

Digital Exploitation & Threat Evaluation for Child Trafficking (D.E.T.E.C.T.)

Provider Guidance & Clinical Considerations

This tool is designed exclusively as an initial screening aid and educational resource. It is not a validated, standardized, or accredited screening instrument and has not been established as a diagnostic or predictive measure. A positive response to any question does not establish that trafficking, exploitation, grooming, abuse, or a mental health condition has occurred. Likewise, a negative response does not rule out exploitation, abuse, coercion, or other safety concerns.

D.E.T.E.C.T. is intended to help mental health professionals and other practitioners identify areas that may warrant additional assessment related to technology-facilitated exploitation, coercion, grooming, trafficking vulnerability, and digital safety.

Results should be considered alongside the youth's developmental history, clinical presentation, disclosures, environmental circumstances, collateral information, and applicable agency policies and legal requirements. Practitioners should use professional judgment and follow applicable mandated-reporting, safeguarding, emergency- response, and documentation requirements.

D.E.T.E.C.T. should not be used as the sole basis for determining a youth's safety, mental health status, legal status, or whether trafficking or exploitation has occurred.

The absence of a positive response should not be interpreted as evidence that exploitation or abuse is not or has not occurred. Youth may be unable or unwilling to disclose experiences because of fear, shame, loyalty, manipulation, threats, developmental factors, or concerns about what may happen if they disclose.

By using this tool, you agree that [Evergreen Caregiver Support](#) and Nathaniel LaChine shall not be held liable for any direct, indirect, incidental, or consequential damages arising from the use, misuse, or interpretation of this tool. No practitioner-client or doctor-patient relationship is established between the creators and the end-user through the distribution of this material.

This document provides mental health professionals and other practitioners with considerations and follow-up guidance for each question on the **Digital Exploitation & Threat Evaluation for Child Trafficking (D.E.T.E.C.T.) screening tool**.

The purpose of the Provider Guidance is not to assign a diagnosis or determine that trafficking has occurred. Rather, it is intended to help practitioners understand what a response **may indicate**, identify additional information that may be clinically or safety relevant, and determine whether further assessment or intervention is warranted.

Section 1: Rapport & Early Vulnerability

Question 1

Are there online spaces (games, apps, or platforms) where you feel more understood or supported than in real life?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate unmet relational needs, social isolation, difficulty finding support in the youth's offline environment, or increased reliance on online communities for connection and validation. These circumstances may increase vulnerability to manipulation or exploitation but are not, by themselves, evidence of grooming or trafficking.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Providers may explore:

- What does the youth receive from the online environment that they do not experience offline?
- What types of relationships or communities are involved?
- Does the youth have trusted adults or supportive peers offline?
- Does the youth feel isolated from family, school, or community?
- Has anyone online used the youth's need for connection or belonging to influence their behavior?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Consider both the protective and potentially harmful aspects of the youth's online relationships. Avoid assuming that online relationships are inherently unsafe.

Question 2

Have you met anyone online who feels easier to talk to or who seems to understand you better than people in your offline life?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate a meaningful online relationship, unmet emotional needs, social isolation, or increased emotional reliance on a particular individual. In some circumstances, individuals seeking connection may be targeted by people who use emotional dependency or perceived intimacy to establish control.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- How did the youth meet this person?
- How long have they been communicating?
- What does the youth know about the person?
- Has the person represented themselves as being the youth's primary or only source of support?
- Has the relationship become increasingly intense or secretive?
- Has the person attempted to influence the youth's relationships with family or friends?
- Has the person requested personal information, photographs, money, or other forms of access?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

The existence of a close online relationship does not establish grooming or exploitation.

