

U.S. Department of Justice
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Investigative Interviews of Adolescent Victims



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These guidelines provide only internal guidance. They are not intended to, do not, and may not be relied upon to create any rights, or standards of conduct or care, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by a person in any civil or criminal matter. These guidelines shall not be construed to create, enlarge, or imply any duty or obligation to any victim, witness, or other person for which the United States or its employees could be held liable in damages.

Introduction

One of the most difficult aspects of any criminal investigation involving child exploitation can be the investigative interview of the child. When the child is an adolescent, the interview can be even more challenging. This interview guide highlights some of the issues of which agents should be aware when working with teenage victims. Although there are many types of adolescent maltreatment in the United States, the FBI focuses mostly on the following:

- **Computer facilitated crimes against adolescents**
- **Trafficked adolescents**
- **Prostituted adolescents**

If you are dealing with an intrafamilial case of abuse involving a teen, please refer to the *Investigative Interviews of Children Guide*. However, if interviewing a teen in a computer facilitated case, or trafficking case, or if you are interviewing a prostituted teen, be aware that the typical interview protocols available to you may not always be appropriate for these adolescents or most conducive to the interviewing situation.

A common mistake interviewers make when interviewing teens about an extrafamilial exploitation situation is that the interviewer often forgets to conduct an investigative interview that tests multiple hypotheses and obtains familial background information. Investigative interviews of exploited victims that only focus on obtaining a fact pattern pertaining to the criminal charge being investigated, i.e., the minor as a prostituted victim, can miss corroborative details that can bolster the victims account and/or behavior.

Preparing for the Interview

Setting the Stage

Prior to conducting investigative interviews of teen victims and witnesses, the Agent can request the Victim Specialist in his/her division to conduct an assessment and develop a resource list, which would include the following issues:

- The location of the closest medical facility that treats teenagers emergently and/or non-emergently.
 - Does the medical facility house a forensic team or multi-disciplinary team (MDT) that can evaluate suspected child abuse?
 - If this medical facility does not house a forensic team or MDT, where is the closest one located?
- Does the community have a child advocacy center or something similar?
- What services does the child advocacy center offer and what fees, if any, are associated with the services (child interview specialists, medical examinations, crisis intervention services or counseling services)?
- What are the procedures for facilitating an interview at the child advocacy center?
- Is the child advocacy center set up to handle teen victims?
- Does the child advocacy center accept emergency interviews?
- What is the child advocacy center's policy on after-hours or weekend interviews?
- What is the child advocacy center's policy on documenting interviews?
- What are the local statutory requirements for the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect?
- According to local statutes, who can take custody of and/or remove a child? Interview facilities and procedures vary, depending upon the local jurisdiction's resources, statutes, and procedures. FBI Agents and Victim Specialists should be familiar with local resources, organizations, and agencies involved in the investigation, protection, and prosecution of violent crime cases with child victims and/or witnesses. Participation on local child protection or multi-disciplinary child abuse teams is critical.

Pre-Interview Preparation

The Agent may want to obtain background information before interviewing the teenager. Pre-interview preparation will vary depending upon the type of allegation, resources available to the Agent, and the amount of time available before the interview takes place. Prior to the interview, the Agent should obtain background information as follows:

- Teenager's name, nickname, date of birth, and sex
- Relevant developmental or cultural considerations that could impact the interview (from caretakers)
- An understanding of the nature of developmental delays, hearing or speech impairments, medical conditions or other languages spoken in the home
- Family composition
- Names of family members, friends, and significant caretakers who are involved with the teenager
- Custody and/or placement arrangements
- An interview of the individual in whom the teenager confided regarding the disclosure (keep in mind this may be another teenager)
- Family behaviors or events related to the allegation issue (i.e., sleeping and discipline rituals)
- Behavioral changes exhibited by the teenager as a result of the disclosure
- Prior disclosures by the teenager of suffering any type of abuse or witnessing violence
- Domestic violence in the home
- Possible misunderstanding of the allegation
- Possible motivations for false allegations by the teenager, as well as by others.

