

# Youth human trafficking screening and response toolkit for educators

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# Introduction

According to the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, & Research at the University of Pennsylvania, one-fifth of homeless youth are survivors of human trafficking.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, research has shown that LGBTQ+ youth have a 120% higher risk of experiencing some form of homelessness<sup>2</sup> and are over 7x more likely to experience acts of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> BIPOC youth face an 83% increased risk, and Latinx youth face a 33% increased risk of homelessness when compared to their white peers. Due to systemic inequities and injustice, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and system-involved youth face increased risks of experiencing homelessness and human trafficking.<sup>4</sup>

Screening tools can help improve the recognition and response to children and youth experiencing or at risk of child labor and sex trafficking. Screening for human trafficking and abuse can also create opportunities to share important information and resources, as well as to engage in discussions with youth and caregivers regarding the risks of human trafficking.

This toolkit was created to assist **school-based mental health professionals, social workers, nurses, McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons, and counselors** in identifying potential survivors or students at risk. The goal of



this screening tool is not simply to obtain disclosure of commercial sexual exploitation or labor trafficking of youth, but also to evaluate the level of risk and to determine the potential support and safety needs of the student.

Before proceeding to the screening portion of the toolkit, please read the instructions carefully. It is also important to review and understand the definitions and best practice information outlined below.

The questions in this toolkit are written to allow for “yes” or “no” responses. However, to ensure a holistic and survivor-centered approach, it is advisable to ask accompanying questions to better understand the potential survivor’s support and safety needs.

<sup>1</sup> *One-fifth of homeless youth are victims of human trafficking.* (n.d.). Penn Today. <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/one-fifth-homeless-youth-are-victims-human-trafficking>

<sup>2</sup> Kovalick, C. (2022). *LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness.* National Network for Youth. <https://nn4youth.org/lgbtq-homeless-youth>

<sup>3</sup> *Sex trafficking and LGBTQ youth.* Polaris. (n.d.). <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LGBTQ-Sex-Trafficking.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Bardine, D. (2022, November 16). *The Intersection of Child Sex Trafficking and Youth Homelessness.* National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2022/the-intersection-of-child-sex-trafficking-and-youth-homelessness>

# Reporting human trafficking

In an emergency, **call 911.**



If you suspect human trafficking, please follow your **mandated reporting requirements.**

- 1 **Call ChildLine** (1-800-932-0313) or file an electronic report through the **[Child Welfare Information Solution \(CWIS\) System.](#)**
- 2 After completing a mandated report, you may also contact the **Pennsylvania State Police Human Trafficking Hotline** (1-888-292-1919) to report suspected trafficking.

For additional resources and information, please contact the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline** by calling or texting 233733 (befree) or 1-888-373-7888.

To find your local rape crisis center, visit **[www.pcar.org/help-in-pa](http://www.pcar.org/help-in-pa)**.

# Glossary

## Human trafficking

Human trafficking is a crime where people profit from the exploitation of children, adolescents, and adults. Labor trafficking includes the use of force, fraud, or coercion to induce an individual to work or provide service.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, sex trafficking occurs when one person manipulates another person into sex acts in exchange for something of value, such as money, food, shelter, or drugs.<sup>6</sup>

## Online sexual exploitation

Online Sexual Exploitation and abuse is when one person manipulates another person through online platforms into doing something sexual, such as forcing or blackmailing someone into sending sexual photos/videos through social media, texts, chat forums, gaming platforms, or performing sexual acts over webcam or live video chat. Online Sexual Exploitation can lead to Image-Based Sexual Assault (IBSA), including Sextortion.

- Sextortion: A form of online blackmail using nude images.<sup>7</sup>

## Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. Examples include:

- Child sex trafficking
- Commercial production of Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM)
  - The term “Child Sexual Abuse Material” is used instead of “Child Pornography” because the term pornography implies consent on behalf of the youth, which is not possible, and may cause a youth survivor to feel as though they are to blame for their victimization.
- Online transmission of live video of a child engaged in sexual activity in exchange for anything of value.
- Situations where a child engages in sexual activity in exchange for non-monetary things such as food, shelter, drugs, or protection from any person.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Recognizing Human Trafficking*. (2015, October 13). Polaris. <https://polarisproject.org/labor-trafficking>

<sup>6</sup> *What is Human Trafficking?* | Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR). (n.d.). Pcar.org. <https://pcar.org/human-trafficking>

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (n.d.). *Sextortion* [Review of *Sextortion*]. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Retrieved December 6, 2024, from <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/sextortion>

<sup>8</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (n.d.). *Sexual Exploitation of Children*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/sexual-exploitation-children>

## Child labor trafficking

Labor trafficking affects children in industries ranging from domestic work to forced criminality, entertainment, and agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Child labor trafficking is defined as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a child under 18 to provide involuntary labor or services.<sup>10</sup>

## Commercial sex act

A commercial sex act is any act in which sexual activity is exchanged for anything of value by any person. In Pennsylvania, any youth found to be engaging in commercial sex acts are considered victims of human trafficking regardless of if force, fraud, or coercion is proven.<sup>11</sup>

## Recruitment

Recruitment involves the proactive targeting of vulnerabilities and grooming behaviors for the purpose of inducing an individual into labor and sex trafficking, involuntary servitude, debt bondage, and commercial sex acts.<sup>12</sup>

## Smuggling vs trafficking

Human smuggling is the illicit act of transporting a person or people across an international border. Although illegal, smuggling is often a consensual arrangement in which the parties go their separate ways after the smuggling has occurred. In contrast, human trafficking involves the exploitation of people through force, fraud, or coercion. What may begin as a smuggling agreement may become a trafficking situation if vulnerable people are exploited.<sup>13</sup>

