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BYTES

TOPIC: Addressing and Preventing Sex Trafficking One Youth at a Time

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Micro Training Course Developed by
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

**Read through this self-study.*

**Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire*

**Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

When we think about human trafficking, we often think of modern slavery where individuals are forced into labor or commercial sex work and moved across borders. But trafficking also happens on a smaller scale right there in Alaska. Sex trafficking of children and youth is defined as the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" where the victim is under the age of 18. For individuals over 18 year of age, force, fraud or coercion must be present but when the individual is under 18, there needs to be no coercion in order for it to be considered sex trafficking. This is called **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children or CSEC**.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 act requires Title IV-E agencies such as OCS to develop procedure to identify, document and provide services for children under their supervision who are at risk of becoming sex trafficking victims. OCS has implemented protocols to locate youth missing from foster care including determining why a child was absent from foster care and what happened during that time.

What makes youth vulnerable for being recruited for trafficking? Traffickers have sophisticated ways to recruit and retain youth, including enticing young women and men with gifts, money, attention, and later with fear, abuse, and threats of violence or even death. Youth in foster care can be particularly vulnerable. They may have experienced multiple placements, few attachments, long stays in care and previous histories of sexual abuse and adults failing to protect them. Youth may be recruited by boyfriends, or other youth as well. Almost all victim of sex trafficking have some vulnerable that can be exploited or manipulated by the trafficker. Youth who run away from care or are on the street are particularly vulnerable because they might be compelled to trade sex for a place to sleep or for food. Youth in foster care who age out without permanent connections are also at risk. LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, Transgender) youth are disproportionately represented among the CSEC Population primarily due to being kicked out of their home because of their sexual orientation. Boys are often overlooked as being CSEC victims yet one study in New York City estimated that up to 50% of the CSEC population are boys. Children and youth who have experienced previous sexual trauma and more vulnerable. 70 to 90 percent of sexually exploited children have a history of child sexual abuse.

Recruitment can happen on the internet and in public places like the shopping mall and at school. It can happen by adults and other youth at foster homes, group homes, residential and juvenile justice centers, bus transportation centers, in villages, by extended family members, recreation centers, and strip clubs. Recruiters can use promise of a job, a modeling or acting center, a dancing or hospitality career, or recruiters can be boyfriends and romantic

relationships who use the relationship to coerce the youth into sex with others. Social media is popular for exploiters to find youth who are dissatisfied at home. Different apps, sharing photos, responding to posting about dissatisfaction at home can all be places where an online friendship might be sparked and a suggestion to meet might begin a relationship that turns exploitive. Offers to get together can turn into chances to run away or party.

Traditionally, the victims of trafficking may be called prostitutes and viewed and treated as criminals. The thinking has changed and we see these youth as not culpable for crimes committed due to human trafficking. Under the law children and teens involved in these crimes are victims, not perpetrators. That means we have stopped using the words child prostitute and reframed it as teen victim. The victims themselves may not see themselves as “victims”. Remember that recruiters systematically break down youth with gifts and money, and then threats or violence. That can form a strong “trauma-bond” between them. Victims may believe themselves to be in love with their trafficker or not be able to survive without him.

What are the possible signs or indicators? Remember that this information is useful not only for the youth who come to your home as foster children or for your birth children, it is also useful for recognizing sexual exploitation of other youth you come in contact with—friends of your children, youth group participants, school children, other foster youth, youth you meet in a professional contact, youth you have contact with in a day to day life. Signs that may indicate that a youth might be vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation include:

- Adult male always present or sudden appearance of an older boyfriend.
- Sudden increase in money, expensive things
- Change in language or slang used
- Signs of physical or sexual abuse (bruises, cuts, burns, submissiveness, jumpy, malnourishment); appears fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, avoids eye contact.
- Talk about losing property
- Chronic runaway/homeless youth
- Lying about age/False ID/Lying about identity
- Carries multiple hotel key cards, lots of money, sharp objects (weapons)
- Tattoo with a name that is not their own; or that he/she is reluctant to explain
- Staying out excessively late or secrecy about whereabouts or communication
- Associating with an older crowd or older men

In addition, if you are a foster parent, a child or youth who runs away while they are in your home,

- Notify OCS of an unapproved absence of 10 hours or more.
- File a report with your social worker or with OCS Intake
- Try to build good communication with your youth. When they return, the social worker should talk to them to determine what happened while they were away. But you may notice things or have information. Be sure to share these concerns with your caseworker.

To protect your children and your teens, learn everything you can about Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Covenant House Alaska and Priceless in Alaska are doing a lot of work in this area. Check www.acrf.org for more information about sex trafficking. There is also a National Human Trafficking Resource Center and a Hotline that for information or with concerns.

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