



**m** DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMAN SERVICES

## Identifying sexual exploitation and sex trafficking

Today's child protection workers must have the ability to identify sexual exploitation, which includes all commercial sex acts (sex in exchange for anything of value or a promise of anything of value) and non-commercial sexual abuse (sexual assault with no exchange of anything of value) involving a minor.

→ **Screen in** if parents or caregivers are involved; if not, **screen out** and provide child welfare response

### Suspected or known sex trafficking

One type of sexual exploitation is sex trafficking. In Minnesota, sex trafficking is prostitution that a third person – not the buyer or the victim – facilitates or profits from.

→ **All sex trafficking** involving a minor is a mandatory report; **screen in** for investigation regardless of who the alleged offender is

### Conducting intake and screening

For child protection workers, identification is the key to proper intake and screening of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation cases. Workers should ask themselves these questions when screening for sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

- **Are you concerned** that any child/children within this report may have exchanged or are potentially being pressured into exchanging a sexual act (including pornography or stripping) for money or services, such as drugs, alcohol, food, shelter, transportation or protection?

Example of being pressured: Online ad for sexual services or other solicitation/offer/request for a sexual act in exchange for something of value.

- **To your knowledge**, is there any other person (other than potential victims) involved in the exchange of the sexual act, beyond the people engaging or planning to engage in the sexual act?

Examples of others involved include those recruiting, organizing, making child accessible, advertising child, transporting or profiting from the act. The child could also be profiting from the act.



### Accessing services

For Safe Harbor, sexually exploited youth includes children and youth engaged in or at risk of commercial sexual activity. Connect with regional navigators to access services, shelter and support for youth. See the [MDH Safe Harbor website](#) or contact the Day One Hotline at 1-866-223-1111.

# High-risk indicators of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking

The following indicators do not necessarily mean sexual exploitation or sex trafficking are happening, but may be relevant in relation to a potential trafficking situation. The factors below may also indicate other issues in children's or youths' lives to evaluate within the context of all maltreatment reports and their prior history.

- Unexplained finances and belongings, including:
  - Changes in appearance or possessions with no apparent means to afford them such as hair, nails, clothing, jewelry and makeup
  - Access to money/large amounts of cash, clothes or other expensive belongings youth could not afford on their own
  - Multiple cell phones and/or frequent phone number changes
- Missing for periods of time, including:
  - Missing from home for days at a time and unaccounted for
  - Repeated absences without explanation (generally missing, skipping class, late for curfew)
  - Running away from home multiple times
- Hotel use, including:
  - Multiple hotel cards
  - Staying in hotels known for trafficking
  - Pictures taken in hotel rooms
- Tattoos/brands/markings (may be name of trafficker, cost code, other ways of being marked by a trafficker)
- Exploration commonly associated with sex trading, including:
  - Searching Backpage, or similar applications or websites
  - Photos or videos used for postings on websites
- Older boyfriend or vaguely identified female or older male companion who may be introduced as a relative; signs of controlling relationship, including youth who are visibly stressed about being in contact with that person or who are checking their phone often

- Association with others known to be involved in trafficking, exploitation or sex trading
- Involvement in law enforcement stings or investigations related to prostitution, solicitation or sex trafficking
- Unexplained bruising, burns, scars; undernourished; repeated or ongoing illnesses; broken bones; or extreme fatigue
- Trauma symptoms such as hypervigilance, constant agitation or easily startled.

## Other indicators to consider

- Family members involved in sex or labor trafficking, prostitution, or promotion of prostitution
- Involvement with specialized Safe Harbor services or other services for sexually exploited youth
- Issuance of interim assistance or eligibility letter from the federal government for foreign-born children
- History of sex abuse or domestic violence
- Homeless; this may not be a formal situation; it could be couch hopping
- Alcohol or drug use
- Mental health issues; look for evidence of self-harm or cutting
- Sexually transmitted infections; note youth 13 or younger with positive sexually transmitted infections tests or repeated tests
- Gang affiliation or possession of weapons
- Physical, cognitive or developmental disability that impairs abilities of youth or children



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