

ad litem or court-appointed special advocate to assist in the court process. Your child may also receive assistance from a victim-witness advocate through the state prosecutor's office.

The services of an attorney may be helpful at any time during the investigation of a case of a sexually exploited child, but they are particularly important if you are facing one of the situations noted below. You

- have questions, during a criminal trial of the alleged exploiter, that the prosecutor or other professionals involved in the case cannot answer
- want to file a civil lawsuit against someone who sexually exploited your child
- want to file a civil lawsuit against an agency or institution that failed to protect your child from sexual victimization

What Should We Look for in an Attorney?

Cases of child sexual exploitation can have complex legal issues. Parents should consider the items noted below when hiring an attorney.

- legal advice should come only from an attorney.
- your attorney should be licensed to practice in the state where the case arose and/or where any trial is likely to occur.
- if your child has been sexually exploited, your attorney should be familiar with child-abuse and neglect investigations, the laws about custody and visitation, and procedures that may be used in trials when a child is a witness. If a parent has been involved in the sexual exploitation, there may be issues surrounding child custody and visitation.

- your attorney should be experienced in conducting trials, especially trials in criminal and family court.

Where Do We Find a Qualified Attorney?

The agencies and organizations noted below may be able to help you find an attorney.

- nonprofit service providers serving families of missing and exploited children
- lawyer-referral services of the local or state bar association
- legal aid office, if you think that you are financially eligible for free or reduced-fee representation

What Should We Expect From the Professionals Who Are Helping My Child?

When working with law-enforcement officials, social-service personnel, physicians, therapists, and/or attorneys

- ask about his or her experience and training in dealing with a particular problem. If you are not satisfied, work within the system to find another professional who does have the needed skills. Even if you pay a reduced fee or receive services at no cost, you have the right to have a physician, therapist, and attorney with the proper training and experience.
- discuss your child's situation openly, completely, and honestly.
- trust your feelings and your child's feelings. You and your child should feel comfortable with the professionals helping you, even if the

examination or assessment process creates feelings of discomfort.

- if you are not comfortable with any professional who is assisting your child or family, discuss this discomfort openly. If this discussion does not produce positive change, seek another professional to help you with that aspect of the case.
- try to cooperate as fully as possible and help the child cooperate with each step of this process.
- ask questions if you do not understand what is happening.

• discuss the fees for examination and consultations. Find out what is covered by insurance benefits that you may have. Ask for a written statement that explains the basis for charges. Your law-enforcement agency or district attorney's office can tell you if your state has a crime-victim-assistance program that will pay for necessary counseling, medical treatment, and/or legal fees.

- if your child's case does not have enough evidence to be "substantiated," you and your child may still need counseling and support. Such assistance may also involve prevention education to help understand the dynamics of child sexual exploitation and actions that can be taken to reduce its occurrence.
- know that even if no physical evidence was found, the therapist or physician may still be able to testify in court about the evaluation and discuss the fact that your child was sexually exploited. It is important for the therapist to continue seeing your child, even if the court does not find that sexual exploitation occurred.
- know that all criminal-justice personnel, medical personnel, therapists, and attorneys have a code of ethics that they must fol-

low. If you believe that your criminal-justice professional, physician, therapist, or attorney is acting inappropriately or is not keeping you informed about the assessment and treatment, discuss your concerns openly. If this discussion does not produce positive change, talk to his or her supervisor or contact a professional or medical association for more help. Do not stay in a situation that makes you or your child uncomfortable.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information on missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs and descriptions of missing children worldwide; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with non-profit service providers and state clearinghouses on missing-person cases; and provides information on effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 USC § 5771 and 42 USC § 5780.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST*** (1-800-843-5678), is available in Canada, Mexico, and the United States for those who have information on missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing internationally is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipLine® is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business

number is 703-274-3900 within the United States. The business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

For information on the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free-of-charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Publications Department at


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**Parental guidelines
in case your child might
someday be the victim
of sexual exploitation**



We're
here
because
they're
out
there

OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention
NATIONAL CENTER FOR
**MISSING &
EXPLOITED**
CHILDREN
1.800.843.5678
www.cybertipline.com

Parental guidelines in case your child might someday be the victim of sexual exploitation

In case of child sexual exploitation, there are key steps that families can take to help children begin the healing process.

What Are the Signs of Sexual Exploitation?

