

SAFE YOUTH ZONE

The Safe Youth Zone initiative is a way to ensure temporary haven for any youth who faces a potentially threatening situation and needs a place to go, particularly those in danger from human trafficking and abuse. Oftentimes these youth have no place to go for help and end up going back to unsafe spaces, exploiters, traffickers, or other situations where they may be subjected to more abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation.



KEY STEPS: Departments of Health Services and Public Health



Human Trafficking and Exploitation

- CSEC is child abuse
- Trading sex to meet basic needs is exploitation
- Exploitation happens to girls, boys, trans, and gender non-conforming youth, too
- Exploitation also includes labor trafficking, the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person to work, including illegal work like selling drugs

Young adults 18+ can also be victims of exploitation

WARNING SIGNS FOR EXPLOITATION

Exploitation happens to youth of all genders. Many youth are trafficked because they are easy targets, and LGBTQI+ youth often feel isolated and alone. This makes them more vulnerable to exploitation of all kinds. Sex and labor trafficking are the most severe forms of exploitation and can happen simultaneously. All trafficked people are entitled to support and protection.

- Shows signs of abuse or neglect (i.e. unexplained bruises or other physical trauma)
- Tattoos, branding or scarring (i.e., crowns, references to money, \$, loyalty)
- Substance use interferes with their functioning
- Provocative, sexualized, or unwashed clothing that is not consistent with the season
- Secrecy regarding intimate partners, friends, associates
- Fearful of exploiter, partner, caregiver, or employer
- Seems afraid to answer questions or appears agitated
- Not in control of personal identification
- Conversation seems scripted
- Youth is exchanging sex for money or material goods, including food, shelter, drugs, clothing, basic needs for themselves or someone else
- Uses language that suggests exploitation (i.e., “the life”, “the game”, “track/blade”)
- Runaway and/or homeless

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Additional Agency Steps

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Protocol:

When a youth in trouble seeks help at a designated Safe Youth Zone, the following protocol will be initiated:



- 1) Youth seeks help at a designated DHS/DPH Safe Youth Zone location - Youth may not specifically ask for help, but staff should approach any unaccompanied young person as someone who potentially needs assistance. Some questions to ask may include:
 - a. Hello, my name is _____. How can I help you? Are you doing ok?
 - b. May I know your name?
 - c. Are you injured right now?
 - d. Are you in immediate danger from anyone or anything nearby?
 - e. I would like to assist you in a private location where you can rest for a moment. Would you like to follow me so we can talk privately?
 - f. Is there anyone you would like to call? I have a phone available.
- 2) DHS/DPH staff admits youth to the designated private location in the facility and alerts staff member who can assess for what additional immediate resources may be required (medical care, access to a telephone, law enforcement notification, etc.)
 - a. If the youth reports an *imminent threat* of violence, call facility security AND the jurisdictional law enforcement agency for assistance (this may be the same for those DHS/DPH facilities with Los Angeles County Sheriff Deputies onsite). *Let the youth know that you are calling security to ensure a safe environment for the youth so that you can have a conversation free from any threats or violence. Make the call in front of the youth to build trust.*
 - b. If the youth requires immediate medical attention that cannot be provided at the facility, follow the facility protocol for medical evaluation or call 911 for assistance. *Let the youth know that you are contacting the nearest person/facility to ensure the youth gets immediate medical attention from a safe and secure medical team. Make the call in front of the youth to build trust.*
 - c. If the youth is a minor (under 18 years of age), or if they disclose that they are a non-minor dependent (NMD) of DCFS or Children's Court, immediately call the DCFS Child Abuse Hotline at 800-540-4000 to report any incident. *Make the call in front of the youth to build trust.*
 - d. If the youth is not a minor or a NMD:
 - i. Offer to call 2-1-1, or allow youth to use the telephone to call;
 - ii. Offer a copy of the Helpful Resources for Victims of Violence resource sheet and offer the use of the telephone;
 - iii. **With permission from youth**, staff calls the jurisdictional law enforcement agency (for most DHS/DPH facilities, this will be onsite LASD) for immediate assistance.
- 3) DHS/DPH staff provides youth with a safe, secure location to wait for responder to arrive.
 - a. While youth is waiting, DHS/DPH staff provides water and snacks, along with any clothing/blankets needed for the youth to feel comfortable, to the extent possible. *(Note that youth may seem uncooperative or hostile. These behaviors may reflect a history of traumatic experiences. Staff must remain courteous and patient and attempt to offer assistance regardless of youth's language or behavior.)*
 - b. If the location is near closing time and the youth is a minor (or a NMD), staff calls both the Child Abuse Hotline and jurisdictional law enforcement agency (for most DHS/DPH facilities this will be onsite LASD) for an immediate response. Staff should inform the Child Abuse hotline that the facility is near closing, and that law enforcement has been contacted. DHS/DPH staff must stay with the minor until the first responder arrives (if OT is accrued, it will be paid with proper documentation).
- 4) DHS/DPH staff writes up the incident according to the facility reporting protocol.