

# Cultural Considerations

## When working with Homeless, Runaway and Sexually Exploited Youth

A product of the Safe Harbors Youth Intervention Project (SHYIP)  
Multi-Discipline Cultural Consideration Team



# Cultural Considerations

The cultural considerations content has been developed thanks to the commitment, dedication and significant work of following agencies and SHYIP representatives.

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Breaking Free

Casa de Esperanza

Center for Victims of Torture

Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)

District 202

Face to Face/SafeZone

Face to Face Counseling Clinic

Family Tree

Freeport West Inc./Streetworks Collaborative

Girl Scouts of St. Croix Valley

Hmong American Partnership

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition

Neighborhood House

Partners for Violence Prevention

Planned Parenthood

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Partners for Violence Prevention (PVP) was founded in 1996 to reduce the impact and incidence of violence on youth and families. It began in response to a community need to promote safe neighborhoods and provide effective intervention and prevention alternatives. PVP's unique collaborative strategy has provided the basis for its success and in May 2004, PVP earned its' 501(c) 3 non-profit status. Since its inception, PVP has acted as an innovative service provider and a pivotal bridging point in violence prevention for youth, programming for over 70 health care and social service agencies, law enforcement agencies, schools, businesses, churches, and other community organizations. PVP is regarded as a local and national model for replication in other communities, school and neighborhoods.

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# Introduction to Cultural Considerations

Dedicated to helping providers understand youth from diverse cultures, the Safe Harbors Youth Intervention Project (SHYIP) created the following cultural considerations. This section is to be used by multiple disciplines to help professionals gain cultural sensitivity when working with youth.

It is recognized that culture is neither a blueprint nor an identity, but rather individuals carry with them multiple cultural preferences and traditions within our multicultural society (Fontes, 2005). Because individuals carry multi-faceted identities with them at all times, peoples' culture is unique to their experiences. As a result, our culture not only influences our views, but also how we relate to those whom we encounter.

Professionals must understand and accept the complexities of culture as something that is ever changing and continuously being revised. The development of cultural competence is an on-going practice that evolves over time and requires professionals to consciously seek unfamiliar experiences so they may better understand, value, and appreciate diverse cultural interactions and settings. It is hoped that all individuals and agencies will aspire to achieve understanding, appreciation, and respect of cultural differences and similarities in an effort to better serve and understand the populations with whom they work.

Aspiring to be considerate, sensitive and competent is the ultimate goal for professionals using SHYIP's Cultural Consideration guide. The information presented here is specific to cultural communities and reflects input from a multidisciplinary team. The composition of this team was made up of active representatives and reviewers from each community discussed. The considerations begin with general considerations for all professionals to apply to their work, followed by the most pertinent considerations

applicable to each system (medical, law enforcement, legal, schools). It is expected that all professionals will read, become familiar with and employ these considerations when working with youth.

For optimal effectiveness, these considerations are to be incorporated into all levels of professional practice and service delivery from policy making to administration to each individual community of service providers. In doing so, these cultural considerations will assist professionals as they grow in their capacity to value diversity, manage the dynamics of differences, acquire cultural knowledge and adapt to the multiple contexts of each youth's experiences.

Ultimately, it is intended that professionals using the SHYIP Protocol Guidelines will reference the cultural consideration section frequently and use it to develop and grow their personal and professional cultural competence.

# General Youth Considerations

The following are recommendations developed by the SHYIP team and community members for working with all youth, regardless of their identified cultural community.

## Basic Concerns Youth May Experience:

The following is a short list of concerns many youth identify during a crisis situation. If left unaddressed, they will likely grow into barriers of service. These concerns include:

- Feeling that they lack credibility and will not be believed
- Fears regarding their immigration status, including timeline of residence (Illegal/Legal status of family)
- Complications because youth are already in the system due to truancy, runaway, prior victimization, probation, etc.
- Fear of getting someone else in trouble if a report is made
- Threats of harm if the youth reports the assault
- Fear of caregiver finding out and reacting negatively to youth's victimizations, truancy or running away
- Lack of trust in authority figures
- Lack of hope in the system based on previous circumstances
- Does not label incident as sexual assault
- Self-blame and self destructive behaviors
- Illegal behavior (drinking, drug use etc.)
- Fear of being lectured for behavior

## Culturally Related Considerations for all Youth:

- Youth may fear their family/community discovering what happened. Often youth fear ostracism, family retaliation and may not have the support of family. Be sure to provide an advocate for youth regard-

less

of parental involvement.

- Regardless of how openly sexual violence is discussed within communities, rape and sexual violence is not a cultural practice or culturally accepted for any culture.
- Many communities do not use eye contact when in conversation with others; this is a cultural practice of respect for elders/adults and should not be considered a form of disrespect or not paying attention.
- Not all females will shake hands with someone of the opposite sex. (In some cultures, neither females nor males will shake hands).
- Family and community remain important across cultures. Youth will often avoid telling parents/caregivers what has occurred or avoid reporting due to not wanting to be shamed or bring shame upon the family.
- Many communities will nod their head in respect with the intention of "I hear you." Many times nodding one's head is misinterpreted as "you're agreeing with me or you understand me." Therefore, be sure to ask for a verbal response before making decisions.
- Youth may have faced racism in the legal system, police, court, and in hospitals. Be sensitive about how reluctant youth are to go to these places and always give youth an option to have an advocate.
- Regardless of age or cultural community the youth belongs to, these factors do not imply that service providers should talk to them in slower English or louder, as this minimizes one's abilities and intelligence.
- Avoid stereotyping and making assumptions about identity, appearances, race or class.

# General Youth Considerations

## General Youth Considerations

- Always establish rapport with youth and never give up on youth, even if the youth has a negative/harsh attitude towards the professional.
- Many youth and families have trust in the legal system. When a youth chooses to report, there is an implication that the case will be charged and prosecuted. When cases are not charged or prosecuted, youth are often re-victimized within the family and community for what appears to be lying about the incident.
- When using an interpreter, pay attention to what the interpreter says and watch body language. Not all interpreters relay the correct information and some may add their own opinions while interpreting which is unacceptable.
  - \* Always use certified interpreters.
  - \* Never use family members or children as interpreters.

# African American Youth

The following are recommendations developed by African American community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

*“Blacks have a 375 year history on this continent: 245 involving slavery, 100+ years involving legalized discrimination and only 30 years involving anything else.”* Historian – Roger Wilkins

African Americans are not monolithic people. They are a richly diverse population, spanning the spectrum of lifestyles and interests, education and income levels, and religious background. However, the unique legacy of slavery, racism, sexism and economic oppression continues to influence the lives of contemporary African Americans. Although working with young African American males and females is a complex process with much more than can be contained here, the following points should be taken in consideration:

- The brutal history of African Americans still resonates with contemporary African Americans and has left a sense of distrust for many systems including law enforcement, the courts, school systems and health care.
  - \* Many African Americans from all backgrounds still do not trust institutions that are “white male” driven largely because of the institutionalized racism that exists within these structures.
- Many Black families are fractured because of poverty and the ills associated with poverty (e.g. unemployment, health care, childcare). When poverty is socialized within the family structures, young African American males or females might experience a lack of direction and isolation.
- For many African American youth there are immediate and extended families that are support systems.
- In African American communities, the church is often an extension of family and can be a major contributor to supporting youth.
- Today’s pop culture perpetuates images of young black males that are sexually dominate and young black females that are exotic gold diggers. This leads to perceptions that young males are overly sexual and young females are un-rapable. These stereotypes do not represent the majority of black youth, but must be recognized as contributors to their self-identity.
- Many young African Americans have incorporated Hip-hop and Rap as part of their culture along with many other young mainstream Americans. This diverse musical genre can be used for good and bad, but must be noted as an important form of expression among youth.
- Most rapes in the African American community are intra-racial, black on black. Fear that a young victim will be labeled a traitor to his/her race for raising the awareness of black on black rape may prevent reporting.
- A belief in the African American culture is that females have to be strong and protect their men. As a result of this cultural belief, black females may be reluctant to identify their perpetrator.
- Always treat African Americans as individuals, not as the problem the youth comes to you with, or by the trauma that he/she has experienced.

