

# COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (CSEC) SCREENING TOOL

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (under the age of 18) involves children engaging any sexual activity for something of value (money, gifts, substances, accommodations, or other ways to meet their basic needs). Young people may describe a range of behaviors as consensual. However, underlying exploitation can be at play, and no overt threats are required for behaviors to qualify as CSEC.

## SCREENING QUESTIONS

**The following questions<sup>1</sup> are adapted from a validated screening tool. A “yes” to any of the following questions requires a report to Child Protective Services (CPS).**

- 1. Have you ever traded or been asked to trade sex or sexual acts for food, shelter, other basic needs, or something that you consider to be valuable?*
- 2. Have you frequented hotels to have sex?*
- 3. Have you ever used social media or the internet to try and exchange sex for basic needs or something you consider to be valuable?*

**A “yes” to the following questions would not necessitate a report to CPS without additional information:**

- 4. Have you run away two or more times in the last 6 months?*
- 5. It is not uncommon for young people to stay in work situations that are risky or even dangerous, simply because they have no other options. Have you ever worked, or done other things, in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?*
- 6. Sometimes employers don’t want people to know about the kind of work they have young employees doing. To protect themselves, they ask their employees to lie about the kind of work they are involved in. Have you ever worked for someone who asked you to lie while speaking to others about the work you do?*
- 7. Sometimes people are prevented from leaving an unfair or unsafe work situation by their employers. Have you ever been afraid to leave or quit a work situation due to fears of violence or threats of harm to yourself or your family?*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT) validated screening tool. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740918307540>

## INDICATORS & VULNERABILITIES

Use the list of indicators & vulnerabilities below as follow up information for the screening questions above. This list is **not** a formal assessment for CSEC, but places to pause and consider asking more questions or pay close attention to the possibility of CSEC.

- Frequenting hotels/motels
- Evidence of a controlling, abusive or dominating relationship with an older partner or adult
- Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothes, frequent hair and nail maintenance
- Frequently running away
- Occasional trips to cities (Portland, Boston, NYC) arranged by and paid for by someone else
- Evidence of brands or tattoos, especially names, initials, birthdates, or crowns
- Multiple cell phones
- History of child protection involvement
- Foster care system involvement or multiple placements
- History of juvenile justice system involvement
- Suspected gang affiliation
- History of sexual abuse
- Frequenting areas known for risky/criminal activities
- Unexpected physical injuries
- Secrecy, vagueness, or defensiveness regarding relationships and/or whereabouts
- Disconnection from family or friends or new peer group that seems unwarranted
- Disconnection from school
- Behaviors that indicate fear, anxiety, hypervigilance, depression, or paranoia
- Sexually transmitted infections/pregnancy
- Status as a refugee, asylee, asylum seeker or unaccompanied minor
- Chronic unstable housing or homelessness

## NEXT STEPS

1. If the child answers "yes" to screening questions 1, 2, or 3 and/or you suspect CSEC and/or the child has disclosed CSEC to you call CPS at 1-800-452-1999.
2. Make an immediate safety plan with the child. Consider shelter/housing, medical care, transportation, and advocacy/support services.
3. Make a warm referral to the local sexual assault support center by calling 1-800-871-7741.
4. Don't go it alone. Sexually exploited young people have a variety of complex needs that no one agency or discipline can meet. Use local resources to provide safety and support for the youth.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This tool should be used by professionals who have been trained in CSEC and trauma, as victims have often experienced multiple traumas and can require high levels of sensitivity and care. Many of the indicators also require a report by a mandated reporter.

Affirmative answers to the screening questions and/or a report to CPS do not equate with definite investigation or CPS action.