

**Plymouth County  
District Attorney's  
CSEC Task Force**

**Guide to:  
CSEC Safety Planning**

# Plymouth County CSEC Task Force

## Guide to CSEC Safety Planning

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These discussion topics and safety recommendations are a starting point for any professional working with youth at risk for sexual exploitation. This document also contains steps that partnering agencies may take and have found helpful in safety planning with and for CSEC victims.

- We believe safety planning is a team effort among the caretakers and partner agencies that are involved in the child's life and that know the child best.
- It is most successful when the child is an active participant in the process.
- A safety plan needs constant revisiting and may need adjustments as circumstances change.

- While talking with young people about exploitation may not at first glance seem like a safety planning measure, the quality of these interactions has the potential to increase trust and rapport or to further alienate a youth.
- We believe a large component of safety planning involves increasing the youth's support network and ensuring the youth has a safe and supportive person they can reach out to 24 hours a day.

- Conversations should be held in a private setting in a supportive, non-judgmental manner.
- Even if the youth does not disclose, you will have provided education and an open door for future disclosures.



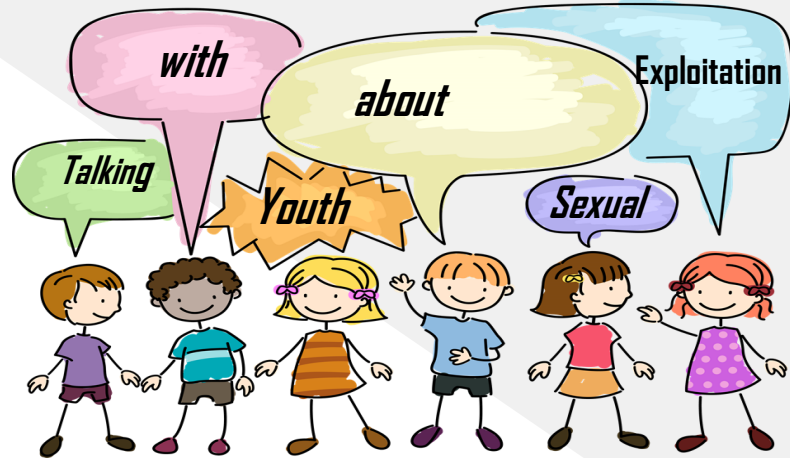
When CSEC is suspected, a 51A must be immediately filed with DCF.  
The 51A will initiate a MDT Response from the Children's Advocacy Center.

## Be aware of the connotations of your words.

Young people often hear that exploitation is “prostituting” themselves or “selling their bodies” and, understandably, become angry and defensive when asked questions worded this way.

## Here are some considerations for talking about exploitation

- The young people we work with sometimes have had to make difficult decisions about their bodies. They may have to do things they’re uncomfortable doing or wouldn’t have done if they had other options. There are people – peers and adults – who take advantage of this.
- For Example: If someone you know had to perform a sexual act in order to have a place to stay, to eat, to get a ride, or to obtain something else of value, that person has experienced exploitation.
- **Sexual acts doesn’t just mean actually having sex; it could also be other sex acts like oral sex, dancing in a strip club, posing for nude or sexual photos.**
- If a person – whether an adult or a peer, someone you know or don’t know, whether male or female– asked you to perform a sexual act (on them or on someone else) in exchange for something else of value, that is sexual exploitation regardless of their reason for asking. **(Note: it’s not always explicit that one thing is being exchanged for another).**
- Sometimes exploitation is not as obvious: someone may give others drugs and it seems like they’re just partying together, but eventually that person wants the other to do something to pay off the debt; this may include a sex act on the person supplying the drugs or someone else.
- Gangs are sometimes involved in these situations and make the fear of “telling” that much worse.

