

## COMMON CAREGIVER REACTIONS TO CSEC

### A caregiver may be **Worried**.

A caregiver may be concerned about the **physical or emotional harm** experienced by the child. A caregiver may be worried about a **sexually transmitted infection**. A caregiver may worry and wonder about **long-term consequences** (“Will she get past it?” “Will it always affect him?” “Is she scarred for life?”). A caregiver may worry that the child will **return to their exploiter and be commercially sexually exploited again**.

### A caregiver may feel **Guilty**.

A caregiver may feel guilty about what has happened. They may **blame themselves** or wonder what they could or should have done differently so that their child would not have been exploited.

### A caregiver may be **Angry**.

A caregiver may be **angry at their child and blame them for what happened**. Sometimes children first make contact with exploiters when they are engaging in activities, at locations, or with people that are against their parents’ rules (running away, skipping school, out after curfew, hanging out with older people, internet activity, etc.). A caregiver may be **angry at the exploiter (pimp) or others, even friends** of their child, who have been a “bad influence” or even got them involved.

### A caregiver may feel **Uncertain how to parent**.

A caregiver may be unsure about **how to help** their child stay safe and how to be a good parent for their child. Sometimes parents are afraid that if they attempt to “set limits” (curfew, monitor activities, say where and when they must be places, who it is okay or not okay to be with, etc.) that their child will run away and be exploited again or experience other dangerous situations. Caregivers may also want to exercise **even more** control and monitoring of their child in an effort to **protect them and keep them safe**.

### A caregiver may be **Confused about what happened**.

A caregiver may be in the dark about **what their child experienced** during their time of exploitation. They may have questions about what happened but not know how to ask their child. Or they may have asked and the child has not wanted to talk about it. They may also be confused about **the criminal justice or social service systems** now involved with the family and **what will happen next**.

### A caregiver may feel **Ashamed**.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (“Prostitution”) is associated with **significant stigma** and negative views by others. A caregiver may feel that the child or even the whole family is devalued. The caregiver may worry that the child will have a “reputation” (“Once a prostitute always a prostitute”).

### A caregiver may feel **Isolated and Alone**.

Because of societal views, feelings of shame, or fears of blame by others, a caregiver may not have anyone they confide in or seek support from. It can feel **like no one else is dealing with this** issue and **no one understands** what they are going through.

### A caregiver may feel **Frustrated**.

Caregivers have often tried very hard to help their child in the past. A caregiver may experience frustration that **their child continues to have difficulties**.

### A caregiver may feel **Hopeless**.

Sometimes caregivers feel that they have done everything that they can and **nothing has helped**. They believe that there is **nothing else to do** to change the situation or help their child. It can sometimes be difficult to commit to a therapy process with their child if there have been many other times they have tried to help and have felt that their child did not improve as a result.

### A caregiver may be **Afraid**.

They may fear retaliation by the exploiter for the child leaving him or for the family cooperating with the police.

### A caregiver may feel **Overwhelmed**.

When a child has been commercially sexually exploited a caregiver may be overwhelmed by their CSEC experiences, may feel many powerful feelings (anger, worry, shame) or may have difficulty feeling anything (feel “numb”). Strong feelings and difficulty feeling anything at all are common reactions.

### A caregiver may be **reminded of their own trauma**.

Caregivers may have their own history of trauma (for example, child physical abuse or sexual abuse, domestic violence, their own Commercial Sexual Exploitation). These reminders of upsetting events in the past and reactions to difficult memories can make helping a child even more difficult.