

Human Trafficking: Protecting Our Youth

What's Happening

Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery. It includes both sex trafficking and forced labor. Youth with difficult family situations or histories of trauma, including those in foster care, can be at greater risk.

States are required to consider any child who is identified as a victim of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking (as defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act) as a victim of “child abuse and neglect” and “sexual abuse.” The term “sex trafficking” means the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. The term “severe forms of trafficking in persons” means sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.

Any child under age 18 engaged in commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking, even if the youth’s participation is not forced or coerced. This includes:

- Prostitution
- Stripping
- Pornography

Human trafficking also includes forced labor. Common examples involve:

- Selling illegal drugs
- Begging
- Door-to-door sales
- Restaurant work
- Hair and nail salons
- Farm work
- Au pairs and nannies
- Domestic work

What You Might Be Seeing

Cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 States. Victims can be children or adults, U.S. citizens or foreign nationals, male or female. Children as young as 9 years old may be at risk.

Signs that a child or youth may be involved in human trafficking include the following:

- Frequent, unexplained absences from school
- Running away from home
- Unexplained bruises or scars, withdrawn behavior, or anxiety/fear



- Knowledge of sexual situations or terms beyond what is normal for the child’s age
- Signs of drug addiction
- Sudden changes in clothes, friends, or access to money
- Having a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” who is noticeably older and/or controlling
- Expressing concern for family members’ safety if he or she shares too much information
- Working unusually long hours and being paid very little
- Living at a workplace or with the employer, or living with many people in a small space

What You Can Do

- **Be aware of recruiting tactics.** Traffickers target victims through social media websites, telephone chat lines, afterschool programs, at shopping malls and bus depots, in clubs, or through friends and acquaintances. Ask questions about your youth’s friends—especially new friends and those who appear to be significantly older. Monitor computer use and know where he or she hangs out. Traffickers may also be family members or even peers.
- **Understand that trafficked youth are victims, not criminals.** If a person has been forced to commit illegal acts, he or she is a victim and is not guilty of a crime. Help the youth understand that he or she will not be punished for seeking help.
- **Report suspected trafficking.** If you think a youth may be involved in trafficking:
 - If the youth is in immediate danger, call your local police department or emergency access number (e.g., 911).
 - To report suspected human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1.888.373.7888, text BeFree (233733), or submit a tip online at <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org>.
 - To report a sexually exploited or abused minor, call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1.800.THE.LOST or report online at <http://www.cybertipline.org>.