# African American Youth

- Recognize that a person who has experienced adversity and feels beat down by life still has pride. As a result, do not act like you are superior, or treat the youth as less intelligent because of his/her current situation.
- Do not assume a youth's race by their skin color; always ask how the youth identifies his/her race.
- As a Caucasian man, avoid calling African American males, "boy" as this is disrespectful.
- If youth use slang words such as "baby daddy" or "baby mama," professionals should avoid referring to a father or mother in those words at all cases.
- Do not make assumptions about whether a youth is involved in a gang because of the way he/she dresses.
- African American male youth relate to African American men. If possible, attempt to provide support/assistance in partnership with African American men on staff.

## Law Enforcement Considerations:

- Historically, and in contemporary times, many African Americans have had negative experiences with law enforcement personnel (i.e. racial profiling).
- Because of past experiences and current fears associated with reporting a sexual assault (i.e. embarrassment, shame and disbelief), law enforcement professionals may find some

African American youth "acting out" by displaying poor eye contact, showing anger or disrespect.

- Young Black gay males are a highly marginalized community and may be hesitant to report a sexual assault because they fear blame, disbelief or intolerance.
- Young Black females fear validating negative societal images of Black males or turning Black perpetrators over to the legal system.
- Remember that Black youth may have been raised to fear the police and as a result their actions may or may not appear to be disrespectful.
- If an African American young female or male makes the decision to report the rape, there may be a concern that once the rape has been reported nothing will happen to bring the perpetrator to justice. An explanation is needed to help youth understand how both law enforcement and the legal system will work on their behalf. Equally important is the discussion of the limitations of law enforcement and the legal system.

## Court System Considerations:

All children deserve to be treated fairly, regardless of race or ethnicity. Policy makers, police officials, officers of the court and corrections must work together to remove racial inequities from the juvenile court system.

It is the perception within African American communities that court systems may not always give fair assessment of cases presented.



# African American Youth

The following are facts law enforcement and court officials should be aware of:

- African American youth comprise 15.4% of the national youth population.
- The arrest rate among African American youth (ages 10-17) is nearly twice the rate of their white peers.
- African American youth are 1.4 times more likely to be detained than their white peers due to racial profiling (DWB – Driving While Black). Among all racial groups, whites are the least likely to be detained.
- Nationwide, one of every three young black males is in prison, on probation or on parole.
- Nearly 60% of young offenders serving time in adult state prison are African American, although African Americans comprise only 15.4% of the youth population.
- Although people of color make up one-third of the total United States youth population, they make up nearly two-thirds of the young offenders behind bars.

Although there are limited statistics specific to Black young females who end up in the court systems, the following general information should be considered when working with a sexually abused female:

- Young victims have most likely experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse in conjunction with overall family problems. They may suffer from physical and mental disorders and/or endure academic failure.

- Forty to 73% of girls in the juvenile court system have been physically abused. In United States population, 26% of teenaged girls report physical abuse.
- Young females are three times more likely than boys to be sexually abused. This leads to increased mental health disorders, truancy, prostitution and sexual violence, as well as other destructive behaviors that impact young women for the rest of their lives.

## Medical System Considerations:

A disproportionate number of African Americans live with serious diseases and health conditions. Some of our youth are afflicted with diabetes, hypertension and obesity; therefore sexual violence can further compromise the mental, emotional and physical well being of youth.

- To enhance a youth's sense of safety, medical professionals should explain invasive procedures.
- Like all young males, the young heterosexual black male victim may be at an age where there may be confusion or questions about his sexuality; therefore, there may be hesitation to complete an examination.
- Respect the needs of the youth (e.g. a young black male may be uncomfortable with a female forensic nurse).

# African American Youth

## School System Considerations:

School professionals are aware that urban education is viewed today as failing in its major goal of educating students, especially those students characterized as people of color, including African American and Hispanic students. Among people of color, African American males are affected most adversely. The following points may not appear to have a relationship to sexual abuse; however, as discussed earlier in this document most rapes are intra-racial. It is considered by many that African American males experience school adversity and hardship.

- Research has shown that when Black male students are compared to other students by gender and race they consistently rank lowest in academic achievement, have the worst attendance record, are suspended and expelled the most often, are most likely to drop out of school, and most often fail to graduate from high school or to earn a GED.
- Black males are characterized as having more health problems and mortality rates at a younger age than any other group in the United States.
- The ills that plague Black males are not completely the responsibility of the public schools, but are a responsibility of society as a whole. However, the public schools have potential to play a major role in addressing the problems of Black male students.

- \* The more the Black male is suspended from school, the more opportunity he has to bond with the street and to develop a pattern of school truancy. Poor school attendance leads to more contact with juvenile court and for some Black males, this may begin a journey away from school and towards jail for many wrong behaviors including sexual assault.
- Schools struggle with many problems associated with size, diverse populations, and financial concerns; however, schools have a major responsibility for developing and implementing programs to prevent failure of all children.

# American Indian/Alaskan Native Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Ramsey County Urban American Indian/Alaskan Native community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

Colonization by the United States government resulted in historical trauma and racism for American Indians/Alaskan Native. As with any community who has withstood such experiences, generations of urban American Indians may have developed a complex mistrust of service providers, law enforcement, etc. It is important to recognize this historical context, even if the youth does not. Be mindful that it may take time to establish trust and rapport with American Indian/Alaskan Native individuals. Some general considerations to include:

- Avoid assumptions and generalizations that all American Indians/Alaskan Natives are the same. There are 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States and several tribes exist without Federal recognition.
- Avoid believing the statement, “What works for the majority, works for all.”
- Indian communities are small and everyone tends to know every individual. This impacts the long standing issue of sexual exploitation/assault. Fortunately, as with other communities, the topic of sexual exploitation is becoming more openly acknowledged and discussed.
- Take time to allow for silence and be respectful to youth; avoid interrupting youth, talking too much and talking in aloud voice. Also, refrain from being directive, aggressive, or intrusive as all of these tactics contributes to intimidation.
- American Indians/Alaskan Natives have a strong rule to “respect your elders.” As with other communities, it is difficult for a youth to publicly seek help if the perpetrator was an adult/family member.
- Recognize that a non-American Indian/Alaskan Native may need to earn the trust of an individual who has been victimized. Take the time to build a relationship and earn trust.
- Unspoken rules, such as: “Do not turn on your own community” may prevent youth from seeking services or reporting violence.
- It is very offensive to make assumptions about American Indians/Alaskan Natives’ spiritual practices or beliefs. As with traditions, customs and experiences, individual’s spirituality is diverse.
- Recognize that because of the generations of forced assimilation into the dominant society, some American Indians/Alaskan Natives are unfamiliar with the traditional practices of their Nations. Don’t assume youth know of, have access to, or want these resources.
- Refrain from criticizing practices that are not the same as what you believe or choose.
- Avoid saying, “Color doesn’t matter to me” or “Some of my best friends are Native.” This will not impress youth, and may even jeopardize the relationship.
- Some youth are going to be more quiet than others, don’t mistake quietness for being shy or a disability. Accordingly,

# American Indian/Alaskan Native Youth

youth who avoid making eye contact is not necessarily an indication of something further to investigate.

- According to the Department of Justice, 86% of sexual assaults on American Indians/Alaskan Natives are perpetrated by non-American Indians. This often creates barriers related to reporting.
- Recognize that American Indians/Alaskan Natives come in all colors and/or have varied knowledge and experience with their own cultures.
- As a professional working with this community, it is important to be patient. Let individuals have time to think and process.
- Avoid making assumptions about the family layout (aunties, grandmas, extended family etc.). Extended families are often primary caretakers of youth, but not always. Also, it is important to understand the concept of customary adoption within American Indians/Alaskan Natives communities.
- Be aware that family is often both urban and reservation. Frequently, American Indians/Alaskan Natives travel back and forth, so that support, safety, and resources may be located with both, neither, or one or the other. Every individual is different.
- Recognize that some youth have accelerated responsibility within the family structure such as helping with childcare, cooking, cleaning, etc.
- Alcohol and drugs impact all communities. Despite statistical cultural disparities, do not assume alcohol or drugs are in any way related to a youth's experiences.
- Recognize that speaking original languages are valued and lineages are valued as well.

