

Risk Factors and Warning Signs

Risk Factors

Anyone has potential to be a victim of human trafficking. However, researchers have identified some factors that may increase a child's risk of sexual victimization. This is not an exhaustive list, nor is this a checklist for determining if someone is a victim. However, awareness of these risk factors can help advocates to ask questions of their clients, to secure preventative assistance for clients, and to understand the vulnerabilities experienced by the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).

• Individual

- History of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or other maltreatment.
- Symbolic or literal parental abandonment
- History as a runaway or "throw away" youth.
- Experiencing homelessness and/or poverty.
- Involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system.¹
- Identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBTQIA)
- Physical or mental disability or illness.
- Family substance abuse or early substance use.
- Unaddressed trauma
- Academic underachievement

• Social and Environmental

- Adult sex industry and oversexualization of youth; glorification of "pimp culture".
- Community violence or gang culture
- Homophobia and transphobia.
- Open access to technology for most youth.
- Exposure to/acceptance of violence.
- Transient male population.
- Proximity to borders.
- Sexism and misogyny.

¹ Some reports assert estimates as high as 85% of CSEC victims having contact at some point in their life with the child welfare system. See S. George, S.

The Strong Arm of the Law is Weak: How the Trafficking Victims Protection Act Fails to Assist Effectively Victims of the Sex Trade 45 CREIGHTON L. REV. 563-580 (2012).

Warning Signs

Knowledge of certain indicators can lead to a better awareness when working with clients.

- Older and/or dominating boyfriend, girlfriend, or friends.
- Have few or no personal possessions.
- Owes someone money or has his or her money controlled by someone else.
- Sudden possession of expensive items or money.
- Branding tattoo.
- Unexplained injuries or signs of abuse.
- Cannot answer questions about where he or she is staying, from, going, etc.
- Claims to be “just visiting” either their current location or another.
- Chronic truancy.
- Sudden, highly sexualized behavior.
- Spends an inordinate amount of time online.
- Sudden interest in the sex industry.
- Inability or refusal to leave where he or she is currently staying.
- Gang involvement.
- Exhibits sudden, drastic change in behavior: anxious, fearful, signs of depression.
- Loss of interest in age-appropriate activities.
- Family or friends who have a history of involvement in the commercial sex industry.
- Has no identifying information (license, passport, ID card, etc.).

Credits: Polaris Project; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “How to Identify a Human Trafficking Victim” (2013); Molly Murphy, MPH, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Clinicians’ Opportunities for Intervention”

Additional Resources

1. [Human Trafficking: Protecting Our Youth](#) (Child Welfare Information Gateway): This one pager lists many signs that a youth may be involved in human trafficking.
2. [Warning Signs: When a Child is at Risk for Commercial Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\)](#) (King County): Review this document for red flags, guiding principles, and tips on how to ask questions to youth who might be survivors of sexual exploitation.

Screening Tools

What are Screening Tools?

A screening tool is a compilation of questions that a clinical professional reviews with youth in order to assess the youth's risk for having a history of sex trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation.

Examples of Screening Tools

- **National Screening Tools**

- [Trafficking Victim Identification Tool](#) (Vera Institute of Justice)
- [Comprehensive Human Trafficking Assessment](#) (National Human Trafficking Resource Center)
- [Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool \(CSE-IT\)](#) (Westcoast Children's Clinic)

- **Local Screening Tools**

- Child Guidance Clinic's Sex Trafficking Assessment Review (STAR) (Attached)
- Amara Legal Center's Sex Trafficking Survivor Screening Tool (Attached)

Introduction to the **Sex-trafficking Assessment Review (STAR)**

by Andretta and Woodland



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Discreet Identification of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Victims

- a brief (12-item), objective, and nonintrusive CSEC screening alternative
- quantitative decision making system for determining a youth's amount of CSEC risk
- STAR includes a codebook, and initial data show high levels of scoring agreement among screeners with a moderate level of training (i.e., inter-rater reliability)

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STAR Introduction

The Sex-trafficking Assessment Review (STAR; Andretta, Woodland, Watkins, & Barnes, in press) is a brief (12-item), objective, nonintrusive, quantitative decision making system for determining a youth's amount of CSEC risk. The STAR is intended to be a screener employed by large agencies where thorough clinical interviewing of all youth with agency contact is not administratively feasible. Said another way, the STAR is best conceptualized as a triage tool. Therefore, the STAR should not be used to confirm a CSEC suspicion, but rather to assess whether or not a youth should be provided with a thorough CSEC assessment. The STAR also includes a codebook, which providers should be familiar with before administering to youth.

