



Missouri Department of
Social Services

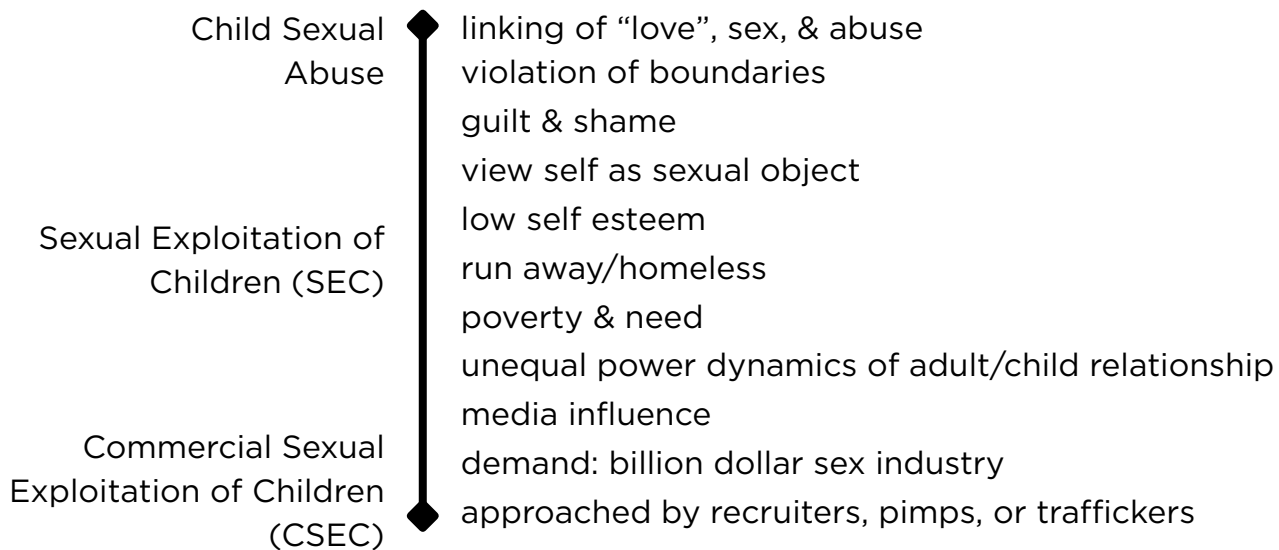
A Caregiver's Guide to Understanding Child Exploitation and Trafficking

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RISK FACTORS, SIGNS, AND SYMPTOMS

There are several factors that can make youth vulnerable to sex trafficking. The continuum of abuse shows the impact and increased vulnerabilities of youth who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. This continuum is a visual aid in understanding the connections between child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children (SEC) and the commercial sexual exploitations of children (CSEC).

Continuum of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children (SEC), & Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)



Traffickers often prey on vulnerable youth, luring them to perform sex acts or acts of labor through false promises, threats, or threats to harm those they love. Youth who are middle-school or high-school aged are typically most at risk. Several other risk factors can make children more vulnerable to trafficking, including:

- Single-parent homes
- Minimal supervision
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of a strong social network
- Unsupervised online time
- Focusing on friendships and connections made online
- Not going to school
- Youth in foster care or juvenile justice systems
- Youth who frequently run away from home
- Youth with a history of childhood abuse (physical, emotional or sexual), sexual assault, or rape, especially when unreported
- Youth experiencing or living with someone with substance use issues

Youth who have experienced exploitation might go through stages of changing their behavior. You can use these stages to identify where your child could be in the process of changing, and how you can support them.

The information about stages of change on the following pages is from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Community Intervention Project.

PRE-CONTEMPLATION

A child in this stage does not see or acknowledge a problem

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Deny being sexually exploited.
- Disclose involvement in 'the life', but does not present it as a problem.
- Be defensive.
- Not want your help, and 'want you to stay out of my business'

YOUR GOALS:

- Foster trust and understanding for your child to feel heard.
- Help them recognize the pros and cons of their actions.
- Express your concerns for their safety.
- Encourage them to envision possible changes.

CONTEMPLATION

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Acknowledge life's pain and misalignment with desires.
- Process abuse and its effects, not ready to leave yet.
- Experience ambivalence about leaving.
- Be open to self-reflection, discussing emotions, and considering consequences.

YOUR GOALS:

- Actively listen to your child for better understanding.
- Encourage involvement in healthy social groups and new experiences.
- Praise any progress, no matter how small.
- Acknowledge and validate fears of change.

