



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESPONSE GUIDE

for Faith-Based Community Leaders



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

As a faith leader, you are in a unique position to help combat human trafficking by educating and engaging the people of your faith and in your community. As someone with a regular presence at houses of worship, community events, and other public places, you may be able to recognize signs that someone is in danger. This guide seeks to spread awareness of the heinous crime of human trafficking and help bring it out of the shadows.

With your help, we can save lives.

This guide includes information about:

- » What human trafficking is
- » How to recognize it in houses of worship and other places.
- » Key indicators of human trafficking.
- » Examples of human trafficking in faith-based communities.
- » Tips for how to spread awareness among your congregation and community.
- » Reporting options if you suspect someone is affected by human trafficking or is being exploited.

For the purposes of this guide, the term “victim” will be used to describe an individual experiencing human trafficking. The term “survivor” will be used to describe a former victim who is in the process of recovery.



## WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

**Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.** Human traffickers use various forms of force, fraud, and coercion to control and exploit victims.<sup>1</sup> These forms may include, but are not limited to, fraudulent employment opportunities, false promises of love or a better life, psychological coercion (i.e., threats of blackmail), and violence or threats of violence.<sup>2</sup> However, under U.S. law, causing someone under the age of 18 to engage in a commercial sex act, regardless of using force, fraud, or coercion is human trafficking.<sup>3</sup>

**The crime of human trafficking hinges on the exploitation of another person.** People often falsely believe “human trafficking” implies that victims must be moved from one place to another to qualify as a victim. Human trafficking does not require a border crossing or transportation to be considered a crime.<sup>4</sup> It is a crime that can be committed against an individual who has never left their hometown.

## Who It May Affect

**Human trafficking victims can be any age, race, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, or socioeconomic class.** In many cases, victims do not come forward to seek help because of varying vulnerability factors that may include potential language barriers, a fear and distrust of authority, or they do not self-identify as a victim. Traffickers target vulnerabilities and will look to satisfy whatever need an individual has, whether it’s providing basic needs like food or shelter or emotional support.

1 To learn more about the definitions of force, fraud, and coercion and examples of different indicators of human trafficking, please see pg. 14-16 of the U.S Council’s 2021 Annual Report: [https://www.state.gov/united-states-advisory-council-on-human-trafficking-annual-report-2021/#\\_Toc89431164](https://www.state.gov/united-states-advisory-council-on-human-trafficking-annual-report-2021/#_Toc89431164)

2 See [18 USC Chapter 77](#) for language on elements of the crime.

3 See [18 USC Chapter 77](#) for precise definitions.

4 Learn more about the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling: [dhs.gov/bluecampaign](https://dhs.gov/bluecampaign)





## Risk Factors

Understanding risk factors can help place faith leaders in a better position to aid in preventing the individuals they interact with from being exploited. Keeping the following risk factors in mind will help provide you with a better understanding of human trafficking victimization:

- » Poverty, financial instability, or homelessness
- » Lack of support networks, such as strong relationships with friends, family, or other trusted adults
- » Unstable immigration status
- » Gang involvement
- » Low self-esteem
- » Personality and characteristics of an empath or “people pleaser”
- » Being bullied
- » History of self-harm or suicidal ideation/attempt(s)
- » Experiencing discrimination due to their race, gender identity, sexuality, disability, or other personal characteristics
- » History of abusive intimate partners (i.e., boyfriends or girlfriends)
- » Family history of sexual abuse or violence
- » Family history of mental health disorders or disabilities
- » Cultural historical trauma (particularly among minority communities)
- » Community or familial history of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation
- » Substance abuse or addictions
- » Cognitive and physical disabilities
- » Neurodiversity
- » Being the sole or primary provider for their family





# INDICATORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

Indicators of human trafficking can help alert faith leaders to a potential victim of this crime in their house of worship and the greater community. While no single indicator is necessarily proof of human trafficking, recognizing the signs is the first step in identifying possible victims.

## Physical or Behavioral

Does the individual...