We suggest that a cut score of 7 be used to identify youth with at least a moderate risk for CSEC victimization, and a cut score of 10 to identify youth with a high risk for CSEC victimization. Items 11 and 12 require access to court records. If court records are not available, the cutoff for moderate risk is 7, and the cutoff for high risk is 9.

It is also suggested that the STAR be administered along with an assessment of mental health symptoms. For instance, at DC Courts, we administer the STAR along with the Connors Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales – Clinical Index – Self-Report (CBRS-SR; Connors, 2008). Additionally, the STAR administration packet includes a scale intended to assess perceptions and attributions commonly observed in individuals who have suffered child sexual abuse: The Children's Attributions and Perceptions Scale (CAPS; Mannarino et al., 1994). The CAPS was included to continue the validation of the STAR. It is helpful to know how STAR scores are associated with scores on scales intended to assess constructs that should be theoretically related. It would be beneficial to the development of the STAR to provide DC Courts with all de-identified data collected, and ideally confirmation as to whether or not youth were confirmed CSEC victims.

With regard to pre-requisite training, practitioners should be provided with a training focused on administering STAR and using the associated codebook. It is also highly suggested that agencies that use the STAR examine inter-rater reliability to ensure practitioners are scoring youth responses in the same manner. Agencies interested in employing the STAR should contact Dr. James R. Andretta of DCSC to help organize personnel training, administration, and data collection prior to use.

References

Andretta, J.R., Watkins, K.M., Barnes, M.E., & Woodland, M.H. (in press). Towards the discreet identification of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) victims and individualized interventions: Science to practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*.

Connors, C. K. (2008). *Connors Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Multi-Health Systems.

Mannarino, A., Cohen, J., & Berman, S. (1994). The children's attributions and perceptions scale: A new measure of sexual abuse-related factors. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 23, 204–211.
doi:10.1207/s15374424jccp2302_9

STAR AND ASSOCIATED SCREENING INSTRUMENTS

Last, First: _____ **Gender:** **M** **F**
DOB: _____ **School:** _____
Age: _____ **Grade:** _____
Ethnicity: _____ **Date:** _____

STAR (© 2015 District of Columbia Courts; Andretta, Woodland, Watkins, & Barnes, in press)

Please ask the youth the following questions and endorse the level of risk associated with each answer using the Likert Scale below.

- | | No Risk
0 | Moderate Risk
1 | High Risk
2 |
|----------|---|----------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. | Where were you staying last night (or the night prior to detention if detained)? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> at a friend's house | | <input type="checkbox"/> at a boy/girlfriend's house |
| _____ 2. | Are you living with anyone? If so, who are you living with and what is your relationship to them? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> at a friend's house | | <input type="checkbox"/> at a boy/girlfriend's house |
| _____ 3. | Have you ever been placed in foster care or a group home? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> one placement | | <input type="checkbox"/> multiple placements |
| _____ 4. | Have you ever run away or left home/foster care? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 3 times | | <input type="checkbox"/> more than 3 times |
| _____ 5. | How long do you usually stay away? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> part of a day | | <input type="checkbox"/> entire day/overnight or more |
| _____ 6. | Are you dating anyone? If so, how old are they? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> older than youth | | <input type="checkbox"/> over 18 |
| _____ 7. | What are some things you bought for yourself over the past two months? Who paid for it? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> self and item \geq \$100 | | <input type="checkbox"/> friend and item \geq \$100 |
| _____ 8. | What names have you used other than your own? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> any alias | | <input type="checkbox"/> alias with connotation (e.g. Treasure or Candy) |
| _____ 9. | Do you have any tattoos? If so, do they have special meaning? | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> any tattoo | | <input type="checkbox"/> tattoo denoting allegiance to a person/group |

Screener to Answer on Own:

- _____ 10. Evidence of abuse (e.g. ligature marks, burns, bruises)?
 visible bruises bruises hidden under clothing
- _____ 11. Any “red-flag” charges in records (e.g. status offenses, loitering, runaways, curfew violations)?
 more than 1 charge more than 5 charges
- _____ 12. Charge of solicitation/prostitution
 any charge of solicitation/prostitution

Children’s Attributions and Perceptions Scale

These are questions about some things you may have felt in the last 6 months. There are no right or wrong answers.

