



TEXAS
Department of Family
and Protective Services



**Child
Protective Services**

Commercial Sexual Exploitation – Identification Tool Protocol

September 2025

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1. Introduction

The *Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool Statewide Protocol (CSE-IT Protocol)* provides useful information to support Child Protective Services (CPS) and Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC) staff in effectively performing their job duties. This information includes reference material, procedures, and guidelines that assist Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and SSCC staff in effectively performing their job tasks required for children in care.

This resource guide provides important information on a range of topics for the purpose of assisting and guiding staff to:

- Make essential decisions;
- Develop strategies to address various issues;
- Perform essential procedures;
- Understand important processes; and
- Identify and apply best practices.

It is important to remember the information in this resource guide does not substitute for DFPS policy. Policy statements may sometimes be included, but only as references. Policy statements may sometimes be included, but only as references. Any policy appearing in this resource guide will be emphasized and include a link to the actual policy in the CPS Handbook or Texas Administrative Code rule.

DFPS policy always takes precedence over any resource guide. DFPS strives to keep both synchronized; however, delays sometimes exist. If questions arise, always follow DFPS policy in the CPS Handbook.

While information in this resource guide is not policy, except where noted, the actions and approaches described here are also not mandates. Staff should adapt their performance of critical tasks to the individual needs and circumstances of the children and families with whom they work.

Combined with clear and concise handbook policy, this resource guide should help staff provide a high level of service to children in Texas.



CPS Policy 4222.2

Re-Allowing Placement:

If the caseworker learns of a detailed justification for changing the status of and considering placements in a foster family that is on Disallowed Placement status, the caseworker must elevate this consideration through the regional chain of command to the regional director.

2. Overview

The *CSE-IT Protocol* is established in accordance with the *Child Protective Services Handbook*, House Bill 451, 89th Legislature, Regular Session, 2025, and the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act 2014.

The CSE-IT Protocol:

- Establishes a universal screening approach for children who enter and/or are in DFPS conservatorship;
- Outlines coordination amongst staff roles to support CSE-IT completion; and
- Supports identification and service planning for youth at risk or victims of human trafficking.

The *CSE-IT Protocol* should be followed in conjunction with existing policy, and all actions must be documented within appropriate timeframes.

Human Trafficking Facts

- Research has found links between out-of-home placements and an increased vulnerability to human trafficking and sexual abuse (Reid et al., 2017; Gibbs, Henninger, et al., 2018).
- Most victims do not self-identify and are often involved with child serving organizations for years before their victimization is recognized.
- Victimization often begins before 14 years of age.
- Traffickers can exploit children in foster care or who are missing from foster care because of their increased vulnerabilities, historical abuses, and the fact that these children may not have their familial, emotional, or basic needs met (Amaya et al., 2021).

3. What is the CSE-IT?

The **CSE-IT**, pronounced “see it”, is a validated screening tool designed to improve early identification of youth who are experiencing commercial sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking.

The tool was developed by West Coast Children’s Clinic and is currently used in Texas and multiple other states, as well as across various sectors, including juvenile justice, education, advocate agencies, runaway and homeless youth agencies, and some areas of child protection.

The CSE-IT is a quick (five to seven minute) information integration tool that uses credible information from intake processes, case files, colleagues, child protective services, juvenile probation, Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY) advocates, and/or caregivers to complete and score eight key indicators listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. CSE-IT Key Indicators

CSE-IT Key Indicators
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Housing and caregiving;2. Prior abuse and trauma;3. Physical health and appearance;4. Environment and exposure;5. Relationships and personal belongings;6. Signs of current trauma;7. Coercion; and8. Exploitation.

CSE-IT Scores

The completed CSE-IT will give the user an outcome (number score) between 0 and 23. Table 1 below describes the three outcome categories and necessary actions based on a number score:

1. **No Concern/Not Enough Information;**
2. **Possible Concern;** and
2. **Clear Concern.**



Caution

The CSE-IT informs the level of risk and should not be the sole source for deciding whether a youth is or has been sexually exploited.