Focus on the **nature of the relationship, boundaries, power dynamics, and behavior of the other person.**

Section 2: Potential Grooming & Boundary Testing

Question 3

Has anyone online ever asked you to keep your conversations, messages, or relationship private or a secret?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate a request for ordinary privacy or may represent an attempt to establish secrecy, isolation, or control. Secrecy becomes particularly concerning when it is combined with threats, manipulation, sexual requests, financial demands, or efforts to isolate the youth from trusted adults.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What did the person ask the youth to keep secret?
- Why did they say it needed to remain private?
- How did the youth feel about the request?
- Was the youth threatened or pressured to maintain secrecy?
- Did the person discourage the youth from talking to parents, caregivers, therapists, teachers, or other trusted adults?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess whether secrecy is voluntary or the result of manipulation, fear, coercion, or threats.

Question 4

Online relationships can sometimes become very intense. Has an online connection ever asked for your passwords, tracked your location, or guilt-tripped you into blocking or stopping talking to certain friends or family members?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate attempts to establish control, surveillance, dependency, or social isolation. These behaviors can occur within abusive or exploitative relationships and warrant further assessment.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What information or account access was requested?
- Does the person currently have access to the youth's accounts or location?
- Has the person monitored the youth's activities?

- Has the person demanded that the youth block or stop communicating with others?
- What happens when the youth does not comply?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess whether the individual currently has access to accounts, devices, location information, or other personal information that could be used to monitor or threaten the youth.

Question 5

Has anyone you met online ever given you gifts, money, favors, or special attention that made you feel like you owed them something in return?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate manipulation through gifts, attention, perceived indebtedness, or reciprocity. Gifts or financial assistance are not inherently exploitative; concern increases when they are connected to expectations, pressure, sexual requests, secrecy, threats, or control.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What was provided?
- What, if anything, did the person expect in return?
- Was the youth told they owed the person something?
- Did the youth feel pressured to repay the person?
- Were sexual images, meetings, money, services, or other activities requested?
- What happened when the youth declined?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess the youth's perception of obligation and whether the relationship involves a pattern of increasing demands.

Section 3: Potential Sexual Exploitation & Coercion

Question 6

Has anyone ever asked you for photos, videos, or messages that felt private, sexual, or uncomfortable?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response indicates a need to explore potential sexual boundary violations, coercion, grooming, exploitation, or image-based abuse. The response alone does not establish that grooming or exploitation has occurred.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- Who made the request?
- How old was the youth at the time?
- What was requested?
- How did the person respond if the youth hesitated or refused?
- Did the youth send anything?
- Were threats, pressure, deception, gifts, or promises involved?
- Is the person still contacting the youth?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess whether sexual content involving the youth may exist, whether the youth is being pressured to create additional content, and whether threats or distribution have occurred. Follow applicable agency policies and reporting requirements.

Question 7

Is there anything happening online right now that makes you feel nervous, stressed, or worried about checking your phone or notifications?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate ongoing harassment, coercion, threats, sextortion, cyberbullying, stalking, exploitation, or another source of digital distress. It may also reflect non-exploitative stressors and therefore requires further exploration.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What happens when the youth receives a message or notification?
- Who is contacting them?
- What are they asking the youth to do?

- Are there threats or demands?
- Does the youth fear someone will share information, images, or secrets?
- Has the youth attempted to block or disengage from the person?
- Has the behavior escalated?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Current threats, escalating demands, stalking, threats of physical harm, or fear that an individual knows the youth's physical location may require immediate safety planning and implementation of applicable response protocols.

Question 8

Do you or have you ever been asked to share, trade, or send pictures or videos in exchange for something of value (such as money, gifts, game items, favors, or access)?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate potential transactional sexual exploitation, coercion, image-based abuse, or manipulation. Additional context is necessary to understand whether the interaction involved pressure, deception, threats, control, or exploitation.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What was requested?
- What was offered in exchange?
- Did the youth feel they could say no?
- Did the person follow through on what they promised?
- Were additional requests made after the initial exchange?
- Was the youth threatened or pressured to continue?
- Does the person possess or threaten to distribute sexual images?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess for ongoing coercion, possession or threatened distribution of sexual content, financial exploitation, and other forms of technology-facilitated sexual abuse.

