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# Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding

Developed by: *Wichita State University Center for Combating Human Trafficking* // In Partnership With: *MANY*

**TOPIC: Victim-Centered and Survivor-Led Practices**

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In Partnership With: *MANY* 

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# Victim-Centered and Survivor-Led Practices

This resource is one of several topics addressed in the [Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding](#). The toolkit is designed to be a resource for multidisciplinary professionals, policy makers, volunteers, faith communities, and others involved in anti-trafficking work. While the information provided on each topic is in no way exhaustive, you will find additional resources to facilitate further study.

Each topic is addressed in three sections. First, the “**what?**” – what we know about the topic which includes a review of what we know from both research and the field. “**So what?**” addresses what this means – the reason this information is important to understand and how it will enhance our response to trafficking. “**Now what?**” considers the implications of this information in practice - how the information can be used to enhance our response to human trafficking. This includes specific implications for mentoring relationships, when applicable. *Note: Special thanks to our sister K.P. for sharing your insight and voice on this topic.*

## What?

An effective response to human trafficking includes services that are both victim-centered and survivor-led. The term victim-centered refers to an approach to practice that focuses on the needs of the victim rather than the roles, expectations, or desires of the individual and/or organization(s) intervening. In a victim-centered approach, the victim’s wishes, safety, and holistic well-being take priority in all matters and procedures (*Office of Justice Programs, 2010*). Achieving safety, security, and stability of victims/survivors is the primary objective (*Alvarez & Cañas-Moreira, 2015*). Ultimately, victim-centered practices seek to minimize re-traumatization and further exploitation associated with the justice and social service response process (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Office of Justice Programs, 2010*).

Building upon the term victim-centered, the term survivor-led refers to an approach that equips and empowers survivors to take a leadership role in their own life and in the larger movement against the form of abuse and/or exploitation they have endured and overcome (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Countryman-Roswurm, 2015; Lloyd, 2008*). In this manner, a context is cultivated that promotes the holistic prosperity of survivors (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*).

- **Survivor-centered practices acknowledge the unique needs of every survivor and ensures that services are tailored to meet those needs** (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*).
  - The needs of the victim come before everything else (*Office of Justice Programs, n.d.*).
  - Services are provided in a considerate and nonjudgmental manner (*Office of Justice Programs, n.d.*)
- **Survivor-led services strive to incorporate the voice of survivors, ensuring that development and implementation of programming is driven by their experience and expertise** (*Lloyd, 2008*).
  - Survivor leadership acknowledges that survivors are more than their experience of abuse and exploitation. Rather, they are experts who should ultimately lead and make changes to the anti-trafficking movement (*Lloyd, 2008*).

## So What?

- **In a victim-centered approach the needs of the victim come first.** This means that investigation and potential prosecution of traffickers is not the priority and should never be pursued over the safety and security of the victim (*Department of Homeland Security, n.d.*).
- **Survivor-led programs provide survivors a voice in their services and recovery.**
  - Survivors of trafficking have had very little choice or control during their exploitation. Offering services without choice can be reminiscent of their exploitation experience (*Office of Justice Program, n.d.*).

## So What? (cont.)

— Far too often, service providers believe they are “rescuing” victims of trafficking. However, they fail to see the potential of victims to recover and ultimately thrive. Such attitudes result in services that are prescriptive and directive instead of empowering (*Lloyd, 2008*).

— Survivor leaders are vital to the success of the anti-trafficking movement. Their insight and expertise are needed to establish more effective responses to human trafficking (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*). The development of survivor leaders begins with programs and services which empower and help develop their leadership skills.

**"Elevate the voice of survivors and follow their lead. Survivors are the people who have overcome abuse and exploitation."**

## Now What?

### General Practice Implications

#### *Individuals*

- **Put the needs of survivors first.**
- **Seek to empower survivors and offer leadership opportunities through survivor-led services.**
  - Encourage survivors to lead in whatever way they feel comfortable and passionate (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*).
  - Provide survivors opportunities to have a voice in service provision.
  - Engage survivors as equal partners and be willing to follow their personal and professional expertise as survivor leaders (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*).
- **Honestly examine personal beliefs, stereotypes, and paradigms regarding human trafficking and survivor leadership.** Listen and learn from survivor leaders and be receptive to criticism (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015*).
- **Seek to empower survivors and offer leadership opportunities through survivor-led services.**

#### *Service Providers*

- **Do not pursue investigation and prosecution over the wellbeing of a survivor. Make healing the first priority for all survivors in your care.**
- **Create opportunities for survivor leaders in programs and services.**
  - Survivors are more likely to trust other survivors. Additionally, seeing a survivor in a leadership role in an organization provides hope to other survivors (*K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).

## Now What? (cont.)

### *Community*

- **Elevate the voice of survivors and follow their lead. Survivors are the people who have overcome abuse and exploitation.** They are intimately aware of the needs of survivors, what works, and what doesn't work. They should always be at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015; K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).

## **Mentoring Practice Implications**

### *Individuals*

- **Provide space for the survivor to lead in a mentoring relationship.** Choice is empowering and something that most survivors have been robbed of during their exploitation (*K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).
- **Do not push for details about your mentee's past.** Allow information to come up naturally and as your mentee feels comfortable sharing (*K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).
- **Remember that every person has a past, even you.** Recognize and acknowledge the strength it takes to survive and overcome (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015; K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).

### *Service Providers*

- **Consider using survivors as mentors** (*DuBois & Felner, 2016*). They can speak to the experience of exploitation as no one else can and instill hope in the survivors they work with (*Countryman-Roswurm, 2015; K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016*).

### *Community*

- **Seek survivor leadership in mentoring programs.**

## Resources

- [GEMS White Paper: From Victim to Survivor, From Survivor to Leader](#)
- [Rise, Unite, Support: Doing No Harm in the Anti-Trafficking Movement](#)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center: Using a Survivor Leadership Model to Address Human Trafficking](#)
- [Office of Justice Programs: A Victim-Centered Approach](#)



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