



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS GUIDE

## for Student Leaders on College Campuses

### Contact Blue Campaign

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

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



[@dhsbluecampaign](https://twitter.com/dhsbluecampaign)



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

As a student leader, you are in a unique position to help combat human trafficking by educating and engaging the people on your campus. You play an important role because you are part of an interconnected community and regularly interact with students, professors, and others. As someone with regular access to dorms, classrooms, and other public areas of your campus and around town, 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 work to end human trafficking.

This guide includes information about:

- » What human trafficking is
- » How to recognize it on college campuses
- » Key indicators of human trafficking
- » Examples of human trafficking on college campuses
- » Tips for how to spread awareness in your campus community
- » Reporting options if you suspect someone is affected by human trafficking or 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.

## 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).



## 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 or even their home.

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)





## 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, shelter, or emotional support.

## Risk Factors

Understanding risk factors can help place student leaders in a better position to aid in preventing the individuals they interact with from being exploited. College students, in particular, are vulnerable to individual and environmental risk factors that may make them more susceptible to human trafficking situations. Keeping the following risk factors in mind will help provide you with a better understanding of human trafficking victimization:

- » Poverty, financial instability, or homelessness
- » Living away from home, often for the first time
- » Lack of support networks, like strong relationships with friends, family, or other trusted adults
- » 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, marginalization, and lack of access due to their race, gender identity, sexuality, disability, or other personal characteristic
- » 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
- » Community or familial history of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation
- » Substance abuse or addictions to alcohol or other substances commonly found on college campuses
- » Cognitive and physical disabilities
- » Being the sole or primary provider for their family





# INDICATORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Indicators of human trafficking can help alert resident advisors, campus law enforcement, members of campus government, and other student leaders to a potential victim of this crime on their campus. 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 class or display a sudden drop in academic performance?
- » Exhibit any behaviors that could lead to academic probation?
- » 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, or nervous/paranoid, or disassociated/"checked out"?

## Social

Does the individual...

- » Have on-campus housing but rarely stay in their dorm?
- » 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 or extracurriculars they normally attend?
- » Stop showing interest in their 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?



# 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, or an inability to decipher exploitative situations. They seek victims in a variety of places, such as online, on campuses, and at nightclubs, strip bars, and malls. 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 we may fail to see the signs of deception, manipulation, and coercion.



## Who Are Traffickers?

There is no single face of traffickers. They can be from any background, any age, 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?

### ON CAMPUS

Traffickers have increasingly turned to the internet to identify and lure victims, but they do still utilize physical meeting spaces for recruitment as well. Student leaders must always be vigilant of any suspicious activities they may see at their school, including those from both students and faculty. Because campuses have many young people in one place, there are more opportunities for traffickers to use their victims for peer-to-peer recruitment. This is when traffickers coerce or force their victims or other students 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.

### POPULAR OFF-CAMPUS MEETING PLACES

Locations that students frequent outside of school may include malls, parks, concerts, community centers, public transit centers, house gatherings, bars, parties, etc. Traffickers look for opportunities to impair their victim’s judgment anywhere. This can take the form of buying drinks that they can lace with drugs or adding drugs to a drink while the student is distracted. Traffickers can easily add drugs to punch bowls and other open containers. These drugs may interfere with the ability to take care of oneself and make sensible decisions. The student may suffer drug-induced memory loss. During a drugged state, photos or videos may be taken that are then used coercively to force someone to engage in commercial sex acts. It can happen to others, too. Student leaders must be vigilant of others who appear distressed or unaware of their surroundings.

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

Social media and online dating apps are great ways to meet and connect with new people in the campus community, 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. Not everyone is out to harm or hurt one another, but you should be aware of some warning signs.

- » **Instant Love:** Traffickers lure their victims into becoming emotionally attached. Take the time to get to know someone. Do not share many personal details on 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 or to where the trafficker lives. If you decide to meet, make sure it’s somewhere you feel safe and comfortable.
- » **Job Promises:** If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. 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 friends and family. Be wary of job offers in remote locations, faraway states, and foreign cities.







