

VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH IN SEX TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATIONS

DO separate individuals from the group of potential victims before speaking with them.

- Traffickers will set individuals against each other. Even if potential victims appear to get along, they will hesitate to talk in front of their peers in case someone reports their conversation with law enforcement to the trafficker.
- There is a deep hatred of being a “snitch” or “telling on someone.” There must be an opportunity to confidentially ask for assistance or report a crime.

DO have a service provider or support resources on hand.

- Prepare to have vetted service providers (CPS, NGOs, shelters, etc.) available to contact at any time to immediately connect victims to services.
- When possible, potential victims should speak to the service provider immediately as they will usually discard resources that make it obvious to a trafficker that they have engaged with law enforcement.

DO have some form of a care pack available.

- Multiple NGOs create “care packs” containing toiletry kits, clothes, or other essential items. Having these bags readily available helps build rapport by meeting immediate needs, such as providing a change of clothes or even food.
- If a potential victim’s cell phone is taken for evidence collection, provide a replacement phone. This builds rapport and ensures you can stay in contact with the potential victim.

DO be sensitive to the needs of each individual.

- Service providers may have set parameters for the clients they serve and some are more appropriate for certain survivors than others. Please consider gender identity and whether the individual has children in their care when directing them to the best service provider for their needs.
- Ask female potential victims if they would prefer a female interviewer. A male interviewer may cause discomfort/fear if the trafficker is male.

AVOID arresting potential victims of trafficking.

- When potential victims are arrested, the chances of them speaking to law enforcement and providing intelligence are low. Consider if your agency would prefer to build a larger trafficking case and gain intelligence or make an arrest on a prostitution misdemeanor and gain little-to-no intelligence.
- Prostitution charges often do not concern potential victims. They are used to obtaining these types of charges, know it is part of “the life,” or their trafficker/peer bails them out.

AVOID leaving the scene of the identification without a clear plan of action for the potential victims.

- Having a plan prepared for the potential victim increases your chances of being able to successfully contact them in the future. An external service provider such as an NGO can assist, increasing your chances of successful future contact.

AVOID texting the potential victims.

- Do not send text messages, as you do not know who can access their phone and read your messages. To ensure no one else is listening, meet in person or use video calls to communicate with a potential victim. If this is not possible, a non-video phone call can be used.

AVOID only focusing on minor victims.

- Identifying minor victims may lead to a simpler investigation and prosecution, but historically, adult victims have provided key intelligence about sex trafficking cases involving adult and minor victims.

DON'T give up on victims.

- Behavior patterns of chronic runaway youths or repeatedly identified adults may appear predictable. Law enforcement has, at times, not entered these cases into the NCIC system or prioritized their investigation. Please keep offering support as you never know when they will decide to change or accept services, or at which point they may become victims of other crimes such as assault or murder.