- It is also important to remember that American Indians/Alaskan Natives view culture as a form of healing and away of life.

## Law Enforcement and Medical System Considerations:

- Do not assume that a youth's reaction (be it highly emotional or unemotional) means that the youth is ignorant or fabricating the crime committed against them. Their response may be a sign of fear, respect, intimidation, or distrust.
- Understand the importance of family. As protocol/rules permit, it may be extremely important and helpful for the youth to have a family member(s) allowed to be present during the police interview, medical examinations, etc.

## School System Considerations:

- Generally, the western-model oriented educational system alienates American Indian/Alaskan Native youth.
- Institutional racism and judgment continue to impact American Indians/Alaskan Natives experiences.
- Boarding Schools have devastated individuals by forcefully taking American Indian/Alaskan Native children from their families. During this time, individuals were generally abused physically, sexually, emotionally and spiritually for American Indians/Alaskan Natives' culture and traditions (i.e. American Indians were beaten for speaking their language). Identities were dismantled as American Indians/

# American Indian/Alaskan Native Youth

Alaskan Natives were forced to assimilate into mainstream Christian culture.

- \* Although this was decades ago, it is extremely important to acknowledge this devastation because it is relevant to American Indians/Alaskan Natives identities. The culture continues to heal.
- A lack of American Indians/Alaskan Natives' history is an ingrained part of the United States educational curriculum which makes it difficult for youth to connect school to life.
  - \* The history and contributions to this country are not accurately reflected in the textbooks.
  - \* Often American Indians/Alaskan Natives' are stereotyped and portrayed as historical figures from the past or something related to Thanksgiving, wars, or casinos.
  - \* As with all youth, American Indian/Alaskan Native youth's learning styles are not the same.
- Generally, American Indians/Alaskan Natives are not acknowledged for the positive contributions they make to the community; rather, American Indians/Alaskan Natives are frequently publicly exploited.
- American Indian/Alaskan Native individual's worldviews are not the same.

## Homelessness and American Indian/Alaskan Native Youth:

- Be aware that immediate and extended families are both extremely important to American Indian/Alaskan Native.
  - \* Because there is little difference between immediate and extended family, if youth are staying with someone, they may not consider themselves homeless.

## Important information regarding the ICWA – Indian Child Welfare Act, PL 95-608:

### What is the Indian Child Welfare Act?

- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law that was passed in 1978.
- ICWA sets out rules that state courts have to follow in certain child custody cases involving Indian children. Under state law, courts must follow these rules.
- The rules are designed to keep Indian children connected to their families and tribes. Maintaining this connection serves the best interests of Indian children and also promotes the stability and security of Indian tribes and families.
- One important way ICWA helps to keep children connected to their families and tribes is by requiring social service agencies to make special efforts to keep Indian families

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together. These agencies must provide services that reflect the current social and cultural standards of the family's Indian community.

- A high number of Indian children were being removed from their families by state courts and county social services agencies and put in non-Indian homes and institutions. These rules apply in cases where Indian children are being taken away from their parents or Indian custodians.
- Often, state and county officials did not understand, ignored, or rejected the cultural or social customs of the child's tribal community.

## When does the Indian Child Welfare Act apply to youth?

ICWA applies to child custody cases where an Indian child is being taken away from a parent or Indian custodian, or where parental rights are being "terminated" (ended). These include:

- Foster care "placements" (placing a child in the custody of foster parents)
- Child Protective Services removal
- Guardianships (in juvenile court and probate court) and adoptions (in juvenile court and family court)
- Certain juvenile court cases (for example, truancy cases)
- ICWA does not apply to custody cases between parents who are divorced or are getting divorced

## What defines an American Indian Child?

- An American Indian child is one under the age of 18, who is either enrolled in a federally recognized tribe or eligible for enrollment in a federally recognized tribe;
- If the state has reason to believe that the child is American Indian, the court has a duty to discover their tribal identity;
- The State must notify the tribe immediately; notice to parents, tribe, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) notification

## Under ICWA, what rights does the Indian child's tribe have?

- The tribe has a right to participate in custody cases of its Indian children.
- The tribe can "exercise" (use) "tribal jurisdiction." (The term "jurisdiction" refers to which court – tribal or state – has the right to hear a case. Whether the tribe has jurisdiction may depend on whether the child lives on or off the reservation.)
  - \* NOTE: Jurisdiction is a very complicated subject. Contact proper authorities if you have questions about the jurisdiction of your custody case.
- The tribe has the right to be notified about the child custody case.
- The tribe has the right to ask for up to 20 more days to get ready for a hearing.

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- The tribe has the right to ask that the case be moved to tribal court.
- The tribe has the right to deny your request that the case be moved to tribal court.
- The tribe has the right to look at the documents about the case that the court has on file.
- The tribe has the right to see records kept by the State on the placement of tribal children.
- The tribe has the right to apply certain tribal laws or customs to the custody case. These include laws that define “Indian custodian” or “extended family,” for example.
- The tribe has the right to disagree with ICWA’s placement preferences and to tell the court where the tribe thinks it would be best for the Indian child to live.
- Tribes have all the same rights about getting proper notice from the court that you do, including the right to ask for invalidation.
- Notice to the tribe must be sent to the tribal chairperson or other representative that the tribe chooses.

# Cognitive and Developmentally Disabled Youth

The following are recommendations developed by professionals who provide services to Cognitive and Developmentally Disabled community members as well as developed by participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

- Youth may have difficulty communicating that abuse has occurred and may appear frustrated with their inability to communicate words verbally.
- Reports from youth with disabilities may be construed as false and not believed because of their lack of credibility (based on their physical and cognitive abilities).
- Youth with disabilities are at an increased risk for abuse because of their vulnerabilities as compared to the general population and are more likely to be victims of crime.
- Youth with disabilities need additional support and will typically have difficulty accessing appropriate services. Guiding youth throughout the referral process is essential.
- When youth report abuse, investigations are triaged through the county child protection agency. Because of jurisdiction problems, multiple caretakers and displacement, charges may not be reported and/or investigated.
- Youth with disabilities rarely report either abuse or assault because of:
  - \* A lack of trust for authority figures
  - \* The assumption they will not be believed when telling their story
  - \* Disabilities act as a barrier for youth to acknowledge the abuse
- Most likely the abuse will be someone well known to the youth (family member or caregiver.) Safety should always be assessed before transporting youth back home to a caregiver or another family member.
- Developmental delays (cognitive, psychological or physical) may interfere with the understanding of what is happening in abusive situations.
- Youth sometimes lack the ability to know the difference between care and abuse, especially when abuse does not cause physical harm.
- Feelings of isolation and withdrawal because of special needs may make youth more vulnerable to manipulation as a result of increased desire for attention and affection.
- Youth are more vulnerable to abuse in the community because they may be unable to make safe decisions and may lack self-protective skills.

## Frequent Characteristics of Youth with Cognitive/ Mental and Physical Developmental Disabilities include:

- Youth are educated to be compliant and responsive to authority figures.
- Youth are dependent on support from long-term caregivers and/or several caregivers.



# Cognitive and Developmentally Disabled Youth

- Youth may be looked upon as being asexual and are often not provided with general sex education and/or denied recognition of their sexuality as it may be delayed in onset.
- They may be viewed negatively by society and labeled as “bad,” or “different.”
- It is important to be aware of any behavior changes seen in youth.
- Professionals should assess whether the youth is cognitively or developmentally delayed. Knowing whether the youth is developmentally/cognitively delayed may be critical to the charging decision, may constitute a separate offense and will assist prosecution, courts and law enforcement. If the youth is cognitively or developmentally delayed, attempt to document the level of youth’s functioning. The following questions are appropriate to ask a parent, guardian or school official to assess the youth’s functioning:
  - \* Are youth’s cognitive/developmental challenges obvious and, if so, in what way?
  - \* Has youth been evaluated recently? If so, by whom? (Copy should be attached to police reports).
  - \* How well does this youth conceptualize abstract questions?
  - \* What is the youth’s chronological age vs. developmental age?
  - \* What is the difference between youth’s developmental age and age of consent?

