



KNOWING THE SIGNS OF YOUTH SEX TRAFFICKING

How You Can Help

Human trafficking is one of the greatest issues the world faces today, and cases today are typically based in historical trauma. Native communities know this especially to be true. It is no secret that ever since European settlers arrived and encroached upon Native lands, Native individuals have been trafficked. Today, many reservations attract outside visitors who would solicit trafficked victims, especially with the rise of casinos. It is ultimately up to the community to recognize the signs, and to take what steps they can to help remedy this dire issue. In this resource, you will learn some of the common signs of a trafficked victim and what you can do to help. There is also some information that can be used and shared to prevent becoming a victim in the first place. While it is the responsibility of law enforcement to apprehend those who perpetuate human trafficking activities, it is the moral responsibility of all people to report a situation if they feel like someone is being trafficked.



Why Should We Care?

Minors and adults are sex trafficked by pimps who trap them in a cycle of violence and sexual exploitation. This is a complex situation where there is no simple model or template. Pimps/traffickers go to great lengths to hide themselves and because exchanging sex for money is illegal, the victim is at the most risk for contact with law enforcement but also with violence from their trafficker and customers.

Common Signs of Sex Trafficking

It is important to consider some of these signs as potential indicators of a trafficking victim;

Physical & Behavioral Signs

- They appear to have been physically abused
- They appear malnourished or unhealthy
- They act very submissive, anxious, and even fearful
- They are especially paranoid around law enforcement
- Their speech sounds very scripted or rehearsed

Other Indicators

- They do not have many personal possessions and not in control of their own financials or ID
- They live with their employer, are paid very little or not at all, and work excessive hours
- They are in poor living conditions, or there are multiple people in a cramped space

It is important to be mindful of these signs, and try to make accurate connections before attempting to intervene. You may endanger the individuals' life or your own if you are not careful.



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Sex Trafficking as a Unique Culture

People in the '**life**' have a different language, rules and ways of interacting. Code language for pimps includes '**Daddy**', '**Boss**', or '**Manager**'. Traffickers can be friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, parent, uncle, strangers, or gang members to name a few. Specific rules in sex trafficking situations can include not being allowed to talk to black men (potential pimps), being forced to meet a money quota for the day, or being forced to stay out until that quota is met. Interaction with '**squares**' or people outside of the life are limited to hotel employees, others in the life and customers.

Other sex trafficking specific language includes;

- '**to break**' which is give their pimp money in between customers.
- '**to be out of pocket**' which is that they were not working and not making money, or talking to someone they shouldn't have been talking to.
- '**trick**' is a sex purchaser or sex customer.
- '**wifey**' or '**wife in law**' which refers to other girls/women working for the same pimp.

Where does it occur?

- Sex trafficking occurs both **outdoors** (on the street) and **indoors** (in hotels/motels, resorts, casinos).
- Sex is sold **online** (backpage.com, etc) through Instagram and Facebook, as well as in brothels, massage parlors, strip clubs, by gangs, on the street, in casinos, etc. There are also hidden networks that cannot be seen easily like john boards where sex buyers critique persons who they have purchased for sex and ethnic-based groups like cantinas that serve only persons from a specific region of the world.

What does sex trafficking look like?

- Seeing the person in the same area every night at the same time
- Walking slowly, acting as if they don't really have anywhere to go
- Having multiple phones, and checking them constantly
- Hanging around gas stations/convenience stores by the street
- Paying attention to the cars driving by, making eye contact with the drivers
- Walking with a variety of women down the street
- Going in and out of hotels, spending less than an hour
- Condoms and sexual products in purse or pockets
- Displaying excessive fear when contacted by law enforcement
- Sex trafficking related tattoos on neck, chest, or thighs (money related, pimp related, party-related or aspects of 'trust and loyalty')
- Looking malnourished
- Blank, emotionless look in their eyes
- Provocative clothing (even when pregnant)
- A female walking or riding a bike with a male some distance behind her trailing her, sometimes talking to her on the phone
- Waving to cars, standing on corner
- Saying random things to strangers (especially men) to try to get their attention



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What should I consider suspicious?

- Not knowing the address of where they are and not having any home address
 - Looking towards the people with her before answering any questions
 - No legal identification or the only identification is obviously fake
 - A young girl with someone much older
 - Reports no contact with their family
 - Previous citations for loitering
 - A young person walking alone at night
 - Sexual in conversation, sexually aggressive, fearless
 - Constantly being texted and emailed
 - If one person in a small group seems to be being watched over or controlled by the others, or 'escorted'
 - They do not make eye contact or only make eye contact with the people they are with
 - Large amounts of cash on them or no cash on them
 - Older companion(s) talk for them
 - If they run when you try to make contact
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What could I find on a phone or computer?