CSE-IT Score Explanations

Table 1. CSE-IT Outcome Categories and Actions

Score	Outcome Category Description	Actions Based on CSE-IT Results
0-3	<p>No Concern/Not Enough Information: This final score indicates either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information available does not suggest the youth is being sexually exploited; or • Currently there is not enough information to determine a higher rating. <p>This rating does not state sexual exploitation categorically does not exist. This score means no trafficking interventions are currently needed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The case will continue to be worked according to current policy and practices including the existing plan of service.
4-8	<p>Possible Concern: Information indicates the child may be at high risk for or experiencing sexual exploitation but there is either limited information available or the current behaviors and circumstances do not clearly indicate exploitation.</p> <p>Caregivers should actively monitor a young person who receives this rating, fully assess their needs, and initiate preventive actions to ensure exploitation does not intensify or occur.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine if human trafficking victimization exists or is suspected to have occurred; 2. Complete <u>Expectations for Newly Identified and/or Suspected Victimization</u>; 3. Identify risk and mitigating factors, as well as determine if services and referrals are needed; and 4. Identify stabilization support services for current placement or if placement change is needed.
9-23	<p>Clear Concern: Clear, concerning information from observations, client records, or information from others involved in the case indicates numerous risk factors and vulnerabilities are present.</p> <p>This final score suggests the youth is being commercially sexually exploited or is at high risk for sexual exploitation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine if human trafficking victimization exists or is suspected to have occurred; 2. Complete <u>Expectations for Newly Identified and/or Suspected Victimization</u>; 3. Identify risk and mitigating factors, as well as determine if services and referrals are needed; and 4. Identify stabilization support services for current placement or if placement change is needed.

Expectations for Newly Identified and/or Suspected Victimization

When new concerns for trafficking victimization are suspected or identified, including disclosures and CSE-IT **Clear Concern** results, regardless of who is alleged to be perpetrating the trafficking, report to DFPS Statewide Intake immediately, but **no later than eight hours** from suspicion, identification, disclosure, or a **Clear Concern** CSE-IT score.



Referrals

All **Suspected-Unconfirmed** and **Confirmed** trafficking victimization events.

- Refer to the Care Coordination Team (CCT) (legal or placement county); and/or
- Referral to CSEY advocate agency, if appropriate.

Documentation

All **Suspected-Unconfirmed** and **Confirmed** trafficking victimization events must be documented in the following:

- IMPACT **Human Trafficking List** page;
- IMPACT documentation in case plan and contact narrative; and
- The **Trafficking Referral Survey** for the following circumstances:
 - ▶ A commercially sexually exploited youth or human trafficking advocacy agency referral is completed for a child or youth; and/or
 - ▶ A CCT referral is completed in any stage of service; or
 - ▶ A CCT opt-out official decision is made in any stage of service.

Primary Caseworker Responsibilities

The primary caseworker must complete the following steps outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Primary Caseworker Responsibilities



4. CSE-IT Screenings

DFPS screening core functions are explained in Figure 3.

Figure 3. CSE-IT Screening Core Functions for DFPS

Circumstances Requiring CSE-IT:

- **Within 45 days** of entering DFPS conservatorship;
- Rescreening **every six months** while in DFPS conservatorship; and
- For every recovery from a missing event **within seven days** of the child or youth's recovery.

Users Trained to Facilitate CSE-IT Completion:

- Conservatorship program directors and supervisors or SSCC equivalents; and
- Special investigators and program directors.

Information Sources Known to CSE-IT Users for Screenings:

- DFPS and SSCC staff involved with the youth's case; and
- Credible information from intake processes, case files, colleagues, law enforcement, CPS, juvenile probation, CASA volunteers, CSEY advocates, service providers, and/or caregivers.

Post Screening Required Actions:

- Determine victimization occurrence and/or suspected;
- Report information that yielded a **Clear Concern** to DFPS Statewide Intake;
- Service referral determinations;
- Placement needs and changes; and
- Documentation.

Figure 4 outlines the criteria for CSE-IT initial screenings and re-screenings.

