

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT)

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT, pronounced “see it”) is a research-based screening tool that helps improve early identification of commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY). The tool was developed by West Coast Children’s Clinic (WCCC) and is currently used in Texas and multiple other states and across various sectors, including juvenile justice, education, advocate agencies, runaway/homeless youth agencies, and limited areas of child protection.



We cannot solve a problem that we cannot see, and unfortunately, commercial sexual exploitation often goes unrecognized. The CSE-IT was developed to increase the visibility of and improve our response to youth who are at risk, have been, or are currently being exploited. [Research](#) for the validation of the tool indicates that most youth are exploited two or more years before being referred for services, do not self-identify as victims, and are unlikely to make an outcry. Screening allows for earlier identification using research-based indicators of exploitation and creates opportunities for earlier intervention.

The CSE-IT is built on the premise of universal screening and is recommended for use with all youth served ages 10 and older. The CSE-IT is not a diagnostic tool and it cannot confirm victimization. Confirmation of victimization requires using educated, professional judgment in consideration of evidence and what is known about the youth and the circumstances. But the CSE-IT helps screeners identify the existence of and relative amount of research-based indicators in a particular youth, assigning a score that can help screeners effectively triage which youth have relatively high scores and need further assessment and services.

The CSE-IT is designed to be a quick (5-7 minute) information integration tool, not a structured interview. Credible information from intake processes, case files, colleagues, child protective services, juvenile probation, or caregivers may be used to complete a CSE-IT and score eight key indicators. The tool is a way to organize all the information gathered to assess for likelihood and risk of sexual exploitation and can be integrated into an agency’s existing systems and processes.

| CSE-IT Key Indicators |
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| 1 - Housing and Caregiving |
| 2 - Prior Abuse and Trauma |
| 3 - Physical Health and Appearance |
| 4 - Environment Exposure |
| 5 - Relationships and Personal Belongings |
| 6 - Signs of Current Trauma |
| 7 - Coercion |
| 8 - Exploitation |

The CSE-IT provides a more objective screening than applying individual knowledge about trafficking indicators and subjective intuition. The CSE-IT also provides a common language for understanding research-based indicators and risk factors, and gives the user a concrete outcome, or number score, allowing multiple systems to respond accordingly.



In Texas, a score of “clear concern” for a minor means that a child is a “presumed victim” for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and service delivery, including referrals to [Care Coordination](#), [CSEY Advocacy](#), and other specialized services available. It is not intended to meet investigative, statutory, legal, or other criteria specific to other applications.

A clear concern score, along with any indicators of trafficking or other forms of abuse or neglect, should be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Statewide Intake (Abuse and Neglect Hotline) at 1-800-252-5400. The Statewide Intake (SWI) division is the “front door to the front line” for all DFPS programs. Statewide Intake assesses all reports of abuse, neglect, (including sex and/or labor trafficking) or exploitation, and routes them to the appropriate local office when allegations meet the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ (DFPS) investigative jurisdictional authority in accordance with Texas Family Code §261.301.

DFPS will investigate allegations only if the suspected perpetrator is a person traditionally responsible for the child’s care, custody or welfare (e.g., member of the child’s family or household, school or daycare staff) and if the perpetrator:

- Knowingly causes, permits, encourages, engages in, or allows a child to be trafficked, or
- Fails to make a reasonable effort to prevent a child from being trafficked.

Texas Family Code §261.301

SWI will ensure that a report of child trafficking not under DFPS investigative jurisdiction is processed as an Information & Referral (I&R) and sent to law enforcement (LE), local law enforcement, the Texas Department of Public Safety Joint Crimes Information Center (JCIC) and the local Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC).

Becoming a CSE-IT User

The Child Sex Trafficking Team, WCCC, and Allies Against Slavery have partnered to integrate CSE-IT within *Lighthouse*, an innovative software platform. This integration enables users to complete screenings easily and securely online and access and analyze their CSE-IT data at any time. Individuals are required to complete training to utilize the CSE-IT, and users should be competent in trauma-informed approaches to youth interaction. Additionally, agencies will need to register and sign an agreement with Allies Against Slavery in order to access the [Lighthouse](#) platform.

Visit <https://alliesagainstslavery.org/lighthouse-support/> to learn more.