a history of going missing from care (“running away”)*
- *Has visible signs of abuse (i.e. cigarette burns, marks on body but not face, etc.)*
- *Behaviors are consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Attire is not appropriate for the season/situation*
- *Clothing/jewelry/phone has upgraded over time in a way that can't be accounted for by a family financial situation or job*
- *Has a tattoo which the youth is reluctant to explain*
- *Found in an area known for “prostitution” (either physical area or website)*
- *Uses language from “the Life”*
- *Frequently truant from school*
- *Is involved with an older male*
- *Is involved with someone gang-involved*
- *Being secretive about what they do online*
- *Has a history of multiple sexually transmitted infections or pregnancies*
- *If transitioning, has access to hormone injections outside the supervision of a medical provider*
- *Has new “friends”—older teens or adults*
- *Is disconnected from family or other caregivers*

IF A MINOR DEMONSTRATES MULTIPLE INDICATORS OF RISK, THEY MAY BE BEING COMMERCIALY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED.

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IF YOU SUSPECT EXPLOITATION OR BELIEVE A CHILD TO BE AT HIGH RISK

Talk to your child's school social worker, guidance counselor or nurse.

Intervention and Prevention programs are available. You don't want to hold this on your own.

Contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at

1-888-373-7888

or text

BEFREE (233733)

There is someone there 24/7 to talk to. They will connect you to help in your area.