### DECEPTIVE OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT OR FINANCIAL STABILITY

Labor traffickers can take advantage of the economic instability of college students by offering them jobs that appear legitimate at first. What can seem like a good opportunity to acquire funds for tuition, loans, rent, or other basic expenses can quickly turn into an exploitative situation. A student may agree to a job and find conditions are not what were expected or agreed upon but they are prevented from leaving the job by their employer. For example, traffickers may coerce an “employed” student into opening lines of credit and then running up their debt. Traffickers may then tell their victims the only way to pay off the debt is through continued work. This is called debt bondage, a form of forced labor.

## EXAMPLES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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



### Dorm Danger

Avery is a resident advisor at a predominantly freshman dorm on campus. Over the past few weeks, she has grown concerned about Maya, a resident in her hall. Avery has noticed that Maya rarely sleeps in her dorm at night, and that when she is there, she is accompanied by a much older “boyfriend.” In an earlier conversation, Maya had referred to this boyfriend as her “sugar daddy,” a comment Avery took as a joke at the time. Even more alarming, Avery has observed a marked change in both Maya’s physical and emotional appearance. Maya appears tired and distressed, and during a recent encounter, Avery notices that she has bruises on her arms. Fearing there could be something more than a toxic relationship going on, Avery elevates the issue to her superior.



### Social Media Solicitation

Natalie is a volunteer student advocate at her university’s LGBTQ+ center, offering mentorship and support services to her fellow students. One of the students she has frequently worked with during the fall semester is Ethan, a sophomore. Ethan has confided in Natalie about a deteriorating situation back home. His parents have been going through some financial troubles, and it is uncertain how they will pay for his tuition next semester. In addition, Ethan often talks about a “boyfriend” he met through social media. Though they haven’t met in person, things are moving fast. One day, Ethan tells Natalie that his boyfriend has reached out to him about a vague opportunity to make some money. All Ethan has to do is travel to meet his boyfriend’s uncle. Ethan is admittedly uncertain and anxious about the situation, but he feels his options are limited. Something about this interaction feels wrong to Natalie and she decides to seek the advice of the center’s director.

### Unlawful Landscaping

Tracy and Adam are students at a large public university. While walking to the campus library between classes one afternoon, they notice a troubling situation. A landscaping crew is working at a nearby courtyard, which doesn’t seem out of the ordinary at first. But as Tracy and Adam get closer, they realize that many of the employees look exhausted, distressed, and even injured. Upon closer inspection, none of the employees seem to have the proper personal protective equipment, such as safety goggles, gloves, and earmuffs. One man, whom the pair assumes is the boss, appears to be monitoring the workers too closely. Whenever crew members try to interact with each other, the man is quick to reprimand them. The crew’s mistreatment bothers Tracy and Adam. Rather than going to the library, they opt to contact campus law enforcement.





# HOW TO SPREAD THE WORD ON CAMPUS

Anyone can join in the fight against human trafficking. Here are a few ideas to help you get started on your campus and within your local community.

## HOST AN EVENT

Host an educational session or campus event. Educate, promote discussion, and empower participants to recognize the signs of human trafficking and take action to report.

## PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT

Talk to your university administration about their procurement practices and contract clauses since these may have an impact on forced labor. Learn more about the food service provider on campus and whether it sources responsibly.

## SHARE OUR VIDEOS

Talk to your student government or university administration about adding the Blue Campaign's ["What is Human Trafficking"](#) video to the interactive displays on campus.

## 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.

## TALK WITH A PROFESSOR

Reach out to a professor about learning more about human trafficking as part of a course or independent study.

## SHARE ARTICLES

Talk to your school about sharing human trafficking information in the school's newspapers or daily emails.

## TEAM UP

Form a student organization to educate people about trafficking and how to address it. Pair up with campus groups to sponsor an event or work with fraternities/sororities and other student groups on making human trafficking prevention training mandatory for their members.

## ENCOURAGE CAMPUS SECURITY TRAINING

Talk to your campus law enforcement and public safety officers about requiring human trafficking prevention training for officers and students. [Awareness training videos](#), [indicator cards](#), and more 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 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.

## SHARE WITH YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

After getting any necessary approvals, put up posters at bus stops and post information about human trafficking inside bathroom stalls. Speak to local restaurants and other businesses about providing a brief presentation to their staff about how to spot someone being trafficked.



# 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)