- » Appear to be deprived of food, water, sleep, medical care, or other necessities?
- » Suddenly have more (and/or more expensive) material possessions, like purses, clothing, and/or cell phones and/or large sums of cash on their person?
- » Have bruises or other signs of physical trauma?
- » Have tattoos or scars that would indicate branding by a trafficker?
- » Have scars, cut marks, burns, or other signs of self-harm/suicidal tendencies?
- » Show sudden or dramatic changes in behavior?
- » Have unexplained absences from worship services?
- » Talk about or use language related to performing sex acts for money?
- » Suddenly become extremely quiet, avoid eye contact, and keep their head down?
- » Defer to another person to speak for them, especially during interactions with authority figures?
- » Appear to be coached on what to say, or their responses seem rehearsed?
- » Have a difficult time providing logical answers to basic questions?
- » Act fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous/paranoid, or disassociated/ "checked out"?

## Social

Does the individual...

- » Have a "boyfriend," "girlfriend," or romantic partner who is noticeably older?
- » Reference someone in their life being their "sugar daddy/sugar momma," or refer to themselves as a "sugar baby"?
- » Engage in unhealthy coping behaviors (i.e., increase in use of drugs or alcohol, etc.)?
- » Engage in sexual behavior that puts them at risk of harm or indicate they may be experiencing abuse from their partner?
- » Seem to engage in high-risk behaviors even at the apparent expense of safety and/or consequences?
- » Seem restricted from contacting family, friends, or his or her legal guardian?
- » Stop attending or showing interest in activities they normally attend?
- » Stop showing interest in future plans?
- » Reference traveling to other cities or towns frequently?
- » Talk about getting paid very little or not at all for the work they do?
- » Flaunt large sums of unexplained money/income or boast of an extravagant new lifestyle?
- » Claim to be completely financially covered and independent at a young age?
- » Live with an employer or have an employer listed as their caregiver or emergency contact?
- » Appear to not have the freedom to quit their job?





## EXAMPLES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The following examples are fictional but based on actual tactics that traffickers use to exploit victims. These are indicators that someone is a potential victim of human trafficking. How you respond should be in accordance with your religious organization's protocol.



### After Hours Affair

Amy is a custodian at a local house of worship. Lately, Amy has grown concerned about Zoe, a member of the house of worship's youth organization. Amy has seen Zoe meeting a much older male in the parking lot after hours, even though her attendance at services has recently dipped. The male frequently picks Zoe up, and then drops her back off several hours later. Amy has noticed a marked change in Zoe's demeanor. Zoe seems stressed and timid, and one night, when Amy asks if Zoe is all right, it is the older male who answers. Zoe refuses to make eye contact and remains quiet. Amy decides to report her suspicions to the house of worship's director of operations.



### Troubled Youth

A youth leader at a local house of worship, Jack, is used to interacting with young people. One of them is Corey, an exceptionally gifted teen who has had a difficult time applying himself. Jack has noticed that Corey looks noticeably under the influence lately. In talking with Corey's peers, Jack learns that Corey has been bragging about staying out late, using drugs and alcohol, and showing off wads of cash. They also mention that Corey has talked about being an older woman's "sugar baby." When Jack directly inquires about Corey's well-being, the teen is defensive and dismissive. He storms out of Jack's office, and Jack decides to seek the advice of the house of worship's faith leader.





## HOW TRAFFICKERS OPERATE

Traffickers often prey on individuals with little or no social safety net, including a lack of social or family support systems, unstable housing, previous traumatic experiences or abuse, questionable immigration status, limited English proficiency, and inability to decipher exploitative situations. They seek victims in a variety of places, such as online, in houses of worship, and at fellowship events. Traffickers lure, trick, and sometimes have intimate relationships with their victims. Most victims are manipulated through promises of false love, attention, and help. Many times, the trafficker and victim appear to be in a loving relationship, but instead there may be clear signs of deception, manipulation, and coercion.

