

Do's and Don'ts of Appropriate Engagement with CSEC Victims

DO put into practice your knowledge of **risk factors, pathways to CSEC**, and techniques for **victim identification** when identifying and engaging with youth.

DON'T rely on **stereotypes** to identify or engage with sexually exploited children.

DO provide a **safe** place for engagement.

DON'T question or engage a sexually exploited child at a location where they feel **threatened** or **unsafe**.

DO be **nonjudgmental** when listening to a sexually exploited child.

DON'T react verbally or physically in a way that communicates **disgust** or **disdain**. Refrain from displaying a **shocked** face or talking about how “awful” the child’s experience was. This may shut the child down.

DO work to build **trust** with a sexually exploited child.

DON'T expect immediate **gratitude** for your efforts.

DO pay attention to your **body posture**. Face the child and make eye contact. Show interest, empathy, and understanding through verbalizations, nods, and facial expressions. Speak in a calm and even tone.

DON'T act or appear to be distracted, disinterested, or disapproving. Do not use **intimidation** tactics like interrogating the child or standing over the child.

DO keep **physical contact** to a minimum. When there is physical contact, let a child know exactly what you are doing and remind the child that you are not there to hurt them.

DON'T use physical contact where it is not appropriate. Physical contact as a comforting response should be initiated by the child.

DO be familiar with **street language** and slang that children and youth might use.

DON'T try to use street language and slang **out of context** when talking with children and youth.

DO use language and terms that are **appropriate** and **sensitive** to a child's experience as a victim.

DON'T expect youth to always phrase their experiences in language that is appropriate or to **refer to themselves as victims**.

Do not use inappropriate language, derogatory terms, shame, or belittlement when discussing the child's experiences.

DO recognize the various symptoms of **trauma** exhibited and **coping mechanisms** used by a CSEC victim that may not be those one typically associates with victims.

DON'T use strategies that switch intermittently between treating the child as an **offender**, then as a **victim**.

DO recognize the child as a victim and a survivor of severe **child abuse**.

DON'T treat the child as a **perpetrator** by prosecuting the child and not using statutory rape, sexual abuse, and trafficking laws to prosecute pimps, johns, traffickers, and recruiters.

DO help a child "slow down" and **debrief** if they seem overwhelmed or disconnected when telling their story. Limit the amount of information you ask them to disclose.

DON'T expect or push every child to **disclose** all the details of their abuse. Sometimes heavy information will need to be gathered in stages.

DO keep the child **talking** and make them feel comfortable.

DON'T dispute facts or comment on a child's motivation. This is likely to stop the flow of information.

DO take sexually exploited youth **seriously**.

DON'T diminish the seriousness of their experiences or concerns.

DO meet a sexually exploited child **where they are** and on their terms, and try to meet the needs they present.

DON'T expect a child to recognize their situation as **exploitative** or to present themselves as a victim in need of immediate intervention or rescuing.

DO apply sensitivity and attention to a child's **cultural background**.

DON'T draw **conclusions** based on stereotypes of a child's culture, race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexual orientation. Do not impose **actions** that are culturally inappropriate or insensitive.

DO continually **process** your own experiences, feelings, and judgments concerning the issues surrounding sexual exploitation.

DON'T ignore signs of vicarious re-traumatization or burnout fatigue.

DO improve a **systemic response** to CSEC by creating inter-agency relationships to comprehensively meet victims' needs.

DON'T assume sole responsibility for meeting the myriad and **complex needs** of a CSEC victim.

DO collaborate with local **experts** and **survivors** of sexual exploitation to engage with victims or to work for policy change.

DON'T marginalize the experiences or voices of survivors in a community response to CSEC.