Interview Environment

- Child advocacy centers can be an appropriate resource for interviewing younger children; however, they may not be the ideal setting for an adolescent, especially those who are victims in extra-familial cases, such as those involving traveler victims and prostituted teens. Bringing the teen to a center designed for young children may be insulting to the teen and result in the teen's unwillingness to provide the interviewer with information. Some advocacy centers are aware of adolescent needs and will have a more age-appropriate interview room for this age group.
- Depending on your case, be aware of what your particular advocacy center will and will not do. A center that is unwilling to allow presentation of evidence to teens may hinder rather than help your case.
- If you decide not to use an advocacy center, other locations also may be appropriate for a teen-victim interview such as a counselor's office at school or an interview room in your local police department.
- Avoid interviewing a teen in his/her home. Because the home is not a neutral setting, it is not conducive to obtaining the best statements from a teen.

Selecting the Interviewer

General Guidelines

There should be no more than one or two interviewers in the interview room with the adolescent. If there are two interviewers, one should ask the questions while the other interviewer provides written documentation of the interview. Adolescents should not be interviewed in front of their parents and/or friends. A teenager may minimize, deny, or exaggerate victimization if his/her parent and/or friend is present and/or observing the interview.

Non-Traditional Interviews

- Choose an interviewer who, in addition to being well-trained in conducting victim interviews, is also adept at conducting the non-traditional interview required for a prostituted, trafficked or computer-exploited teen victim.
Examples:
 - Often the vice officers in the local police department are the best suited for interviews of prostituted teens because they are familiar with the “street lingo” that they commonly use. Not understanding the teen's language may cause the teen to “shut down” or provide inaccurate information.

- For computer-facilitated crimes, it is important to know which computer-related investigative questions to ask.

Additionally, when interviewing teens during these non-traditional interviews, it is still important to conduct a legally defensible, thorough interview.

Extra-Familial Case Interviews

- The interviewer should gather background information on the teen's family, home, past abuse history, etc., which often can provide additional insight into the case at hand.
- The interviewer should have familiarity with various types of adolescent victimization.

Documenting the Interview

- The documentation of the forensic interview of a teen is imperative. Depending on who conducts the interview, it may be recorded in various ways:
 - Videotape**
 - Audiotape**
 - Written report**
- The adolescent should be told at the outset of the interview how the interview will be documented.
- There are pros and cons to all documenting devices, but it is important to know what your local jurisdiction accepts. Some states do not allow videotaping while others require it. It is not uncommon for an exploitation case to be prosecuted both at the federal and at the state levels. Thus, it is important that the interviewer covers all aspects of the exploitation situation that relates to the involved federal and state criminal statutes and documents the interview in a way that will be admissible in both the federal and state courts.
- If the interview is being documented in a written report, it is important to document it verbatim if possible.
- One advantage of an audio or video recording of the interview is that it can be used during judicial proceedings to impeach either a recanting teen or to provide evidentiary statements when a teen cannot be located—common occurrences in prostituted teen cases. FBI Agents, who assume the role of interviewer, must have SAC approval to videotape or audiotape the victim's interview.

Conducting a Phased Interview with an Adolescent

Rapport Building

If you are conducting a “cold” interview with a teen, let him/her know BEFORE you start to build rapport, why you want to talk to him/her.

“My name is XXX and I work for the FBI. My job is to talk with teenagers about all different things. I wanted to talk to you today about someone you talked to online, but first I want to find out more about you.”

If the interview is not a cold interview and the adolescent knows why you are there to talk with him/her, you can start to build rapport after you introduce yourself.

“My name is XXX and I work for the FBI. My job is to talk with teenagers about all different things, but first I want to find out more about you.”

- The interviewer can now start building rapport with the adolescent by asking about sports, music, movies, friends, etc.
 - Use as many open-ended questions as possible during this phase, as it will allow the teen to answer in a narrative format.
 - This phase of the interview will allow the interviewer to access the cooperation of the teen, as well as his/her expressive and receptive language ability.

