

# Educators and Human Trafficking: In-Depth Review

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## Introduction

Educators and other school-based professionals have a critical role to play in recognizing potential human trafficking and in helping potential victims access specialized services.

Educators are in a unique position to identify foreign national and U.S. citizen youth in diverse situations of both sex and labor trafficking. It is not uncommon for youth to continue attending school while they are still in the trafficking situation, and the school setting can provide an opportunity to interact with a potential victim without a controller present. Educators are trained to look out for potentially dangerous behaviors, changes in behavior and emotional state, and signs of abuse and neglect, all of which are likely to be present in victims of human trafficking. In addition to intervention, educators are well-positioned to engage in direct prevention work with their students. Schools and extra-curricular and recreational venues frequented by young people may be targeted by controllers who wish to recruit for both sex and labor trafficking, and it is important that students learn the signs and risk factors and how to reach out for help.

The following document is a tool created specifically for educators and school-based professionals to help recognize, respond, and prevent human trafficking in an educational context.

## Human Trafficking Defined: The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 was the first comprehensive federal act to combat human trafficking in the US. As defined under U.S. federal law, victims of human trafficking include minors induced into commercial sex, adults age 18 or over involved in commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion, and adults and minors in forced labor, services or involuntary servitude via force, fraud, or coercion.

- Sex Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, or obtaining of a person for a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not yet attained 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup>
- Labor Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subsection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 22 U.S.C. § 7102.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*



Sex and labor trafficking involve patterns of exploitation and control. Minors may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation in both labor and sex trafficking, however it is important to note that control, exploitation, and vulnerability do not end after a person turns 18. Educators may observe indicators of potential trafficking in students over the age of 18. Educators may also observe potential indicators of human trafficking in the parents, family members, and care-givers of their students.

*NOTE: The term “minor” refers to an individual who has not yet attained 18 years of age. “Minors” and “children” are used interchangeably throughout the document to indicate a person under 18 years old.*

### **National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) Hotline Vignette**

*The following vignette is based on calls received by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. Identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

A teacher became concerned after one of her 14-year-old students failed to show up to classes for several weeks. The teacher spoke with several of the student's high school friends who indicated that the student had an older boyfriend who sometimes picked her up from school. The friends also directed the teacher to multiple postings advertising the student for commercial sex on Backpage.com, Craigslist.org, and a local dating website. The teacher noticed that several ads featuring different young girls listed the same phone number, and she suspected that this number belonged to a pimp. The teacher reported the information to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline after speaking with the student's father, who indicated that the student had recently run away and was believed to be staying with her boyfriend. The NHTRC connected the father and the teacher with a specialized task force who began investigation into the case.

### **Human Trafficking Controllers & Networks**

Educators may encounter minor and young adult victims in all forms of sex and/or labor trafficking. There is no single profile of a controller or a victim. Controllers may be males or females, adults or other minors, friends, family members, intimate partners (husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend), acquaintances, or persons unknown to the potential victim prior to recruitment. Victims may be males or females, U.S. citizens or foreign nationals, adults or minors. Each situation is unique and the following types of controllers, networks, and venues have been highlighted as particularly high-risk for students. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

**Pimp-Controlled Sex Trafficking:** Pimp-controlled sex trafficking involves a complex relationship between a typically male controller, or “pimp”, and one or more women and/or girls. In this relationship, the pimp wields complete control and domination and induces commercial sex acts in order to make money. The pimp attains authoritative levels of control and obedience through a combination of intense manipulation and feigned affection, violence, and verbal, psychological, and/or emotional abuse.

In the pimp relationship, the pimp is motivated primarily by the pursuit of money. Pimps engage in a systematic process of recruitment and “breaking-down” of a victim to ultimately induce commercial sex with strangers. They aim to achieve complete control over their victim's sense of identity and self, and they maintain control over their victims through physical force, branding, sexual assault, confinement, torture, document confiscation, strictly and violently



enforced rules, creating dependencies, quotas, and debt, among other means.<sup>3</sup> Common locations of pimp-controlled sex trafficking include streets, clubs, hotels or motels, and truckstops. Pimps often recruit and advertise their victims online. Other methods of advertisement may include word of mouth, business cards, and as escort services. Pimps recruiting victims to engage in commercial sex may first present themselves as a boyfriend, and victims often continue to see the pimp as a boyfriend long after the exploitation and abuse have begun, and even when the pimp has multiple women or girls under his control.

