

BACK TO BASICS: SERVING CHILD TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

THE CHILD ABUSE PROSECUTION PROJECT'S BACK TO BASICS SERIES

The Association of Prosecuting Attorneys' Child Abuse Prosecution Project is pleased to offer its Back-to-Basics Series, a "to-do" list for both new and experienced child abuse prosecutors and their multi-disciplinary teams.

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It is essential to use Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and their Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) members to protect child victims of trafficking and to investigate their buyers and traffickers for prosecution.

Comprehensive and Coordinated Team Approach to Support Child Abuse Victims

MDT partners include:

- Police Departments
- Prosecutors
- Victim Advocates (confidential and system-based)
- Child Protective Services
- Medical Providers
- Mental Health Clinicians
- Parole/Probation
- Juvenile Court Counselor, etc.

Ability to expand established MDT membership to address child victims of trafficking to include:

- Federal Law Enforcement
- State Police
- Juvenile Justice/Youth Services
- Homeless/Runaway Youth Organizations
- Supporting Services for Trafficked Youth

Consider the Following:

1. *Develop protocols and guidelines* for MDTs to receive and screen reports, communicate and share information, and collaborate to effectively respond to these specialized cases.
2. *Expand existing MDT membership* to include agencies, organizations, and services for investigating child traffickers and supporting trafficked youth.
3. *Conduct a Forensic Interview (FI)* when appropriate. There may be occasions when more than one interview is necessary for a child trafficked victim. In this instance, it is important to follow your protocols and guidelines and to document the reason(s) for multiple interviews.
4. *Identify and promote training programs* designed to educate agencies and the community on the commercial sexual exploitation of children.
5. *Provide safety planning* not only to the victim but to CAC Staff and Medical Providers. Trafficked youth seeking medical attention may be accompanied by their trafficker or associates to a CAC or to other medical facilities.
6. *Resources for trafficked youth* can be tailored to address their specific needs and may include the following: housing assistance/safe homes, access to school/education, life skills training, drug and alcohol treatment for trafficked youth, mental health counseling for trafficked youth, and survivor/mentoring services.

Tips for Prosecutors

- Prosecutors should act quickly to meet a trafficking victim and begin an investigation. They can work closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to investigate and build these challenging cases
- Collaboration among local, state and federal law enforcement provides the opportunity to determine the best venue for case prosecution. State prosecutors can be cross-designated to prosecute federal child trafficking cases. If cross-designation is not possible, work closely with your local federal prosecutor to build the strongest case with the best sentences. State and Federal prosecutions often operate with very different timelines so work together to ensure the victim has support and the defendant is held or has bail conditions throughout your prosecution
- There may be unrelated charges to aggressively pursue against a trafficker and/or buyer regardless of whether a child trafficking victim can go forward in a criminal case. Getting the victim out of a dangerous situation is the top priority in a child trafficking case. Once removed from the situation, the victim is more likely to feel comfortable disclosing abuse
- Prosecutors should form important relationships with advocates, local treatment providers and other community partners that support, guide and assist the child trafficking victim. These essential services increase the chance of long-term victim cooperation in a criminal case and helps the child to stay safe and recover

For more in-depth information on model practices and guidelines see APA's Publication, *Child Trafficking Victims: Approaches for Prosecutors and their MDT Partners*