Competency and Suggestibility

Unlike younger children, adolescents are assumed by the courts to know the difference between the truth and a lie. Therefore, with an adolescent, the interviewer does not need to assess this ability and can just say to the teen, “It is important that we only talk about truthful things in here today.”

Although examples do not need to be provided to adolescents, it is still important to tell him/her the following rules in order to reduce suggestibility. Teenagers are no more suggestible than adults, but anyone can be influenced by leading questions.

Rules:

- If I ask you a question and you do not know the answer it is okay to say ‘I don’t know’. You do not need to guess.”
- “If I make a mistake, it is okay to correct me.”
- “If I ask the same question more than one time, it is not because you

gave me the wrong answer, it is just that I forgot I already asked that question or I forgot how you answered me.”

These seem like simple rules, but they will lessen suggestibility concerns and help the interviewer to defend the interview in court. Some interview protocols call for purposefully lying to a teen so that he/she corrects the interviewer, therefore showing that he/she is not suggestible. However, purposefully lying to the teen adds to his/her sense of betrayal and may harm the interview if the teen does not correct the interviewer.

Eliciting Information

- To receive the most accurate statements from the teen, it is imperative that the interviewer use as many open-ended questions as possible, allowing the teen to provide narrative statements in response. The interviewer still will need to follow up with the focused questions of who, what, how, where, and when. To avoid the risk of “shutting the teen down,” the interviewer should not interrupt a teen’s narrative.
- Leading questions should be avoided.
- An adolescent should be able to provide narrative statements in sequence and also should be able to provide a substantial amount of information about the event. However, environmental and/or traumatic events may limit these skills even in the adolescent.
- It is during this phase that the interviewer may ask more specific questions related to the type of case involved. For example, questions regarding computer use or pornography, although asked to some extent in every interview, may be asked in more detail, depending on the relevance to the case.
- Ask the teen about any additional perpetrators or acts (alternative hypotheses).

Use of Interview Tools

- While eliciting information, the interviewer may choose to use an interview tool with an adolescent.
- Although both anatomical dolls and anatomical diagrams are appropriate to use in interviews with younger children, the use of an anatomical doll with a teen may be considered insulting. However, anatomical diagrams can be used with this age group to clarify the teen’s disclosure.
- If a teen is using slang language for body parts or is reluctant to verbalize a certain body part used in the victimization, he/she can point to an anatomical diagram of the body area. This allows the teen to use the diagram as a demonstration aid instead of his/her own body or the interviewer’s body.

Sarah: "He touched me on my hoochie coochie."

Interviewer: "Sarah, I'm not sure what you mean when you say hoochie-coochie. Can you point to the place on this diagram where your hoochie-coochie is?"

- If a teenager is reluctant to talk to the interviewer, the interviewer may ask the adolescent if she/he would rather write down what happened. This is a very useful and widely used technique.
- If an anatomical diagram and/or a written statement from the adolescent is used, it should be marked as case evidence.
- Anatomical diagrams are available on the Office for Victim Assistance (OVA) intranet site.

Closure

Closure is the time in the interview process to allow the teen to ask the interviewer any questions and for the interviewer to ask if the teen has additional information to provide that has not yet been discussed.

- If the teen was anxious or upset during the interview, allow him/her time to regain composure.
- Always thank the teen for participating in the interview, even if no information was provided.
- Leave the door open for a second interview, if new evidence is uncovered or the teen discloses new information.

Following the Interview

Discussing Interview Details with Parents

- There is no federal law that states that an interviewer must share all details of a forensic interview with a parent or guardian. In fact, the interviewer must decide what information, if any, is to be relayed to the parent/guardian and in what setting. This is especially true with interviews of teens. Remember that teen victims of federal offenses are sometimes compliant in their victimization. Even teens that are non-compliant are often embarrassed or have difficulty relating details of sexual activity to an interviewer. If a teen thinks or knows that the interviewer is going to discuss details of the exploitation with his/her parent, he/she may refuse to discuss the exploitation or provide inaccurate information.
- It is good practice during the interview to tell the teen "up front" what will be said to his/her parent/guardian. Some teens will have no problem

having the interviewer discuss with their parents/guardians what was disclosed in their interview. Other teens will want to tell their parents/guardians themselves. Some teens will want the interviewer or a therapist to be present when information is revealed.

