

CASA ACT KEY TERMS

Within the anti-child trafficking community, many key terms are used. To better understand this program guide, it will be helpful to understand and know the common phrases, key terms, and acronyms that may be encountered in anti-trafficking work. Please note that some of the acronyms are similar, and their definitions are evolving.

▶▶ **Care Coordination Team (CCT):**

The Office of the Texas Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT), Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, Inc. (CACTX), the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), and local communities are establishing CCTs for Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY) across Texas to promote sustainable autonomy, healing, justice, and stability for youth ages 0–18 who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation. The CCT is made up of professional organizations in the community that provide services for trafficking victims or who investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. In most Texas communities, the Children's Advocacy Center lead the CCT development process and serve as the local Care Coordinator. Care coordination employs awareness, education, creativity, collaboration, and capacity-building to identify and recover youth who have been trafficked and to facilitate tailored, accessible, trauma-informed, and holistic resources through a coordinated network of providers. CCTs build trust, transparency, and solutions with members of the team to mitigate duplication of work and so that local and statewide partners are bridges instead of barriers to services for children, youth, and families.

▶▶ **Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSST):**

A division in the Office of the Texas Governor (OOG), the CSST mission is to build sustainable capacity, enhance expertise, promote policies, create new and leverage existing collaborations to protect children from sexual exploitation, help the public recognize signs of sexual exploitations, help victims/survivors recover, support healing, and bring justice to those who exploit children. CSST divides Texas into five regions and provides a Regional Advisor to each area to support communities in building a response to child sexual exploitation. Additionally, CSST leverages funding through grants from the Office of the Governor to advance efforts across Texas.

▶▶ **Children's Advocacy Center (CAC):**

There are 70+ CACs across the state of Texas that facilitate interagency multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) made up of representatives and service providers to coordinate investigations, prosecutions, as well as services for victims of child abuse and neglect rising to the level of a crime. Professionals at CACs work collaboratively to provide the services that are necessary for children/youth to begin the emotional and physical healing process. The CAC is a child/youth-friendly facility that provides a sensitive, trauma-informed environment for evaluating and treating the victims and their non-offending family members, which minimizes further trauma. Additionally, some CACs facilitate the staffing of CSEY cases through Care Coordination Teams (defined above).

▶ **Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT):**

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 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. The CSE-IT has eight key indicators: housing and caregiving, prior abuse and trauma, physical health and appearance, environment exposure, relationships and personal belongings, signs of current trauma, coercion, and exploitation. Many of the questions relate to the last 90 days. The results of the screening are no concern, possible concern, or clear concern.

In Texas, a CSE-IT score of clear concern for a minor means that a child/youth is a Presumed Victim for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and service delivery. If a CASA staff completes the CSE-IT and a score of clear concern is received, the CASA staff should notify the youth’s caseworker, who will then refer for services. The DFPS hotline should also be called. CASA should not notify the CCT. Please see the CSE-IT protocols for more details.

▶ **Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY):**

CSEY refers to youth who are confirmed or at-risk of sex trafficking, prostitution, sex tourism, pornography, early marriage, performance in sexual venues, online or electronic transmission of youth engaged in sexual activities, among other crimes.[1] For the purposes of this program guide, CSEY also includes children.

▶ **Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth Advocate Agencies (CSEY AA):**

CSEY AA are nonprofits that employ staff (known as advocates) to provide individualized 24/7 crisis response and ongoing trust-based relational support to child, youth, and young adult survivors until the age of 21. CSEY AA may also provide robust case management that is flexible to support and not duplicate, replace, or interfere with the efforts of other service providers. CSEY AA work collaboratively with other stakeholders to support the victim-centered goals pursued by the survivor and their family, law enforcement, prosecutors, child welfare, juvenile justice, healthcare, and other partners. They help survivors gain the strength and empowerment needed to participate in the investigation and prosecution of exploiters.

A child or youth in DFPS conservatorship who is a Presumed, Suspected-Unconfirmed, or Confirmed victim of trafficking can have both a CASA volunteer as well as a CSEY advocate. DFPS and CSEY advocates have approved MOUs guiding their work together.

[1] Clayton, et al., 2013

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS):

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) conducts civil investigations of child abuse or neglect in coordination with law enforcement and, when appropriate, takes necessary actions to protect the child/youth from further abuse/neglect. DFPS investigates allegations of abuse or neglect, including sex trafficking and or labor trafficking, when the alleged perpetrator is traditionally responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare in accordance with Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code. The decisions made concerning protecting a child/youth shall be based upon the professional judgment of DFPS staff in conformance with current DFPS policy, statutory law, and placement factors.

Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (HTCE):

A division of DFPS established in 2017, the HTCE Division/HT Division serves all 254 counties, and all child welfare stages to:

- Strengthen continued compliance with all federal and state human trafficking mandates,
- Develop policy, practices, and service identification to address and/or prevent trafficking, and
- Improve DFPS's capacity to identify, report, recover, and support victims of trafficking in their restoration journey.

To accomplish this work, the HTCE Division collaborates with DFPS staff, partners, and community stakeholders, including but not limited to law enforcement, city/county/state government, advocacy agencies, and faith-based organizations. The HTCE also provides technical assistance, training, and case consultation. The HTCE is the main point of contact for local, regional, and statewide trafficking matters (at a local CASA program level) even when the community is involved in community-based care.

Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs):

Created through statute in accordance with Texas Family Code 264. Local Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) support and coordinate the efforts of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) of professionals consisting of law enforcement investigators, prosecutors, Child Protective Service workers, medical professionals, mental health professionals, and victim advocates, which can include CASA. Other local service providers may also serve on the MDT in many communities. In the neutral setting of the CAC, MDT members can collaborate on strategies that will aid investigators and prosecutors without causing further harm to the child. This innovative multi-disciplinary approach significantly increases the likelihood of a successful outcome in court and long-term healing for the youth. CAC multidisciplinary teams collaborate to coordinate investigations; limit, when possible, the number of times each child is interviewed; provide comfortable, child-friendly settings for interviews; reduce the child victims' travel to investigative agencies; coordinate medical and mental health services; and increase public awareness about the incidence and impact of child abuse.