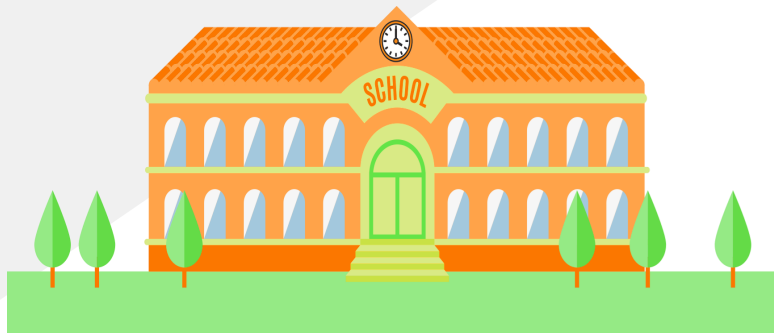


- Sometimes someone seems like they really care for another person – an older person may give a runaway a place to stay and food to eat; the person may act loving, like a boyfriend/girlfriend or a parental figure, but then ask the youth to help him/her out by doing something sexual.
- These things can happen any time – while hanging out, while at a party, while on social media – but we know that when a young person is on the run, they are much more likely to encounter exploitive situations.
- It’s called exploitation because someone who has something the other person needs or wants is trying to take advantage of that person’s situation.

## Educate young people about exploitation (i.e. recruitment tactics, long-term consequences, etc.).

**Resources available:** My Life My Choice, Word on the Street, Love 146: Not A Number and I Am Little Red (available in English and Spanish) are examples of some CSEC prevention training materials.

# Safety at school and in the community



Schedule regular check-ins with youth.

Require the youth call in or message when they reach their destination; accountability builds trust.

Encourage youth to learn their friends' real full names, not just nicknames.

Encourage youth to memorize phone numbers to call if they need help. They shouldn't rely on the phone numbers saved in their phones; they may not have the phone when needed.

Encourage youth to pay attention to details: names, ages/birthdates, addresses, makes and models of cars, license plates. This information may be helpful later.

Encourage youth to get to know the school resource officer at their school.

Encourage youth to travel with someone they trust; there is safety in numbers. Stay out of isolated areas and try not to walk alone.

Make sure the youth has a non-caretaker "safe" adult they can go to.

Teach self-care and coping strategies for when the youth feels stressed and wants to run, cut, or engage in any risky behavior.

Encourage youth to maintain control of their personal documents (license, birth certificate, etc.). If they have possession of these documents, they should never ask a friend or anyone else to hold onto them.

Encourage youth to be aware of their surroundings: if they feel they're in an unsafe or scary situation, they should go somewhere public where there is visibility and access to a phone.

If the youth needs to call someone for help or for a ride, encourage them to wait in a public place (example, a fast food restaurant).



# Encourage Youth to Identify a “Safe” Adult

- Help youth identify people they can access 24-hours a day if/when they need help. This is essential, particularly when there are concerns for running and for self-harming behaviors.
- Make sure the “safe” adult knows he/she is the safe person and knows the safety plan and coping strategies.
- Encourage youth to talk to their safe adult about their fears and concerns. If the support people do not know the youths’ concerns, they cannot help to address them.
- Consider establishing a “code word” so the youth can alert their safe adult to a potentially dangerous situation even when they’re not in a space where they can talk freely.
- Some residential programs have someone on-call 24-hours a day that residents can reach out to if they need help/need a ride.

Every youth should have a non-caretaker safe adult they can go to.

- Some mentor programs allow mentees to access their mentors 24-hours a day; consider My Life My Choice, GIFT and Safe Corners. Some programs allow mentees to reach out via social media, an important feature in the event the youth doesn’t have a phone. Some programs allow mentors to meet with the mentee even when they are missing from care.
- Some counseling agencies have clinicians and advocates on-call 24 hours a day for clients they work with who are in crisis. Check with the agency working with youth, and make sure the youth has the relevant numbers.

**Provide 24-hour hotline numbers in the event the youth needs immediate help.**

## What can families and caretakers do?

- Strive to create a supportive, caring relationship and to maintain open and positive communication. Many survivors of exploitation later recognize that they were lured in by false affection and the attention their exploiter gave them.
- Learn the names – nicknames and real full names -- of the people the youth associates with.
- Ask the youth where they are going and with whom.
- Become familiar with the areas the youth frequents.
- Make a note of the make, model and license plate numbers of cars the youth is seen getting into.
- Know the youth’s usernames and/or passwords for devices and social media accounts.
- Learn about the apps that teens are using.
- File a missing persons report if the youth goes missing from care.
- Have a plan for if/when a missing youth is sighted. The agencies working with the youth can assist with this.
- Communicate with the agencies involved; the more they know about the situation, the better they are able to make appropriate referrals and provide supports that address the issues.
- Consider family counseling. A good counselor will work with you to establish goals that best suit you and your family. Possibilities include improving communication, establishing boundaries, recognizing warning signs, identifying and responding to triggers.
- Regularly monitor the youth’s social media and encourage open discussion about social media trends.



