

Recommended Interviewing Techniques and Interview Questions for Youth

- Ensure the interview takes place in a confidential and comfortable environment. Start with a friendly introduction and engage in small talk to help place the youth at ease.
- Be attuned and mindful to the child's developmental and cognitive age and adapt the interview and questions so that it is developmentally appropriate for the child.
- Begin with rapport building questions, such as "How are you?", "Would you like something to drink?" Be kind, warm, and compassionate.
- Show genuine care and concern for their well-being and acknowledge their feelings and experiences without judgement.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used. Share that their safety and well-being is the priority, and that the goal is to provide the support, services, and interventions needed to promote their safety and well-being.
- Prioritize questions regarding their immediate safety, health, and emotional needs. Ensure they have access to support services based on their individualized needs
- Be patient and allow them to share at their own pace. Be prepared to pause and take a break if the youth becomes overwhelmed, agitated or distressed.
- Ensuring that basic and immediate needs are met, first and foremost, without having them be contingent on participation in an assessment is particularly important for youth that experience exploitation. Keep in mind that youth impacted by commercial exploitation often have their access to food, water, restrooms, and sleep restricted by their exploiters as part of the patterns of coercive control experienced.
- Ask open-ended questions to invite the youth to share their experiences in their own words. Steer clear of questions that suggest a specific answer, which can compromise the integrity of the information.
- Use simple, developmentally appropriate language. Follow the youth's lead and use of terminology in discussing their experiences. Don't use clinical jargon or terminology (i.e., rape, exploitation, domestic violence, sexual abuse), as youth may not associate their experiences with those concepts, and refrain from using the term "CSEC", "Commercially Sexual Exploited Child" or "Labor Trafficked Child", as youth may not identify with these terms. Also, do not refer to the child as a "prostitute". Similarly, avoid using the term "delinquent" if a child is missing from school or a "criminal" if they have been forced or coerced to engage in illicit activities on behalf of their trafficker.
- Refrain from judgmental or shaming statements during ongoing assessment and familiarize yourself with language about the commercial sex industry or whichever industry the child has been trafficked in.
- Make the best efforts to interview known or suspected trafficking victims during the initial contact, as leaving home or care, or going missing is common among trafficked youth.

Interview Questions

Begin with open-ended questions to avoid “yes” or “no” answers:

- How are you feeling?
- Begin by introducing yourself by your own affirmed name and pronouns
- What name would you like me to use when talking with you? Do you have any preferred nicknames?
- Where have you been staying?
- How do you get clothing, food, etc.?
- Ask the youth about how their health is. Any past or current internal pain, injuries, untreated medical conditions, pregnancies, or medication needs? If appropriate, ask the family or caregiver as well.
- Assess thoroughly for past and current drug/alcohol consumption by the youth - exploiters often rely on substance use/dependency as a means of controlling victims. Ask who provides the drugs and how the youth obtains the drugs.
- Who do you spend time with? How would you describe your relationship? What do you like/not like about the relationship?
- Where do you stay or sleep if you aren't at home/placement?
- How is school going? What do you like or not like about school? How often do you go to school?
- When you are not in school during the week, what do you do?
- Ask the youth about all tattoos, and have them describe their tattoos and ask how/where the tattoo was obtained (this information should be well-documented)
- How do you support yourself?
- For labor trafficked youth it is important to review their full "work" history and ask questions about "work" activities as well.
- Ask if anyone else ever received/ was given money for their work, asking youth to self-narrate about how they supported themselves can lead to facts about force, fraud, and coercion indirectly
- Identifying exploiters is critical for preventing further victimization and recruitment. Asking youth and their families about the names, nicknames and monikers of youth's associates, employers, and romantic partners may provide evidence to support the allegation of exploitation
- How do you get around (means of transportation)?
- Is there anyone who might be worried about your safety?
- Has anyone ever held your ID or other legal documents without your consent?
- Have you ever worked in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?
- What do your parents/siblings/relatives know? Have they been involved in the commercial sex industry, an exploitive work situation, or forced to do things they didn't want to do?
- Are you afraid of anyone?
- Is anything worrying you or not going well?
- When you work or do something against the law, does anyone else get any money or benefit?
- Encourage the youth to describe their experience or relationship with their exploiter (remember to use the term that they use for their exploiter. For CSEC they may refer to them as "boyfriend" or "daddy," or a domestic worker might

refer to them as an "aunt," "uncle," "mom," "dad" or other family member. Ask clarifying questions throughout.

- Many traffickers exploit multiple minors and adults at the same time, so it is important to also ask if the youth has knowledge of other victims and if they know the address of where they might be located. In the CSE context, victims may specifically refer to other victims as their "girlfriends/wifeys/boyfriends."
- Determine if the exploiter has children of their own, as these children may also be victims of commercial exploitation and/or other forms of abuse/neglect.
- Ask if they are aware of any youth or adults who may need help and their location.
- Assess thoroughly for any past and current contact with Law Enforcement and the Probation Department involvement.
- Ask the youth if they have contact with service providers or other professional or community services, and where they feel most comfortable receiving services.
- Request the youth's phone number, nicknames, and social media usernames, if they are willing, for the purposes of maintaining communication (have them show you their pages/accounts). Indicate to youth that you are doing this for the purpose of being a support if they are ever in need and to develop a relationship.
- Begin to identify youth's short and long-term goals, using their terminology. It is important to ask youth - what do you need right now? How can I help you?

If the youth is not forthcoming, consider asking more specific questions:

- Has anyone ever held your ID or other legal documents without your consent?
- Have you ever worked, or done other things, in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?
- Have you or anyone else ever received anything of value, such as money, a place to stay, food, drugs, gifts, favors, etc., in exchange for you having sex or performing a sexual activity? Has anyone ever paid in order to have sex with you? Or have you ever had a date or appointment with a John/client/trick? Did you feel that someone was encouraging, pressuring, or forcing you to do this?
- Ask if there were any prior incidents, even if the youth denied any current exploitation. Youth who have experienced CSEC and/or labor trafficking often deny allegations during an initial interview, only to acknowledge at a later date that the incident did occur.
- Have you ever worked or done something you didn't want to do and someone else got all the money or most of the money?
- Have you ever worked in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?
- Were you, your family, or coworker(s) ever threatened by the person or people you worked for? Did you ever see another employee/worker being hurt or threatened? Did you ever see anyone who tried to leave or quit being harmed or threatened? What do you think would happen if you tried to leave?
- Have you ever worked for someone who asked you to lie when speaking to others about the work you do?
- Did the person or people you work for ever threaten to report you to the police or other authorities?

- Have you ever been tricked or forced into doing any kind of work you didn't want to do?
- Have you ever been promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what you expected?
- Aside from needing the money, did you feel forced or pressured to continue with the work?
- Have you ever been with or worked for someone who didn't let you contact your friends, family or the outside world, even when you weren't working?
- Have you ever been afraid to leave or quit a situation due to fears of violence or threats of harm to yourself or your family?
- Have you ever worked for someone who asked you to lie while speaking to others about the work you do?
- Has anyone given you drugs or gifts to have sex with you or to keep you working for them?
- Did you keep or have to share the money you earned?
- Have you had pictures taken of yourself that were advertised on the internet or social media? (e.g., Tick Tock; Instagram; Snap Chat)
- Are you, your family, or any of your friends associated with a gang? Do you party/hang out with them? Do you need to do anything for them?
- Have you ever worked to pay off a debt you or your family owes?