



Coordinated Action Against Sex Trafficking (CAAST) Initiative Standards of Service Provision for Human Sex Trafficking Survivors

CAAST Overview:

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) coordinates a statewide initiative referred to as the Coordinated Action Against Sex Trafficking (CAAST). CAAST is a regional network of rape crisis centers that is building statewide capacity to provide high-quality services to sex trafficking survivors across Maryland.

Rape crisis centers are ideal for this initiative because they have expertise in sexual assault, trauma-informed care, empowering survivors, and navigating multiple government agencies and the criminal justice system. Therefore, the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention funded the CAAST Initiative in Fall 2016.

CAAST is a regional network of the following six rape crisis centers:

- Allegany County: Family Crisis Resource Center, Inc.
- Baltimore City and Baltimore County: TurnAround, Inc.
- Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties: For All Seasons, Inc.
- Frederick County: Heartly House, Inc.
- Howard County: HopeWorks
- Prince George's County: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Center

These organizations have in-house Human Trafficking Regional Navigators who support trafficking survivors in accessing the services they need to help rebuild their lives. Through the CAAST program, Regional Navigators are expanding services and increasing the capacity of rape crisis centers to address the needs of sex trafficking survivors across the state.

Purpose of Standards:

The purpose of these standards is to assist advocates at rape crisis centers, including Regional Navigators, and other service providers involved in empowering survivors, in addressing the specific needs of survivors of human sex trafficking. Important intersections exist between the needs of sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking survivors, which make rape crisis centers uniquely qualified to identify, empower, and assist this population. There are also important differences between sexual assault and human trafficking service provision, including safety concerns, resource availability, legal needs, and trauma responses that require specialized training.

Core Values of Standards:

Survivor-Centered Response

A survivor-centered response is imperative in building rapport with the survivor to increase their access to essential services and options for pursuing justice against their offenders. The survivor's needs and concerns should be at the forefront of all service provision. The survivor has rights and should be informed of these rights in all phases of the process. The survivor always has the right to decline services.

Trauma-Informed Response

Service providers should be trained and informed on the myriad of psychological and physical methods traffickers use to exploit their victims. It is imperative to understand the impact that exposure to both acute and ongoing traumatic stress and events can have on all areas of a trafficking survivor's life, including emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal functioning. Becoming "trauma-informed" means using knowledge of trauma to design and deliver high-quality services. Trauma-informed response requires that all members are trained in techniques and best practices specific to interacting with trafficking survivors and reducing the potential for re-victimization.

Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care:

- **Safety:** Promoting physical and emotional safety.
- **Trust:** Maximizing trustworthiness through clarity about tasks, roles, and responsibilities, and through maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- **Choice:** Providing the survivor with information so that they may make informed decisions. Prioritizing the survivor's choice and control.
- **Collaboration:** Sharing power with the survivor and maximizing collaboration.
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing the survivor's decision-making and skill-building.
- **Language access and cultural competency:** Eliminating disparities and access to services based on language or culture.

Empowerment-Based Response

It is important to emphasize the empowerment of the survivor by reinforcing autonomy and self-determination. An empowerment-based response is particularly important for trafficking survivors whose choices have often been taken away from them. It is vital to empower the survivor with information to help them make informed decisions and to respect those decisions.

Advocacy-Based Service Provision

Advocacy-based service provision is survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and empowerment-based. It is important to elicit, support, and build on the survivor's strengths, assets, resilience, and potential for growth and development.

Collaboration

Human trafficking is often a multi-jurisdictional crime and may require regional coordination and relationship-building within and across systems to best serve the survivor. Each survivor should be empowered to decide whether or not to collaborate with additional partners in their unique case. Service providers must honor the survivor's choice. Waivers of confidentiality shall not be requested unless it provides a benefit to the individual survivor.