**National Runaway Hotline:**

**1-800-Runaway**  
**Text Info: 66008**

**National Human Trafficking Hotline:**

**1-888-373-7888**  
**Text: BE FREE (233733)**

**National Sexual Assault Hotline**  
**(RAINN)**

**1-800-656-HOPE**  
**Text /Chat Option: [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)**

**DCF Hotline:**

**1-800-792-5200**

**DYS**

**Communications & Information Center**  
**1-617-960-3333**  
**(For DYS Involved Youth Only)**



**Utilize 24-hour emergency numbers when needed.**

**For mental health crisis in  
Plymouth and surrounding areas:**

**Emergency Services:**  
**508-996-3154**

**For mental health crisis in  
Brockton and surrounding areas:**

**Emergency Services:**  
**877-670-9957**

**If it's an emergency situation, dial 9-1-1.**

# How residential programs, DCF, DYS and DMH may help

- 1) **Explore** the safest residential placement options.
- 2) Get **creative** with residential placement options (Should the youth be placed out of the area for safety reasons?)
- 3) **Barter beds** when trying to secure a placement out of the area.
- 4) Request the court to issue a **stay away order** to help secure placement out of the area.
- 5) Assign **one-on-one staff** to the youth.
- 6) **Limit social media access** to try to reduce risk of running.
- 7) Develop **incentive plans** with the youth.
- 8) Offer one-on-one, family, and group counseling.
- 9) Utilize the harm reduction model. Discuss with youth how to run more safely: where will they get food, where will they sleep, who are safe people, etc.
- 10) Schedule **regular check-ins** with youth.
- 11) Build **education into conversations**. Ex.: *a safe person doesn't expect something in exchange for helping. Explain the Children's Advocacy Center's team approach to helping youth who may have experienced or witnessed abuse, violence or exploitation.*
- 12) Provide access to on-going counseling and other services.
- 13) Make appropriate referrals.
- 14) Update the MDT team when a new concern is identified/new report filed; youth goes missing from care; youth returns after missing from care; a significant event is anticipated (change of placement, court date, child aging out of DCF care); etc.

## When a child is at risk of running or on the run

- Utilize the harm reduction model. Discuss with youth how to run more safely: where will they get food, where will they sleep, who are safe people, etc.
- Encourage check-ins even while the youth is on the run.
- Identify triggers and plan around them.
- File a missing person report with the local police department and make a NCMEC referral.
- Inform the MDT when a youth goes missing from care.
- Request an alert on the DCF hotline so the appropriate people are notified and the recovery plan is followed, regardless of when the missing youth is recovered.
- Plan for medical follow up. Access to appropriate medical services and follow-up is vital to the health and safety of CSEC victims, especially upon recovery.
- Welcome the youth back upon return and meet immediate needs.
- Explore what makes the youth run and what makes them return.
- Explore what makes them feel safe when doing well. Discuss coping strategies for when they feel anxious, unsafe or triggered.
- Take an updated photograph and document changes to identifying information.

# The Importance of seeing a SANE Nurse



If a child suspected of being exploited needs medical clearance, **they should be brought to a SANE hospital site; a SANE hospital response is available 24-hours a day. (See SANE Hospital Site List)**

- Ensure hospital is aware of concerns of sexual exploitation.
- **Notify a SANE nurse from the Children’s Advocacy Center that a potential victim is being brought to the hospital** may help facilitate the internal response.
- Coordinate with the hospital staff. By discreetly alerting them that there are concerns for exploitation and high risk of running, they may be able to assist by suggesting parking close to the entrance, increasing security presence, and providing a waiting area and/or examination room away from exits, etc.
- Ask if hospital staff can facilitate having the My Life My Choice or GIFT program respond to the hospital.

