

Texas CASA's CSE-IT Recommended Protocols for Local Program Use

I. Key Terms

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) - 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.

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, Children's Advocacy Centers 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 CSEY and to facilitate tailored, accessible, trauma-informed, and holistic resources through a coordinated network of providers. Care Coordination Teams 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.

Difference between an MDT and a CCT

MDTs are organized to focus on the criminal proceeding of prosecuting child sex trafficking. CCTs are organized to focus on healing and services for victims of child sex trafficking. At no point should a CASA staff or volunteer be involved in the investigative side of a child's criminal case.

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 AAs 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.

II. What is the CSE-IT?

Created by West Coast Children’s Clinic (WCCC), the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Tool (CSE-IT), pronounced “see it,” is a validated screening tool that helps improve early identification of commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY) through universal screening. The tool consists of 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.

In Texas, Lighthouse, developed and managed by Allies Against Slavery, is the software program that local CASA programs will use to enter information into the system and perform CSE-IT screenings.

CSE-IT is designed to be a quick (5-7 minute) information integration tool, not a structured interview. At CASA programs, the CSE-IT is to be completed by CASA staff. Credible information from intake processes, case files, colleagues, child protective services, juvenile probation, or caregivers may be used to complete the CSE-IT and score indicators. The tool is a way to organize all the information gathered to assess for likelihood and risk of sexual exploitation: **It is not intended to meet investigative, statutory, legal, or other criteria.**

There are three possible outcomes of the CSE-IT:

0-3 score – No concern/Not enough information

4-8 score – Possible concern

9-23 score – Clear concern

A clear concern score triggers contacting the youth’s caseworker for a referral to the MDT, and referring to the DFPS hotline. If the caseworker cannot be reached, the CASA program should notify the next person in the chain of command and/or The Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) hotline (1-800-252-5400). A possible concern triggers the CASA program to implement an intervention process through education and advocacy through the CASA volunteer and current resources. Review *Implementation Stage of the CASA ACT: Program Guide*.

III. Why Screen?

88% of people who have been trafficked say they interacted with a professional who missed the chance to identify and help them.¹

In 2016, The University of Texas conducted a prevalence study that estimated 79,000 children in Texas were survivors of sex trafficking. No other studies have been performed since 2016; therefore, the actual numbers today may be higher.²

According to a DFPS study in 2014, *Human Trafficking of Domestic Minors*, most victims of sex trafficking do not self-identify, or they come into the child welfare system for other reasons and are not identified as victims of trafficking.³

In Fiscal Year 2022, there were 38,294 children in the conservatorship of Texas, of which 1,334 were missing at some point during that period. Most of these children had been located by the end of the year. 69% were between the ages of 15-17. Of the children who were found from being missing, about 10% reported being victimized or sex trafficked while missing.⁴ These numbers are conservative estimates of trafficking victimization given the challenges and inability of victims to self-identify, as well as the lack of recognition of trafficking by key stakeholders who intersect with such victims.

During the first 11 months of 2020, there was an alarming increase in child sexual abuse materials. 1,500,000 unique commercial sex advertisements were posted in the state of Texas, over 20% of which advertised suspected children.⁵

The priority of the CSE-IT tool is to triage quickly and effectively those youth who are at higher risk of trafficking or survivors of sex trafficking and coordinate services for them. The results of CSE-IT screenings will also establish documented research on what is occurring in Texas and help with victim legislative advocacy.

IV. Who is Screened?

The CSE-IT is a validated universal screening tool for children 10 years and older; therefore, children in the custody of DFPS ages 10 and up are eligible to be screened. If screening occurs only on children suspected of being a victim of sex trafficking, the data is inaccurate, and victims are likely to be missed due to a lack of consistency. Screening should also occur on children and youth who run away more than four times in a 12-month period; children who are 12 years of age or older and have run away; children who are on runaway status for more than 30 consecutive days and are recovered; children with two or more incidences of sexual abuse and/or exploitation within a 12-month period; and child victims of sex trafficking.