PREPARATION

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Has made a commitment to leave.
- Has thought a lot about leaving, and now begins to "test the waters".
- Exhibits signs of independence by taking small steps to be able to leave.
- Researches and is open to resources.

YOUR GOALS:

- Actively listen to your child for better understanding.
- Encourage involvement in healthy social groups and new experiences.
- Praise any progress, no matter how small.
- Acknowledge and validate fears about change.

LEAVING 'THE LIFE'

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Go through stages of exiting until their financial situation is stable.
- Start a part-time job.
- Cut off contact with pimps and move from the area of exploitation.
- Be more stable, with less running away behaviors.

YOUR GOALS:

- Validate the effort to leave.
- Address safety and self-care concerns.
- Help process anxiety and loss, emphasizing long-term benefits of change.
- Highlight and build on your child's strengths.

LEAVING THE LIFE

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Remains out of CSEC.
- Develops new skills for a new life.
- Avoids temptations and responding to triggers.

YOUR GOALS:

- Plan for follow-up support with patience and realism.
- Discuss coping strategies for relapse, triggers, and temptations.
- Encourage the development of new skills and strengths.
- Acknowledge progress and validate strengths.

RELAPSE

When talking about relapse, it is important to note that under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, anyone under the age of 18 is being revictimized when they engage in CSEC-related activities.

YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Return to 'the life'.

YOUR GOALS:

- Address feelings of failure; reassure that relapse is common.
- Revisit stages of change.
- Evaluate triggers for relapse; plan stronger coping strategies.
- Reassess motivation to leave and identify barriers.

REAL STORIES FROM REAL YOUTH

CSEC victims can tell you what has and has not worked in their lives. The following is a list of interventions and interactions that youth had with various allies. The youth remember these people and experiences as being meaningful and effective when they were struggling with leaving the commercial sex industry.

What kind of support helped you when you were in “the life” and struggling to exit?

“I could talk to my counselor without nobody calling me names. I could tell them how I feel for the day, what my goals are and what I want to achieve, and they’ll help me achieve it.”

“When I was beat up in the hospital, the nurse gave me a hug for a really long time. It was the first time in a long time that someone had been kind to me.”

“They (the youth program) have showed me what my talents are. My favorite is poetry.”



READ MORE STORIES FROM REAL YOUTH

Supporting your child through these changes is important. Try to be non-judgmental and understanding when talking to your child. **Avoid using phrases like these:**

- “If you leave, we’ll close your bed and you can’t come back”
- “You don’t have to be here” / “Go ahead and leave if you want”
- “I don’t have to be doing this for you”
- “If you care so much about your family and they care so much about you, why aren’t you with them?”
- “You aren’t coming in this house until I let you in”
- “You have to stay”
- “You’ll get arrested/caught up in something if you leave”
- “There’s no where else to go”
- “We can’t help you if you choose to be in the life/prostitute yourself”
- “Your boy/girlfriend doesn’t love you”
- “Why do you keep doing this to yourself?”
- “You should be grateful to have this placement/home”
- “There’s the door. You can leave.”
- “I better get reimbursed for purchasing these items for you otherwise I’m taking them back”
- “I’m going to put you out if you...”
- “Because I said so”

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

Information in this section is provided by Love 146.



HAVE PERSPECTIVE AND BE MINDFUL

- Safety features are important, but they're not a replacement for open conversations with your child.
- Prepare your kids for the world. Part of life is risk, and part of growing up is learning how to safely manage risk.
- Technology isn't all bad or all good. There are both benefits and risks for your child.



MAKE A PLAN AND TAKE ACTION

- Consider your child's current device and app and how easy it is to access inappropriate content. Check the privacy settings where you can.
- Research or try games or new technology first before introducing it to your child. And initially be present or play it with them.



STAY IN CONVERSATION

- Encourage your child to come to you even when they do something they shouldn't do.
- If your teen already has relationships with people they met online, validate that those relationships are real by asking about them the way you would their other friends.
- Talk to your child about what to do if they see private parts, get messages from strangers, or see something upsetting online.



SO YOUR YOUTH IS GOING THROUGH SOMETHING

- Try to be non-judgmental when listening to your youth. Pay attention to your body, and try to reflect understanding and empathy through your body language as well as your words.
- Don't feel like you need to have all of the answers. If a youth asks you a question and you don't know the answer, it's okay to tell them you need to do some research or talk to someone and get back to them.
- Name the behavior rather than labeling the youth. For example, a youth is not "stupid" because they made a choice to do something that was risky.



**MORE
RESOURCES
FROM LOVE 146**



REPORT A CONCERN

Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline
800-392-3738

Human Trafficking Hotline
888-373-7888