- Under some circumstances, the interviewer may choose not to reveal any information to the parent/guardian at interview time because the teen has expressed concern for his/her well-being if the parent/guardian finds out about the disclosure. Remember that there is no federal child protection system. Often the teens involved in federal cases are not eligible for child protection intervention because the abuse is extra-familial, not intra-familial. Do not leave a teen in a dangerous situation. For example, consider a teen who went online to locate adults of the same gender to experiment with sexually. If the teen tells you in the interview that he/she will be physically injured or kicked out of the house if his/her parents find out, information from the interview should only be revealed to the parents in a structured setting, such as a therapist's office where the parents' reactions to the information can be assessed and reconciliation can occur.
- **NEVER** promise the teen that his/her parent/guardian will not find out what happened. The parent/guardian will most likely learn the details as the case moves through the system. The division's Victim Specialist will usually be the appropriate person to speak with the parent/guardian.

Medical Exam

- If the teenager or the investigation discloses that the teen is a victim of sexual abuse and/or exploitation, a medical exam should be done. If the last incident of sexual activity with the alleged perpetrator was within 72 hours, the examination must be performed expeditiously. If the last known contact with the alleged perpetrator took place more than 72 hours ago, the teen should still be examined, but it does not need to be a rushed appointment. All teens should be examined by a doctor or nurse who specializes in child abuse/assault and the examination should include use of a colposcope, if possible.
- **HIV, STD, and pregnancy tests should be performed; however,** if a teen refuses to have a medical examination or the tests, he/she cannot be forced to do so. The examination and testing can be paid for from case funds or, in some cases, can be performed for no cost at a free clinic.
- Asking the teen about past sexual activity with age-appropriate partners will be a necessary line of questioning during the medical exam; however, this line of questioning is not appropriate during the forensic interview.

Compliant Victims

A **victim's complicity**, or cooperation in the victimization, is an enormous issue that is given very little attention in the field of child maltreatment.

- **“Compliant victims” refers to children or adolescents who cooperate in or “consent” to victimization.** Since children cannot legally consent to having sex with adults, this compliance should not in any way alter the fact that they are victims of serious crimes.
- Although children of all ages may be compliant in their victimization, society takes issue with compliant adolescents. Teenagers often are compliant in their sexual victimization because they are at a stage of development where they are curious about sexual activity, vulnerable to flattery, and attracted to risk-taking—making them easy targets for perpetrators. The victim in your case may be a compliant teen, a non-compliant teen, or a teen that was compliant in some acts and not in others.
- A teen may **reluctantly** go along with sexual contact to receive benefits from the perpetrator, such as video games, money, attention, etc., while another teen may be actively participating in what he/she considers a “relationship.”
- **The interviewer’s approach to the compliant teen may influence the accuracy of the teen’s statements.** For example, if an interviewer approaches a compliant teen who does not view himself as a victim by stating, “I’m so sorry this bad person did this to you,” the interviewer may obtain statements from the teen that are exaggerated, minimized, or a denial of any involvement. The teen will respond with statements that he thinks the interviewer wants to hear and may attempt to minimize his complicity.
- One approach to dealing with compliant teens is for the interviewer to be receptive to the teen’s statements, keeping an open-mind and letting the teen discuss what happened without any interruptions or comments. It is often important to reiterate to a compliant teen that you are not judging him/her, but it is your job as an interviewer to find out what happened.
- **Challenging the perceptions of a compliant teen in an interview can be unproductive.** If a compliant teen tells the interviewer that she is in love with her “boyfriend” and is not a victim, it is better to ask the teen to tell you about being in love with her boyfriend instead of challenging her perception of the relationship. If the interviewer tries to convince the teen that she IS a victim under the law, the teen may become defensive and provide little or no information.

