

WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Practical Tips for Frontline Law Enforcement



IF YOU ENCOUNTER A POTENTIAL VICTIM WHILE ON PATROL:

- **Separate** them from all others on the scene so you can have a one-on-one conversation.
- One of the first things you should ask about is **safety and wellbeing**. Ask potential victims if they are cold, tired, or hungry. Put their needs first, even if they are not receptive.
- Ask victims if they are comfortable speaking with you or would **prefer speaking with a colleague of yours**. The background of some officers - size, race, gender - may remind some victims of their abusers. Other victims may feel judged by someone of their same gender or race.

DURING YOUR CONVERSATION:

- Victims are good at reading people. It's how they survive. So **be clear on your intent: to help them**. Information-gathering must come second. Otherwise victims will see you as just another person who wants something from them.
- Know that there is no "magic question." Most important is that you be **patient, genuine, and kind**, meeting victims where they are with a lack of judgment. Victims may not remember *what* you say, but they almost always remember *how* you said it.
- **Body language** is very important:
 - Sit with your legs crossed or closed. If that is not comfortable, put a binder or clipboard on your lap.
 - If a victim is sitting, do not stand. Kneel or sit to be at eye level.
 - Maintain relaxed breathing and a calm tone of voice.
- Whatever words victims use to refer to an exploiter (e.g., "boyfriend," "trick"), if possible **do not reframe their language**. If they use a word that would be awkward or inappropriate for you (e.g., "daddy"), ask what term you should use in reference to this person. Trying to convince a victim that their exploiter is a "sex trafficker," predator, or criminal will alienate them from you.

UPON CONCLUSION OF THE CONVERSATION:

- Have **phone numbers ready** to give to victims, for an investigator and/or advocate. Ask victims to enter these numbers in their phones under a fake name in case they ever need them.
- Even if victims do not accept your help at that moment, know that **planting a seed of respect and compassion** may cause them to ask you or your colleague for help later on.