Standards:

1. Specialized Training

- a. All staff that may have contact with survivors of human trafficking should, at a minimum, be trained and informed about:
 - i. How to recognize the signs of human trafficking; and
 - ii. How to respond if trafficking is suspected.
- b. All service providers that may work directly with sex trafficking survivors should be trained and informed about the unique needs of sex trafficking survivors and best practices in service provision for this population. Trainings should include understanding:
 - i. The signs of human trafficking;
 - ii. The means used by traffickers to recruit, groom, and control their victims;
 - iii. How to identify survivors of human trafficking without using formal screening methods that might deter survivors;
 - iv. The impact of trauma on all aspects of a trafficking survivor's life;
 - v. The various social, physical, and cultural contexts and challenges survivors may face;
 - vi. How to respond once a survivor has been identified; and
 - vii. How to provide high-quality services to help trafficking survivors rebuild their lives.
- c. Service providers should review and adapt their organization's policies and procedures to ensure that they are appropriate for survivors of sex trafficking.

2. Confidentiality

- a. Assisting trafficking survivors may require the release of confidential information more often and to more organizations than when assisting other survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence. Service providers should always obtain the informed, reasonably time-limited, written consent of the survivor before relaying specified confidential information to any person. Service providers facing emergency situations, such as during intake or crisis hotline calls, should follow applicable rules and protocols. Waivers of confidentiality shall not be requested unless it provides a benefit to the individual survivor.

3. Mandatory Reporting

- a. Sex trafficking of individuals under the age of 18 is considered child abuse and is subject to reporting laws. MD Family Law Code Ann. 5-701.
- b. In accordance with state law, mandatory reporters must notify Child Protective Services of incidents of child sex trafficking to assure coordinated responses.

4. Safety Planning

- a. Safety planning with survivors is an ongoing process that should continue throughout service provision. The level of danger a trafficking survivor may face depends on many factors including how violent and extensive the trafficking network may be, whether the trafficker has connections in the survivor's local community that would

- allow them to harm or threaten the survivor and their loved ones, and the trafficker's perception of how much a survivor's disclosures may harm the trafficker.
- b. Trafficking survivors may face risks due to increased isolation. Traffickers often use coercive control, intimidation, and physical violence to socially and geographically isolate their victims. Survivors may also come from abusive homes, have limited or no English language skills, be distrustful of police, or be unfamiliar with ways to seek help and safety. They may not have access to adequate resources and support and may experience heightened social and cultural stigmas.
 - c. It is important to work with the survivor on how to safely use technology, including how to preserve privacy when using social media, the use of spyware, changing passwords, turning off location services, etc.
 - d. It is imperative to recognize the psychological impacts of trauma bonding on survivors when safety planning and providing services. Many survivors of sex trafficking may not be ready to leave their trafficker. Thus, it is important to meet individuals "where they are," discuss harm reduction, and provide these individuals with resources to stay safe from violence.
5. Essential Services
- a. Each organization need not provide all services that a survivor requires. The goal of the CAAST initiative is to provide a network that allows access to all types of services through partnerships.
 - b. Some of the essential services that survivors may need include:
 - i. Crisis intervention
 - ii. Basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care;
 - iii. Safe and accessible emergency, transitional, and long-term housing;
 - iv. Substance abuse treatment programs;
 - v. Mental health services;
 - vi. Legal services;
 - vii. Case management;
 - viii. Advocacy; and
 - ix. Safe and reliable transportation between service providers.
 - c. Service providers shall not require survivors to speak or participate in private or public events in order to receive services.
6. Housing
- a. Safe and accessible housing for trafficking survivors is needed for various populations including minors, adults, foreign nationals, undocumented immigrants, persons with disabilities, and those who identify as male, female, and gender non-conforming.
 - b. Providing housing for sex trafficking survivors requires specific considerations.
 - i. Trafficking survivors may have increased safety concerns while residing in emergency and transitional housing.
 - ii. Many housing programs serving this population are emergency shelters for people at risk of imminent danger. The length of stay is often 30-60 days. Guidelines for length of stay for trafficking survivors should reflect

the often longer time frame it may take a survivor of sex trafficking to find their next step. Options for transitional housing programs are essential.