Depending on level of abilities it may be necessary to individualize the approach, these suggestions may be helpful; however, they can be demeaning to the person as well.

- Speak slowly and clearly; use simple language.
- Present one concept at a time
- Use visuals (draw pictures, make outlines)
- Ask for feedback by youth to ensure clear comprehension

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## Guidelines and Steps to Using Interpreter Services:

To obtain a certified ASL interpreter, call 651-224-6548.

### General guidelines for choosing interpreter services:

- Only use certified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters (call 651-224-6548)
- Do not allow “signers,”—people who are not certified to interpret, regardless if they know sign language, interpreters must be certified.
- Do not use children or any family members to interpret.
- Do not wear sunglasses.
- Attempt to get an interpreter of the same sex as the deaf/hard of hearing person for the best situation for youth.

### Guidelines for interacting with an interpreter:

- Have the interpreter stand next to you facing the deaf/hard of hearing person.
- Face the deaf/hard of hearing person, not the interpreter.
- Give the deaf/hard of hearing person direct eye contact—avoid looking at or watching the interpreter.
- While the deaf person will mostly likely watch the interpreter, she/he also will have eye contact with you and want a relationship with you.

- Speak directly to the deaf/hard of hearing person as if you would a hearing person. Direct questions at the deaf/hard of hearing person (i.e. “How are you feeling?”). Avoid directing questions at the interpreter (i.e. “Tell her...” “Ask her...”)
- Make sure the room is well lit and free from any distractions.
- Have deaf/hard of hearing person face away from the light (from windows, flashing lights, and computer screens) or other distractions.

### If you absolutely cannot get an Interpreter:

- Avoid using computers or writing on paper. When a deaf/hard of hearing person is in crisis, their English and typing skills become impaired.
- Attempt to locate a Video Relay Services (VRS), which enables a person with hearing disabilities who use ASL to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment.
- Video Relay Services (VRS) is more efficient and effective than a TTY machine for a deaf/hard of hearing individual to express what has happened to them.
- As the very last communication option when working with a youth with hearing disabilities, it is an option to use a computer to type back and forth or pen/paper, however please use the following considerations if method is used:
  - \* Remember English is a second language for individuals with hearing disabilities. Keep written sentences short and

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use simple words. Instead of, “Did s/he assault you?” it is better to say, “Did s/he hurt you?”

- \* During a crisis situation, youth will have difficulty trying to explain their experience/situation through a TTY, a computer or writing their words onto paper. Be patient and understanding during this process.
- \* A small percentage of deaf people read lips well, but only 30 percent of what is said is visible on the lips and may be especially difficult to understand in stressful situations.
- \* Avoid using lip-reading as the method for communication, even if the deaf/hard of hearing individual states it is okay.

## General Considerations:

- Youth expect providers to display signs of impatience upon learning the youth’s communication limitations.
- More than likely, the perpetrator plays an integral role in the survivor’s daily life and is an acquaintance to the survivor. Safety of youth should be assessed.
- When deaf individuals report sexual assault, they encounter stereotypes about being a sexual assault victim and deaf.
- Many deaf victims of sexual assault perceive a lack of support within the deaf community, particularly if the perpetrator is also deaf.

- There is a lack of trust using interpreters; victims of sexual assault believe they cannot rely on interpreters to accurately represent their words and experiences.
- Avoid becoming frustrated, differences in hearing abilities are not visible and providers should suspend judgment and build awareness that we all have different abilities.
- Youth who are deaf and/or hard of hearing that also are homeless and/or live in shelters, face additional challenges such as not hearing a perpetrator behind them, not hearing fire alarms, etc. Building a safety plan with youth is extremely important.

## Law Enforcement System Considerations:

- If outside and squad cars are visible to the person with hearing disabilities, do not attempt to talk to the deaf person while the squad car’s lights are flashing or when there are other outside distractions. The flashing lights should be turned off and a quiet room to take the police report should be found.
- The deaf community recognizes law enforcement as a resource; however, reporting sexual assault rarely happens because of frustration communicating with first responders (911 dispatch) and fear of stigmas related to victimization.
- There is often a fear that the perpetrators words will be taken over the victim’s report.

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth

- Be aware that if a police officer yells, “stop,” a deaf/hard of hearing youth may not see nor hear them and can easily be misinterpreted as defiant behavior. Do not punish deaf/hard of hearing youth for their hearing abilities.

## Medical System Considerations:

- It is important to view deaf/hard of hearing individuals as members of a linguistic and cultural community. This may challenge the medical model which focuses on an individual.
- Recognize the difference in communication of deaf individuals. Some may be comfortable with lip reading and writing; other may prefer or only use ASL.

# Hmong Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Hmong community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

- Rape and sexual violence are typically not discussed within the Hmong culture; however, just because it is not discussed, does not mean that rape or abuse is culturally accepted or a cultural practice.
- Youth may have fears about their family/community hearing about the crime that occurred. Many Hmong youth may fear ostracism and family retaliation despite the circumstances of the event. Especially if youth do not have the support of their family, an advocate is extremely valuable during their process.
- Hmong youth may have faced racism within the different social systems (i.e. with the police, legal system and in hospitals.) Be cautious about how reluctant youth are to go to these places. Provide or be an advocate assisting them throughout processes involving these systems.
- Avoid making assumptions, generalizations, or stereotypes about all Asian youth being the same. For example, a common stereotype is that all urban Asian youth are involved in gang activities. This is hurtful to the youth's identity formation and social expectations.
- Avoid talking to youth with slower English or talking louder because they are Hmong; this is demeaning even if the youth's English is not as fluent as others.

## Medical System Considerations:

- Keep in mind that not all Hmong youth will need an interpreter. However, always give the option of having an interpreter.
  - \* Although Hmong youth may be fluent in English, youth may not understand English medical terminology. Some words do not translate and comprehension of medical terminology often is not clearly understood.
- There are not Hmong words for all the Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI):
  - \* If medical personnel are discussing information/preventative precautions about sexually transmitted infections, always clarify that youth understand that she/he does not have a deathly disease and explain if each infection is curable or incurable.
- Be sensitive when talking about body parts:
  - \* Keep in mind that Hmong words for private body parts are more graphic than English words;
  - \* Find and use an interpreter that knows the under-tone language for body parts and is comfortable with other medical terms.
- Communicate and discuss with youth the process of the evidentiary exam, what is likely to happen. Talk with youth throughout the process of the exam:

# Hmong Youth

- \* Many times when a victim does not speak English, the examiners avoid talking with them, making the exam more unbearable and uncomfortable.
- While some grant specifications are focused on services for the Hmong community, youth have the right to decline the exam.
- The uses of contraceptives are not always favorable in the Hmong community, particularly with parents/caregivers; allow youth to make their own decisions about reproductive health.

## Law Enforcement System Considerations:

- Typically, Hmong youth experience racism and assumptions that youth are associated with gangs. When youth sense that they are being falsely judged, they may not want to cooperate with law enforcement.
  - \* Avoid assumptions that runaway youth are affiliated with gangs, and/or are running away from gangs; also, do not assume a youth was sexually assaulted by a gang member as this may or may not be the case.
- Police should use appropriate words in regards to sexuality. Use sensitivity when talking about youth's sexuality; Hmong words for private body parts are more graphic than English words.
  - \* For example, be sensitive and do not force youth to use particular words to describe where they were penetrated if they are not comfortable and refuse to use graphic language to describe what occurred.