Disclosure, Evidence, and Denial

Conducting a “cold” interview, where the teen has not made a disclosure statement, can be a difficult situation for the interviewer. Evidence can be used to corroborate a teenage victim’s abuse status; however, it still may not aid in a disclosure if the teen chooses to remain in a state of denial. When teens either are not ready or are unwilling to make a disclosure, investigators must use extra care in building rapport and presenting evidence in a manner that will not cause additional harm or stress.

- Most children and teens are funneled into the criminal justice system because they have made the statement that they were abused. This statement can be accidentally or purposefully made by the child or teen, although teens usually disclose in a purposeful way.
- **Many child maltreatment victims never disclose about the abuse while they are still children.** Those who do disclose often will recant the initial allegation. Recantations occur for many reasons, including pressure from the perpetrator, pressure from the family, fear of the unknown, or not wanting to get the perpetrator in trouble.
- Most interviewing protocols are designed for younger children who have made a disclosure statement.
- In federal cases, Agents often are dealing with adolescents who have never made a disclosure; however, investigative tactics determine that the particular teen may be a victim of abuse and/or exploitation. Evidence may be found that indicates the teenager’s victim status. When a teenager who is not in an active disclosure phase is interviewed, the rate of denial of abuse is much higher.
- **An interviewer cannot force a victim to disclose.** A teen that has been exploited and/or abused may deny the exploitation and/or abuse, even when presented with evidence, because he/she is not ready to disclose, may be embarrassed, or may want to protect the perpetrator.
- **Evidence**, such as pictures or chat logs, can and should be verbally or physically revealed to a teen during a cold interview, as it may act as a stimulus for disclosure. If the evidence obtained through the investigation is pornography, the interviewer must determine if the full pornographic picture should be shown to the teen or possibly a cropped version.
- If a teenager, or child of any age, seems in the pornographic pictures to be unaware that the photos were taken, consult with a mental health professional **BEFORE** the interview, as certain measures will need to be taken before that information is relayed to the child or teenager.

- Be aware that even after evidence of victimization is presented, a teenager may not be willing to disclose. It is imperative that the interviewer, in frustration, does not turn to interrogation tactics to elicit a disclosure. This does not mean that the interviewer cannot gently confront or challenge the adolescent. When done appropriately, confrontation and challenge are acceptable tactics in an investigative victim interview.
- To enable a teen to feel comfortable in the interview setting and avoid increased anxiety, an interviewer should let the teen know why he/she is being approached and, when necessary, that he/she is not in trouble. While causing increased anxiety may be a desired reaction in an interrogation setting, it is not appropriate for an investigative interview of a minor victim. Therefore, before beginning to build rapport with the teen, tell him/her why you wish to talk. An example would be saying to the teen, "I want to talk to you about people you have talked to online, but first I want to find out a little more about you".

Appendix A: Adolescent Development

One of the most challenging populations for agents to work with is adolescents. Adolescence is a definitive stage of development that must be taken into consideration during the interview process.

- **Adolescents are risk takers.** It is not uncommon for an adolescent to get involved in risk-taking behavior, such as experimenting with drugs, alcohol, or sexual activity.
- Adolescents often break rules that have been set for them by adults, such as ignoring curfews and skipping school.
- **Adolescents have a very different view of social relationships than adults.** Associating with people deemed inappropriate by their parents and/or other adults is perfectly acceptable to adolescents. A thirteen-year-old girl “dating” an adult man is not an acceptable situation to most adults in our society. However, the adolescent may view this “relationship” in a different way—she may see this adult man as providing her with items that a boy her own age cannot, such as gifts and rides in his car.
- **Adolescents tend to blame themselves if something negative occurs when they are taking risks or breaking rules.** The interviewer needs to take into consideration that this internal trauma or self-blame may outwardly manifest itself as rude or obstinate behavior.
- **Adolescents in our society validly fear not being believed when they disclose abuse situations.** Statistically, adolescents experience more maltreatment in our society than younger children, but the abuse incidents are often not reported to the authorities. Many people blame a teenager for not stopping the abuse; therefore, the teenager does not disclose for fear of being stigmatized by society. Because adolescents validly fear not being believed and also may have been involved in a risk-taking and/or rule-breaking event when the abuse occurred, it is imperative that those working with the adolescent do not convey an accusatory attitude toward the teen. Reprimanding a teen for going to a party where she was not supposed to be and subsequently was sexually assaulted, can make the teen defensive and hamper the interviewer’s ability to build rapport and obtain information. Remember that adolescents understand the consequences of disclosing information to the interviewer and how it can affect them adversely.
- **Adolescents often have the physical attributes and narrative skills of adults.** However, this may work against them in an interview because interviewers often treat the adolescent as if he/she were an adult and forget to take his/her developmental stage into consideration.