¹ Lederer

² Busch-Armendariz, et. al.

³ Human Trafficking of Domestic Minors (2014)

⁴ Children and Youth Missing from DFPS Conservatorship & Human Trafficking Initiatives (2023)

⁵ Office of the Attorney General (December 2020)

V. Best Practices

1. CASA supervisors/staff should be trained in the CSE-IT and how to complete screenings while being mindful of confidentiality.
2. CASA programs should have a staff member assigned to oversee the completion of CSE-IT screenings for children ages ten and up, and the program's trafficking efforts (such as training of volunteers, engagement with stakeholders, ACTs approach, etc.) if applicable.
3. CASA programs will become registered licensees of Lighthouse. See the Lighthouse Onboarding Process below.
4. The CSE-IT is completed by CASA staff, not CASA volunteers.
5. The child/youth is never directly involved in or a part of the screening.
6. All screenings should be performed before the 60-day status hearing to facilitate courts to act as soon as possible on services.
7. CASA staff and the child's caseworker should collaborate to complete the CSE-IT screening. CASA staff will attempt to contact and notify the child's caseworker about the plan to complete the CSE-IT screening and will endeavor to involve the caseworker in this process. The inability to reach the caseworker will not delay the screening. If the caseworker is not present or available for the screening, CASA staff will advise the child's caseworker of the completion date and the overall score of the CSE-IT.
8. CASA volunteers may be present for screenings because they may have information about their case that is unknown to the staff.
9. CASA staff may screen all eligible youth on multiple occasions. It is an intentional element of screening. CSE-IT screenings should occur every six months if a youth has not previously scored as a clear concern. Note that if a youth has scored a clear concern, there is no need to screen again afterward.
10. If a child is missing from or exits foster care, a screen should be done once they are back in foster care. A CASA volunteer may request a CSE-IT screening when new information is disclosed. After the initial screen, subsequent screenings are attached to an existing file in Lighthouse, ensuring there are no duplicate accounts for children.
11. CASA staff will educate volunteers through ongoing continuing education about their role in the CSE-IT screening process, specifically about becoming familiar with the CSE-IT key indicators. In court proceedings, CASA volunteers should be able to explain the CSE-IT as a validated tool that is not meant to be investigative.
12. Once a month, or at a different predetermined regular interval by the program, CASA staff will identify which children served will turn ten years old and notify the supervisor that the child is due for a CSE-IT screening. A birthday report from Optima/case management system may be used to identify which children are turning ten years old by a given date.
13. CASA programs should not directly contact a CCT when receiving a clear concern score. Instead, CASA programs are to notify the child's caseworker and the DFPS Hotline (see #14-15). The child's caseworker will complete a referral to Care Coordination (or the Care Coordination Team referral) if in operation.

14. CASA staff using the CSE-IT will be trained in making reports to DFPS Statewide Intake and Law Enforcement. The information that informed the completion of the CSE-IT is crucial for these entities to assess jurisdiction and provide response and support to a survivor.
15. CASA staff will make a referral to the DFPS Statewide Intake Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 when the CSE-IT has resulted in a score of clear concern. **Do not use the online reporting option for sex trafficking reporting. REPORTING TIP:** Articulate all the specific information known that supports the individual CSE-IT indicators and the potential evidence of exploitation, abuse, and/or neglect, along with the total clear concern numerical score.
16. To ensure timely case management, if at any time CASA staff does not receive a timely response from DFPS to requested information, requested communication, or has other concerns, the parties are committed to following the appropriate chain of command, starting with caseworker supervisors, and working up until the matter is resolved. If issues persist, reach out to the [Texas CASA ACT](#) for assistance.
17. CASA staff and volunteers will advocate for Care Coordination Services and CSEY Advocate services for the youth when appropriate.

VI. Lighthouse Onboarding Process

A designated person from the local CASA program with signing authority completes the paperwork to set up the program and its users in Lighthouse.