**Familial and Intimate Partner Trafficking:** Sex and labor trafficking can occur within familial and intimate partner relationships. Labor trafficking within the family unit or an intimate partner relationship can be very difficult to identify, particularly when occurring simultaneously with other forms of abuse such as domestic violence and child abuse. As a result, familial or intimate-partner labor trafficking of adults and minors is often overlooked by practitioners and law enforcement. It is important to remember that any form of labor or services compelled through force, fraud, or coercion, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the controller, is considered labor trafficking. Victims of labor trafficking are frequently forced to work in the home as domestic servants, in small businesses or restaurants (which may or may not be owned or managed by the family), in agriculture, or in factories, among others.

Sex trafficking may be easier to identify within a family or intimate partner relationship because it involves a key component that distinguishes it from other forms of abuse – the presence of a commercial sex act. Intimate partners may force victims to engage in commercial sex acts with friends or strangers as an act of humiliation, punishment, or in exchange for assorted favors. In other cases, intimate partners as well as family members may coerce their victims to engage in commercial sex to make money for the controller or the family.

The unique and complex dynamic of any familial or intimate partner relationship can make it particularly difficult for the victim to leave the situation or involve law enforcement due to love, loyalty, dependence, shame, fear of repercussions within the family unit, and lack of a familial support network.

**Gangs:** Gang involvement in human trafficking can take diverse forms. Gang members may force new members, girlfriends, and family members, such as siblings, into prostitution. Gangs may be involved in various sex trafficking networks, including pimp-controlled street prostitution and escort services, residential brothels, and commercial-front brothels. The culture of gangs often enforces a low status for female gang members or female associates of gang members, which heightens the risk of sexual violence and/or sexual exploitation for women and girls with proximity to gang members. Women and girls who approach gangs for membership or protection are frequently forced to have sex or perform sexual acts, often without consent. Gangs may also use force, fraud, or coercion to compel male and female youth to engage in transporting or selling drugs. Involvement with or proximity to gangs may also mask that an individual is a trafficking victim, since indicators of trafficking or trauma may be perceived as delinquent or gang-related behaviors. Victims often do not reach out for help and report abuse for fear of retaliation by the gang, as well as fear of arrest due to their involvement in gang-related and other criminal activities.

**Sales crews:** Victims work long hours each day soliciting money or selling products such as magazine subscriptions, candy, cleaning products, and other diverse items. Sales crews may employ financial restrictions or manipulation, including debts and daily quotas. The controller or manager confiscates all or most of the victim's earnings and the

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<sup>3</sup> This is an excerpt from “Domestic Sex Trafficking: The Criminal Operations of the American Pimp” written by Polaris Project. To access the complete document visit our *Resources* page at [www.traffickingresourcecenter.org](http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org) or click [here](#).



victims may be dependent on the controller for transportation, housing and daily food allotments. Youth involved in sales crews often experience isolation as they are removed from familiar surroundings and frequently transported to new locations. Crew leaders and employers often recruit young people into sales crews by making false promises about travel and income opportunities. Other methods of control include sexual harassment, limited food/meals, and facilitated access to addictive substances. Youth involved in sales crew networks have reported document confiscation, threats, physical and sexual abuse, and abandonment. Sales crews may include any age or nationality of victim though they predominantly recruit young adult U.S. citizens over the age of 18.

**Domestic Servitude:** Domestic workers perform work within a household, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, elder care, gardening and other household work. Domestic workers may or may not live in their employer's homes. Victims of domestic servitude commonly work 12 to 20 hours a day or more for little to no pay. A situation becomes trafficking when the employer uses force, fraud and/or coercion to maintain control over the worker and to cause the worker to believe that he or she has no other choice but to continue with the work. Domestic workers may be U.S. citizens, undocumented immigrants, or foreign nationals with specific visas types. While many are adults, minors, particularly foreign national minors, may also be domestic workers, often in the homes of family members or acquaintances. Traffickers may exert control over their victims through threats of deportation or other harm to the victim or the victim's family, physical abuse, deprivation and denial of proper nutrition and medical care, document confiscation, debt, and/or restrictions on movement and communication. Traffickers often exploit a foreign national domestic worker's unfamiliarity with the language, laws and customs of the U.S., and use physical, verbal and/or sexual abuse to create a climate of fear and helplessness. Youth may have come to the U.S. with the expectation that they would attend school, obtain an education, and have other opportunities.

### Risk Factors and Victim Vulnerability

Vulnerability to human trafficking is far-reaching, spanning multiple demographic characteristics such as age, socio-economic status, nationality, education-level, or gender. Controllers often prey on people who are hoping for a better life, lack employment opportunities, have an unstable home life, or have a history of physical or sexual abuse. The methods of recruitment and control may vary by type of trafficking, controller, and network, but the common link is the exploitation of the unique vulnerabilities of each victim.

