

# Inclusion of Non-Traditional Partners, Improved Collaboration, and Evolving Practices to Better Support Victims

By Chris Newlin

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## The Office for Victims of Crime

The Office for Victims of Crime recognized the importance of developing this series to increase the shared understanding of human trafficking, highlight promising practices for responding to human trafficking, and to identify the areas where we could expand our impactful work. We have been challenged by limited research on the incidence and prevalence of human trafficking and impactful intervention strategies, but the series sparked significant discussion over the past decade which has been followed by extensive program development for responding to Human Trafficking. It often requires the long view (ten years in this case) to see we have made good progress in this area, and much more work is needed in the future.

## The Essential Elements of Multidisciplinary Response

Over the past decade, there have been significant advancements in how we respond to Human Trafficking, particularly child sex trafficking (CST). The complexity of these cases necessitates a multidisciplinary approach. While traditional partners involved in child sexual abuse (CSA) cases are important, CST requires the inclusion of non-traditional partners such as the Department of Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Court, Truancy Officers, State law enforcement, FBI, HSI, and other survivors. These partners play a critical role in effectively addressing the unique challenges posed by CST cases, which often span multiple jurisdictions and require coordinated efforts.

## Positive Shifts in Language and Conceptualization

There has been a notable shift in our language and understanding of CST cases over the past ten years. Terms like "juvenile prostitution" are no longer used, and there is a broader recognition of the youth involved as victims rather than perpetrators. This shift has led to treating these young individuals with the dignity and respect they deserve. The challenging behaviors exhibited by these victims are now understood as symptoms of their victimization, rather than grounds for blame.



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## Forensic Interviews: A Focus on Criminal Enterprise

Forensic interviews for CST differ significantly from those for CSA. While CSA interviews primarily focus on the alleged sexual contact between the offender and the victim, CST interviews emphasize understanding the criminal enterprise. The goal is to uncover details about those involved and how the operation functions. Selecting the best environment for these interviews, which may sometimes be outside the traditional Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), is crucial to meet the specific needs of the youth.

## Medical Intervention: Addressing Comprehensive Health Needs

Medical exams in CST cases prioritize the general health status of the victims, who are at significant risk for various medical issues. Unlike CSA medical exams, which focus on finding evidence of abuse and reassuring the child about their physical well-being, CST exams also address the broader health concerns of youth who might not have received regular healthcare.

## Mental Health Challenges for CST Victims

CST victims face unique mental health challenges due to a lack of familial support and experiences of polyvictimization. These factors complicate the provision of essential mental health services. Understanding the complexities of their situations, including the reasons they might leave home and the resulting vulnerability to victimization, is vital for delivering effective support.

## Progress and Future Directions

Significant progress has been made in our response to CST. Specialized trainings for various disciplines, multidisciplinary collaborations, and victim-centered practices have all improved. New multidisciplinary teams across the nation are now dedicated to addressing CST. Moving forward, it is essential to continue evolving our practices to better support CST victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

As we continue this important work, it is clear that a multidisciplinary approach is crucial for making meaningful strides in combating child sex trafficking and providing the support that victims need to heal and thrive.