It is important to remember the following rules:

First, do not use authoritative parenting skills. The teen you are interviewing is not your child, and it is not your role to be giving him/her parenting advice.

Second, be honest and “up front” with the teen victim. Not being honest with the teen can add to the adolescent’s sense of betrayal.

Third, ask for clarification. Often the interviewer does not believe he/she needs to clarify the teenager’s statement as he/she would with a younger child. The interviewer may think he/she understands what the teen is saying; however, without clarifying questions, there can be miscommunication. For example, when a teen says, “he had sex with me,” the interviewer must clarify what the teen means when using the word “sex.”

Appendix B: Juvenile Subjects vs. Juvenile Victims

MIOG includes guidelines in accordance with laws pertaining to juvenile subjects, not victims. Because of their age, however, teenage victims often are subjected to rules and regulations intended for juvenile suspects, which should not happen. Procedures for interviewing juvenile victims are much different than for interviewing suspects. MIOG does not discuss the interviewing of a juvenile victim, but rather focuses on obtaining a confession from a juvenile subject as follows:

MIOG states that whether or not a juvenile subject can be interrogated for a confession or admission of his/her guilt between the time of arrest and his/her initial appearance before the magistrate depends on the law of the circuit in which the arrest occurs. If interrogation is to take place it cannot begin until arrangements for the juvenile’s initial appearance before the magistrate AND reasonable efforts to locate and notify the parents, guardian, or custodian have been made.

The following issues should be considered when dealing with juvenile victims rather than juvenile subjects:

- Unlike an interrogation of a juvenile subject, the interviewer of a victim does **not** need parental permission to interview the juvenile.
- Sometimes a teenager has been involved in illegal activity, such as theft, during the sexual exploitation for which he/she is being interviewed. If the teen victim is also being looked at as a subject and the illegal criminal behavior is going to be used against the teen, it is good practice to separate the interviews into a victim interview and a subject interview. Information

about illegal activity may not be known before the beginning of a forensic interview; however, if within the course of the forensic interview the adolescent mentions illegal activity for which he/she could face legal consequences, the interviewer can say:

“What you just mentioned about stealing is important, so I am going to have one of the detectives talk to you about that when we are done talking.”

- There are times when a teen’s involvement in an illegal activity may be considered by the multidisciplinary team to be part of the exploitation. Examples may be drugs or alcohol given to the teen in return for the sexual activity or the teen taking self-pornographic pictures and sending them online to the perpetrator. **Remember, if you are conducting a victim interview, you cannot utilize interrogation techniques.**

Appendix C: Custody Issues

- FBI Agents **cannot** take protective custody of a child or teenager, unless there are exigent circumstances where the teen’s welfare and safety are in question.
- A victim who is a minor must be turned over for custody to the appropriate authorities, usually Child Protection Services (CPS) or the local law enforcement/juvenile justice system. Involve your Victim Specialists in these situations as they have the resources to find the correct custodial agency. **MIOG** clearly states the following:
 - Local authorities, rather than the FBI, have the responsibility for taking custody of a victim child located in their jurisdiction.
 - Local court systems have the authority to ensure that the child is returned to the parent having legal custody.
- In a traveler or prostituted teen case, CPS will usually not be involved unless they already have custody of the teen.
- If CPS has custody, they can use their interstate compact to get the teen back to his/her home.
- If CPS does not have custody, however, the Juvenile Justice System has a system of federally funded shelters that will house teens for up to two weeks. These shelters are not locked.
- Determination to place a teen in a locked facility:
 - Local Mental Health or Child Protection will determine if a teen needs to be in a locked facility because he/she is a danger to himself/herself or others.