- If youth does not speak English, it is imperative that Law Enforcement attempts to get an interpreter of the same gender as the youth.
- Be sure to ask youth if they would be most comfortable with a male or female officer to make the report.
- Interview youth alone and not in the presence of any family members (perpetrator's or youth's).
- Inform youth there are Hmong advocates from advocacy offices that they can speak to and assist them through this process.
  - \* Make sure the advocate understands both the law and Hmong culture, especially how these may conflict with each other.
  - \* Find advocates or advocacy agencies you know and trust before a situation arises when you need one.
- Explain law enforcement procedures and each stage of the process. Youth will want to know how the youth individually, and their family will or will not be affected by the process.
- Never assume home is the safest place, regardless of status of an arrest.
- Before a youth is returned home after they have been picked up for running away:
  - \* Assess the safety of home
  - \* Discuss where they were living/staying before returning them home
  - \* Discuss all places where youth typically run
  - \* Assess reasons why youth left home

# Hmong Youth

- Youth and their families trust the legal system and hope all cases will be charged and sentenced after a sexual assault. When youth choose to report, the expectation is that their life will return to normal. It is important to note that in circumstances when the case is not charged or prosecuted, youth often are ostracized by the community and re-victimized.

## Court System Considerations:

- Build trust and rapport with the youth and explain the American Criminal Justice System. Hmong people may or may not be familiar with system procedures and what is likely to occur throughout the legal process.
  - \* Be mindful that there is not a legal system in the Hmong culture; therefore, the American Criminal Justice System is something new to Hmong individuals, young and old.
- Be mindful that it is always the victim's choice in how the case is resolved. Be mindful that not all victim(s) will want his/her case to be resolved within the Clan system. Moreover, not all cases that enter the criminal justice system are appropriate to be resolved within the Clan system.
- Keep in mind, despite if the victim was born and raised in the United States, he/she may want to use the clan system to resolve their case. Also, youth may want to use both the Clans in the community and law enforcement to resolve the issue regarding the criminal case.

## School System Considerations:

- Keep in mind that within the Clan system, everything is solved quickly; whereas, in the mainstream criminal system it may take months to a year for a case to be resolved.
- Depending on circumstances, Hmong youth may be more likely to share information with Hmong school personnel, because they understand the culture.
- Sometimes Hmong girls may be forced to marry their boyfriend or the perpetrator to not bring shame onto the family after an assault has occurred.
- Hmong parents may not understand the school rules for “un-excused” absence and may keep the youth home to baby-sit.
- If the youth is truant from school, language and communication may become a barrier. As a result of language barriers for some caregivers/parents—youth may tell parents/caregivers that they are going to school, when in fact there is no school (holidays, school vacations, etc.) and youth meet up with friends, boyfriends, etc. Or vice versa, youth will tell parents there is “no school today,” when in actuality there is school; as a result, youth typically develop a truancy problem that parents are unaware exists.

# Homeless Youth

The following are recommendations developed by homeless community advocates as well as participating community members involved with SHYIP.

## The Diversity and Subgroups Among Homeless Youth:

There are many sub-group populations of homeless youth and the definitions are changing while systems which serve or should serve these youth may not be aware of their existence. The numbers of homeless youth enrolled in schools continues to rise with inadequate services available. Moreover, while there are still youth living in the public eye, under bridges, in vehicles, “squatting” in abandoned buildings or “camping” out of doors, many homeless youth remain invisible.

There are a number of youth, both urban and suburban, who are difficult to identify as homeless. They may not consider themselves homeless when they are living couch to couch, week by week, or even day by day with kin or friends. Variations of homelessness exist. Some youth who live with friends, neighbors and their parents do so because these figures do not care especially if the youth stays “out of their hair.” Some youth stay with family members who may provide them with basic essentials including food, clothing, and money, but the youth does not truly have a “home.”

Other groups of youth are escaping danger and may be relying on friends to secretly “hide” them and provide shelter.

Another population of youth are homeless because they have been shoved out or thrown away. These youth often come from families who are fed up with a youth’s behavior, (independent and resistant, smoking marijuana, not attending school, etc.) or they come from families that are living in poverty, overcrowded, and can’t feed them because there are too many other small children to feed. Youth in these situations are not receiving the

support they need. It is important not to make assumptions regarding the family life or support systems a young person has or does not have.

Among homeless populations there are a growing number of documented and undocumented immigrant youth. This population experiences the stress of acclimation to a new culture and generational differences. Adults and elders of immigrant populations often struggle with English, while their children become proficient in a new language in school. This can create tension and role reversal because children and youth are in the role of an interpreter for the family. Some cultural traditions practiced in former immigrant nations are also illegal in the United States, female genital circumcision, early marriage, etc.

Young immigrants may refuse to continue cultural traditions such as choosing to wear different attire in their search to become “American”, or to blend. Therefore a rift can develop between youth and parents. If a young person acts “out” of cultural tradition, a parent may banish the young person from the family and cultural comfort, i.e. extended family, community. These issues coupled with poverty and “starting over” that immigrants also struggle with, cause homelessness among immigrant youth populations. Many youth, who are undocumented drop-out of school because they see no future, they know they cannot go on to higher learning opportunities. As a result, the stress of streets can “pull” at a youth who already endures hopelessness.



# Homeless Youth

## General Considerations:

- Avoid defining homelessness for youth. Ask open-ended questions such as, “Where did you sleep last night?” “Do you feel safe where you’re staying?” A youth may be sleeping in a friend’s garage and not consider herself/himself homeless.
  - Always explain to youth that they have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
  - Explain to youth their information will be kept confidential; however, always explain mandated reporting laws before any disclosure by youth.
  - Begin the interview and/or intake session by asking if they prefer the door open or closed.
  - Homeless youth often have issues around trust, because of prior relationships when trust has been broken. Be sincere and patient to allow trust to develop. When trust is gained youth will be able to disclose information that is relevant in working with them.
    - \* Begin the intake session by asking them informal questions (how they are doing) and ask if they need anything (water, food, etc.).
  - Many members of the homeless community have been abused emotionally, sexually and/or physically. When asking about these sensitive issues, it is imperative to read body language. They may verbalize in one way, but their body language may express something different. Note any inconsistencies and come back to it later.
- When asking questions, be direct with youth. Ask the question up front and constantly remind her/him that the answers that they give will be kept confidential and that you are trying to determine what services they would most benefit from.
  - Do not coerce or force youth to do anything. Pressuring a youth to disclose information is very detrimental. Many youth often rebel after being told what to do simply because systems already dictate the things that youth do not have control over in their lives. Hence, allowing youth to have options and choices builds the relationship between youth and service provider.
  - Offer referrals as information that they can use at their leisure. Do not demand or suggest what they ‘need’ to do.
  - Do not generalize. Each person has her/his own story and is diverse. When doing an intake with a youth, read each question as if you have never read it before. The youth may feel you are insincere if you appear to know the answers before they give you an answer.
  - Always ask if there is anything else you can provide that you haven’t already mentioned.
  - Homeless and at-risk youth may not identify as being sexually exploited.
    - \* When asked where they live it’s important to ask about the living situation. A youth may say they’re living with “a friend.” Be sure to explore the youth’s living situation. Ask, “What is the age of “your friend”? What other people are living in the apartment, home, etc.?” All professionals should follow this line of inquiry.

# Homeless Youth

## Advocacy Considerations:

- When advocating for homeless youth, remember that other service providers may not understand what the history and experiences of a homeless youth have been. Be prepared to educate other professionals.
- Do not disclose any facts about the youth's life that they have not given you permission to disclose or signed a "Release of Information Form".
- Teach youth how to advocate for themselves. Make initial contacts to advocate for homeless youth and then model how a youth can advocate and speak to providers to obtain services.
- Advocate from a strength based perspective. Homeless youth may have multiple needs, but they bring a lot of skills to the process; it is important to recognize the strengths they have gained from their life experiences and empower the youth.

## Medical System Considerations:

- Never make the assumption that one will recognize a homeless youth by dress code, attitude, or stance. Homeless youth come in all sizes and shapes and often are dressed like all other youth, even if it's the only clothing they own. Maintaining an image is extremely important for their positive self-identity. Be aware that homeless youth may be reluctant to disclose a full medical history and information when questioned and examined. They may be

concerned that their family will learn about a visit to a physician or emergency room and may not desire contact. Or they may be concerned that information they share will show up on a family insurance policy. However, youth will often disclose personal issues to a doctor or a nurse, more than any other service provider; this is a great opportunity for medical professionals to learn what is really occurring in the life of a young homeless person.

