

Identifying Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth

The following are common indicators that you may find useful in identifying commercially sexually exploited youth. Aside from the first bullet point, a child exhibiting one of these indicators may not necessarily or definitively be a victim of CSEC. Likewise, not all victims of CSEC exhibit all of these warning signs. However, the presence of any of these signs is worthy of further inquiry and intervention, and may suggest that the child is being commercially sexually exploited.

- If the age of an individual has been verified to be under 18, and the individual is in any way involved in the commercial sex industry, or has a record of prior arrest for prostitution (or related charges), then he or she is a CSEC victim.
- Physical and sexual violence are the everyday reality of many sexually exploited children and may leave visible signs of abuse, such as: unexplained bruises, black eyes, cuts, or marks.
- Exhibit behaviors including fear, anxiety, depression, submission, tension, and/or nervousness.
- Exhibit "hyper-vigilance" or paranoid behavior.
- Sexually exploited children and youth often express interest in, or are in relationships with, adults or older men.
- Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships, including: repeated phone calls from a "boyfriend" and/or excessive concern about displeasing partner.
- Unexplained shopping trips or possession of expensive clothing, jewelry, or a cell phone could indicate the manipulation of an exploiter.
- Not in control of their own money.

- Use of lingo or slang from "the life" among peers, or referring to a boyfriend as "Daddy." (See Handout 3.6 *Street Terminology*)
- Secrecy about whereabouts•
- Unaccounted for time, vagueness concerning whereabouts, and/or defensiveness in response to questions or concern.
- Keeping late-nights or unusual hours•
- Wearing sexually provocative clothing can be an indicator of sexual exploitation. It should be noted that, contrary to stereotype, not all children in the commercial sex industry wear such clothing, and sexually provocative clothing is not a warning sign in and of itself. Wearing new clothes of any style, or getting hair or nails done with no financial means to do this independently, is a more general indicator of potential sexual exploitation.
- A young person with a tattoo, which he or she is reluctant to explain, may have been tattooed or branded by a pimp. Pimps and other sexually exploiters often tattoo or brand children and youth, particularly girls. Youth are commonly branded with their exploiter's name tattooed on the neck, chest, or arms.
- Most sexually exploited children have been trained to lie about their age. Sometimes a child's appearance and/or actions can contradict the information they give. Be sensitive to clues in behavior or appearance that could indicate that a child is underage.
- Personal information-such as: age, name, and/or date of birth-might change with each telling of his or her story, or the information given might contradict itself.
- Has no identification or is not in control of his or her identification documents.
- Has an explicitly sexual online profile via internet community sites, such as MySpace.com, BlackPlanet.com, etc.

- Excessive frequenting of internet chat rooms or classified sites, such as Craigslist.org, known for recruitment.
- Depicts elements of sexual exploitation or the commercial sex industry in drawing, poetry, or other modes of creative expression. Prints lyrics to sexually explicit music or songs that allude to the sex industry.
- Doctors and nurses can consider frequent or multiple sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or pregnancies a warning sign.
- Homeless or runaway youth who are in the position of surviving on their own may be forced to exchange sex for survival needs, such as housing or shelter. This can lead to recruitment into the commercial sex industry or a more organized or regular trading of sex for money, shelter, or things of value.
- Youth living in group homes and youth shelters are targeted by exploiters for sexual exploitation.
- Truancy or tardiness from school may be a sign that sexual exploitation is occurring during school hours, or during hours when the young person should otherwise be sleeping.
- Family dysfunction-including: abuse in the home (emotional, sexual, physical, etc.), neglect, absence of a caregiver, or substance abuse-is a major risk factor for CSEC, and therefore may be a warning sign.