

Mental Health Care Professionals Resource

Definition of Trafficking

The definition of sex trafficking differs based on the age of the victim. An adult who receives compensation for a sex act may be taking part in prostitution. Sex trafficking occurs when an individual commits a sex act due to force, fraud, or coercion. Anyone who recruits, harbors, transports, or obtains a victim in these cases is considered a sex trafficker.

When it comes to individuals under 18 there is no such thing as prostitution. If there is a commercial exchange for sex with a minor it is considered sex trafficking, even in cases when there is no evidence of force, fraud, or coercion (Bayless, Roe-Sepowitz, Agliano, & Hall, n.d.).

Common Mental Health Indicators of Trafficking¹

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-traumatic stress disorder • Anxiety disorder • Panic disorder • Obsessive compulsive disorder • Dissociative disorder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major depressive disorder • Substance abuse disorder • Explosive disorders/violence • Intermittent explosive disorder • Eating disorder |
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Warning Signs²

No one of these signs is an indicator that a person is being sex trafficked. However, the more signs that one individual may exhibit, the greater the likelihood that they are.

Behavioral	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrepancy in reported age and apparent age • Resistance to gynecological exam • Homelessness • Chronic runaway • History of abuse • Traveling with an older male or "boyfriend" • Dominating or controlling "boyfriend" or companion in the room who refuses to leave • Use of street lingo with references to "the game" or "the life" • Lack of identification • Claim that the he or she is "just visiting" the area and unable to provide a home address • Involvement with the juvenile justice system through truancy, curfew violations and other status offenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malnutrition and poor diet • Dehydration • Evidence of sexual trauma • Bald patches from having hair pulled • Signs of self-inflicted injury or suicide attempts • Cigarette burns, bruises, contusions, or fractures • Unexplained scars • Tattoos that may serve as a "brand" that the victim belongs to a certain trafficker • Respiratory infections • Drug-related health issues such as asthma, Hepatitis C, skin infections • Injuries to head and mouth • Multiple sexually transmitted infections • Pregnancy with little to no prenatal care

Be Prepared

Use the following questions to gather your organization's contact numbers and policy information to be prepared for if and when you need to take action on behalf of a sex trafficking victim.

What is my organization's policy about reporting sex trafficking?	
Who do I speak to regarding a case of sex t	
Who do I speak to regarding training for identifying sex trafficking victims? What is their contact information?	

¹ Williamson, et al., 2010

² U.S. Department of Education, 2013, 2015

Screening Questions^{3, 4}

If you suspect your client could be a victim of sex trafficking, ask some of the following questions.

- Can you come and go as you please?
- Has anyone ever paid someone else to have sex with you (like a boyfriend, boss, manager, etc.)?
- Tell me about that tattoo.
- Do you have to work to contribute money to your 'family'?
- Do you have a boyfriend? If so, how old is he and what do you like to do together? Where did you meet?
- Have you ever run away from home? If so, where did you stay and who did you stay with?
- Have you ever had to do things that you did not want to do in order to stay somewhere?
- Has anyone ever taken pictures of you and put them on the internet?
- Have you been physically harmed in any way?
- Where are you staying?
- Are you or your boyfriend a member of a gang?

If you believe someone is a sex trafficking victim, take action.

General

- **If they are in imminent danger, call 9-1-1**
- **Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-3737-888.**

Victims under the age 18

- **If they are not in imminent danger, call your local police.**
Ph: _____ - _____ - _____
- **As a mandated reporter, call Child Welfare.**
The phone # for my state's office is:
_____ - _____ - _____

When contacting any of these agencies, be prepared to give:

- The name and contact information of the victim.
- Specific information: physical and behavioral signs.
- Actions taken so far by the reporter.

³ Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force Human Trafficking Screening Tool, 2013; Roe-Sepowitz, et al., n.d.

⁴ Mirror the language of the victim. For example, if she refers to her abuser as "boyfriend" then use this word instead of "pimp" or "abuser".