A follow-up visit with a SANE nurse at a Children’s Advocacy Center can provide additional opportunity for the child to address concerns about their bodies in an environment very different from a traditional medical setting. At the CAC the nurse has more time to establish rapport, discuss issues, and provide education in a comfortable, private setting.

## If the youth feels threatened

**Be considerate of the level and source of the youth’s fear as well as their level of attachment detachment from the exploiter when safety planning with them.**

An intervention program like Ending the Game by Sowers Education Group may be helpful. The curriculum teaches about psychological coercion with the goal of reducing feelings of attachment to traffickers and therefore reducing the rate of recidivism among CSEC survivors.

- Consider where the trafficker/exploiter frequents the most and work with the youth to create a safety plan that includes safe routes to travel.
- Remember not to travel alone; there is safety in numbers.
- Determine places the youth can immediately go to be safe.

- Vary travel routes and daily routine to the extent possible.
- Emphasize the importance of smart use of social media: be careful of posting location or plans; check privacy settings; consider blocking anyone causing the youth to feel uncomfortable.

- Consider having the youth give their safe person a code name if they store phone numbers in their phone, (and let the support person know his/her code name!) in case the trafficker/exploiter goes through the phone and makes calls.





- Encourage youth to memorize a couple of phone numbers to call if they need help. They shouldn't rely on the phone numbers saved in their phone; they may not have the phone when needed.
- Remind the youth that they may want to consider deleting texts if their safety becomes at risk for contacting support people or someone not known to the exploiter.
- Encourage youth to refrain from speaking with the trafficker/exploiter's friends and family.
- Consider establishing code words: a "safe" word to let the support person know it's safe to talk, and a "danger" word to warn of a potentially dangerous situation. For example, if the youth needs help and the "danger" code word is sushi, they could say, "I'm at Joe's apartment and I could really use some sushi." (Of course, make sure the danger code word is not something the youth would normally say). Use of the code words should be practiced so the youth will remember them when tensions are high.
- Consider contacting the appropriate office to share the youth's safety concerns if the person threatening the youth is on probation or parole.

- Discuss safe ways to maintain contact with the youth if they continue to communicate with exploiters. It may be unrealistic or even dangerous to expect youth to cease all communication with exploiter.
- Discuss potential plans for safety in the event of an argument. Avoid arguing in a bathroom, kitchen, garage, rooms where weapons are kept, or rooms without access to an outside door. These rooms contain more objects and/or hard surfaces that may be used and cause injury. Avoid arguing in the car.
- Discuss a safe way of keeping track of any threats that are made (i.e., where, when, what was said and/or done, if threats were made against other people like the youth's family, etc.)
- Emphasize the importance of safely saving/forwarding any messages or posts that are threatening or harassing in nature. Screenshots can also be sent to a trusted adult in case something happens to the youth's phone. The youth should not respond to threatening messages—the exploiter will try to use whatever they say against them.

- Consider the possibility that the trafficker installed tracking apps on the phone if he/she seems to always know where the youth is. Reevaluate safe ways for the youth to communicate (e.g., is an additional device or means of communication needed). Inform law enforcement of the possible tracking device.
- Consider alternative and safe placement options to remove youth from unsafe situations.
- Consider getting a protection order (also called a harassment prevention order or restraining order). Some people may think that it's just a piece of paper; it's a piece of paper with the law behind it. For more information, encourage the youth to speak with his/her guardian and/or support person. A SAFEPLAN Advocate can assist with the process; to find out where to apply call the SAFELINK at **1-877-785-2020.**



# Some questions and considerations for law enforcement:

Encourage the youth to speak with the MDT Team at the CAC and/or with law enforcement about their safety concerns.

Some questions that may help law enforcement include:

- What areas does this person frequent the most? Are there areas he/she avoids?
- Does this person work? If so, where?
- Does this person have a car? What is the make, model, and license plate?
- Who is this person's closest associates? Where do they hang out?
- Does this person own a gun or any other weapons? Where are they kept?