Parents should be alert to these potential indicators of sexual exploitation

- changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying
- bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances
- acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters
- a sudden acting out of feelings or aggressive or rebellious behavior
- regression to infantile behavior
- a fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people because children of any age should not be forced to give affection to anyone if they don't want to
- be alert to signs that your children are trying to avoid someone, and listen carefully when your children tell you how they feel about someone
- pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in the private areas

If you observe any of these behaviors in your children, talk to them about the causes. Behav-

ioral changes such as these may be due to causes other than sexual exploitation such as a medical, family, or school problem, but be sure to work with your child to get to the root of the problem. Also keep in mind that sometimes children do not always demonstrate obvious signs such as these but may do or say something that hints at the exploitation.

What Should Families Do When Children Disclose That They Have Been Sexually Exploited?

Don't

- underreact to or minimize the information
- overreact to the information or panic
- criticize or blame your child

Do

- respect your child's privacy
- support your child and the decision to tell
- show physical affection, and express love and support with words and gestures
- explain to your child that he or she has done nothing wrong
- help your child understand it was the offender's responsibility, not your child's
- remember that children seldom lie about acts of sexual exploitation
- keep the lines of communication open
- seek appropriate medical care for your child
- notify law enforcement
- in cooperation with law enforcement, alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-

abuse, or other appropriate social-services organizations

- consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child and the entire family

What Should We Look for in a Physician?

Optimally the physician who treats your child should have

- board certification, which is special training, experience, and certification, in a relevant medical specialty such as pediatrics, family practice, or obstetrics/gynecology
- particular experience in conducting medical evaluations of children for sexual exploitation and abuse because child-sexual-exploitation cases may involve complex issues about diagnosis, evidence collection, and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases
- knowledge about the legal issues involved in child sexual exploitation and abuse, especially the laws about reporting child sexual victimization; procedures used by law enforcement and protective services; evidence collection, and expert testimony in your state

What Should We Expect From the Criminal-Justice System?

Most states have a child-protection team composed of trained professionals who investigate cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and make recommendations for intervention.

Many states have now established child-advocacy centers that provide these services under one roof. Check with your law-enforcement agency or child-protective-services agency to see if a child-advocacy center is in your community.

If your community does not yet have a child-protection team or child-advocacy center, inquire about ways that you and your child can best assist in the investigation while minimizing the stress and trauma that can occur in the criminal-justice process. For instance inquire about

- measures in place to strictly limit the disclosure of your child's identity and location
- safeguards to limit the number of pretrial interviews your child needs to participate in
- provisions for a speedy trial
- the availability of videotaped testimony and closed-circuit televised testimony to avoid having your child testify in court in the presence of the alleged exploiter

If your child does need to testify in the courtroom, inquire about measures such as

- closing the courtroom to all but necessary personnel during a child's testimony
- permitting leading questions of a child witness
- admitting a child's out-of-court statement as an exception to the hearsay prohibition

How Important Is Counseling?

Counseling and therapy can help your child understand that he or she is not to blame and can help him or her cope with reactions such as the overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame that

some children have. A child who initially appears to be coping with exploitation may not have come to grips with what happened or may be in denial. Children may only tell part of the story about the exploitation until they feel comfortable and secure enough to disclose the whole story. Seek referrals for qualified individuals from the other professionals who are helping you. Also be aware that you and other members of your family, including the victimized child's siblings, are impacted by the exploitation and may need counseling to help them cope with their feelings.

What Should We Look for in a Therapist?

The therapist should

- have an advanced degree in a recognized mental-health specialty such as psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling, or psychiatric nursing. Advanced degrees are master's degrees, such as MSW, MS, MA, and doctorates such as MD, PhD, PsyD
- be licensed to practice as a therapist in your state
- have special training in child sexual exploitation and abuse, know how it affects children and adults, understand how to place responsibility on the exploiter, and have a treatment plan
- have knowledge about the legal issues involved in child sexual exploitation and abuse, especially the laws about reporting child sexual victimization; procedures used by law enforcement and protective services; evidence collection; and expert testimony in your state

Where Do We Find a Qualified Physician or Therapist?

Many communities have special programs, such as child-protection teams and child-advocacy centers, for treating child sexual exploitation and abuse or therapists with experience in certain areas. You may also find qualified therapists in your community through the organizations noted below.

- nonprofit service providers serving families of missing or exploited children
- local psychological or psychiatric association referral services
- university departments of psychology or psychiatry
- child-abuse hotlines
- child-protective-services agencies
- rape-crisis or sexual-assault centers
- family-court services of a court-appointed, special-advocate (CASA) group or *guardian ad litem*
- crime-victim-assistance programs in the law-enforcement agency, prosecutor's, or district attorney's office
- victim advocates and counselors at rape and sexual assault centers
- child-advocacy centers

Will We Need An Attorney?

You do **not** need an attorney merely because your child is testifying in a criminal case regarding sexual exploitation. You can inquire whether or not your child will be appointed a *guardian*