

## Understanding Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Understanding the mindset of child victims of human trafficking is important when trying to overcome common barriers to victim identification. Many victims may not see themselves as victims, know that what is being done to them is wrong, or seek help due to several factors including:

- \* Confinement, monitored movements, use and threat of violence
- \* Fear, shame, self-blame, hopelessness
- \* Traumatic bonding and loyalty to the trafficker
- \* Language and social barriers
- \* Distrust of law enforcement or service providers
- \* Facilitated drug addiction and forced engagement in illegal activities
- \* Debt bondage
- \* Lack of awareness of available resources and legal protection
- \* Normalization of exploitation

**Gaining the trust of a victim of human trafficking is an important first step in providing assistance.**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Administration for Children and Families



## Support for Child Victims of Human Trafficking

If you are concerned that a child may have experienced forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888 to report a tip, access resources, and connect to local services. The toll-free hotline, operated by a nongovernmental organization, is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, in more than 200 languages. The hotline can connect victims to services including:

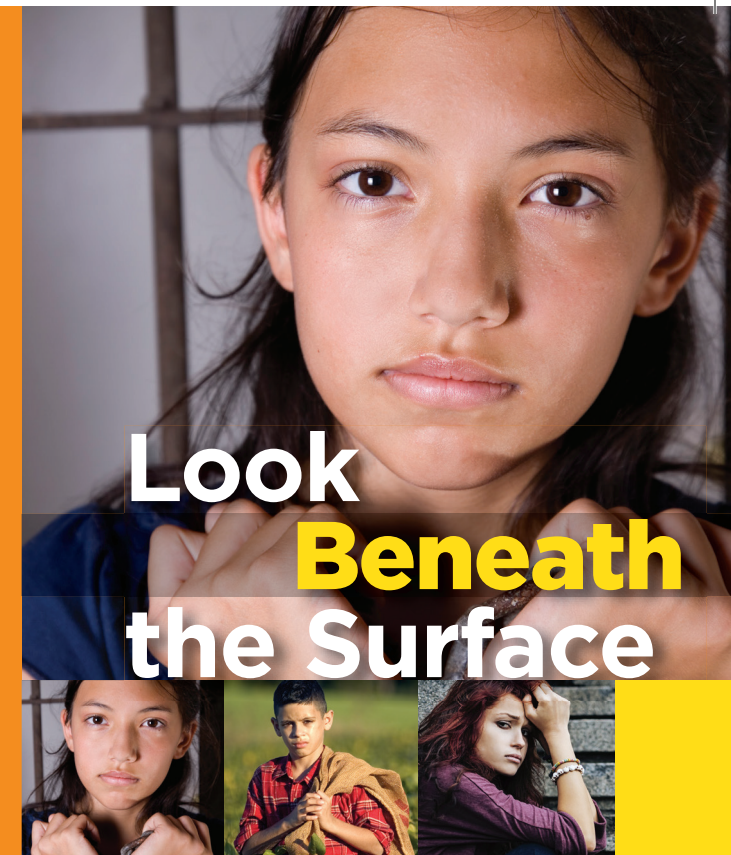
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|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| * Safety planning         | * Interpretation/        |
| * Housing and shelter     | Translation              |
| * Mental health           | * Food                   |
| * Specialized foster care | * Transportation         |
| * Health care             | * Education/Job training |
| * Case management         | * Legal assistance       |

Victims of human trafficking who are not U.S. citizens can receive help, including immigration assistance, to obtain federal and state benefits and services to the same extent as refugees through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Foreign child victims of trafficking may be eligible for the T visa, which allows them to remain in the U.S. and apply to adjust their status to lawful permanent resident after four years. Unaccompanied trafficked children may be eligible for the HHS Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program, which provides a comprehensive range of services for children and places them in culturally appropriate foster homes, group homes, or independent living arrangements, according to their needs.

Child victims of trafficking who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents are already eligible to receive public benefits and can access support through the child welfare system, runaway and homeless youth programs, and other federally-funded services.

**For more information about human trafficking visit [www.acf.hhs.gov/endtrafficking](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/endtrafficking).**

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**Can you recognize child victims of human trafficking among the people you help each day?**

**Health and human service providers, law enforcement officials, educators or community members can help identify victims of human trafficking and connect them with services and support to rebuild their lives.**

## Human Trafficking is Modern-Day Slavery

It involves the exploitation of someone for the purpose of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

If a person younger than 18 is induced to engage in a sexual act for money or something else of value, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion. Victims can be anyone from around the world or right next door: women and men, adults and children, U.S. citizens and noncitizens. Some populations are at higher risk for human trafficking, including victims of other forms of violence, disconnected youth, and racial and ethnic minorities.

Child victims of trafficking are often exploited for sexual purposes, including prostitution, pornography and sex tourism. They are also exploited for forced labor, including domestic servitude, factory work and farming.

### Child victims of trafficking can be found in:

- Brothels, strip clubs
- Street prostitution, truck stops, online
- Illicit drug trade (couriers)
- Farms, ranches, fisheries
- Domestic service, nannies
- Manufacturing, factories
- Construction, landscaping
- Restaurants, other food services
- Hotels, hospitality industry, tourism
- Sales crews, peddling, begging rings

## Identifying Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Children who are victims of human trafficking may not disclose their trafficking situation or know that they are a victim of trafficking. It is crucial for health and human service providers, law enforcement, educators, and community members to assess potential safety risks, use trauma-informed practices, and create a safe and non-judgmental space to identify trafficking indicators and assist a potential victim.

Human traffickers proactively target children and youth who have experienced other forms of abuse and violence, including those in the child welfare systems, runaway and homeless youth services, and unaccompanied minor programs. Migrant workers and domestic workers are also at higher risk due to increased social and physical isolation. By looking beneath the surface, picking up on the right clues and asking the right questions, you may discover children who are being exploited.

- Children exploited for commercial sex may show evidence of untreated sexually transmitted diseases or infections.
- Forced labor may expose children to physical abuse or dangerous work conditions. They may also develop back, vision, or respiratory problems.
- The psychological effects of exploitation include helplessness, shame and humiliation, depression, denial and disbelief, disorientation, or anxiety disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Children who are victims of trafficking can also be identified by environmental factors, including whether the child lives at the workplace or with an employer, lives with multiple people in a cramped space, or is not in school, attends school sporadically, or has a significant gap of schooling in the U.S.

## Communicating with Child Victims of Human Trafficking

When communicating with children who have been exploited, it is important to remember child victims may have experienced other forms of trauma and abuse prior to or during their trafficking situation. Children may have normalized violence, assume what has happened is their fault, react with hostility, and may not establish trust easily. They also may have been coached to answer your questions in a certain way. With the guidance of a trauma-informed child welfare expert, asking some of the following questions may help you determine indicators of human trafficking:

- Did you ever feel pressured to do something you didn't want to do? Did anyone ever promise or give money or anything of value to you or someone else in exchange for touching or hurting you?
- Are you in school? Are you working? Can you leave if you want?
- Where do you live? Who else lives there? Are you scared to leave?
- Have you or someone you know been threatened?

**While these questions can open conversation, it is vital to remember that the child should be approached in a manner that reflects his or her age, development, culture, language and what is known about the nature of his or her experience. It is often the case that children will reveal more about their experiences as they build trust and factors in their story may also change over time. It is important not to press them to answer questions until they are ready.**