- Check youth out for cuts, scars, skin infections, needle marks, etc. Homeless youth who live in alternate spaces (i.e. homeless camps, squats, or abandoned buildings), may have increased skin problems. They also may have a history of self-injurious behavior such as cutting, utilizing needles, lack of hygiene care or scars from accidents. Keep information available about the needle exchange program in Minnesota, one resource is Access Works to refer youth who are not ready to stop injecting drugs.
- Always ask for a sexual risk history and have a conversation about risk-reduction, Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases (STI's and STD's). Offer youth safer sex supplies and give them follow-up refer to agencies where they can continue to access safer sex supplies and information. Because sexual abuse and exploitation among homeless females and males is common, it must always be included in medical intakes.
- Attention must be paid to respiratory health. Homeless youth often have respiratory conditions due to smoking, exposure to weather and chemicals, or childhood illnesses.

# Homeless Youth

- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in homeless populations is more common than has been recognized; consider TBI when examining a homeless youth.
- Homeless and at-risk youth may not identify as being sexually exploited.

## School System Considerations:

- Never assume by a youth's attire that they are or are not homeless.
- Be sensitive and aware of a youth's current and past relationships. Take note of their socialization patterns including their level of isolation with peers at school and attachment.
- Watch and take notice of concerning body language while interacting with youth.
- School professionals should be educated about homeless youth and warnings signs that a youth in school may be homeless and/or exploited.
- Keep an updated referrals list and resources that will be helpful to youth.
- Avoid labeling and generalizing youth's experiences after they have been exploited and/or are homeless.
- Be sensitive and familiar with the family compositions and avoid assumptions of a youth's family.
- Be sensitive to Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Queer/Questioning (LGBTQQ) youth. (See Cultural Considerations for LGBTQQ youth)

## Law Enforcement, Legal System and Juvenile Correction Systems Considerations:

- Be sensitive to youth and avoid judgments towards youth, avoid generalizing and making assumptions about their experiences. Rather than assuming, always ask the questions directly to the youth.
- Take into consideration prior history, prior victimizations, family history, etc.
- Be aware of familial issues and whether or not it is safe or unsafe to return a youth to "home," or the place youth is staying.
- Provide youth with resources and referrals based on a youth's specific needs. Only provide information about the resources/referrals that you know to be true.
- Understand and be familiar with LGBTQQ youth. Understand the dynamics of this population and know the correct language for referring to this population. There is overlap between homelessness and LGBTQQ youth; avoid making assumptions based on preconceived notions and stereotypes.
- To build trust and rapport with law enforcement and the legal system, use comprehensive questioning and non-generalized language (i.e. parent(s) rather than mom & dad).
- Individuals within the court system have tremendous power over youth; always treat youth with respect and dignity even though they may look, act or behave differently than the service provider.

# Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Questioning Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Questioning community advocates as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

- Avoid making assumptions about gender and/or about the kinds of relationships/families individuals are involved with; specifically, avoid generalizing that all youth are heterosexual.
- Regardless of the shelter or Transitional Living Program (TLP) youth should be allowed to self-define their gender. This means specifically asking the youth: “What are the most comfortable sleeping arrangements for you?” “Do you want a male or female space to sleep, or a private place to sleep (as available for transgender youth)?”
  - \* Always allow youth respect, dignity and safety in choosing gender specific sleeping arrangements.
  - \* Before placing youth in a safe shelter, be aware of how the staff responds to a Transgender youth, make sure it is in a respectful and safe atmosphere.
- It is respectful to LGBTQQ youth to have non-gender specific bathrooms in public spaces.
- Have clarity around the diversity of family. Recognize that youth might come from queer/LGBTQQ families themselves.
- Some LGBTQQ youth may feel safer living on the street than entering a shelter due to fear of harassment by peers or inexperienced shelter staff.
- Be sensitive and use respectful pronouns. Ask youth how/what gender pronoun they identify with, along with the name they prefer to be called.

- Allow youth to identify who they are and how they identify. If you do not know, always ask.
- All personnel can learn to be allies for LGBTQQ youth by leading by example, i.e. if there is a transgender student, use their preferred pronoun and name. This also applies across all professionals who seek to be resources for all youth.

## Advocacy Considerations:

- Some youth who have been assaulted by a same sex partner may be concerned about not being taken seriously by professionals. Youth may be concerned that others will believe that males cannot be raped or that an assault by a partner is “mutual” since they are both men and can protect themselves.
- A person may not wish to be open about an assault if it will somehow involve coming out about gender identity or sexual orientation. Get consent from the individual person before assuming it is okay to share their personal information (sexual identity/orientation) with any other providers or family members.
- Unlike many youth who come from families where discrimination and harassment are shared experiences, (i.e. racial discrimination), a person who is LGBTQQ will face discrimination or harassment but they may not have the support of their families.
- LGBTQQ youth may have multiple identities with which their sexual orientation or gender identities intersect. It is helpful to consider these intersections when advocating for youth.

# Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Questioning (LGBTQQ) Youth

- Before providing referrals to youth, determine if the referrals are LGBTQQ friendly and safe.

## Medical System Considerations:

- Many youth may not feel comfortable disclosing about sexual behavior unless a clear non-judging stance has been taken. Asking, “Have you been sexually involved with males, females or both,” can be a nonjudgmental approach.
  - \* Always use inclusive language.
  - \* Avoid making assumptions that someone is male or female, gay or straight and always ask questions openly. “Are you dating someone,” “How do you identify your gender?” “Where do your parents live”, etc.
- Transgender youth may resist being seen naked. Many transgender people do not relate comfortably to their genitals and may deny to themselves that they exist.
  - \* Transgender youth may be uncomfortable if they feel their medical provider is deciding their gender based on their genitals.
- Discretion should be used when calling the person from the lobby for an appointment. If you are aware a person is transgender, it is most respectful to walk up to them and say it is their turn rather than call their legal name from across the room, thereby “outing them” or causing them to feel unsafe.
- If you ask if a female is sexually active and she says she is, do not assume she is referring to heterosexual vaginal sex.
- A person who is transgender also has a sexual orientation and can be gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual, etc. Gender identity, not biology, will likely determine how a person identifies his or her sexual orientation. For example, a person born biologically male who identifies as female and is attracted to males will likely consider herself to be heterosexual.
- Assess the situation of homeless youth/LGBTQQ youth; meet youth where they are and avoid making decisions about what you, as a professional, believe is best.
- Be a resource for medical needs rather than a provider who is going to attempt to solve youth’s problems.
- Incorporate intake and assessment forms that are gender inclusive to the medical setting.
- Provide sexual health education, sexually transmitted infections/disease education, mental health support – never assume the youth is straight or only has heterosexual sex/relationships. If a youth identifies as “straight,” don’t assume they only have heterosexual sex, etc.
- Medical providers must remain non-judgmental and use a “Harm Reduction” approach to youth who choose to continue in sex-work.
- Provide safe sex supplies to youth or provide a referral to a clinic that can supply this.

# Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Questioning (LGBTQQ) Youth

- Provide affordable health care and all other basic needs and services youth need in places that are LGBTQQ friendly and safe.
  - \* If the first response medical clinic is not affordable to the specific youth's needs, provide them with referrals that would assist them best for the immediate and long-term medical needs.

## Law Enforcement System Considerations:

- Law enforcement will encounter homeless and LGBTQQ youth under many circumstances which law enforcement deem dangerous and unsafe for youth. It is best to build a relationship with youth before attempting to “save” the youth, being a resource for youth is most helpful short and long-term.
- Many transgender youth have identification that does not match their gender expression and are therefore very concerned about interacting with systems/people that may be confront them about this inconsistency (airports, public restrooms, reporting assault, etc).
- It is very important to remember that homeless and LGBTQQ youth need safer places to stay (places that are LGBTQQ friendly and where youth feel safe and welcome). When placing youth, be sure youth feel comfortable at the safe place to ensure they will stay at the secured safe place.
- Be sensitive and educated on the diversity of the LGBTQQ community.
  - \* It is common for service providers and law enforcement to have opposing goals, having someone within law enforcement to lead this effort is ideal.