While anyone may be at risk, certain populations experience heightened vulnerability to human trafficking. Educators should pay attention to general indicators of vulnerability, isolation, abuse, or other at-risk behaviors.

### Individual Factors

- Sexual, physical, emotional abuse, and/or trauma
  - Youth with existing trauma may have become desensitized to violence, sexual and/or emotional abuse, may lack a safe support system, and may have come to believe that they deserve or are responsible for abuse.
- Unstable, abusive, or neglectful home environment
  - Youth living in an unstable or abusive home environment may seek to run away or move in with a potential controller in an attempt to escape the abuse.
  - An abusive home environment may also be an indicator of familial trafficking if the abuse is used as a means of control for the purpose of commercial sex or labor.
  - Youth who have been removed from an abusive home and are now in foster care or in the custody of child protective services are also at high risk and often targeted by controllers.
- History of or plans to runaway/homeless



- Runaways and at-risk youth are targeted by pimps and traffickers for exploitation in the commercial sex industry or different labor or services industries. Pimps and sex traffickers are skilled at manipulating child victims and maintaining control through a combination of deception, lies, feigned affection, gifts, threats, and violence.
- Runaway and homeless youth may also choose to or be forced to engage in sex in order to meet their basic needs such as food and shelter.
- Lack of basic needs which may include inadequate sleep, nutrition, or clothing that is dirty or inappropriate for age or weather conditions.
- Low self-esteem, highly sensitive to peer ridicule
- Isolation from peers
- History of truancy, delinquency, criminal activity
- Mental illness/mental health issues
- Developmental/learning disabilities
- Low level of school engagement, abilities are markedly under grade level
- Gang affiliation
- Language barriers
- Immigration Status
  - Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are highly vulnerable due to a combination of factors, including limited employment options, poverty and immigration-related debts, and fear of deportation.

### **Social/Societal Factors**

- Racism/racial inequality
  - Racial stereotypes regarding the sexuality of women of color; concentration of specific races, ethnicities, or nationalities in lower wage labor sectors; acceptance of violence against racial minority groups.
- Sexism/gender inequality
  - High prevalence of sexual and physical violence against women and girls; hyper-sexualization of women and girls; concentration of females in lower wage labor sectors.
- Homophobia and Transphobia
  - Peer violence and bullying; acceptance of violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth; disproportional representation in runaway and homeless youth population; abandonment and rejection by family/guardians.
- Glorification of pimp culture, and hyper-sexualization and violence against women in the media and popular culture.
- Mistrust of law enforcement or the legal system
  - Particularly for undocumented immigrants who may fear deportation, lack certain legal protections and status, and/or may not have access to information about the legal system and their legal rights.

### **Methods of Recruitment**

Controllers are skilled at using victims' unique vulnerabilities, and often target their recruitment efforts at high-risk populations. For example, youth with a history of familial abuse or neglect are at high risk for running away from home, and therefore, more likely to be approached by a pimp. LGBTQ youth may face unsupportive home environments and peer groups, and they are also more likely to run away or be abandoned or disowned by parents.



Methods of recruitment vary by trafficking network, but early initial parallels across sex and labor trafficking include:

- Appealing to promises of a better life;
- Using congeniality to appeal to a missing relationship or vulnerability in a youth's life.
  - For example, absent or abusive parental figures; low self-esteem or need for approval; untreated past or ongoing trauma at home, among peers, or perpetrated by acquaintance or stranger.
- Unmet needs including shelter, food, clothing, and employment
- Using peers or other victims to recruit
- Manipulating a sense of duty to help provide for others, such as family members; manipulating a sense of shame or gratitude
- Exploiting debt or other economic vulnerabilities
- Internet enticement through chat rooms, profile-sharing, and popular social networking sites.
- Violence, threats, and force

### **Internet-Facilitated Recruitment & Trafficking**

The internet has been identified as a leading venue used by pimps, traffickers, and johns for buying and selling adults and minors for sex and labor in the U.S. Victims trafficked through pimp-controlled sex trafficking, escort services, in-call and out-call services, chat rooms, pornography, and brothels disguised as massage parlors are commonly marketed on websites such as Backpage.com, Craigslist.com, Myredbook.com, Eros.com, and others. Labor trafficking is also facilitated through online venues – frequently manifesting in fraudulent job opportunities. The internet can also play an important role in providing access for victims to reach out for help.

### **Sex Trafficking**

Pimps and other controllers in sex trafficking situations use a variety of recruitment techniques.

