

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

The TA Tidbit is an online publication of the TA Network highlighting resources developed or provided in response to requests from SAMHSA SOC grantees on various topics.

This edition focuses on the **commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)**.

Children, youth, and young adults engaged in the child welfare system have an increased risk for having been exposed to and being survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. These youth may be coerced into sex work by friends or family members or utilize sex as a means to survive if they are maltreated, run away or have the experience of being "thrown away."

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines CSEC as "crimes of a sexual nature committed against juvenile victims for financial or other economic reasons". Mirroring the position of the [U.S. Department of Justice](#), many states have decriminalized prostitution for minors. This legislation defines minors as victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking, which promotes referral for treatment in lieu of incarceration. Currently, there are no evidenced-based interventions for CSEC. Best practices include trauma-informed models.

A combination of the following risk factors may indicate current or past involvement in sexual exploitation:

- Extreme attire that may not be appropriate for weather conditions
- Bruises or other physical trauma
- Tattoos on the neck or lower back which are visible a majority of the time
- Refusal to make eye contact/looks down while walking
- Initiates discussion of sexual topics
- Marked discrepancy in behavior and reported age (reports being age 18, but acts 15 years old)
- Downplays existing health problems or risks
- Multiple or frequent sexually transmitted infections
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or somatic complaints
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Significant concerns regarding safety and danger



Policies and practice strategies that support CSEC:

- Legal assistance should include affirmative defense, caseworker privileges, and vacate prostitution and other non-violent offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked;
- Safe harbor legislation with embedded supportive services;
- Catered supportive services to youth and their families/foster parent(s);
- Promote awareness and additional provider development targeting the unique behavioral health needs of this population.

See below for resources for CSEC:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
 - [Guidance to States and Services on Addressing Human Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States](#)
 - HHS Author Manuscript: [Understanding and Responding to the Needs of Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth: Recommendations for the Mental Health Provider](#)
- Casey Family Program: [Addressing Child Sex Trafficking from a Child Welfare Perspective](#)
- Connecticut Department of Children and Families:
 - [Practice Guide for Intake and Investigative Response To Human Trafficking of Children](#)
 - [Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team](#)
- New Jersey:
 - [Coalition Against Human Trafficking](#)
 - Department of Children and Families: [Investigating Human Trafficking Allegations Protocol](#)
- Center for Children & Youth Justice: [Washington State Model Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children](#)
- Foster Family-Based Treatment Association: [Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking/Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children](#)
- University of Maryland: [Safe Center for Human Trafficking Survivors](#)
- Freedom Network USA: [Trauma-Informed Case Management Webinar Series](#)