

OFFICE ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking is a crime and [public health](#) concern that affects individuals, families, and communities across generations. Cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 states, the territories of the United States, and the District of Columbia.

There are two types of a severe form of trafficking in persons:

Labor Trafficking — Individuals are compelled to work or provide services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

Sex Trafficking — Individuals are compelled to engage in commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. When a person under 18 years old is induced to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion.

Who is at risk?

Individuals from any class, religious, cultural, or ethnic group can be targeted in human trafficking schemes. The following groups are especially vulnerable:

- Individuals who have experienced childhood abuse or neglect
- Children and youth involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems
- People experiencing homelessness
- American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders
- Survivors of violence
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) individuals
- Migrant workers
- Undocumented immigrants
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- People with disabilities
- People with low incomes
- People with a history of substance abuse
- Communities exposed to intergenerational trauma

Where does trafficking occur?

Trafficking can happen anywhere, from illicit markets to legal industries like hospitality, construction, agriculture, or domestic services. The National Human Trafficking Hotline identified at least [25 types](#) (PDF) of human trafficking.

Who are the traffickers?

Traffickers can be any gender or age — some are strangers, while others are peers, friends, romantic partners, or family members.

What are the signs that someone may be experiencing trafficking?

Some potential indicators of trafficking are listed below. People who are experiencing trafficking may or may not show some of the signs listed.

Physical Health

- Frequent treatment for sexually transmitted infections
- High number of sexual partners
- Multiple pregnancies/abortions
- Exposure to toxic chemicals
- Dental issues
- Bruising and burns
- Signs of self-harm
- Weight loss or malnourishment
- Respiratory issues
- Suicide attempts
- Physical and sexual abuse

Behavioral Health

- Confusing/contradicting stories
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Unaware of current date, location, or time

- Protects person who hurt them
- Minimizes abuse
- Guilt and shame about experiences
- Suicidal ideations
- Extreme timidity
- Aggressive, antagonistic, or defensive
- Heightened stress response
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Withdrawn
- Depressed

Social/Environmental

- Absent from school
- Failing grades
- Sudden increase in substance use
- Change in dress
- Age-inappropriate romantic partner
- Change in friends
- Repeat runaway
- Not able to speak for oneself or share information
- Evidence of being controlled
- Wears inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Lives at worksite
- Multiple people in cramped living space



Many individuals who have experienced trafficking encounter health care and social service professionals during and after their exploitation, but remain unidentified. [SOAR to Health and Wellness training](#) equips professionals with skills to identify, treat, and respond appropriately to human trafficking.

How to get help

The [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#) is a 24/7, confidential, multilingual hotline for victims, survivors, and individuals with human trafficking concerns.

Call 1-888-373-7888

Text “BeFree” (233733)

Live chat humantraffickinghotline.org



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GET HELP • REPORT TRAFFICKING

Other ways to help: Learn [10 ways you can help end trafficking](#), including spreading the word that demand fuels exploitation and thinking about where you eat and how you shop.

Legal definition

The federal, legal definition of a severe form of human trafficking describes three facets of the crime: [an action, a means, and a purpose](#) (PDF). For example, if an individual is recruited by fraudulent means for the purpose of forced labor, that individual has experienced trafficking. [Learn more about the federal law.](#)

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