- Local authorities will determine if a teen needs to be in a locked facility because he/she has committed a crime or has outstanding warrants for which detainment is needed.
- **Victims cannot enter locked facilities solely for the benefit of the Agent's investigation.**
- FBI Agents may not travel on planes with teens, register them into hotels overnight, or take any other type of long-term custody. Agents and Victim Specialists may transport victims for such purposes as attending forensic interviews or for medical examinations or tests with permission from their parent/guardian.

Appendix D: Resources for Runaway Adolescents

- When the FBI is notified that an adolescent is missing or has left home without permission, the Victim Specialist (VS) should immediately contact the adolescent's parent/guardian to assist them in contacting the local authorities (within the first five days of the minor leaving home) to report the adolescent as a runaway/missing minor. This step is critical to ensure that an NCIC report/case number is generated. In most jurisdictions, this step also may be necessary for the family to receive services when the adolescent victim is located.
- If the victim is a chronic runaway and the parents are having difficulty supervising the victim, the VS can refer the parents/guardian to their local authorities to assist the parents/guardian in filing a "runaway petition." A runaway petition allows for the local authorities to take custody of the victim and have them placed into shelter care once the victim is located.
- If the victim is a ward of the state, i.e., in foster care, the VS should initially work with the caseworker, not foster parents, to determine appropriate reunification services for the victim.
- If, through email chats or other data, the agent is able to determine a destination to which the victim is traveling, the VS can contact the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) to locate shelters or agencies in the community that can provide assistance and temporary shelter for the victim. The VS should be in contact with family members or guardians and attempt to develop a reunification plan before the victim arrives.
- After an adolescent victim has been located, the investigative interviews of the victim and the subject by the case agent have been completed, and the victim has undergone any necessary medical treatment, reunification

assistance should be initiated. An assessment of the victim involves an interview to determine the victim's living situation and circumstances surrounding the runaway behavior, as well as the development of a reunification plan for the victim and his or her family. To initiate family reunification (NRS does not provide assessments), the VS should contact the NRS Crisis Hotline at (800) 621-4000 or 1-800-RUNAWAY. Victim Specialists and Special Agents should note that in order to proceed, the NRS will need to speak directly and personally to the youth. During this telephone contact, the victim needs to talk to the NRS individually and should be afforded a private space to conduct this conversation. If the victim expresses a desire to return home, NRS will also conduct a conference call with a verifiable parent/guardian to initiate a reunification plan.

- If the victim states they do not want to return home because they are being abused by a parent/guardian, the VS should contact Child Protective Services in the state in which the child resides.
- If a victim refuses to return home but denies abuse and/or neglect, the VS should contact the NRS and local authorities to determine the best services for the victim.
- The NRS is the federally designated national communication system designed to assist youths who have run away from home and who are involved in high-risk situations. The NRS is available 24 hours a day throughout the United States and its territories, including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. The NRS provides confidential crisis intervention services, serves as the referral agency for more than 17,000 youth-serving agencies, and has access to information on 200,000 other organizations through hard-copy resource directories. The NRS and other youth crisis agencies and services are funded through the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act, Public Law No. 108-96 (2003), which amended the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, 42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.
- After the NRS has talked with the victim, they will refer the VS to the appropriate agencies in the community or nearby that can provide services to the adolescent victim and his/her parents or guardian. The NRS will make referrals, but cannot guarantee that the suggested agencies will be able to provide needed services; this is determined by the service providers. Where appropriate, the agencies can provide food, clothing, medical care, and counseling services for the victim and his/her family. The FBI Agent and/or VS can transport the victim to the referred social service agency.