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Frequently
4

Always
5

- _____ 1. Do you ever feel like you’re a different age (older/younger) than you are?
- _____ 2. Do you think that people treat you as if you were older than you really are?
- _____ 3. Do you feel different than other girls/boys your age?
- _____ 4. Do you act different than other girls/boys your age?
- _____ 5. Do you feel that you make bad things happen to other people?
- _____ 6. If something bad happens, are you usually responsible (is it your fault)?
- _____ 7. Do you blame yourself when things go wrong?
- _____ 8. Do you feel that you do or say things that cause other people to get into trouble?
- _____ 9. Do you think people believe you when you tell them something?
- _____ 10. Do people ever feel that you are not telling the truth about something?
- _____ 11. Do people ever feel that you have “made up” or imagined something that actually did occur?
- _____ 12. Do people ever doubt what you are telling them?
- _____ 13. Do people ever accuse you of lying?
- _____ 14. Do you ever feel that it is hard to trust other people (who aren’t your friends)?
- _____ 15. Do you ever feel that you can’t count on anyone?
- _____ 16. Do you ever feel that you can’t trust your friends or members of your family?
- _____ 17. Do you ever feel that trusting people can be risky?
- _____ 18. Do you ever feel that people whom you trust do things to hurt you?

STAR (Code Book)

<p><u>Item 1</u></p>	<p>Where were you staying overnight prior to detention?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the youth does not reveal the nature of the relationship with whom they stayed with the night before or the rater is uncertain about the relationship between the youth and person providing housing, the rater should assign a “2”, like in the following examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staying with a boyfriend or girlfriend ▪ Pimp ▪ On the street ▪ <i>Someone</i> but not a friend or family member ▪ “somewhere where I feel safe” • If the youth reports staying overnight with an individual characterized as a member or friend of the family (i.e., “my uncle’s house, “my god-father,” “my cousin”), the rater should attempt to determine if the youth had permission to be with the individual. If the parent/guardian was not aware of the youth’s whereabouts, then the rater should at minimum assign a “1”.
<p><u>Item 2</u></p>	<p>Are you living with anyone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The youth may initially say they live with their mom, however, you learn the youth stays, or spends as much or more time away from home, with a boyfriend (rating=2) or friend (rating =1) then assign a rating of “2” or “1”, which trumps the 0. <p>If so, who are you living with and what is your relationship to them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the youth does not reveal the nature of the relationship with whom they are staying, or the rater is uncertain about the relationship between the youth and person providing housing, the rater should assign a “2”, like in the following examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staying with a boyfriend or girlfriend ▪ Pimp ▪ On the street ▪ <i>Someone</i> but not a friend or family member ▪ “I don’t live no-where” or “stays where I feel safe”
<p><u>Item 3</u></p>	<p>Have you ever been placed in foster care or a group home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Youth Shelter House (YSH) is also known as a Family Reunification Home (FRH), and both are distinctly different than a therapeutic group home. Youth sometimes indicate they were at a “group home” but were actually at a YSH or FRH. Thus, the screener should probe to determine if the “group home” is either a YSH/FRH or an actual therapeutic group home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ YSH/FRH examples in the city are ASY, Triangle, 4 C’s, Umbrella, Sasha Bruce, Dupont ○ The screener may clarify, “You said group home but did you mean youth shelter house such as…”

