

## Sex trafficking as a form of child maltreatment: A brief guide for child protection supervisors and investigators

### Starting an investigation? Keep these facts in mind:

- In Minnesota, sex trafficking is prostitution that a third person – not the buyer or the victim – facilitates or profits from. Sex trafficking investigations are sexual abuse investigations, and the alleged offender may be a caregiver, non-caregiver or unknown to the victim.
- Coordination with law enforcement is critical. Coordinate with all levels of law enforcement investigating the acts of trafficking throughout the duration of the child protection investigation.
- As in all sex abuse investigations, sex trafficking victims should have a forensic sexual abuse interview. Investigators should consult with the county/tribal attorney's office and with the law enforcement agency that is investigating.
- Connect the child and family with services early. This may include a referral to child protection or child welfare case management, and also to Safe Harbor services.



### Key steps for sex trafficking investigations

All sex trafficking reports are classified as alleged sexual abuse reports and require a 24-hour response and family investigation. The investigation determines whether maltreatment occurred and if there is a need for ongoing services. During the investigation, prioritize youth safety and youth-directed connections to services as much as possible. The following is a list of key issues for child protection supervisors and investigators in a sex trafficking investigation.

- **Coordination with law enforcement:** Start by cross reporting to local law enforcement. If the acts of trafficking happened outside local jurisdiction, contact the agency with jurisdiction to coordinate. On these cases, coordination with the statewide Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force or other multijurisdictional task forces may be necessary and beneficial.
- **Face-to-face contact with victim:** The first contact (within 24 hours of receipt) is for assessing immediate safety and building rapport. If there is an active law enforcement investigation, do not interview the alleged victim until coordinating with law enforcement to determine how the forensic sexual abuse interview should be completed. These are sexual abuse cases and should be treated as such. Under best practice, investigators should work to reduce the number of interviews. Understand that the process of disclosure takes time and requires trust building.

### Special considerations in sex trafficking investigations

- **Cases involving multiple victims:** Ensure coordination with other child welfare and law enforcement jurisdictions. If there are multiple victims of the same trafficking scheme in a single jurisdiction, agencies are encouraged to assign their cases to the same child protection investigator.
- **Cases involving multiple jurisdictions:** All law enforcement and child welfare agencies need to be aware of other agency involvement. This will ensure that a victim-centered approach is taken to reduce the number of interviews and duplication of efforts.
- **Cases involving multiple offenders:** Keep in mind that sex trafficking investigations may have multiple offenders. All alleged offenders should be added under the sex trafficking allegation. A separate maltreatment determination should be made for each alleged offender.

Child protection workers are encouraged to view Sex Trafficked Children and Youth Investigative Protocols, a comprehensive Minnesota Department of Human Services bulletin that includes more in-depth information for social service agencies. The bulletin is available at <http://bit.ly/dhs-trafficking-bulletin>.

- **Family interviews:** Even when the alleged sex trafficking offender is not a family member, workers should still assess family safety. Face-to-face contact with the child’s primary caregiver is required regardless of the relationship of the alleged offender. Face-to-face contact with siblings should be conducted when there are safety concerns or allegations that directly involve them. Structured decision making tools are not required in non-caregiver offender sex trafficking investigations. Keep in mind there may be other concerns of maltreatment in the home, which should be reported.
- **Safety planning:** Begin creating a safety plan immediately and update it throughout the case. Safety planning should be developmentally appropriate and focus on harm reduction, including both physical and emotional safety risks to the child at home and in the community.
- **Refer to case management, Safe Harbor or other services early:** Child protection investigators should consider referring the youth to that area’s Safe Harbor Regional Navigator and, if needed, county or tribal case management services as soon as possible.

Counties and tribes should consider referral to child welfare case management if there are not concerns of maltreatment by parents.

- **Alleged offender interviews:** Many factors, including an ongoing law enforcement investigation, may complicate the alleged offender interview. The interview may be postponed if there is an active law enforcement investigation. Interviews with the alleged offender should be made in coordination with law enforcement and the county or tribal attorney’s office.
- **Making maltreatment determinations:** After conducting an investigation, the local welfare agency will conclude whether maltreatment has occurred. Determinations can be made on known or unknown offenders. Supervisory or team consultation is strongly encouraged.
- **Closing the investigation:** If necessary, workers and supervisors should consult with the county or tribal attorney’s office regarding the case closing. If a determination of sex trafficking is made on a known offender and that individual has children, it should be reported as threatened sexual abuse to the county or tribe where those children reside.



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