### Who Are Traffickers?

There is no single face of traffickers. They can be from any background, age, or ethnicity and can be perpetrators of any gender. To victims, they can be:

- » “Pimps” or a romantic partner
- » Employers, co-workers, or other professionals
- » Individuals in positions of authority or power, community leaders, or people of prominence and influence
- » Family members
- » Friends or peers
- » Strangers
- » Connections of mutual friends

### How Are Traffickers Reaching Victims?

#### IN HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Faith leaders must always be vigilant of any suspicious activities they may see at their houses of worship, including those from children, adults, and other religious leaders. Peer-to-peer recruitment is just one example. This is when traffickers coerce or force their victims into recruiting their peers with potential promises of payment or reward (i.e., a finder’s fee), better status or position, or less abuse and better treatment.

#### AT FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY EVENTS

Activities that faith-based community members may participate in outside the house of worship include community meals, fundraisers, special services, and holiday-themed events.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE, AND DATING AND GAMING APPS

Social media and online dating apps are great ways to meet and connect with new people, but they can also be utilized criminally. Traffickers use the anonymity of the internet to develop trust and a seemingly solid friendship, then arrange to meet and deceive a victim into trafficking. This exploitation could even begin on livestreaming platforms with chat functions. Not everyone is out to harm or hurt others, but you should make your faith community aware of some warning signs:

- » **Instant Love:** Traffickers lure their victims into becoming emotionally attached. Encourage those in your community to take the time to get to know someone. Do not share many personal details over the internet.
- » **Willingness to Pay:** Traffickers quickly establish themselves as trustworthy confidants. Under the guise of love, the trafficker will offer to pay for a potential victim to travel to a weekend getaway to where the trafficker lives. Make sure that those in your community know that if they decide to meet, it’s somewhere they feel safe and comfortable.
- » **Job Promises:** If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. We should all be wary of offers for jobs in fields that are typically hard to break into, such as modeling and acting. Traffickers lure victims into isolation away from their communities, friends, and family. Raise awareness among your community to be wary of job offers in remote locations, faraway states, and foreign cities.





## VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH

When human trafficking is suspected, a victim-centered approach places a victim's priorities, needs, and interests at the center of a faith leader's interaction with the individual. When encountering a potential victim, it is important to remember that victims may not be comfortable coming forward and working with authority figures. They need help to feel stable, safe, and secure. Trafficking victims may:

- » Initially fear, distrust, or resent authority figures
- » Not identify as a victim
- » Not tell a complete story, become defensive, or use rehearsed or misleading responses
- » Identify with the trafficker or express romantic feelings/loyalty for them due to the trafficker's control and because of the formed "trauma-bond" between the exploiter and the victim
- » Fear judgment, consequences, and harm from those in authority

## Effects of Trauma

Victims of human trafficking are often suffering from the complex trauma of their most recent experience or from past experiences. Trauma is severe emotional or mental distress caused by a single event (an intense one-time event, where there is serious threat of harm or death) or a series of events or situations that are long-term (witnessing or experiencing neglect, abuse, or other forms of violence). It is important to understand how trauma can impact brain function and result in behaviors that may not seem to match the situation, like:

- » Telling a fragmented story when recalling a traumatic event
- » Impaired memory
- » Inability to recall events in sequence and context
- » Lack of emotion/apathy
- » Non-responsiveness or lack of involvement with the external world, isolation, and withdrawing
- » Laughing or joking inappropriately
- » Erratic and compulsive behavior
- » Irritability, trouble controlling anger, and outbursts of rage
- » Feelings of detachment, dissociation, or estrangement from others





# HOW TO SPREAD THE WORD IN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

Anyone can join in the fight against human trafficking. Here are a few ideas to help you get started within your faith-based community.

## HOST AN EVENT

Host an educational session, such as a panel or workshop, at your house of worship. Educate, promote, discuss, and empower participants to recognize the signs of human trafficking and take action to report it.

## PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT

Talk to your religious organization's governing bodies about their procurement practices and contract clauses since these may have an impact on forced labor. Download the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) ["Comply Chain" app](#) to learn more about supply chain compliance on issues of child labor and forced labor.

## SHARE OUR VIDEO

Play Blue Campaign's ["What is Human Trafficking"](#) video at community events or on video screens at your house of worship or religious facility.

## SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow the Blue Campaign on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#). Share our content with others. Use the following hashtags: #EndTrafficking and #BlueCampaign.

## SHARE A MESSAGE

Share a message or sermon to encourage your community and congregants to learn more about human trafficking.

## GET THE WORD OUT

Share information about recognizing and reporting human trafficking in articles, blogs, or newsletters to reach your community and congregants.

## TEAM UP

Identify law enforcement and social service organizations working to address human trafficking and consider ways to help spread the word. Seek available [training](#) in your area and encourage congregants to participate. Consider hosting your own training for congregants and your community.

## ENCOURAGE FACILITY MANAGERS OR SECURITY STAFF TRAINING

Require your facility managers or security staff to take a human trafficking awareness training. Awareness training videos are available on [our website](#).

## BE A CONSCIENTIOUS CONSUMER

Speak up and insist that the clothes you wear, the food you eat, and the products you buy do not come from those in [forced labor situations](#). There are a variety of digital applications, such as the DOL's [Sweat and Toil app](#), and websites that are designed for consumers to research and make informed purchases with the confidence that their dollars are not supporting forced labor practices.

## CONNECT WITH OTHER FAITH OR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Help spread information about how to recognize and report human trafficking by sharing Blue Campaign's [free resources](#) with other faith and community leaders.





## HOW TO REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING OR GET ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

**Do not at any time attempt to confront a suspected trafficker directly or alert a potential victim to your suspicions. Call 911 for emergency situations — threats of violence, physical assault, emergency medical needs, etc.**

Please refer to your organization’s protocol for reporting suspected instances of human trafficking and engage additional support resources. Also, consider contacting your state or local human trafficking task force for support. Call **1-866-347-2423** to report suspected human trafficking to the **Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Tip Line** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.

Highly trained specialists take reports from both public and private agencies on more than 400 laws enforced by HSI, including those related to human trafficking. HSI agents and Victim Assistance Specialists responding to reports are specifically trained on a victim-centered approach to stabilize victims and connect them with support services, including providing immigration relief for qualifying victims.<sup>5</sup> You can also **submit an anonymous tip online via the HSI Tip Form** at: [ice.gov/webform/hsi-tip-form](https://ice.gov/webform/hsi-tip-form).

**Call 1-888-373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733)** to report suspected human trafficking to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH), which takes calls from victims and survivors of human trafficking and those who may know them. The NHTH can help connect victims with service providers in their area and assist in reporting their situation to trusted law enforcement contacts. The NHTH is a national, toll-free hotline available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in English, Spanish, and more than 200 other languages. The NHTH is not a law enforcement or immigration authority and is operated by a nongovernmental organization.

**Call 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) or go to CyberTipline.org** to report suspected child sex trafficking, sextortion, online enticement, and sexual abuse material to the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**. NCMEC is a nonprofit organization, available 24/7 to work with families, victims, private industry, law enforcement, and the public to support the identification, location, and recovery of child sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation victims.



<sup>5</sup> Learn more about immigration assistance at [dhs.gov/blue-campaign/immigration-assistance](https://dhs.gov/blue-campaign/immigration-assistance)



## ABOUT BLUE CAMPAIGN

Blue Campaign is a national public awareness campaign within DHS, designed to educate the public, law enforcement, and other industry partners to recognize the indicators of human trafficking, and how to appropriately respond to possible cases. Blue Campaign works closely with DHS components to create general awareness training and materials to increase detection of human trafficking, and to identify victims.

For additional human trafficking resources such as pamphlets, information sheets, and wallet cards, please visit Blue Campaign's resource webpage: [dhs.gov/blue-campaign/share-resources](https://dhs.gov/blue-campaign/share-resources).

### Contact Blue Campaign

[BlueCampaign@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:BlueCampaign@hq.dhs.gov)

[dhs.gov/bluecampaign](https://dhs.gov/bluecampaign)



[@dhsbluecampaign](https://www.facebook.com/dhsbluecampaign)