<p><u>Item 4</u></p>	<p>Have you ever run away or left home/foster care?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rater should make a diligent effort to clarify how many times the youth has run away. • "Running away" can include leaving the house without the permission of a parent/guardian AND a youth being outside the home without the parent/guardian's knowledge of his or her's whereabouts • If a youth responds, "1-2 times", the rater should go with the higher number provided and assign a minimum score of "1"
<p><u>Item 5</u></p>	<p>How long do you usually stay away?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rater should make a diligent effort to clarify how long the youth usually stays away from home. • Youth may receive a score of "0" on item 4 because they only have runaway one time, but the rater should assign a "2" on item 5 if the youth has ever runaway and been out overnight
<p><u>Item 6</u></p>	<p>Are you dating anyone? If so, how old are they?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a youth gives an initial answer, such as, "No. I'm not dating anyone", but then changes the answer to indicate they actually are dating someone older, the rater should use the higher score i.e., older =2 • A youth may deny they are dating someone. However, if a sexual relationship is acknowledged then the rater should score accordingly e.g., older=1, over 18=2 • If the youth is 18 years old, the rater should only assign a "1" if the person the youth is dating is within a year of his or her age (i.e., 19 or 20 years old) • If the youth identifies the person as 18 or older and they are under 17, a rating of "2" should be given.
<p><u>Item 7</u></p>	<p>What are some things you bought for yourself over the past two months? Who paid for it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the youth answers "someone", or "myself," bought something for him or her: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The rater should generate a question that will only produce a dichotomous answer of Yes or No: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Did anyone buy you anything that adds up to over \$100 in the last 2 months?" ▪ If no, then a zero is scored ▪ If yes, then clarify who paid for it? ▪ Items bought by the youth which costs equal to or above \$100, score a 1. ▪ Items bought by anyone other than a parent or guardian, score as a 2.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there is an expensive item with no identified purchaser, score as a "1"
<u>Item 8</u>	<p>What names have you used other than your own?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any alias is scored as "1." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples include: My name is Trevon but people call me "Trey", or some variation of the youth's birth name, such as a nickname given to them by a family member. An alias with a connotation that is sexual in nature should be scored as a "2."
<u>Item 9</u>	<p>Do you have any tattoos? If so, do they have special meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there is a familial meaning of the tattoo such as cousin who passed, rater would score as "1." tattoo denoting allegiance to a person/group should be scored as a "2."
<u>Item 10</u>	<p>Evidence of abuse (e.g. ligature marks, burns, bruises)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to observing if the youth has any bruises, directly inquire if there any bruises that cannot be seen and the cause of them Historical scratches or cuts should be scored as "0". Scratches or cuts received in relation to the charge, should be assigned a minimum scored of "1" bruises hidden under clothing should be scored as a "2."
<u>Item 11</u>	<p>Any "red-flag" charges in CourtView (e.g. status offenses, loitering, runaways, curfew violations)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign a "2" if the youth accrued more than 5 juvenile custody orders (JCO) for runaway or absconding. The JCO may not technically be a charge but we will score a "2." Count the instances when a custody order was requested for running away but not issued. Remember, delinquent charges are different than red-flag charges of PINS <i>Status offenses</i> are activities that are considered offenses due to the youth's age- there are not necessarily criminal acts and may not be considered illegal if committed by an adult. <i>Examples include truancy, running away/fugitive from parent, breaking curfew, failure to appear.</i>
<u>Item 12</u>	Charge of solicitation/prostitution



Identifying Survivors of Sex Trafficking

About the Amara Legal Center

The Amara Legal Center provides free legal services to individuals whose rights have been violated through commercial sex. We serve anyone with a history of commercial sex who has a legal issue, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, or how the individual entered into commercial sex (*i.e.*, whether by coercion, circumstance, or choice). We do not require that a client identify as a survivor of sex trafficking in order to receive services. Our client population includes both individuals currently or recently involved with commercial sex and those who have not been involved with commercial sex for years but still have legal issues arising from their past. The most common legal issues we handle include expungement of criminal records, advocacy and representation in criminal cases, custody and child support, civil protection orders, as well as representation and brief legal advice on a variety of civil issues. If a legal issue is beyond our expertise, we will work to secure a referral for the client.

How to Use This Screening Tool

The purpose of this screening tool is to assist service providers in identifying survivors of sex trafficking. Most U.S. citizens who are survivors of sex trafficking will not readily self-identify as such, and may be reticent to acknowledge the abuse and exploitation they have experienced. This tool is not designed as a set of questions to be directed at an individual undergoing intake but rather as a list of items that intake staff can pay attention to while working with a client. In other words, service providers need not disrupt their normal intake procedures in order to use this screening tool, but may wish to use it as a guide in directing an intake conversation as appropriate. If the intake staff observes any of the items listed in the screening tool, the staff may check off the “Yes” box for that item at a later time rather than disrupting the intake process. The staff can also use the “Notes” section provided at the end of the checklist to note any observations that are not specifically listed but that may be pertinent.

There is no set formula for when a service provider should contact Amara for a referral. In general, if the intake staff checked off multiple “Yes” boxes, the individual may be an appropriate candidate for referral. However, not every combination of checked “Yes” boxes means that an individual is a survivor of sex trafficking or otherwise involved in the commercial sex industry. If you are unsure whether a particular individual falls within Amara’s client population, please contact Amara to discuss whether a referral would be appropriate.



