

# YOUTH VOICE MATTERS!

## Youth Engagement Tip Sheet

# TOP TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH YOUTH EXPERIENCING COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Adapted from the Los Angeles County Probation Department Child Trafficking Unit's Probation Officer Engagement Guide, developed by the National Center for Youth Law, 2022

### Build relationships



**Genuinely check in and be curious** about who the young person is as a whole person. Take time to build trust. Be there to celebrate the good and be a shoulder to lean on when things are tough. Do not only focus on case plans or upcoming court dates.

**TRY QUESTION 1**

### Always ask youth their perspective first



**Give youth the chance to weigh in** on all major decisions in their lives. This ensures that what happens will be feasible and that the youth will buy into the plan for their care. It also builds confidence, decision-making and communication skills. Follow the youth's lead on whether and how they want to talk about difficult experiences, such as exploitation - asking about details can be re-traumatizing and is usually not necessary for you to support the youth.

### Offer communication options



People like to communicate in different ways and at different paces. **Ask how the youth prefers to express themselves** and be open to changing the way you engage over time as you get to know each other and based on what's going on in their lives.

**TRY QUESTION 3**

### Be consistent



**Show up**, and build these conversations into your regular check-ins. **Remind the youth that you'll talk about these things regularly**, so they know what to expect.

### Be transparent



**Talk openly** about when a decision is made that does not align with the youth's preferences. Be clear that while you may not always agree or be able to do exactly what the youth wants, **you will work together to figure out a path forward.**

## FIVE CONVERSATION STARTERS

- 1 What is **going on in your life that feels most important** to you right now?  
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- 2 I know you have an upcoming court date/team meeting.
  - Is there **anything you want the court or the rest of your team to know** - good or bad?
  - **How do you want to share that?** Ex: Say it out loud yourself, write a letter to the judge, have me say it, etc?
  - **Do you have any questions** about what will happen at court/that meeting?\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 It is important to me that you have a chance to express your opinions, feelings, wants and needs.
  - How do you like to express yourself?
  - **How can I help you feel comfortable** expressing yourself?
  - **What tools can I provide** for you to make it easier for you when we talk? Ex: Paper and pen, music, drawing pad, including a friend or other support person, etc?\_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Do you know **who is on your team and how to reach out to them** if you need something? Who do you reach out to if you want to share something good that happened?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5 As we're getting to know each other, **what is a sign that something could be wrong** and that I should check in with you? Ex. You're usually chatty but you tend to get really quiet when something is bothering you, etc?  
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