Handout #2:

Relatable and Respectful Engagement Strategies

When youth refuse to talk to you or are being vague or difficult:

► Try not to get frustrated. They are not consciously being delinquent or difficult. All behavior is purposeful, but that doesn’t mean we are aware that we are doing it or why we are doing it. Try to roll with it and not let it sidetrack you.

► Most of the time, they are not providing you with information because they know you are going to disrupt something they perceive as good or beneficial, so acknowledging this is a good place to start some dialogue with them.

► Ask if they feel threatened; if so, address the safety threat accordingly. If not, validate their fears and have a genuine conversation with them, providing as much accurate information as you can so they can make a decision on how much they want or do not want to talk.

► Honesty is always the best policy. Do not lie to them, under any circumstance.

► Validate the strength and courage it takes to survive on the streets or in tough situations.

When engaging lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ) youth:

► LGBTQ youth are often denied access to services and therefore may rely on commercial sex to sustain themselves. You want to ensure that you are prepared to validate that experience for them as well as assist in locating services to support their exit from commercial sex.

► Be prepared to step outside the box when an LGBTQ youth, or any youth, tells you they are engaging in commercial sex to “live” their gender or sexual identity.

► Cultural competence is an important element in the work we do. Workers need to understand how sexuality is viewed within specific cultures, especially how gender and sexuality manifests in different cultures.

When engaging Native American youth:

► Be mindful that their identity as a Native could be viewed as a strength, or a contributing factor for entering the life, or both, depending on the circumstances.

► Be mindful of Native youth trauma responses and that they may not trust law enforcement or advocates due to negative past experiences with these groups.

► Promote healing. Provide native youth with culturally based services that address their broad range of needs. Begin by asking if they believe accessing a Tribal healer or Native ceremonies would be helpful: “Is there a ceremony you think would help you at this time? Cleansing, blessing, or sweat lodge ceremony?”

► Utilize culturally specific screening tools and work with local Tribal resources and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) social workers/advocates.

► If possible, engage with youth over a meal. Eating together is a culturally effective engagement strategy—offer a sandwich, a burrito, something to share. At a time when survival is their priority, the simple act of eating with someone may have been denied a long time.
Provide clear communication that if they do not feel safe, they can reach out (and give reliable resource information).

Critical things that children and youth survivors really care about when working with caseworkers and other providers:

- Setting boundaries and maintaining your honesty. Setting boundaries is one way to demonstrate integrity, and that is important to these youth.

- Clearly communicate your role and what you can and cannot do. Be sure to include individuals on the multidisciplinary team who can be available to support the youth in ways you are unable to.

- Be real and authentic. Survivors are very adept at reading people—a skill they learn in the life—and it has helped keep them alive. Be yourself and genuinely show concern for their well-being and an interest in who they are as individuals.