- The referral agency will work with the adolescent victim and his/her parents/guardian to facilitate reunification services.
- One type of reunification service that may be offered to the victim and his or her family is the HOME FREE Program. The NRS is the sole administrator of the HOME FREE Program, a collaborative effort with Greyhound Lines, Inc. The International Association of Chiefs of Police helped develop the idea for the program. Note that reunification with the victim applies to parents and/or guardians only. HOME FREE provides free bus tickets for victims and/or one family member to travel to meet the victim. Adolescents over the age of 15 can travel unaccompanied.
- Victims under the age of 15 may not travel alone, except under specific guidelines. Victims under the age of 15 **must meet all five of the following requirements** to use the HOME FREE Program:
 - The trip will not have bus transfers.
 - The trip will not last longer than 5 hours.
 - The trip must be completed in the daylight hours.
 - The origin and destination stations must be full service agencies or Greyhound operated facilities.
 - The destination station must be open at the time the passenger is scheduled to arrive.
- In the case of youth under the age of 15, through HOME FREE, parents and/or guardians are eligible for a ticket to travel to pick up the youth and to return home. **To receive any of the HOME FREE Program services the victim must be entered into NCIC.** However, in cases with extenuating circumstances, NRS will work with Greyhound to issue a ticket for a victim to return home even if an NCIC report has not been made.
- The NRS cannot ensure, with usage of the HOME FREE Program, that a youth over the age of 15 will return home. However, the NRS strongly suggest that the youth contact NRS along the way via the toll free number to keep the NRS informed of the victim's whereabouts. Referral agencies will also work with a victim and his or her family to determine the most appropriate reunification plan and services. When the referring agency encounters problems reunifying the victim and his or her parent/guardian, either because extenuating circumstances make use of the HOME FREE PROGRAM inappropriate or the family does not have the monetary means to reunify with the victim, the referring agency may contact the FBI VS to request assistance.

- If the victim has any outstanding warrants, he/she needs to be remanded to the local juvenile justice authorities. These victims will receive services in detention facilities until their local case is resolved.
- NRS does not know, nor ask, if a youth has any outstanding warrants. NRS cannot share any information, i.e., case records, with the FBI or other sources.
- NRS contact information:
 The National Runaway Switchboard
 3080 North Lincoln Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60657
 Hotline: (800) 621-4000
 Hotline TDD: (800) 621-0394
 Telephone: (773) 880-9860
 Fax: (773) 929-5150
 E-mail: info@nrscrisisline.org
 Web: <http://www.nrscrisisline.org>
- The OVA will work with the VS on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is appropriate to use Emergency Victim Assistance Funds to cover reunification expenses.

Appendix E: Information on Specific Populations of Teen Victims

When working with all adolescent victim populations, it is important to involve the Victim Specialist from the beginning of the case. The safety and well-being of the adolescent are paramount and must be incorporated into any and all investigative techniques.

Prostituted Teens

- May require multiple meetings with you before rapport is built.
- Since this population is moved often by the pimp, you may only have one chance for an interview.
- May have loyalty to his/her pimp.
- Resources are difficult to find for this population.
- Finding out about past life events (past sexual/physical abuse, neglect, home situation, and whether they are a runaway or throwaway teen) is imperative.

- Knowing “street lingo” is important.
- Know that contact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system can put the teen victim in danger with his/her pimp.

Trafficked Teens

- Significant language and cultural barriers.
- May have loyalty to the trafficker(s).
- For internationally trafficked child victims, if appropriate, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) can take custody of the child instead of CPS. ORR works with NGOs who specialize in dealing with internationally trafficked child victims. Consult your Victim Specialist for information regarding specific resources.

Developmentally Delayed Teens

- Your interview should be based on the cognitive ability of the teen rather than his or her age.
- If possible, it is important to know about the teen’s developmental disability before the interview.
- Review the Individualized Education Program (IEP) from the teen’s school. The IEP documents the goals (educational and life skills) of the teen for the school year.
- Consult with teachers, therapists, etc. who will offer you insight into the teen’s disability and the appropriate way to communicate with him/her in order to obtain the most accurate information.

Interviewing Adolescent Victims

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