- As law enforcement asks questions about family, be aware that families come in a variety of arrangements. For example, some youth have two moms/dads for parents; hence the question “Where do your mom and dad live” is alienating. It is better to ask youth, “Where does your family live,” or “Where do your parents live?”
- Comprehensive questioning and non-generalized language (parent(s) rather than mom & dad, or assuming sexual orientation) will allow youth to build trust and rapport.

## Legal System Considerations:

- Many transgender people have documents that have discrepancies between legal name and gender marker and gender presentation. It is best to inquire about these privately to have questions clarified. Limit your questions only to what is necessary rather than to satisfy curiosity.

## Juvenile Corrections System Considerations:

- Transgender youth are often placed in settings based on biological features rather than identity. Any person who does not conform to gender norms may be at significant risk of being re-victimized in locked settings. To avoid re-victimizing youth:
  - \* Be conscious around issues of sleeping arrangements, showers/bathrooms and changing areas. Provide private and separate areas as needed.

# Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Questioning (LGBTQQ) Youth

- Some LGBTQQ youth are forced to stay in detention longer than needed due to inability of workers to locate safe placement settings in foster care or group homes.
- Individuals within the court system have tremendous power over youth; always treat youth with respect and dignity even though they may look, act or behave differently than the service provider.

## School System Considerations:

- Within each school, clearly identify “safe staff.” This can be done with stickers, signs, etc. placed outside of staff doors/offices. Safe staff members are known to be staff members LGBTQQ students can talk with about issues.
- Be sure both students and staff are clear on harassment policies; in addition, anti-harassment policies should always be enforced (teasing, taunting, etc.).
- Always allow students private changing areas in school locker rooms.
- Encourage staff support for both LGBTQQ support groups and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA), and an awareness of the difference between these groups (a confidential support group just for LGBTQQ groups vs. a GSA which is more of an activist/activity group).

# Latino/Hispanic Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Latino/Hispanic community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## General Considerations:

- Latinos are not a monolithic ethnic group. Latinos can be documented or undocumented immigrants from different countries with different cultural traditions. They can belong to families that have lived in the United States for many generations. Some may claim English as their native language, others may claim Spanish as their native language, and yet others may be native speakers of a variety of indigenous languages.
- Even if youth appear to speak English, ask if she/he would prefer to have an interpreter. Hire only certified interpreters. Do not use family members, particularly children, to interpret.

### When using an interpreter:

- \* Face the victim, not the interpreter.
- \* Speak in first or second person. Ask: “What is your name?” Instead of saying: “Ask her what her name is.”
- Understand the importance of the family. It is extremely important to let the victim decide if she/he wants to inform her/his family of the sexual assault. Ask if she/he would like someone from the family to be present while making a police report, evidentiary exams, counseling, etc. It is her/his choice to have someone present.
- Be informed about the special challenges faced by immigrants (racism, language barriers, sexism, cultural differences, immigration status, etc.). Remember, abuse is not a characteristic of the Latino culture, it can occur in every culture.

- Some Latino youth will make less eye contact or touch each other more in normal conversation, but others will not.

## Legal/Law Enforcement System Considerations:

- Survivors of sexual assault may often believe that it is their fault. Youth may choose not to discuss the assault with their family because they don’t want to scare, dishonor or worry their family, or because of religious beliefs.
- Youth who are immigrants may not report a sexual assault due to fear of immigration problems or deportation. They often distrust the legal system and may not know how to ask for help because of their fears. Likewise, a perpetrator’s immigration status may impact the youth’s decision to report. Most youth do not want their families/partners to be deported. They just want the abuse to stop.
- It may be difficult for a Latino survivor of sexual assault to seek help because of a past experience with distrust and discrimination with the system. Be aware of how these biases may affect communication with law enforcement, and provide reassurance of the confidentiality and safety of the interaction.
- In some Latin American countries, sexual assault and/or domestic violence are not viewed as a crime. In others, sexual assault survivors regularly appear alongside the perpetrator in the local media. In many Latin American countries, photos of the suspected or convicted perpetrators appear on the news. Sometimes the victim’s picture may appear alongside it, or as part of the news piece. This may interfere with the victim’s desire to report as a result of his/her identity being “public”.



# Latino/Hispanic Youth

- \* It is important to explain to youth how sexual assault and domestic violence are addressed in the United States Criminal Justice System.
- \* Inform youth of their rights their rights as minors. This will help youth understand the importance of making a report to the proper authorities or to be seen at the hospital.
- Always talk to youth and take police report alone and without family members or friends present, regardless of whom the youth states she is with.

## Medical System Considerations:

- For many Latinos, questions related to sexuality are a delicate topic, and youth should be asked if she/he will prefer a female or male person to do the examination, make the police report, etc. or in the presence of a person the youth trusts.
- Be aware that when youth go to a clinic or hospital the perpetrator may accompany her/him. Be sure that regardless of whom youth says she/he is with (friend, partner, brother, etc.) that medical personnel see her/him alone.

## School System Considerations:

- School personnel should consider that youth do not want to confirm abuse, exploitation, or assault to authority figures because of experiences where disclosure immediately follows schools informing parents and/or guardians.
  - \* Sensitivity and discussion of confidentiality and mandated reporting should always be discussed with youth.
  - \* Informing Latino youth and parents/guardians of minor consent laws is helpful for families who are unfamiliar with confidentiality laws.
- If the youth is truant from school, language and communication may become a barrier for parents and school personnel.
  - \* For example, youth may tell parents/caregivers that they are going to school when there is no school because of language barriers (and instead are going to a friend's house/boyfriend, shopping mall, etc.).
  - \* Latino parents may not understand the school rules for "un-excused" absence and may keep the youth home to baby-sit for the family.

# Male Youth

The following are recommendations developed by male youth advocates as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## Introduction to Male Youth:

The identification of sexual assaults committed against males is a recently recognized phenomenon. Previous to the feminist efforts of the last 30 years, resulting in much more comprehensive laws and growing public awareness, rape was the only “sex crime” recognized by law. Only males could be charged with rape and females were the only victims recognized by law.

There has been a bias in our culture against recognizing the sexual assault of boys and men as prevalent and abusive. Because of this bias, there has been a belief that boys and men do not experience abuse and do not suffer from the same negative impact of sexual assault that girls or women do. Today this bias is changing; many states are beginning to recognize that sexual assault of males is a problem. Research shows that one out of six boys will have been assaulted by the age of 16. Unfortunately, experts believe too many cases still go unreported.

Recent statistics suggest that 75% of sexual predators are male and 25% are female. Sexual abuse by women of children and teens is a subject most parents and caregivers are not familiar with. Female sexual predators go unreported because of lack of awareness by the public. As recently as 10 years ago, it was a common assumption that females did not or could not sexually abuse children or youth. As a result, as many as 86% of the victims of female sexual predators are not believed, and therefore, the crimes may go unreported and might not get prosecuted.

Many of the considerations stated in the document “Youth Considerations” are applicable to male youth. However, because male victims often face different issues there are additional considerations that should be taken in to account. Following is list of general considerations along with a suggested list of considerations when working with male youth:

## General Considerations:

- Boys are more likely than girls to be sexually abused by strangers or by authority figures in organizations such as schools, the church or athletic programs.
- The feeling of denial is most common after a male youth has been sexually assaulted. The reasons behind denial include:
  - \* A worry that people will not believe him
  - \* A fear that the perpetrator may punish him for reporting the crime
  - \* Inability to view himself as a victim of a crime
  - \* Reluctance to face all potential changes in him that may result from acknowledging what has happened
- Mistaken attitudes including the perception that men/boys cannot be forced into sex makes it difficult for a man or boy who has experienced sexual assault to cope with the event, leaving him feeling isolated, ashamed and feeling “less of a man.”
- Erection or ejaculation during a sexual assault does happen. Reassure the youth that a physical arousal has nothing to do

# Male Youth

with sexual desires or consent. Physical contact or stress can make physiological responses occur.