Figure 4. CSE-IT Initial Screening and Re-Screening Criteria

Initial CSE-IT Screening:	CSE-IT Re-Screening:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Within 45 days of entering DFPS conservatorship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed by conservatorship or SSCC staff; and Children age 10 and older. <p><i>Note: CSE-IT may be used with younger populations when exploitation concerns exist.</i></p> At the Post-Removal Transfer Staffing or Initial Coordination Meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated by the primary casework team receiving the conservatorship case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead collection of CSE-IT information; and Determine if child is receiving care coordination and/or CSEY advocate services; Removing worker and attendees provide relevant information for CSE-IT completion; CSE-IT user is responsible for uploading CSE-IT into the OneCase on the Human Trafficking tab using the following naming convention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSEIT FirstName LastName Date CSE-IT completed.pdf; or Example: CSEIT Jane Doe MM-DD-YYYY.pdf; Complete <u>Actions Based on CSE-IT Results</u>; and Conservatorship worker completes <u>Primary Caseworker Responsibilities</u>. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Every six months while in DFPS conservatorship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary team rescreens all youth age 10 and older; Every recovery from a missing event regardless of age: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special investigator, special investigator program director, or primary team trained CSE-IT user completes CSE-IT within seven days after recovery; The CSE-IT user will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead collection of information to complete CSE-IT gathered from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recovery plan meeting; Recovery interview; Post recovery meeting; and/or Any other source of information; Determine if child is receiving care coordination and/or CSEY advocate services. CSE-IT user is responsible for uploading CSE-IT into the OneCase on the Human Trafficking tab using the following naming convention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSEIT FirstName LastName Date CSE-IT completed.pdf; or Example: CSEIT Jane Doe MM-DD-YYYY.pdf; Complete <u>Actions Based on CSE-IT Results</u>; and Primary worker completes <u>Primary Caseworker Responsibilities</u>.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CASA	Court-Appointed Special Advocate
CCT	Care Coordination Team
CPS	Child Protective Services
CSE-IT Protocol	Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool Statewide Protocol
CSEY	Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth
DFPS	Department of Family and Protective Services
SSCC	Single Source Continuum Contractor

Appendix A: Glossary of Important Terms

Care Coordination Teams: CCTs provide children and youth experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sex trafficking and exploitation with a continuum of care that is non-punitive, responsive, and high-quality community-based services to meet their unique short-term and longer-term needs.

CCTs develop protocols for interagency collaboration and coordination of service intervention to reduce potential trauma to children or youth and families and improve services, while preserving and respecting the rights and obligations of each agency to pursue their respective mandates.

If a CCT exists in the legal or placement county, a CCT referral must be made for Suspected-Unconfirmed and Confirmed victims of trafficking, as well as any child or youth with a Clear Concern CSE-IT result. See the [Care Coordination Teams Overview](#).

Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth Advocate Agency: CSEY advocate agencies are nonprofits that employ advocates to provide individualized 24/7 crisis response and ongoing trust-based relational support to child, youth, and young adult survivors (through age 21 or 24 depending on agency). CSEY advocates may also provide robust case management that is flexible to support and not duplicate, replace or interfere with efforts of other case managers and advocates.

CSEY advocates work collaboratively with other stakeholders in support of the victim-centered goals pursued by the survivor and their family, law enforcement, prosecutors, child welfare, juvenile justice, healthcare, and other partners. They help survivors gain the strength and empowerment needed to participate in investigation and prosecution of exploiters.

See the [Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth Advocate Services Overview](#).

Human Trafficking Federal and State Definitions:

Human Trafficking: The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act or labor or services.

- It is a crime for any person to knowingly engage or attempt to engage in human trafficking:
 - ▶ With the intent or knowledge that the trafficked person will be subjected to forced labor or services or engaged in prohibited sexual conduct; or
 - ▶ To benefit financially by receiving anything of value from participation in a venture that has subjected a person to forced labor or services or engaged a person in prohibited sexual conduct. See [Penal Code, Section 20A.02](#).
- Children can be victims of human trafficking regardless of their citizenship, residency, or alien or immigrant status.

Labor Trafficking: The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services by force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. See 22 U.S.C. 7102(9)(B).

- Knowingly causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing a child to be trafficked in a manner punishable as an offense under [Penal Code, Sections 20A.02\(a\)\(5\), \(6\), \(7\), or \(8\)](#); or
- The failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent a child from being trafficked in a manner punishable as an offense under any of those sections. See [Family Code, Section 261.001\(1\)\(L\)](#).

Sex Trafficking: The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. See 22 U.S.C. 7102(10). For minors, the use of force, fraud, or coercion is not required. This includes the exchange of anything tangible for a sexual act or the promise of a sexual act.

- Compelling or encouraging the child in a manner to engage in sexual conduct as defined by [Penal Code, Section 43.01](#), including:
 - ▶ Compelling or encouraging the child in a manner that constitutes an offense of trafficking of persons under [Penal Code, Section 43.02](#); or
 - ▶ Solicitation of prostitution under [Penal Code, Section 43.021](#); or
 - ▶ Compelling prostitution under [Penal Code, Section 43.05\(a\)\(2\)](#).See [Family Code, Section 261.001\(1\)\(G\)](#).
- Knowingly causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing a child to be trafficked in a manner punishable as an offense under [Penal Code, Sections 20A.02\(a\)\(5\), \(6\), \(7\), or \(8\)](#); or
- The failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent a child from being trafficked in a manner punishable as an offense under any of those sections. See [Family Code, Section 261.001\(1\)\(L\)](#).

