



CASA ACT (Anti-Child Trafficking) is a call to action for the CASA network to do more than 'see something, say something' (a common phrase in the anti-trafficking movement), and to ACT.



LEARNING RESOURCE: EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Q. What were some of the vulnerabilities experienced by Crystal and Sara that led to their trafficking victimization?

A. Crystal was trafficked by her stepfather over several years. She experienced time in foster care and aged out of system. She did not have protective adults in her life, had no one she could trust, and had a history of family trauma – abuse. Crystal had low/no self-esteem.

Sara was trafficked from age 12-14 years old, after being recruited by her best friend. Sara came from a family that did not live together, and was removed from her home because of brother's drug trafficking business. Sara also aged out of the foster care system. Sara experienced sexual abuse, drug trafficking, domestic violence and extreme poverty. Sara did not have protective factors to buffer her, including no self-esteem, structure, or support system.

Other vulnerabilities: Lack of parental involvement, lack of social support, not having strong friendships or relationships, and being bullied in school.

Q. Knowing youth who are trafficked will commonly be unidentified or misidentified, what are some signs that CASA staff and volunteers can look for?

A. Most victims of sex trafficking do not see themselves as victims. They do not self-identify because they blame themselves for choices they were forced to make. Because of the lack of self-identification, many victims are misidentified as a "drug addict", promiscuous, angry, or a person with mental disabilities. The reality is that until we identify the root cause, victims cannot heal from behaviors they have used to survive.



Q. What are some of the signs or red flags from Crystal and Sara's stories that might indicate they were being trafficked?

A:

- Hanging out with older youth and younger adults
- All of a sudden, having a new set of friends
- Receiving gifts often from new friends
- Removed from home
- Recruiter was a female best friend
- Aging out of the system
- Drug trafficking and abuse in the home
- Poverty
- Polyvictimization – sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect
- Very young without supervision
- Not attending school
- Breaking laws and involvement in juvenile justice system
- Angry and aggressive
- Acting out
- Drug use
- Running away
- Dressing provocatively
- Hanging around with a new group of people

Other signs/red flags to be aware of:

- Having large amounts of cash, prepaid cards, hotel keys, multiple keys, tattoos, branding
- Others speaking for the youth
- Refusing to make eye contact
- Disconnection from family and friends
- Close association with overly controlling adults
- Experiencing homelessness/transience

Note that many of these signs do not involve knowing that sex trafficking is happening, but are the tell-tale signs of how victims deal with being abused.



Q. From Crystal and Sara’s experiences, what are effective ways CASA volunteers and staff can advocate with youth who have been trafficked?

A:

- Create a safe space
- Get to know the youth as a person
- Be a mentor – navigating finding therapy, providing care and support, listening ear
- Be a person to feel safe, rest, and feel belonging with
- Provide structure and boundaries
- Be trustworthy - follow through on what you say you are going to do
- Be consistent; longevity of advocacy - do not give up
- Be honest, direct
- Find out about the youth you serve, i.e. if they are interested in art, bring paper and pencils, if it is poetry, bring a journal
- Provide connection
- Be willing to be inconvenienced to build trust and follow through
- Think about what happened to the youth instead of what is wrong with them
- Learn about grounding skills to help with disassociation and PTSD
- Look for techniques to stay present
- Find ways to initiate creativity – [trauma affects creativity and imagination]
- Support projects for youth to master and feel proud of. Be purposeful in looking for activities
- Teach sleep hygiene and safety, especially because a lot of trauma happens in bedrooms, motels, and places to sleep

Q. What were some of the misconceptions/myths that Sara and Crystal mentioned? Do you know of any others?

A:

- Children choose to be trafficked, choose this lifestyle
- Child can consent to sex
- The vision of choice is important to understand – choosing behaviors is all that the youth have; Sometimes it is two bad decisions because of dysregulation, such as throwing a chair or hurting someone
- Behavior means something: Look for opportunities to praise. i.e. “You did throw the chair, but you didn’t hurt someone”
- When a young person is dysregulated and appears ‘out of control,’ people will ask, ‘What is wrong with them?’ rather than, ‘What happened to them?’. The CASA volunteer can work to build a connection when this happens
- “Creepy white van” imagery used in the media
- Mindset that trafficking only happens in other countries
- That trafficking is kidnapping, or violent



Q. Sara said she did not even know she was being trafficked. Listening to Sara and Crystal, what should CASA volunteers understand about child sex trafficking to both identify and serve youth who are trafficked?

A. Child sex trafficking is not something a child or youth is going to tell you is happening to them. The word “trafficking” is our word as advocates and not something a victim will be familiar with. It is our job as advocates to look for the signs and stories, and then build rapport to achieve trust with the youth.

CASA volunteers who work with youth who have been trafficked should expect a youth who is defiant, angry, or scared. It is through sharing yourself, showing up consistently, and always doing what you say you are going to do that youth will begin to trust you.

It can happen in any city, rural or urban. It happens to both females and males. With males, it is often survival sex. Males who are trafficked also work independently.

Although it can happen to anyone, there are increased vulnerabilities i.e. child welfare, juvenile justice, poverty, previous sexual abuse and unhoused.

Q. What are some ways CASA volunteers can empower youth who have been trafficked?

A:

- Provide opportunities for youth to make decisions, even little decisions
- Support youth to speak and share their ideas and stories if they want, help them learn how to use their voice
- Understand the youth
- Create space for young people to be young people and play. The importance of play is vital to restorative creativity and childhood trauma
- Be honest and vulnerable; If you do not know, say that, but follow up
- Bring activities to help connect. Interaction may not be immediate but leave the activity with the youth so they can take the time to process it
- Think about how you show up and show you care
- Learn about trauma informed care
- Create a safe space, not only the environment but emotional safety
- Enter into the youth’s world learning their culture and the things that matter the most to them
- Praise the youth for the good qualities you see, they might not have received affirmations before
- Be encouraging
- Always follow through, which will provide a sense of security/stability
- Avoid passing judgement, which may cause the youth to shut down
- Come along side of the youth, creating a connection, and empowering them to just themselves