Question 9

Sometimes people online break our trust or try to force us into doing things. Has anyone online ever threatened to share your private information, photos, or secrets if you didn't do what they asked?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate coercion, blackmail, sextortion, harassment, or another form of technology-facilitated abuse or exploitation.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What is the person threatening to share?
- What are they demanding?
- Is the person still communicating with the youth?
- Has the youth sent additional images, money, or information because of the threat?
- Does the person know the youth's location, school, family, or other identifying information?
- Has the person threatened physical harm?
- Has the youth attempted to comply, block the person, or delete evidence?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Active threats, escalating demands, threats of physical harm, threats involving additional victims, or indications that the person knows the youth's physical location may require immediate safety planning and implementation of applicable agency reporting and response protocols.

Section 4: Potential Financial Exploitation & Labor

Question 10

Do you currently have your own Cash App, Venmo, or crypto wallet? (Receive/send money, split costs, is a primary caregiver adult aware?)

What the response may indicate:

The presence of financial applications is not, by itself, an indicator of exploitation. A positive

response may provide an opportunity to assess financial independence, account access, money transfers, and whether another person is directing or controlling financial activity.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- Who has access to the account?
- Does anyone else know the password or PIN?
- Is someone else directing the youth to send or receive money?
- Where does the money come from?
- Where is the money being sent?
- Is the primary adult caregiver in the youth's life aware of the cash app(s) in use?
- Has the youth been asked to receive or transfer money for someone else?
- Does the youth understand the transactions?
- Has anyone threatened or pressured the youth regarding money?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Particular attention should be given to financial activity involving coercion, deception, unexplained transfers, account control by another person, or requests to move money on someone else's behalf.

Question 11

It's common for people to team up to build an audience or manage online accounts. Is anyone else managing your social media, managing your gaming accounts, or taking a cut of the money or gifts you received online?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate ordinary collaboration or, depending on the circumstances, potential financial exploitation, account control, coercion, or exploitation of the youth's digital labor or online presence.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- Who manages the account?
- What authority does that person have?

- Does the youth have access and control of their own accounts?
- What money, gifts, or other compensation is involved?
- How is the money divided?
- Did the youth agree to the arrangement?
- Can the youth end the arrangement without threats or consequences?
- Has the person pressured the youth to create sexual or otherwise exploitative content?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Focus on **consent, control, compensation, power dynamics, and the ability to disengage.**

Account management alone does not establish exploitation.

Question 12

Have you ever done tasks or work for someone online (like streaming, gaming, or promoting things) where they didn't pay you what they promised, or asked you to lie about what you were doing?

What the response may indicate:

A positive response may indicate financial exploitation, deceptive labor practices, coercion, fraud-related activity, or exploitation of the youth's digital labor. Additional context is necessary to determine the nature and severity of the concern.

Follow-Up Considerations:

Explore:

- What work or tasks was the youth performing?
- What compensation was promised?
- Was the youth actually compensated?
- Who directed the work?
- What was the youth told to tell others about the activity?
- Did the youth understand what they were participating in?
- Has the youth attempted to comply, block the person, or delete evidence?
- Did the activity involve sexual content, financial transactions, illegal activity, or other potentially harmful conduct?

Clinical/Safety Considerations:

Assess whether the youth was deceived, coerced, financially exploited, or placed in situations involving illegal or unsafe activity. Consider the youth's developmental level and understanding of the arrangement when evaluating consent and vulnerability.

Provider Reminder

A positive response **identifies an area for further inquiry; it does not establish a finding of trafficking, exploitation, grooming, abuse, or a mental health condition.**

When a youth discloses potentially harmful activity, providers should prioritize **safety, rapport, nonjudgmental engagement, and preservation of the youth's sense of agency.** Avoid repeatedly questioning the youth about potentially traumatic events when another qualified professional or investigative process is responsible for obtaining a formal forensic account.

When immediate danger, active coercion, threats, sexual exploitation, or other circumstances requiring intervention are identified, follow the applicable **agency policies, mandated-reporting requirements, child-protection protocols, emergency procedures, and jurisdiction-specific laws.**