- Sexually oriented photos of others to send to potential customers
 - Sexually explicit photos
 - Texts/emails of explicit sexual nature
 - Many texts from one person discussing rates, asking who they are with, or where is their next appointment, etc.
 - Many photos of persons with money, guns, or the '**party**' lifestyle
 - The use of code words like '**daddy**' or '**roses**' or '**donations**' in text messages
 - Names in contacts with amounts or 'stars' or descriptions/address instead of a name
 - The use of a phone app that hides their texts (with an app label of a game or news)
 - Pornography
 - Saved online ads they have posted, with response emails from ads on Backpage.com, Craigslist, Tinder, AdultFriendFinder, EROS, etc.
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What can I do to be part of the solution?

- Try to build a relationship with a person you suspect is being sex trafficked so they can tell you the truth and trust you. Try to get them alone so they can speak freely. They are constantly threatened and degraded by their traffickers, listening and asking questions will help to fight the message from the trafficker that law enforcement is not to be trusted.
- Talk to them, not down to them.
- Make contact with them every time you see them to give them the opportunity to ask for help. Be a human, make a real connection.



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What You Can Do to Help

It is hard to know what you should do in a situation where you suspect someone is being trafficked. You may fear that attempting to intervene will put them in an even more dangerous situation, or that law enforcement officials will not necessarily believe your word on it. There are some things you can do to reinforce your suspicions, such as asking certain questions. It is important to be sure that the trafficker is not present when you ask them. Ask them specific and direct questions. Some examples include;

- **Can you come and go as you please?**
- **Do you have your ID on you? Who has it?**
- **Do you live with your employer?**
- **Are you ok? What can I do to help you?**
- **How did you get here? Why are you here?**
- **What are you doing?**
- **Are you in a dangerous situation?**
- **Are you ready to get out of this life?**
- **What can I do to help you find a safer place to be right now?**

While you can ask these questions to reinforce your suspicions if you feel you are witnessing a case of trafficking, there are other steps you can take which are safer for both the victims and yourself, and address the larger issue. Some ideas include;

- **Call 911 to report it**
- **Have accurate local resources (safehouses, national hotline, shelter)**
- **If they are very hesitant to talk, offer them to speak to someone of the other gender**
- **National or local hotline for trafficking victims to connect to services**
- **Alert the correct unit in your local Law Enforcement Department**
- **Offer food**

While the above are all ideas you can do to intervene if you suspect someone is being trafficked, there are other things you can do to combat trafficking on a larger scale;

- **Be informed about the products you are consuming**
Learn where the products you are buying came from, and be prepared to encourage the supplier to take necessary investigative or preventative steps with regards to human trafficking in their supply chains.
- **Volunteer and support movements in your community and beyond**
Prevent trafficking, host an event to raise awareness, organize a fundraiser for an anti-trafficking organization, etc.
- **Encourage your local schools to include modern slavery in their curricula**
Slavery is taught in schools as an afterthought, and a practice of a bygone era. Everyone, especially those at high risk, should know from a young age how it still impacts our world today.

For a more definitive list of signs and how you can help, visit <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/id/index.htm>



**National Human Trafficking
Hotline**

1-888-373-7888 (toll free)



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Steps Youth Can Take to Prevent Sex Trafficking

For potential victims of trafficking, especially young people, there are steps that can be taken to stop these issues before they start. **Share these tips with the youth in your community so that they can do whatever is necessary to protect themselves first.**

- Know your full name, address, and phone number, as well as how and when to call 911.
- If you feel like you are in an uncomfortable situation, run to safety. If you are around an adult who you feel uncomfortable or unsafe around, get away from them as quickly as possible.
- Do not allow adults to confide a secret with you. A responsible adult should have no reason to do so. Also, if you are ever asked by someone to keep a secret that makes you uncomfortable, whether it's an adult or a peer, tell a trusted adult immediately.
- Do not ever let anyone on the phone or at the door know that you are home alone. Better yet, do not answer the door or phone unless it is your parent or an adult that you are 100% sure is trustworthy.
- If you ever find yourself lost in a public place, find a trusted adult to stay with until you are found by your parents. This person should be a member of law enforcement or some other official.
- When walking from one place to another in your community, avoid areas that are not completely visible to the public, including shortcuts and secluded areas.
- Always get permission from your parents to use the internet. Do not ever talk to anyone online or use a particular site without explicit permission from your parents.
- In the worst case scenario, if someone ever picks you up with the intent to kidnap you, do everything you can to bring attention to it. Kick, scream, and fight off the person who is attempting to abduct you.

Stay Vigilant

While it is important to take action against human trafficking, it is even more important to not endanger the very people we are trying to rescue. Be observant of the signs, conduct some more research to learn more indicators and ways you can help, and know what you can do to prevent. It is ultimately the responsibility of law enforcement to handle these situations, but there are ways you can assist that can set law enforcement officials in the right direction and equip potential victims with the skills needed to stay safe.

Sources

- "Identify and Assist a Trafficking Victim." *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, www.state.gov/j/tip/id/index.htm.
- "Recognize the Signs." Polaris, 17 Feb. 2017, polarisproject.org/recognize-signs.