Screening Tool

Physical Appearance and Demeanor

The person has a tattoo or branding.¹ Yes No

The person is wearing revealing clothing that may be inappropriate for the weather. Yes No

The person is accompanied by another person who does not allow the potential client to speak. Yes No

The person acts fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous about the interaction. Yes No

The person exhibits signs of physical trauma such as unusual bruising or marks or strong reactions to any form of touch. Yes No

The person exhibits fear of any reference to law enforcement. Yes No

The person exhibits reluctance to talk about their life or relationships. Yes No

The person exhibits fear of reporting his/her situation or of filing for a protection order. Yes No

The person talks about or mentions being “in the life” or uses terminology associated with commercial sex such as “trick,” “john,” “track,” or “bottom.” Yes No

Possessions

The person has very few personal possessions. Yes No

The person has no identifying documents or false identifying documents. Yes No

The person has no control of her/his own money or no bank account or records. Yes No

¹ Some pimps or traffickers will “brand” their victims with tattoos of their name or a particular symbol. Often, a tattoo by a pimp will be across a survivor’s chest, but may be in another location as well. A survivor may indicate that the tattoo is her boyfriend’s or baby daddy’s name. Additionally, some tattoos indicate that an individual is involved in gang-controlled trafficking. These tattoos are usually on a survivor’s hand between her thumb and index finger, but may be in another location as well.



Living Conditions

- The person is homeless or lives in otherwise impoverished conditions. Yes No
- The person lives in foster care or in a group home. Yes No
- The person often stays in a hotel or motel. Yes No
- The person travels frequently. Yes No
- The person is not free to come and go as he/she wishes. Yes No
- The person is unwilling or unable to say where she/he slept last night. Yes No
- The person's living situation is connected to her/his work (i.e., the person works for the individual(s) who controls her/his living situation). Yes No

Employment Conditions

- The person is not allowed to keep his/her own money. Yes No
- The person must work to pay off a debt but cannot seem to pay it off. Yes No
- The person does not get a break or rest during working hours, or has to pay to take a break. Yes No

Personal Background

- The person has any type of criminal record, including arrests only. Yes No
- The person has been arrested for prostitution or solicitation.² Yes No
- The person's employment history includes adult entertainment.² Yes No
- The person is or was a victim of childhood sexual abuse. Yes No
- The person is a minor and is sexually active, or is now an adult but was sexually active as a minor. Yes No
- The person is or was a victim of domestic violence. Yes No
- The person has poor attendance in school or has dropped out. Yes No

² If yes, the person automatically falls into Amara's client population.



The person uses or abuses drugs or has done so in the past. Yes No

Personal Relationships

The person has an older boyfriend (or girlfriend). Yes No

The person lacks close ties to his/her family. Yes No

The person or the person's family or friends have been threatened. Yes No

The person is pregnant.³ Yes No

The person has children with an older man she may call her "boyfriend" or "baby daddy."
 Yes No

The person has had custody or child support disputes with the father of her child(ren).
 Yes No

Additional Notes

Referring Clients to Amara

To make a referral, please visit <http://www.amaralegal.org/make-a-referral/> and follow the instructions.

In urgent situations, please call Stacie Reimer, Executive Director, at 202-603-0957.

³ A pregnancy may be an impetus for a survivor of sex trafficking to seek a way out of her situation.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Dos 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 or engaging with youth.

Don't rely on **stereotypes** to identify or engage with youth.

Do use **age-appropriate, common language** to talk with youth.

Don't assume the youth sees themselves as a **victim**.

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

Don't question or engage a sexually exploited youth at a location where they feel **threatened** or **unsafe**.

Do be **nonjudgmental** when listening to a sexually exploited youth.

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

Do work to build **trust** with a sexually exploited youth.

Don't expect immediate **gratitude** for your efforts.

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 sexually exploited youth.

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.

Credit: http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/3-Dos_and_Donts.pdf

Additional Interview Tips:

The following documents (see links below) can provide practitioners with background information, detailed guidance and strategies that can be applied when speaking with survivors of commercial and sexual exploitation.

1. [Engaging Potential Survivors of CSEC or Minor Sex Trafficking](#) (IOFA and Courtney's House)
2. [Principles for Service Delivery to CSEC Victims](#) (Kristi House)
3. [Best Practices when Interviewing a Survivor of Sexual Assault](#) (Amara Legal Center)
4. [Guidelines for Identifying and Interviewing Commercially Sexually Exploited Children](#) (California Child Welfare Council, see page 71)
5. [Language Matters](#) (Stella)
6. [Strategies for Interviewing Child Victims of Human Trafficking](#) (National District Attorneys Association)
7. [Motivational Interviewing: A Primer for Child Welfare Professionals](#) (Child Welfare Information Gateway)