1. Visit [Lighthouse Quick Start Guide](#).
2. After reviewing the license agreement, the decision to complete the CSE-IT screening via Lighthouse should be made by the local CASA program Executive Director (ED). Only the ED or other person with designated signing authority should sign the Lighthouse agreement.
3. [Step 1 of the Quick Start Guide](#) - Sign the Lighthouse Software License Agreement
4. [Step 2 of the Quick Start Guide](#) - A member of the Lighthouse team will contact the CASA program to request location and user information (organization's address, program information, counties served, and Lighthouse users' first/last names and work email addresses).
5. Sign the [CSE-IT Lighthouse Person Records](#) acknowledging how to complete a screening using non-identifying information and return the signature page to [Texas CASA](#).
6. Email lighthouse@alliesagainstslavery.org any time for support or assistance.
7. Reach out to [Texas CASA](#) for other questions about what implementing this tool could look like at the CASA program.

Complete Texas CASA and Lighthouse CSE-IT Training

1. [Step 3 of the Quick Start Guide](#) is CSE-IT and Lighthouse Training
2. Texas CASA CSE-IT trainings are quarterly and will be publicized in the Inside CASA blog and on the Events page of the Texas CASA website.
3. Texas CASA can work individually with programs to train the entire program if that is requested.

4. To schedule individualized training for a CASA program, contact the Texas CASA Learning and Awareness Specialist.
5. Once the CSE-IT training is completed, Texas CASA will send the trainees' names to Lighthouse. Lighthouse users will need to verify having completed Texas CASA's CSE-IT training.
5. Once CSE-IT training is confirmed by Lighthouse, the site and users are activated on Lighthouse and invited to view the Lighthouse CSE-IT training webinar: Lighthouse 101 Webinar.
6. Step 4 of the Quick Start Guide is Login. Users go to Lighthouse to login using the email address from registration. Select "Forgot Password" to reset the password. You are now ready to use Lighthouse.
7. From Texas CASA CSE-IT training records and information from Lighthouse, Texas CASA will notify DFPS Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (HTCE) division at HumanTrafficking@dfps.texas.gov when a local CASA program has been trained to use the CSE-IT and will provide the:
 - a. Local CASA Point of Contact information, and
 - b. List of CSE-IT Trainees.

This will ensure that DFPS notify their staff locally of the CASA program's efforts and work in the trafficking area, and so that CPS staff can also be trained in the CSE-IT and how to make the necessary subsequent referrals.

VII. **CSE-IT Screening Input**

1. Review Lighthouse's Quick Start Guide Step 5, which details the input process.
2. CASA staff will create a CSE-IT screening due date to occur 60 days after the first supervisor assignment in the case. The screening should be a part of the procedures due around the same time as the Status Hearing. This date will be entered into the contact log in Optima under "Safety Advocacy." CASA staff manually audit files to ensure compliance.
3. In the person record of Lighthouse, CASA staff will enter:
 - a. the first initial of their first name, a random first initial of their last name,
 - b. for birthday, enter January 1 and the year the individual was born to capture the approximate age without using the date of birth,
 - c. the rest of the biographical information for the individual and click "Submit."
4. Lighthouse auto-generates a "Person ID (PID)" number for each record created. This number will be entered into Optima so the program can cross reference the Lighthouse person record and associated screenings. This ensures an easy way to recall the CSE-IT record if needed to update.
5. The PID number is entered into Optima's "field ID" in the youth's profile.
6. If you edit the person record at a later time, remember to use only the first initial of their first name, the random first initial of their last name, and the year of birth (01/01/xxxx) in those fields, so that identifying information is not captured in the record.

7. All CASA programs are expected to input the same background data at a minimum. If a CASA program chooses to utilize other data in the software, it may do so if it does not include identifying or confidential information of the child or their family.

Review Lighthouse for a better understanding of CSE-IT screenings.

References

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