

Office of Victims of Crime Grant
Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking
October 2019-September 2022
DCF/CFC Focus Groups/Forums

A grant awarded to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, partnering with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Department of Children and Families

DCF/CFC Focus Groups/Forums
Questions and Protocol

Purpose: to inform the training curriculum designed for staff within the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Comprehensive Foster Care (CFC) staff to support foster families in meeting the needs of youth who have been impacted by/at risk for sexual exploitation. Focus group participants or one-on-one interviews will be conducted by sub-grantee Dr. Amy Farrell, Northeastern University.

The focus group participants include DCF and CFC staff who work directly with foster parents. Other separate focus group participants will include foster parents and youth.

Introduction:

1. interviewer introduces self
2. states preferred pronouns and asks how the participant identifies (this mirrors the importance of this practice with youth)
3. expresses gratitude for attendance and engagement
4. discusses privacy and norms of the (virtual) room

Welcome and explanation of the purpose (see above) of the focus group discussion.

1. One-hour focus group session with no required follow-up

Provide **standard definitions** of terms and acronyms that will be used, most being familiar:

1. CACs – Children’s Advocacy Centers
2. Cisgender - people whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned when they were born.
3. CFC - Comprehensive Foster Care
4. CSE – Commercially Sexually Exploited
5. CSEC – Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
6. DCF – Department of Children and Families
7. EOHHS - Executive Office of Health and Human Services
8. EOPSS - Executive Office of Public Safety and Security
9. 51A – a report of child abuse or neglect
10. Human Trafficking (HT) – an umbrella term used at DCF to include CSEC and Labor
11. HT-SEC – a report of child abuse specific to Human Trafficking – Sexually Exploited Child
12. HT-Labor - a report of child abuse specific to Human Trafficking – Labor
13. MDTs – Multi Disciplinary Teams – there are CSEC MDTs in each of the 12 CACs across the state; developed to comply with the state law on Human Trafficking for those under the age of 18. Each CSEC MDT Coordinator reviews and responds to all reports (51As) of HT-SEC and HT-Labor

Explain **the focus of the grant:**

5. overall, the grant focuses on improving the quality of care, resources, and support provided to youth impacted by/at risk for sexual exploitation.
6. to deliver training and support to staff working with foster parents
7. to support foster parents directly through the hiring of 2 part time Parent Supporters

Address issues of **confidentiality** and how the information from the focus group will be used.

1. All questions are voluntary, staff are under no obligation to answer any question

2. Staff will be asked permission to record the focus group session for the purposes of notetaking. Staff will be asked if there are any concerns about recording.
3. No personally identifiable information from the conversation will be shared. Name, location or other information that may identify the person will not be used.
4. Any confidentiality concerns raised by focus group members concerning the remote platform will be addressed

I. Introduction questions to get started and build conversation:

*[Interviewer says: Today we are going to have conversation about **your experiences working with foster parents.**]*

I. Introduction questions:

1. How long have you been a staff member at DCF/CFC agency?
2. Tell me more about what motivated you to work at DCF/CFC agency?

II. Questions related to experience with foster parents who are fostering youth who are impacted by/at risk of sexual exploitation.

3. To begin, please share your understanding of human trafficking, particularly commercial sexual exploitation of children.

1. **Probe** for specific risk factors and red flags
2. **Probe** for experiences with cisgender boys and transgender boys and girls

4. What has been your experience supporting foster parents who foster young people who may have been impacted by/at risk of sexual exploitation?

Probe for specific risk factors and red flags for cisgender girls and transgender girls (i.e. tattoos, drug use, unexplained clothing/materials, older “friends,” running, truancy, hormone therapy (injections/pills))

Probe for experiences with boys who are cisgender and transgender (i.e. older “friends,” running, truancy, hypersexuality, opposition to authority, gang activity, lack of disclosure, violent behavior towards others, self-harm)

*Note that youth who are **trans-male** will experience both cis-male and cis-female behaviors, while **trans-female** youth mostly experience cis-female behaviors.*

5. This question gets more specific re: supports. Has there been a time where you were asked to support foster parents who are parenting youth who have been impacted by/at risk for CSEC?