- For male youth, sexual assault typically causes confusion or questioning about one's sexuality. Reassure the youth that his sexuality is unlikely to have changed as a result of being sexually assaulted.
- For homosexual youth, many blame themselves because of their sexuality. This self – blame often adds another layer of problematic thoughts for professionals to assess.
- Gay youth tend to hesitate reporting a sexual assault due to fears of blame or intolerance by police or medical personnel. As a result, gay youth might not seek out legal protection and medical care following the assault.
- When male youth are in a medical setting, don't assume that youth want a same sex provider; always ask if youth prefer to have male or female medical provider.
- Youth respond differently to being sexually assaulted. Some may respond to their feelings of shame, guilt, or anger by punishing themselves with self-destructive behavior.
- Many youth may pull away from relationships and family making them more isolated.
- As a coping behavior, some youth may begin using drugs or alcohol. There may be signs of increased aggressive behavior or becoming increasingly agitated with friends, family and partners.

## Working with Male Youth:

- When working with young males, try to build rapport. Appropriately expressing personal feelings and allowing boys to appropriately express theirs will build better relationships.
- It is best to engage youth with contemporary mediums that they identify interest in. For example, you could use a well know movie that highlights challenges, obstacles and achievements in life.
- For many young men, appearing “soft,” too permissive, or inconsistent will inhibit your interaction and progress toward healthy relationship-building. Establish clear guidelines and consequences that are logical, clear, and understandable. These should be discussed from the beginning of your interaction with the youth so that they are aware of what they are expected to be accountable to in the future.
- Be aware of the following fears and concerns a young male victim may have when seeking services:
  - \* Being labeled as gay.
  - \* The assumption that, especially if he is gay, he will not be believed or supported.
  - \* Concern for being treated with shame, blame or intolerance by law enforcement or the medical profession.
  - \* Stigma associated with the myth that “males are not victims.”
  - \* Loss of security, sense of self and “innocence.”

# Somali Youth

The following are recommendations developed by Somali community members as well as participating members involved with SHYIP.

## Who Are Somali People?

Somalia is located eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, east of Ethiopia. Due to the collapse of the 1991 Somali government and subsequent civil war, thousands of Somalis immigrated to this country as either refugees or political asylees. An estimated 50,000 Somalis have made Minnesota their home because of economic opportunities. It is very important for one to know the following key elements about this community:

- **Language:** The spoken language is Somali with regional variations.
- **Social Structure:** Based on family and clan group.
- **Religion:** The majority of Somalis (99%) are Muslim Sunnis. Being a Muslim means declaring (Shahadah) that there is only one God and Mohammed is his messenger.

## General Considerations:

- Shaking hands with the opposite sex is not a common practice in the Somali culture. It is best to not shake hands unless one is first extended to you.
- Physical contact between men and women in public is avoided.
- Somalis sometimes use sweeping hands and arm gestures to make a point or express a feeling.
- The American way of using the index finger to call someone to come towards you is offensive to Somalis. It is a sign of disrespect.

- To show respect, young people avoid looking adults in the eye.
- Indirect speech and humor is used as a way of saving face and overcoming embarrassment.
- In the traditional household, the father is the head of the household; however, due to the civil war in Somalia, many young people are now raised by single mothers.
- One of the important pillars of Islam includes praying five times a day. It is good practice to offer youth a place to pray during prayer times. Do not to be offended if someone requests prayer time.
- Another important pillar of Islam is fasting during the month of Ramadan. The start and end dates of Ramadan change every year because it is based on the lunar year. A person who might be fasting during Ramadan is not allowed to eat or drink from dawn to dusk.
- In the Muslim religion, drinking alcohol and consuming products containing pork is prohibited. Do not offer Somalis alcoholic beverages. Youth who drink alcohol or use drugs might not want anyone to find out because in addition to being illegal, using alcohol and drugs are not culturally accepted behaviors.
- As with other religions, in the Muslim religion, rape is a serious offense and carries serious consequences. There is a stigma associated with rape, which often prevents victims to come forward with their stories.

# Somali Youth

- Avoid making judgments based on a Somali youth's attire. Generally, Somali women wear a head scarf and prefer to cover their entire body. This is something required by their religion and is part of their culture and tradition. Youth may choose to dress less traditionally and more mainstream (urban or pop culture attire) without approving or disapproving his/her entire culture and religion.
- Avoid making judgments based on a Somali youth's verbal language skills. Some youth learn to speak English before they develop sufficient reading, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

## Medical System Considerations:

- Although it is an unlawful act, female circumcision is a common practice. Be mindful when examining young women who might have been circumcised and focus on the issue at hand.
- Youth might not be comfortable to share their sexual or medical history with strangers including medical professionals. Providers should explain why the discussion is important, how it might help the victim, the issue of confidentiality, right to choose services, as well as available resources.
- During physical examination, females might not be comfortable to be with male doctors or interpreters. Ask ahead if they prefer female or male doctors or interpreters.
- Youth might not want their parents or relatives to find out what has happened to them for fear of shaming family members or fear of bringing family members to court.

- Youth might not want to go back to their immediate family. Let youth know their rights and of any community resources that are available to them.
- Youth might prefer living with extended family rather than a foster family or shelter.
- Youth might be suffering from mental health issues or substance abuse in addition to being sexually abused. If a youth has substance abuse or mental health issues, inform them of available treatment and support services he/she can access.

## Law Enforcement System Considerations:

- Somali youth might not know how to cooperate with law enforcement.
- Somali youth hang out to be together but are rarely gang affiliated. It is a cultural norm for friends to congregate in social groups.
- Let youth know about available community resources and provide interpreter services if language is a barrier; be sure to ask youth if they would be most comfortable with a male or female interpreter.
- Do not make assumptions or stereotypes; rather, ask questions if you are not sure about something related to the youth and/or the Somali community.

# Somali Youth

- Many Somalis fear dogs and get upset if touched by dogs or chased by one. It is best to keep dogs away from them when seeking their trust or cooperation.

## Court System Considerations:

- Explain to youth and family the way the court system works, as they will most likely not be familiar with the system.
- Provide interpreters if language is a barrier. Ask youth what gender of interpreter they are most comfortable being with throughout the court process.
- Economic disparities often do not allow for equal representation under the law. Let families know if they are eligible for legal assistance and inform families and youth of their rights.
- Clearly explain to families and youth the meaning, the purpose and the consequences of criminal no contact orders and other legal actions.
- Only with the family and/or youth's consent, connect with Somali community leaders for assistance if culture is a barrier.
- With permission of the youth, find out if there are local restorative justice programs that are available to youth.

- Be aware that the entire family and community might appear in court and expect you to explain the facts of the case. Give families and relatives an explanation of what you can realistically and legally share with them.

## School System Considerations:

- If you are communicating with youth or parents and language is a barrier, provide an interpreter and seek additional services from school liaisons and advocates.
- Explain confidentiality and mandated reporting laws and appropriate conduct to youth and family before any problems arise.

## Suggested Reading for Further Information

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation: Wilder Research. Research on Homeless Youth, Race and Culture and Troubled Youth: <http://www.wilder.org>

Fontes, L.A. (2005). Child abuse and culture. Working with diverse families. New York: Guilford Press.

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs (OJP) “Snapshots on Minnesota Youth.” (2007). <http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/newsletters/Snapshots/2007-09.htm>

Minnesota Runaway and Homeless Youth Act: <http://mnrunawayandhomelessyouthact.com/>

Sue, D. (2004) Counseling the Culturally Diverse (4th ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

The Center for Victims of Torture Resource website for culture competency reading: <http://www.cvt.org/main.php/ResourceCenter>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <http://www.nctsnet.org>

Ungar, M. (2005). Handbook for working with children and youth. Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts. California: Sage Publications.