

# A Professional's Guide to Safe Harbor

## SAFE HARBOR AND THE NO WRONG DOOR RESPONSE MODEL

In 2011, Minnesota became the fifth state in the nation to pass Safe Harbor legislation decriminalizing prostitution charges for youth under the age of 18. Through a statewide multidisciplinary collaborative process, Minnesota developed one of the most comprehensive models for responding to commercial sexual exploitation: No Wrong Door. Minnesota's No Wrong Door Response Model creates a statewide infrastructure for service delivery, specialized housing and shelter, training for systems professionals, and the development of community-specific protocols across the state.

## WORKING DEFINITION OF MINOR COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES):

Minor Commercial Sexual Exploitation occurs when someone under the age of 18 engages in commercial sexual activity. A commercial sexual activity occurs when anything of value or a promise of anything of value (e.g., money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, or higher status in a gang or group) is given to a person by any means in exchange for any type of sexual activity. A third party may or may not be involved.

## SAFE HARBOR LAW

Safe Harbor is structured under the MN Department of Health which offers a public health and public safety focus. A public health focus encourages victim-centered and harm reduction services, and allows for prevention efforts. This view shifts the criminal justice focus to the perpetrators, such as the buyers and the traffickers, instead of the exploited youth.

## NO WRONG DOOR RESPONSE MODEL

- No Wrong Door Response Model has a multidisciplinary and multijurisdictional approach. This ensures that no matter where a youth is identified, whether through schools, advocacy groups, clinics, child protection, law enforcement, or other avenues, every professional will be able to identify exploitation and will know where to refer the youth for services.
- Values and philosophies of No Wrong Door Response Model
  - Those who come into contact with youth should be trained to identify exploitation
  - Youth who are sexually exploited are victims of a crime
  - Victims should not feel afraid, isolated or trapped
  - Sexual exploitation is traumatic. Victim-centered services should be based in trauma-informed care
  - Services should be responsive to needs of youth (gender-responsive, culturally competent, age appropriate, and supportive for LGBTQ youth).
  - Services should be offered statewide
  - Youth have a right to privacy and self-determination
  - Services should be based in positive youth development
  - Sexual exploitation can be prevented
- Regional Navigators stationed throughout the state can help professionals with technical assistance, connect youth with services, provide professional and community trainings and assist with protocol development.

## BASIC TIPS

### Ground Rules

- Non-judgmental and kind
- Address emergency and basic needs first
- Open body-language—awareness of non-verbal communication
- Personal physical boundaries—touching may seem very invasive
  - Meet youth where they are at—harm reduction may be all you can do in the present moment—create a short-term safety plan
- Patience! Even if the story is changing show patience. They may be checking to see if you can handle the real situation. It can be very difficult to admit or disclose that they are being exploited. Lying doesn't mean there is no story, it just means they need to trust you before they are able to share the true story.
- Authentic and honest
  - Don't promise anything you cannot deliver
  - You do not need to have all the answers
- Separate person from others when doing assessment, intake, or interviews
- Refer to Regional Navigator, social worker or another trained advocacy group who understands sexual exploitation

Remember that even if they are in a safe place now, processing these issues can take a very long time. It is normal to back track emotionally and behaviorally.

### Asking Questions or Responding to Disclosure: Victim-Centered Approach

- Stay calm and *listen!*
- “What has happened to you?” rather than “Why are you doing this?”
- “How do you take care of yourself when you are on the run?”
- “Is there anyone who looks out for you?”
- “It sounds like you have been trying to manage a lot of things on your own.”
- Do not immediately ask questions about the pimp or trafficker. They have been taught to be very protective of that person and this will shut down communication.
- **Before giving advice**, acknowledge what is motivating them right now. Before you encourage them to change their situation or behavior, fully understand the repercussions of what changing those things might do to their safety and overall health.
- **They don't need to tell you their whole story!** Unless you are a trained advocate or counselor, it may be best to see what services they will agree to engage in, rather than to make them indulge all of their personal information. The goal is to not re-traumatize them.
- Familiarize yourself with mandated reporting requirements in your county. If you do need to make a report, let the youth know what is required for underage sex trafficking cases, what will happen next, and if possible, allow them to be with you when you make the call.
- Acknowledge their strengths and their survival skills. **Always build confidence!**

## RED-FLAGS OR WARNING SIGNS

### General Indicators

- Lying about age (lying in general)
- Personal information might change or might be contradictory
- Has no personal identification
- Not in control of their own money
- Chronic runaway
- Has new or expensive things with no means to buy them
- Frequent relocation (avoid detection)
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Social indicators in boys and girls
- Older boyfriend/girlfriend or traveling with older person
- Presents from non-guardian or unrelated adults
- Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships
- Fearful attachment to cell phone or odd cell phone behaviors
- Truancy/Frequent recent school transfers
- Friends or acquaintances who are in “the life”
- Something just doesn't feel right!
- References suspicious or odd job offers or situations

### Physical Indicators

- Tattoos or Branding
- Signs of physical trauma
- Injuries in various stages of healing
- History of strangulation
- Scarring from other unattended injuries
- Malnutrition
- Drug and chemical dependency

### Behavioral/Mental/Emotional Indicators

- Exhibit hyper-vigilance or paranoid behavior
- Fear, anxiety, depression, submission, nervousness, or anger
- Uses language used in “the life”
- Abrupt changes in mood or behavior
- Explicit sexual online social media
- Dissociation