

CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

What is Child Sex Trafficking?

Child sex trafficking is a form of human trafficking and modern-day slavery. It is and a serious federal crime with penalties of up to life imprisonment. Those who recruit minors into prostitution violate federal anti-trafficking laws, **even if there is no coercion or movement across state lines.** Federal law defines sex trafficking as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, 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 a person induced to perform such an act has not yet attained 18 years of age (U.S.C. §7102(8)).



What is the Extent of Child Sex Trafficking in the United States?

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. U.S. government estimates that 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. One study conducted by the [University of Pennsylvania](#) estimates that there are 300,000 children at risk for commercial sexual exploitation in the US. [Another study by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#) found that there were almost 4,000 victims of CSEC in New York City alone, and that was only counting local children, not foreign victims trafficked to the city.

How does Child Sex Trafficking Affect our Schools?

School-age children—particularly those not living with parents—are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution). Educators and school professionals can play an essential role in identifying trafficking cases and helping victims access appropriate services.

Children in trafficking situations may continue to attend school. The school setting provides **an opportunity for interacting with trafficked children without a controller present.** As an educator or school professional, you can also take direct preventive action with your students.

Sex traffickers target children because of their vulnerability and gullibility, as well as the market demand for young victims. The children at risk are not just high school students—studies demonstrate that **pimps prey on victims as young as 12.** Traffickers have been reported targeting

minor victims through telephone chat-lines, clubs, on the street, through friends, and at malls. They also use girls to recruit other girls at schools and after-school programs.⌈

What are the Risk Factors?*

Traffickers exploit the vulnerabilities of children that include but are not limited to the following:

- History of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and/or trauma
- Unstable, abusive, or neglectful home environment
- History of running away or homelessness
- Low self-esteem and isolation from peers
- History of truancy, delinquency, and criminal activity
- Mental health issues and developmental/learning disabilities
- Gang affiliation
- Language barrier
- Immigration status

How do I Identify a Victim of Child Sex Trafficking*

The following list can help you recognize potential victims of child sex trafficking. Some of these indicators may be familiar to you as they are in line with red flags for child abuse and neglect. 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 or alcohol 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

How do I Report a Suspected Incidence of Child Sex Trafficking?

- In cases of **immediate emergencies**, it is best to call your **local police department or emergency access number**.

*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.

- 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**. 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. 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 call the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST** to be connected with the most appropriate assistance in your area, or you can 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**.

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 child sex trafficking for schools can be found on the following Web sites:

- **Short film "What I Have Been Through Is Not Who I Am"**
<http://ecpatusa.org/what-we-do/helping-children-in-america/witness-video-project/>
- **Human Trafficking of Children in the United States: A Fact Sheet for Schools by the Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools**
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/factsheet.html>
- **Trafficking prevention tips for elementary schools**
<http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/speaking-out/2012/jun/5/10-trafficking-prevention-tips-schools/>
- **Trafficking prevention tips for middle schools**
<http://c.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/speaking-out/2012/jul/12/title-ten-trafficking-prevention-tips-middle-schools/>
- **CNN news report, Child Sex Trafficking on the Internet "Selling the Girl Next Door"**
<http://youtu.be/fFRZ1NDR0Rc>
- **Child Sex Trafficking At-A-Glance**
<http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-by-topic/sex-trafficking>
- **Resources on the Broader Issue of Human Trafficking by the Polaris Project**
<http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-by-topic/human-trafficking>

Additional information from government and non-government agencies may be found at the following Web sites:

- **U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons**
<http://www.state.gov/g/tip>
- **Federal Bureau of Investigation, Investigative Programs, Crimes Against Children**
<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain.htm>

- **ECPAT-USA**
<http://www.ecpatusa.org>
- **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**
<http://www.ncmec.org>
- **Polaris Project**
<http://www.polarisproject.org>
- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>
- **United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography**
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-sale.htm>

For individuals who wish to become more involved in combating the issue beyond the school setting, toolkits and resources for activism on the issue of child sex trafficking and tourism developed by ECPAT USA can be accessed at the links below:

[Trafficking in America Activist Toolkit](#)

[Trafficking in America Lesson Plan](#)

[Child Sex Tourism Activism Toolkit](#)

This document is based on Human Trafficking of Children in the United States: A Fact Sheet for Schools by the Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools and Educators and Human Trafficking: In-Depth Review by the Polaris Project.