- Pimps manipulate their victims beginning with an initial period of false love and feigned affection. This initial period is critical to attaining long-term mind-control. This period often includes:
  - Warmth, gifts, compliments, and sexual and physical intimacy
  - Elaborate promises of a better life, fast money, and future luxuries
  - Promises of love and marriage, posing as a boyfriend figure.<sup>4</sup>
- Pimps may utilize an initial “grooming” period to prepare a potential victim to engage in commercial sex, including desensitizing the potential victim to sex acts and sexual violence; this may include rape and other forced sexual activity.
- Purposeful and pre-meditated targeting at specific locations including:
  - Bus stations, parks, and youth shelters.
  - Juvenile courts and juvenile justice facilities.
  - Family court and foster care facilities.
  - Outside of junior high and high schools, in shopping center, parks, and other popular sites.
- Purposeful targeting of youth who have just turned 18 and are legally considered adults, but who may not be developmentally capable of or prepared to make adult decisions

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<sup>4</sup> This is an excerpt from “Domestic Sex Trafficking: The Criminal Operations of the American Pimp” written by Polaris Project. To access the complete document visit our *Resources* page at [www.traffickingresourcecenter.org](http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org) or click [here](#).



## **Labor Trafficking**

Controllers in labor trafficking situations use a variety of recruitment techniques.

- False promises of a better life, easy ways to earn money, and educational opportunities.
- Controllers in domestic servitude situations may promise the family members of the minor victim that he or she will attend school and have access to economic resources the family cannot provide.
- Traveling sales crews recruit throughout the country through a wide variety of avenues, including alluring advertisements in newspapers and magazines, direct in-person solicitation, and word of mouth.
- Typical “too good to be true” advertisements offer a range of false promises. Examples of these promises include:
  - Earning lots of quick money
  - “Fun, Money, Travel!”
  - Opportunities to travel throughout the U.S. and take trips to fun vacation destinations
  - Opportunities to stay in nice hotels
  - Opportunities to make new friends and meet peers
  - Award schemes, contests, and competitions for youth based on who can sell the most
- Employers may also target and recruit the children of their employees, i.e. within agriculture, small businesses, or factories.

## **Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking:**

The following is a list of potential red flags and indicators that can be useful in recognizing a potential victim of sex or labor trafficking. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. Each indicator taken individually may not imply a trafficking situation and not all victims of human trafficking will exhibit these signs. However, recognition of several indicators may point towards the need for further investigation. Educators will likely be familiar with many of the indicators below as potential red flags for child abuse and neglect.

***Important:*** Any minor induced to engage in commercial sex is considered a victim of human trafficking under federal law.

## **Physical Indicators**

- Exhibits signs of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, or confinement, including:
  - Bruises
  - Black eyes
  - Burns
  - Cuts
  - Broken bones
  - Broken teeth
  - Multiple scars
  - Evidence of a prolonged infection that could easily be treated through a routine physical/check up
- Appears to lack basic or necessary medical care for an illness or injury
- Reflexively resists being touched, shies away when approached
- Exhibits signs of a drug addiction or alcohol addiction (e.g. red or glassy eyes, shivers, inappropriately cold)
- Appears hungry or malnourished, frequently has no lunch or money for food
- Displays signs of neglect or lack of basic necessities including not having adequate food, shelter, clothes (e.g. revealing, dirty, or inappropriate clothing, no winter coat, no bra, etc.)



- Falls asleep in class or displays an unusual lack of energy or fatigue
- Has a visible tattoo that student is reluctant to explain, i.e. a tattoo of the trafficker’s name which can be a form of “branding”; exhibits other signs of potential branding, i.e. burn marks
- Has one or more untreated sexually transmitted diseases/infections
- Has had to terminate one or more pregnancies over a period of time. If pregnant, hesitates to answer who the father may be or seems unsure of who the father is.