If answered “**Yes**” then ask:

How were you able to respond?

Probe for specific responses:

1. What was done with this information?
2. What supports were offered to the youth?
3. What supports were offered to the foster parents?

6. Are you aware of any youth in your foster homes who have been impacted by/at risk of sexual exploitation?

If answered “**Yes**” then ask:

1. How is this information known or suspected?
2. What was done with this information?
3. What supports were offered to the youth?
4. What supports were offered to the foster parents?

7. Have you worked with foster parents whose [cisgender] boys or transgender youth have been impacted by/at risk of sexual exploitation?

1. If answered “**Yes**” then ask:

Please share your experience or examples of their behaviors that may have been different from youth who have not experienced similar victimization.

8. Have you participated in coordinated supports for young people with other agencies such as multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) through the CACs, law enforcement, and other service providers and caregivers?

If answered “Yes” then ask:

Please share some examples of participating in coordinated supports for young people with other agencies such as CSEC MDTs through the CACs, law enforcement, and other service providers and caregivers.

If answered “No” then educate staff on the purpose of the CSEC MDTs and the value of their participation.

III. Training and Knowledge

[Interviewer says: “As I’ve explained Massachusetts has specific protocols to respond to CSEC; file a 51A for suspected HT-SEC, immediate DA referral and an MDT response, informing DCF/CFC supervisor/manager about concern for CSEC.”

9. How familiar are you with these protocols related to youth impacted by/at risk for CSEC?

1 being not familiar at all and 5 being very familiar and have used any protocols.

1. Where did you learn these protocols?
2. Can you describe and/or explain any protocols you have utilized in response to children impacted by/at risk for CSEC?

10. How familiar are you with **DCF policies** related to youth impacted/at risk for CSEC?

1 being not familiar at all and 5 being very familiar and have used any DCF policies.

For the interviewer – policy examples include:

1. **Protective Intake Policy**
2. **Missing Or Absent Policy**

Follow up: For those who answered 3 or higher, ask:

1. How did you learn about these policies?
2. Can you describe and/or explain these policies?

For those who could not answer this question, please mention the two examples:

3. **Protective Intake Policy** - mandated reporters must file a 51A if CSEC is a concern through red flags. Emphasize that there is no need to name a perpetrator with the allegation of HT.
4. **Missing Or Absent Policy** – when a youth is missing or absent, DCF has procedures for staff, placement resources, children’s families and contracted residential and foster care service programs to follow

11. How familiar are you with identifying the risk factors for CSEC?

1 being not familiar at all and 5 being very familiar and can identify more than 5 risk factors.

Follow up: For those who answered 3 or higher, ask:

5. How did you learn about these risk factors?
6. What risk factors can you name?

For those who could not answer this question or to summarize after question is answered, please mention the following risk factors from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC):

1. Children who are chronically missing or who frequently run away (especially 3+ missing incidents)
2. Children who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, especially if the abuse was unreported or unaddressed, or resulted in the child being removed from the home
3. Children who have experienced prior sexual assault or rape
4. Children with significant substance abuse issues or who live with someone who has significant substance abuse issues
5. Children who identify as LGBTQ and have been kicked out or who have been stigmatized by their family

Other risk factors include:

1. Truancy
2. Additional/unexplained money, new hair style/cut, manicures, tattoos

3. New/older “boyfriend”/friends

12. From your experience working with foster parents, what type of support do you think they need in relation to youth who are impacted by/at risk for sexual exploitation?

13. What type of support do you need from DCF/your CFC agency to help you support your foster parents with the specific issue of CSEC?

14. Interviewer explains the .5 FTE Parent Supporter positions out of RYI and MLMC and then asks:
How could these positions be helpful to you/your foster parents?

15. In the remaining time that we have, please share anything else that you believe would be helpful to inform upcoming CSEC Advanced Clinical training for staff working with foster parents. Are there specific questions you’d like answered during this training?