



# **HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS GUIDE**

## **for Convenience Retail Employees**



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Convenience retailers can play a significant role in combating human trafficking because of their presence in virtually every community - urban, suburban, and rural - as well as their often 24/7 operations. There are thousands of convenience stores across the country where employees are interacting with customers all day, from regulars to travelers passing through. Because convenience retail employees observe and communicate with the public so frequently, they are in a unique position to observe indicators of human trafficking while working.

The purpose of this guide is to inform front line convenience retail employees about human trafficking and the indicators that may help them recognize a potential victim while on the job.

## CONVENIENCE STORES' ROLE IN COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Traffickers and victims may utilize convenience stores to purchase food and other goods, gas, or to use the restroom. Traffickers may take advantage of the expediency, anonymity, and low-cost items that convenience stores offer. If convenience retail employees learn how to recognize and report suspected human trafficking, they may be able to help victims leave their trafficking situation and keep traffickers from harming more people.

### WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

**Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.** Causing someone under the age of 18 to engage in a commercial sex act, regardless of using force, fraud, or coercion is human trafficking under U.S. law.<sup>1</sup> Human traffickers use various forms of force, fraud, and coercion to control and exploit victims. These forms include imposing of debt, fraudulent employment opportunities, false promises of love or a better life, psychological coercion, and violence or threats of violence.<sup>2</sup>

**The crime of human trafficking hinges on the exploitation of another person.** People often falsely believe "human trafficking" implies victims must be moved from one place to another to qualify as a victim. Human trafficking does not require transportation to be considered a crime.<sup>3</sup> It is a crime that can be committed against an individual who has never left their hometown.

### Who Are Victims?

**Human trafficking victims can be any age, race, sex, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, and socioeconomic class.** In many cases, victims do not come forward to seek help because they are vulnerable, potential language barriers may exist, they have a fear of law enforcement, or they do not identify as a victim.

<sup>1</sup> See 18 U.S.C Chapter 77 for precise definitions

<sup>2</sup> See 18 U.S.C Chapter 77 for language on elements of the crime

<sup>3</sup> Learn more about the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling: [dhs.gov/bluecampaign](https://dhs.gov/bluecampaign)





## INDICATORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

During the workday you observe customers as they shop and communicate with them during check-out. While customers are in and around your retail location, you may be able to observe physical and behavioral indicators of human trafficking.

No single indicator is proof that human trafficking is occurring. The indicators below are a few examples that may alert you to a potential human trafficking situation:

### Appearance



The potential victim(s):

- » Shows signs of fear, anxiety, tension, submission, and/or nervousness.
- » Shows signs of physical abuse, restraint, and/or confinement.
- » Exhibits evidence of verbal threats, emotional abuse, and/or being treated in a demeaning way.
- » Shows signs of malnourishment, poor hygiene, fatigue, sleep deprivation, untreated illness, injuries, and/or unusual behavior.
- » Dresses inappropriately for their age or have lower quality clothing compared to others in their group.
- » Dresses inappropriately for the weather.
- » Appears to be with a significantly older "boyfriend," "girlfriend," or romantic partner.
- » Is in a group of varying ages or ethnicities and don't seem to have a social dynamic.
- » Is in a group where everyone has identical tattoos in similar locations. This may indicate "branding" by a trafficker.



### Actions

The potential victim(s):

- » Lacks freedom of movement or is constantly monitored by someone.
- » Avoids eye contact and interaction with others.
- » May be purchasing condoms, lubrication, pregnancy tests.
- » May be making multiple purchases throughout the day.
- » Has no control over or possession of money or ID.
- » Defers to someone else to talk for them or appear to be coached on what to say.
- » May not be able to provide logical details about their travel plans, if asked.





## SCENARIOS: WHAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING MAY LOOK LIKE IN CONVENIENCE STORES

*The following examples are fictional but based on actual indicators that someone is a potential victim of human trafficking.*

### Regulars Can Be Traffickers



Joel has been running his neighborhood's convenience store for the past decade. It is located in a busy neighborhood of a bustling city, so on a normal day he interacts with hundreds of customers. Despite seeing so many customers every day, Joel still has regulars who live in the neighborhood and surrounding areas. One of his regulars is a man that goes by "Ghost." Ghost is in his 30s and is always friendly to Joel and his staff. When Ghost comes by, he usually buys something to drink and then hangs outside the store with some other locals for an hour or so. Ghost is typically by himself or with a friend when he comes into the convenience store but one day he brings in two girls who look very young and Joel has never seen before. Joel sees a lot of teenagers during a typical workday, but they are usually energetic and social with one another. The girls with Ghost appear to be very submissive and quiet, and dressed in revealing clothes not appropriate for the cold weather. Ghost tells the girls they can each pick out two items but that they should "choose wisely, because that's your dinner." The girls don't seem to be carrying their own money and when they're ready to check out, they defer to Ghost to pay for their items. Joel knows something is off, but he also knows and likes Ghost and decides not to take action. Over the next three

weeks, Ghost continues to bring in different young girls to buy food, and they always have a quiet and submissive demeanor and don't look or speak to Joel when he tries to talk to them. Joel decides to report what he's seeing, especially because the girls may be minors.