### **Psychological/Behavioral/Developmental Indicators**

- Is under 18 years of age and engaging in commercial sex
- Is in the commercial sex industry and has a controller (boyfriend, pimp, manager, or “daddy”) or mentions having to meet a nightly quota
- Presence of an overly controlling or abusive boyfriend
- Uses language of “the life” or the commercial sex industry, such as referring to a boyfriend as a “daddy” or the streets as “the track”
- Inability to look in the eyes or face of people, especially her boyfriend
- Carries large amounts of cash, shows off to friends; sudden increase in material possessions and ability to access money
- Shows signs of oppositional, high risk, or self-injurious behaviors
- Exhibits sudden changes in behavior (e.g. a student who was outgoing and social becomes withdrawn)
- Refuses to participate in physical education, overly shy about changing clothes
- Displays unusually fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, angry, or nervous/paranoid behavior
- Reacts with unusually fearful, anxious or angry behavior at any references to “law enforcement”
- Displays detailed knowledge of drug use or activities
- Exhibits sexual behavior that is high risk and/or inappropriate for his/her age and/or has developmentally inappropriate knowledge about sexual acts and behaviors
- Has an explicitly sexual online profile via internet community or social networking sites, such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, Google+, BlackPlanet.com, etc.
- Familiarity with places for selling commercial sex, such as Backpage.com, Craigslist.org, Myredbook.com, etc.
- Reports an excessive amount of sexual partners during a health check-up
- Has knowledge of the commercial sex industry
- Has developmentally inappropriate knowledge of drugs and/or alcohol
- References suspicious job offers or situations (i.e. unusually high wages, unusually long hours, inappropriate work tasks, quotas)

### **Academic/School-Specific Indicators**

- Frequent, unexcused absences, truancy, or inability to regularly attend school/classes
- Misses many school days at the beginning or end of year (planting or harvesting seasons)
- Has attended a large number of schools, frequently transferring, or with large gaps of missing time
- References unreasonable work or “chore” expectations at home (i.e. spending excessive hours on chores, doing all household work, performing tasks without appropriate equipment or to unreasonable standards)
- Indicates that meals/food is limited or controlled





- Frequently travels or references frequent travel
- Exhibits sudden changes in academic performance
- Has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story when accounting for his/her life outside of school

### **Responding to Potential Victims of Human Trafficking**

As an educational professional, you are in a unique position to recognize, identify, and reach out to victims. Exercise caution so as to minimize risk of harm to the potential victim or yourself. Follow all school protocols/policies and/or mandatory reporting laws pertaining to your specific profession or relationship to a minor for reporting potential child abuse, child endangerment, or criminal activity. Before questioning a minor about a potential trafficking situation, consult your school or profession's policies regarding whether or not the presence a parent or guardian is required. If you are a mandated reporter, you must follow existing protocols for reporting in addition to any steps listed below.

Where appropriate, consider the following tips for interacting with victims and reporting a potential trafficking situation.

- **Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) to get help in assessing the situation, to report the incident, or to locate local victims' services: 1-888-373-7888;**
- If you believe that someone is in immediate danger call 911 or local law enforcement.
- If you suspect that child abuse is occurring, report to Child Protective Services (CPS).
- Foreign national minor victims of trafficking are eligible for benefits through the Department of Health and Human Services. To connect with a Child Protection Specialist in the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), call 202-205-4582, email [ChildTrafficking@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ChildTrafficking@acf.hhs.gov) or fax 202-401-5487. The NHTRC can also assist in connecting with a Child Protection Specialist. Click [here](#) for more information about requesting assistance or view the HHS *Child Victim Fact Sheet* [here](#). For additional information, contact the NHTRC hotline at 1-888-3737-888.
- Visit the NHTRC website for more information on human trafficking, including red flags and human trafficking indicators, victim assessment tools, and safety planning materials: [www.TraffickingResourceCenter.org](http://www.TraffickingResourceCenter.org).
- Be sensitive to the victim's specific circumstances - every incident of human trafficking is different.
- Make sure you are not putting yourself or a victim in danger (e.g., take care to notice who is around when you are asking questions or providing resources).
- Try to record as much information about the situation as possible, being careful not to put yourself or the potential victim in any danger.
- Present outreach cards and/or hotline numbers for local anti-trafficking service providers to victims. Give this information directly to the victim and only when he/she is alone. Make sure that victim understands who he/she is calling and help assess when it is safe to call.
- Provide the victim with the NHTRC hotline number and encourage him/her to call if he/she needs help or would like to talk to someone.



## **SAFETY CHECK**

*If you are speaking with a potential victim of trafficking or a student discloses information that leads you to suspect that he or she may be a victim, it is important to conduct a safety check before proceeding. Below are a few considerations to keep in mind and you can access the NHTRC's full Safety Planning tool [here](#).*

- Is it safe for you to talk with me right now?
- Is there anything that would help you to feel safer while we talk?

If speaking with the individual over the phone:

- Are you in a safe place? Can you tell me where you are?
- Are you injured? Would you like for me to call 911/an ambulance?
- If someone comes on the line, what would you like for me to do? Hang up? Identify myself as someone else, a certain company/person/friend?
- How can we communicate if we get disconnected? Would I be able to call you back/leave a message?
- Would you prefer to call me back when you are in a safe place?

