

# Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth and Harm Reduction

# California's Child Welfare Prevalence

- 3,418 youth identified as victims of, or at risk for, commercial sexual exploitation since 2015
- Average age of entry into the life is 12 years old
- Vulnerable populations include LGBTQ, tribal youth, underreported male victims

# Harm Reduction

- Best Practice vs. Promising Practice
- Concept
- Historical application

# Harm Reduction and Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth

- Application
- Limitations
- Macro vs. Micro

When “relapse” refers to a low-level illness, it is thought of as unfortunate.

When it describes a child leaving a place of safety, reconnecting with an exploiter, and placing himself or herself in what may be grave physical as well as psychological danger, it offends every instinct of a responsible adult – whether professional, caregiver, or parent. And with that sense of offense is the real danger that since we cannot ensure the protection of the victimized child, we may decline to engage them because of the risk to our own reputations.

***But our response cannot be “If we can’t control you, we can’t help you.”***

- Will Lightbourne, Former CDSS Director

# Harm Reduction in Practice

## Traditional Approach

- Discourage the youth from their actions and explain how/why they are wrong
- Plead with the youth to immediately discontinue from engaging with multiple sexual partners

## Harm Reduction Approach

- Explore what aspects of these relationships the youth enjoys/ what needs are being met and think of ways to meet those needs in a safer way
- Offer sexual and reproductive health advice in the moment, such as the use of a lubricant with spermicide, keeping some clothing on, etc.

# Harm Reduction in Practice

## Traditional Approach

- Exclusion of a suspected exploiter from a CFT despite the youth's desire to have them included as a support person.

## Harm Reduction Approach

- Honor the youth's feelings of connectivity to their exploiter and consider how you can keep the youth and the team safe while involving the suspected exploiter in the CFT. This builds trust, dispels feelings of shame, and shows the youth's feelings are of value.

# Questions?



# Contact Information

## Child Trafficking Response Unit

[CSECprogram@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CSECprogram@dss.ca.gov)