### Routine Rest Stop or Something More?



Ashley works the evening shift at a convenience store attached to a gas station in a small rural town by the interstate. Her shifts are usually pretty slow, so she is able to observe all the customers who stop off to purchase items, use the bathroom, or pump gas. During one of her shifts, she notices a utility van pull up and a large group of men and women of varying ages and ethnicities get out. She is used to seeing groups of seasonal workers in the area, but this group looks particularly disheveled and distressed. She can see there are two adults in the group that seem to be in charge of the others because they are yelling at and even pushing some people as they get out of the van. As the group enters the store, everyone lines up to use the restroom. As they walk by, she notices their clothes are in poor condition, they have little personal belongings with them, and some of them even have untreated injuries. The group leaders approach the counter to purchase a few snacks and packs of cigarettes for themselves. Ashley knows something is off, so she takes note of the name and city on the ID she checks for the tobacco purchase. As everyone returns to the car, she writes down the information along with the van's license plate. She is not sure exactly what she just saw but knows she needs to report it.





# REPORTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

## What to Report

If you observe suspected human trafficking, the details you provide in your tip can be crucial to locating the trafficker and victim(s). Be observant and try to collect as much information as possible about the situation and people, like:

- » Approximate ages and the number of individuals involved
- » Details about their physical appearances (hair and eye color, ethnicity, prominent facial features, tattoos, etc.)
- » Travel details (where they are going or coming from)
- » Details about their name, address, etc. if ID was checked for a purchase
- » Nicknames or gang-related affiliations being used
- » Vehicle information (color, make, model, license plate, etc.)

## How to Report

**Do not attempt to confront a suspected trafficker directly or alert a victim to your suspicions.** Your safety as well as the victim's safety is extremely important. Instead, please follow one of the reporting options below:

- » **Follow your company's protocol** for reporting suspicious activity or crime taking place at your location.
- » **Call the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Tip Line at 1-866-347-2423** to report suspicious criminal activity, including human trafficking, to federal law enforcement 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 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 the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888** to report suspected human trafficking. It is toll-free and 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. It is not a law enforcement or immigration authority and is operated by a nongovernmental organization.
- » **Call 911 or local authorities** if someone is in immediate danger.

## ABOUT BLUE CAMPAIGN

Blue Campaign is a national public awareness campaign, designed to educate the public, law enforcement and other partners to both recognize the indicators<sup>4</sup> of human trafficking, and respond appropriately to possible cases. Blue Campaign works closely with DHS Components to create general awareness training<sup>5</sup> and materials for law enforcement and others to increase detection of human trafficking, and to identify victims.

Information on additional resources and training offered by Blue Campaign can be found at [dhs.gov/bluecampaign](https://dhs.gov/bluecampaign)

## Contact Blue Campaign

[BlueCampaign@hsi.dhs.gov](mailto:BlueCampaign@hsi.dhs.gov)  
[dhs.gov/bluecampaign](https://dhs.gov/bluecampaign)



@dhsbluecampaign

<sup>4</sup> Learn more about the indicators of human trafficking: [dhs.gov/blue-campaign/indicators-human-trafficking](https://dhs.gov/blue-campaign/indicators-human-trafficking)

<sup>5</sup> Find more training resources: [dhs.gov/blue-campaign/awareness-training](https://dhs.gov/blue-campaign/awareness-training)





# RECOGNIZE AND REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

**Post this info sheet behind the counter or in a place where employees can quickly reference it.**

Every day convenience stores conduct millions of transactions with customers across the country. Most customers are coming in for a quick purchase, but some may need help and can't ask for it. Victims of human trafficking are often afraid to ask for help due to fear of their trafficker. While on the job, you may be able to recognize and report suspected incidents of human trafficking, which could help save someone's life.

## INDICATORS

No single indicator is proof that human trafficking is occurring. The indicators below are a few examples that may alert you to a potential human trafficking situation:

### Appearance

The potential victim(s):

- » Shows signs of **fear, anxiety, tension, submission**, and/or **nervousness**.
- » Shows signs of **physical abuse, restraint**, and/or **confinement**.
- » Exhibits evidence of **verbal threats, emotional abuse**, and/or **being treated in a demeaning way**.
- » Shows signs of **malnourishment, poor hygiene, fatigue, sleep deprivation, untreated illness, injuries**, and/or **unusual behavior**.
- » Appears to be with a **significantly older "boyfriend," "girlfriend," or romantic partner**.

### Actions

The potential victim(s):

- » **Lacks freedom of movement** or is **constantly monitored** by someone.
- » **Avoids eye contact** and interaction with others.
- » Has **no control over or possession of money or ID**.
- » **Defers to someone else** to talk for them or appear to be coached on what to say.

## HOW TO REPORT

**Do not attempt to confront a suspected trafficker directly or alert a victim to your suspicions.** Your safety as well as the victim's safety is extremely important. Instead, please follow one of the reporting options below:

- » Follow your **company's protocol** for reporting suspicious activity or crime taking place at your location.
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- » Call **911 or local authorities** if someone is in immediate danger.