



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

## A FACT SHEET FOR SCHOOLS

### What Is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a serious federal crime with penalties of up to imprisonment for life. Federal law defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as: “(A) **sex trafficking** in which a **commercial sex act** is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has **not attained 18 years of age**; or (B) 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 subjection to **involuntary servitude**, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” [U.S.C. §7102(8)] In short, human trafficking is modern-day slavery.

### What Is the Extent of Human Trafficking in the United States?

Contrary to a common assumption, human trafficking is not just a problem in other countries. Cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and some U.S. territories. Victims of human trafficking can be children or adults, U.S. citizens or foreign nationals, male or female.

According to U.S. government estimates, thousands of men, women, and children are trafficked to the United States for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation. An unknown number of U.S. citizens and legal residents are trafficked within the country primarily for sexual servitude and, to a lesser extent, forced labor.

### How Does Human Trafficking Affect Our Schools?

Trafficking can involve school-age children—particularly those not living with their parents—who are vulnerable to coerced labor exploitation, domestic servitude, or commercial sexual exploitation (i.e., prostitution).

Sex traffickers target children because of their vulnerability and gullibility, as well as the market demand for young victims. The average age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14 years old and traffickers (also called “pimps”) are known to recruit at schools and after-school programs. Recruitment can take multiple forms, including: 1) kidnapping; 2) solicitation by other women or girls recruiting on behalf of the sex trafficker; and 3) the “loverboy” approach of appearing genuinely interested in a romantic relationship while gradually coercing the victim into prostitution.

### How Do I Identify a Victim of Human Trafficking?\*

A victim:

- Has unexplained absences from school for a period of time, and is therefore a truant
- Demonstrates an inability to attend school on a regular basis
- Chronically runs away from home
- Makes references to frequent travel to other cities
- Exhibits bruises or other physical trauma, withdrawn behavior, depression, or fear
- Lacks control over her or his schedule or identification documents
- Is hungry-malnourished or inappropriately dressed (based on weather conditions or surroundings)
- Shows signs of drug addiction

Additional signs that may indicate sex-related trafficking include:

- Demonstrates a sudden change in attire, behavior, or material possessions (e.g., has expensive items)
- Makes references to sexual situations that are beyond age-specific norms
- Has a “boyfriend” who is noticeably older (10+ years)
- Makes references to terminology of the commercial sex industry that are beyond age-specific norms; engages in promiscuous behavior and may be labeled “fast” by peers

\* It is important to note that this list is not comprehensive of all signs of human trafficking, nor are all students who exhibit these signs most certainly trafficking victims. The list is meant to be a guide to help determine if further action is appropriate.

## How Do I Report a Suspected Incidence of Human Trafficking?

- In cases of immediate emergencies, it is best to call your local police department or emergency access number.
- You can report suspected trafficking crimes or get help by calling the national 24/7 toll-free Human Trafficking Resource Center at [1-888-373-7888](tel:1-888-373-7888). This center will help you determine if you have encountered a victim of human trafficking; identify local resources available in your community to help victims; and coordinate with local social service providers to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of rehabilitation and restoring their lives. When appropriate, the Resource Center makes referrals to local organizations that assist victims with counseling, case management, legal advice, and other appropriate services, as well as to law enforcement agencies that help trapped victims reach safety.
- For sexually exploited or abused minors, particularly those who are U.S. citizens, call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) hotline at [1-800-THE-LOST](tel:1-800-THE-LOST) to be connected with the most appropriate assistance in your area, or you can also report incidents at <http://www.cybertipline.org>.
- You can report suspected instances of trafficking or worker exploitation by contacting the FBI field office nearest you at <http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm> or by contacting the Department of Justice's Human Trafficking Office at [1-888-428-7581](tel:1-888-428-7581).

## How Does the United States Help Victims of Human Trafficking?

The U.S. government supports a victim-centered approach. It funds a national public awareness campaign and a number of nongovernmental organizations that assist victims. The U.S. government seriously pursues human trafficking cases and prosecutes the traffickers. For a complete assessment of U.S. government efforts to combat trafficking in persons, please visit the U.S. Department of Justice Web site: [http://www.usdoj.gov/whatwedo/whatwedo\\_ctip.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/whatwedo/whatwedo_ctip.html).

## Resources and Publications

One of the best ways to help combat human trafficking is to raise awareness and learn more about how to identify victims. Information on human trafficking can be found on the following Web sites:

- U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons  
<http://www.state.gov/g/tip>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Campaign to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Justice  
[http://www.usdoj.gov/whatwedo/whatwedo\\_ctip.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/whatwedo/whatwedo_ctip.html)  
<http://www.ovc.gov/help/tip.htm>  
<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/trafficking.html>
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, Investigative Programs, Crimes Against Children  
<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain.htm>
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
<http://www.ncmec.org>
- Polaris Project  
<http://www.polarisproject.org>

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NOTE: This fact sheet contains resources, including Web sites, created by a variety of outside organizations. The resources are provided for the user's convenience, and inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any views, products or services offered or expressed in them. All Web sites were accessed on June 26, 2007.

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