Things to consider:

- Consider requesting law enforcement to increase patrol around the victim's residence.
- Consider requesting a wellness check by law enforcement if needed (for example: if you are unable to contact child and you are worried about their safety).
- If there is a criminal investigation, instruct child not to talk about the investigation with anyone outside of law enforcement or not working in conjunction with law enforcement.
- If the offender has been incarcerated, caregivers and victims should consider signing up for VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday), available in some counties in Massachusetts. VINE is an automated notification system that helps people exercise their rights as crime victims by receiving notification of court dates related to their case.



# Healthy Coping Strategies

Healthy coping strategies are important skills for everyone, especially those exposed to trauma, to learn and practice, and often need to be explicitly taught. This is a sampling of some strategies. Encourage the youth to try a few strategies that they think may work for them.

## Grounding Exercises

Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. Grounding exercises are meant to focus someone's attention on the here and now. Grounding can be helpful when faced with overwhelming feelings of anxiety or intense emotions.

Some simple grounding techniques include the following:

- Sip a cool drink of water.
- Notice how your clothing feels against your body, whether your arms and legs are covered or not, and how your feet feel in your socks.
- Notice five things you can see, five things you can feel, taste or smell.

## Breathing Exercises

Breathe deeply a few times and then allow your breathing to come naturally without trying to influence it. Count each exhale separately. Start over at one each time you reach the number five.

## Counseling

Counseling offers a space to process experiences and emotions without judgement. Unlike a friend, a counselor can listen without bias and help the client to problem solve and apply coping skills.

## Discussing normal reactions

After going through a difficult experience, we can react in ways that may seem unusual or uncomfortable. It can be helpful to talk to a professional or simply remind yourself that the reactions you are having are normal, given the situation.

## Self – compassion

We often judge ourselves much more harshly than we would a loved one or someone else who is going through a difficult time. Practice using self-affirming language and using supportive self-talk.

## Time in nature

Take a walk or go to a local park. If you like, notice your senses and practice grounding while in nature.

## Muscle relaxation exercises

Progressive muscle relaxation can help with sleep disturbance. Start at your head or feet. Focus on an isolated part of your body, tighten the muscles for five seconds, and then release. Progressively work through each part of the body.

## Practice good sleep hygiene

If you are having difficulty sleeping, good sleep hygiene is important. Try to go to bed at the same time each night. Turn off all screens for a few hours prior to going to bed. Limit daytime naps to 30 minutes. Avoid caffeine close to bed time.

## To-do lists

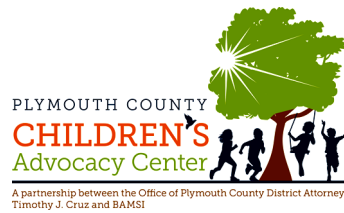
If you are feeling overwhelmed, break tasks down into manageable items and create a "to-do" list. Cross off each task you accomplish.

## Journaling

Writing is a great way to process difficult thoughts and emotions. If you are not ready to talk to someone about your feelings, writing can be a great alternative.

## Negative thought stopping

If you find yourself in a negative thought cycle, change activities. Rather than staying stuck in a negative thought cycle, distract yourself with a project or an activity. It can also be effective to picture a big stop sign every time you start engaging in negative thinking.



Contributions to this document were made by the following partnering agencies of the **Plymouth County District Attorney's CSEC Task Force:**

Plymouth County Children's Advocacy Center	Department of Mental Health
Plymouth County District Attorney's Office	Department of Public Health
Brockton Area Multi Service, Inc. (BAMSI)	Department of Youth Services
Brockton Neighborhood Health Center	Disabled Persons Protection Commission
Brockton Public Schools	Family & Community Resources
Brockton STARR, a program of Old Colony YMCA	Health Imperatives
Committee for Public Counsel Services	Massachusetts Department of Children and Families

Along with the following references:

- A Teen's Guide to Safety Planning [Brochure]. (n.d.) Austin, TX: Loveisrespect, a project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
- Safety Planning Information." National Human Trafficking Hotline, Polaris, [www.humantraffickinghotline.org/faqs/safetyplanning-information](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org/faqs/safetyplanning-information).
- Valila, N. (2018). Preventing the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Adolescent Girls: A Training for Facilitators in Using the My Life My Choice Curriculum.
- White, S. and Lloyd, R. (2014) The Survivor's Guide to Leaving. New York, NY: GEMS.