- iii. Traffickers exert power over their victims by controlling everything they do. Excessive shelter rules, particularly those that are restrictive or punitive, may in fact re-traumatize a trafficking survivor and reinforce the power and control dynamics that they experienced when they were trafficked. Housing providers should examine whether their shelter rules and structures compromise rather than support the empowerment of residents and design alternative approaches.
- iv. Housing providers have faced challenges co-housing sex trafficking and domestic violence survivors. Housing survivors of sex trafficking with individuals who have also been trafficked may resolve these challenges.
- v. In addition to eligibility requirements and waitlists for many housing options, other considerations include costs, safety, childcare, privacy, freedom, location, and conflicts about lifestyle, parenting, and other issues.

7. Substance Abuse Treatment

- a. Sex trafficking survivors commonly suffer severe health issues resulting from substance abuse. Substance abuse and addiction often stem from either being coerced into drug use by their traffickers or by turning to substances as a coping mechanism for the complex trauma they experienced.
- b. It is essential to partner with substance abuse treatment programs that are trauma-trained on the unique needs of survivors of human trafficking to connect survivors with these essential services.

8. Mental Health Services

- a. Sex trafficking survivors often experience complex trauma due to the multiple types of victimization they have endured, including sexual, physical, and psychological abuse.
- b. It is imperative that these survivors have access to qualified, trauma-trained mental health counselors who understand their unique needs. Proper referrals are also needed to connect survivors with appropriate mental health providers who can address the specific needs and complex trauma of the individual survivor.

9. Legal Services

- a. Sex trafficking survivors face a myriad of legal needs including seeking protective orders, seeking U-visas and T-visas, enforcing crime victim rights, accessing criminal injuries compensation, requesting HIV testing, and other legal needs.
- b. Human trafficking survivors also have unique legal remedies available under federal and state laws.
- c. It is imperative to connect survivors with attorneys to discuss their legal options.

10. Case Management

- a. Case management is the central component in provision of comprehensive victim-centered services to survivors of human trafficking. A case manager serves as a

- victim advocate and as the point person coordinating services from multiple providers and helping the survivor navigate complex criminal justice and social service systems.
- b. Case management practices should use a “strengths-based” approach to set a tone of respect and enhance relationship-building between the survivor and advocate or case manager. Examples of a strength-based approach include:
 - i. Motivational interviewing;
 - ii. Identifying and focusing on a survivor’s strengths, competencies, survival skills, supports, and protective factors, in addition to their risks;
 - iii. Using problem-solving methods to engage the survivor in identifying and addressing barriers to safety, developing safety and planning skills, making decisions, improving skills in self-care, and increasing awareness and self-esteem;
 - iv. Encouraging individuals to create their own goals and learn new skills necessary to meet life’s challenges;
 - v. Listening to and understanding what a survivor wants and finding reasonable ways to prioritize the survivor’s choices;
 - vi. Working with a survivor to set realistic goals and identify strategies to overcome barriers to employment and education to make progress towards economic self-sufficiency; and
 - vii. Assisting the survivor in achieving self-advocacy and building their own community of support beyond the service provider program.
 - b. Services must be accessible and provided in a safe space, both physically and emotionally. This includes:
 - i. Responding to the survivor in a consistent, authentic, and respectful manner. Staff should be clear about expectations, roles, responsibilities, and boundaries and explain protocols, forms, and confidentiality;
 - ii. Working with the survivor in ways that recognize and build upon the individual’s strengths, skills, and choices;
 - iii. Collaborating with the survivor in setting goals and steps, making decisions, and pursuing resources;
 - iv. Ensuring that case management and intake processes are done in trauma-informed spaces. This may include soft lighting, availability of fidget and stress toys, taking breaks, etc.; and
 - v. Ensuring that staff are committed to professional development and self-care.

11. Advocacy

- a. It is important to put the survivor at the center of all advocacy, educate the survivor about their choices, and affirm the survivor’s right of self-determination.
- b. Advocates should partner with the survivor to address societal and institutional barriers that hinder the survivor’s ability to make progress and seek solutions to the barriers encountered.
- c. Service providers must avoid imposing their own personal values or ideas on the survivor.