Human Trafficking Referral Survey: The [Trafficking Service Referral Survey](#) must be completed by the primary case worker when any of the following occur:

- A commercially sexually exploited youth or human trafficking advocacy agency referral is completed for a child or youth; and/or
- A CCT referral is completed in any stage of service; or
- A CCT opt-out official decision is made in any stage of service.

Human Trafficking Victimization:

Confirmed: DFPS term for a trafficking event when evidence supports the conclusion that the child or youth has been trafficked.

Suspected-Unconfirmed: DFPS term for a trafficking event when specific information regarding the child or youth and the surrounding circumstances creates a reasonable belief that the child or youth has been trafficked.



Note

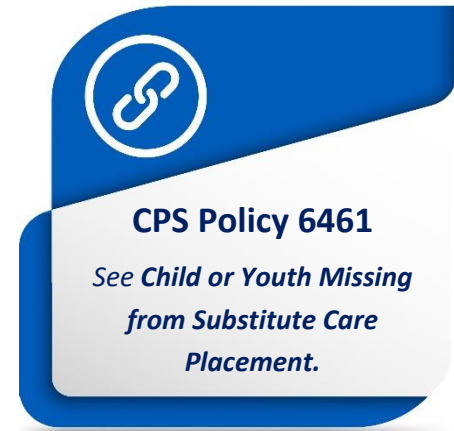
***Confirmed** trafficking event supporting evidence **must** be more than just an allegation or suspicion and does not have to be a direct outcry from the child or youth.*

*A runaway episode, in and of itself, is **not** equal to a **Suspected-Unconfirmed** trafficking event.*

Missing Youth: A child or youth in DFPS managing conservatorship is categorized as missing if the child or youth:

- Runs away;
- Is abducted by a known or unknown person; or
- Is otherwise absent from care with no known location.

When a child or youth is missing from conservatorship, all stages of service are required to act with urgency and prioritize a coordinated and expedient recovery. See [CPS Policy 6461](#).



Post Recovery Meeting: Within three business days of recovery, a post recovery meeting is held to ensure necessary actions are taken, interventions and services are initiated, and CSE-IT information is gathered.

- Same participants as the recovery plan meeting should attend, as well as the youth, if possible;
- Standard releases and confidentiality agreements are addressed with external parties as needed; and
- Stakeholder availability and/or child's unwillingness to participate should not impede adherence to timeframes.

The following should occur at the post recovery meeting:

- Implement and/or adjust the recovery plan to prioritize actions and address the additional physical and emotional needs of the child or youth;
- Assess and develop a plan for ongoing recovery interview attempts as needed; and
- Develop and update the runaway prevention plan for the child or youth whose reason for missing was runaway.

Determination of referrals to:

- Children's advocacy center – multi-disciplinary teams;
- CCT, where available;
- CSEY advocate agency, where available; and
- Other interventions or supports.

Recovery Plan: The recovery plan is a coordinated outline of all planned and active efforts to locate a youth and preliminary interventions and services to be initiated for the youth upon recovery. The plan can be revised throughout the missing episode, as needed, and will include, but is not limited to:

- Information regarding locating the child or youth and to inform the CSE-IT;
- Tasks assigned to recovery meeting participants;
- Potential children’s advocacy center multidisciplinary team engagement;
- Potential CCT engagement;
- Potential CSEY advocate agency engagement;
- Youth’s placement options upon recovery; and/or
- A communication plan which includes the frequency of follow-up meetings and needed recovery plan updates.

Recovery Plan Meeting: Within two business days of the missing event the recovery plan meeting participants will develop recovery plan to locate a missing child or youth. The initial recovery plan meeting will set the frequency of ongoing meetings to update the recovery plan.

Runaway Prevention Plan: A runaway prevention plan should be developed for children in substitute care to address situations or circumstances that could lead to a child running away. This plan will help to provide accountability and clarity for all parties involved.

This plan should be developed in collaboration with the child, caregivers, relatives, and other supportive adults, case management staff, and the child’s caseworker. The plan should be strengths-based, realistic, and positive.

See CPS Policies [6460](#) and 6461.11 and the [Runaway Prevention Resource Guide](#).