- d. Advocates may coordinate with other agencies, with the informed consent of the survivor.
- e. It is imperative to talk about risks, concerns, fears, and benefits related to accessing the criminal or civil justice systems.
 - i. Federal law enforcement must verify that the survivor is complying with reasonable law enforcement requests for an adult trafficking survivor to receive benefits under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).
 - ii. The survivor should be informed about resources offered by federal, state, and local entities. Advocates should connect the survivor with legal service providers to discuss all options for available relief.

12. Transportation

- a. Trafficking survivors often receive services from multiple providers and need safe and reliable transportation between appointments.
- b. Safe transportation is provided by drivers who are known by your organization and have been well-vetted.
- c. Reliable drivers ensure that the survivor is picked up and dropped off at appointments in a timely fashion and is not left alone in an unsafe location.

13. Self-Care:

- a. Emphasizing the trafficking survivor's self-care is an important step in their path to healing and restoration.
- b. Case management should include active listening, eye contact, silence, neutral acknowledgements, and empathetic, empowering dialogue.
- c. Advocates and case managers should also encourage the survivor to identify grounding exercises and other stress management techniques that can support them in times of high-stress or escalation.

14. Language Access

- a. Trained and qualified interpreters should be offered in every aspect of the case, including support services, interviews with law enforcement, and when connecting the survivor with resources. Service providers should:
 - i. Ask the survivor if they prefer to work with an interpreter of a specific gender.
 - ii. Avoid volunteer interpreters unless they were trained in interpretation previously and have been identified by your agency prior to a specific case.
 - iii. Screen for potential conflicts of interest that the interpreter may have. Do not assume that the interpreter is qualified just because they speak the language. Be aware that although people may share the same language, there might be ethnic, cultural, or religious tensions between groups that might lead to miscommunication. Different social and educational backgrounds or regional dialects may lead to misunderstandings as well.
 - iv. Make every effort to obtain an interpreter who does not know the survivor or the survivor's family or friends.
 - v. Do not use family members or children as interpreters.
 - vi. Talk directly to the survivor. Ask questions in the first person and have the interpreter use the first person.

- vii. If possible, keep the same interpreter throughout the case.
- viii. Discuss protocol and expectations with the interpreter ahead of time.
 - 1. Make sure that the interpreter is comfortable asking difficult questions related to exploitation.
 - 2. The interpreter should interpret exactly what the survivor and advocate say. There should not be summaries or side conversations. If the interpreter needs clarification from the survivor, the interpreter should inform the advocate that there is a need for clarification prior to additional communication with the survivor.
 - 3. Prior to any conversation with the use of an interpreter, advocates should stress the importance of confidentiality with the interpreter and require that they sign a confidentiality agreement. At the start of each conversation, confidentiality should be reviewed in the presence of the survivor.

Compliance with Standards:

Direct supervisors should use these standards to review staff and programs to ensure that survivors of human trafficking receive high quality services that support the safety, dignity, and self-sufficiency of survivors. Direct service providers should also use these standards in implementation of grants and trainings.

Review of Standards:

These standards are a working document that were developed as part of initial efforts to guide service providers in delivering survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and empowerment-based services to survivors of sex trafficking. These standards will be reviewed on an annual basis. We expect these standards to change and develop significantly as we gain more experience in this field and establish more evidence-based best practices.

Suggestions may be sent to Sara Kominers, Human Trafficking Policy Attorney, at skominers@mcasa.org.

Resources:

Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “Florida Certified Domestic Violence Center Handbook on Human Trafficking,” Third Edition, 2016.

Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, Law Enforcement and Service Provider Model Protocol, September 2014, Updated June 2018.

Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, “Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide: Strengthening Collaborative Responses,” available at <https://www.ovcttac.gov/TaskForceGuide/eguide/>.

TurnAround, Inc., “Intensive Advocacy Based Case Management,” 2015.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, “Finding a Path to Recovery: Residential Facilities For Minor Victims of Domestic Sex Trafficking,” available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/finding-path-recovery-residential-facilities-minor-victims-domestic-sex-trafficking/residential-facilities>.

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