## Trauma bond

A trauma bond is the powerful emotional connection that can develop between a victim and their trafficker. Traffickers often utilize a combination of rewards and punishments within cycles of abuse to cultivate feelings of trust and attachment in the victim.<sup>14</sup>

9 Communications, N. W. (2024, April 18). *Child Labor Trafficking Is Ensnaring Both US- and Foreign-Born, Study Finds*. www.nyu.edu. <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2024/april/child-labor-trafficking-is-ensnaring-both-us-and-foreign-born-0.html>

10 National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2000) *Child Labor Trafficking | Safe Supportive Learning*. Ed.gov. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools/child-labor-trafficking>

11 Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation. (2016). *Sex Trafficking 101: Act 105: PA's Comprehensive Anti-Human Trafficking Law*. Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation. <http://cseinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Human-Trafficking-Resource.pdf>

12 Office on Trafficking in Persons. (n.d.). *Fact Sheet: Human Trafficking*. Www.acf.hhs.gov. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/fact-sheet/resource/fshumantrafficking>

13 Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. (June, 2017). *HUMAN TRAFFICKING & MIGRANT SMUGGLING: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE*. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/272325.pdf>

14 *TRAUMA BONDING IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING*. (2020). [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TIP\\_Factsheet-Trauma-Bonding-in-Human-Trafficking-508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TIP_Factsheet-Trauma-Bonding-in-Human-Trafficking-508.pdf)





# Human trafficking indicators

Remember, not all indicators are present in every trafficking situation. Survivors may not exhibit typical symptoms of trauma or common indicators of trafficking. Additionally, indicators do not prove or disprove that a trafficking situation is taking place.<sup>15</sup> For example, while chronic absenteeism may signify potential trafficking, there may be other factors contributing to a student's attendance issues, including housing instability, transportation difficulties, bullying, family challenges, or mental health concerns.

**\*Anyone under 18 found to be engaging in commercial sex acts is considered a trafficking victim regardless of if force, fraud, or coercion is proven.<sup>16</sup>**

While human trafficking survivors can be of any age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, or socio-economic status, underrepresented and disinvested communities, such as BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth, face higher risks of trafficking and exploitation.

## **Signs that youth may have been sexually exploited, labor trafficked, and/or are at risk of human trafficking include:**

- Having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse in the past
- History of homelessness or housing instability
- History of running away from home
- History of abuse within the home
- Youth experiencing poverty
- Signs of neglect or malnutrition
- Changes in behaviors or school participation
- Living in foster care
- System-involved youth (juvenile justice, child welfare, behavioral health systems)
- Youth with intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions
- Youth with substance use disorders

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2008). *HUMAN TRAFFICKING INDICATORS*. [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/HT\\_indicators\\_E\\_LOWRES.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/HT_indicators_E_LOWRES.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation. (2016). *Sex Trafficking 101: Act 105: PA's Comprehensive Anti-Human Trafficking Law*. Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation. <http://cseinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Human-Trafficking-Resource.pdf>

### **Labor trafficking indicators**

- Engaging in work not suitable for children and youth
- Accumulating debt to someone they know or being convinced by someone they know that they owe a debt
- Displays a heightened sense of duty or obligation to family, has unreasonable or inappropriate chores or duties
- Unable to communicate freely
- Wearing clothing typically meant for manual work
- Sleeps where they work
- Chronic absenteeism
- Signs of sleep deprivation

### **Online sexual exploitation and/or sextortion indicators<sup>17</sup>**

- Has an explicitly sexual online profile via social media and internet
- Sudden overuse or underuse of technology
- Overprotective of personal devices
- New indications of anxiety and/or depression
- New indications of self-harm or eating disorders
- May seem distant, upset, or on-edge

### **Sex trafficking indicators**

- Fearful or nervous behavior (trouble with eye contact, constantly checking phone, surroundings, etc.)
- Seemingly scripted or rehearsed answers
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Branding/Tattoos
- Unable to communicate freely
- Involved in a relationship with an older adult (may receive frequent gifts, be picked up from school by the adult, etc.)
- Knowledge of language used in the commercial sex industry (“The Life,” “The Game,” “Track,” or “Stroll,” “Johns,” or “Tricks.”)
- Exhibits sexual behavior that is high risk and/or inappropriate for their age

<sup>17</sup> Walsh, W. A., & Tener, D. (2022). “If you don’t send me five other pictures I am going to post the photo online”: A qualitative analysis of experiences of survivors of sextortion. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 31(4), 447-465.



# Recommended resources for continued learning

## Webinar resources — National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

- [Human Trafficking Webinar Series - How to Talk with Youth about Human Trafficking & Exploitation](#) (1.5 hrs.)
- [Human Trafficking Webinar Series - Understanding Child Labor Exploitation in the U.S. and How Schools Can Help Address It](#) (1.5 hrs.)
- [Human Trafficking Webinar Series - Part 1: Supporting Students Who Have Experienced Familial Human Trafficking](#) (1.5 hrs.)
- [Human Trafficking Webinar Series - Part 2: Supporting Students and Schools Through a Human Trafficking Report](#) (1.5 hrs.)
- [Human Trafficking Webinar Series - Emerging from Trafficking: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Survivors](#) (1.5 hrs.)

## Building internal response protocols

- [Toolkit for Building a Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol](#)
- [Tip Sheet: Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Strategies for Vulnerable Students for K-12 Schools](#)

## Implementing referral networks

- [PEARR Tool | HEAL Trafficking: Health, Education, Advocacy, Linkage](#)





# Trafficking screening assessment tool

## How to use this tool:

- 1 Review any relevant information about the potential survivor before speaking with them.
- 2 Ensure a confidential space (e.g., a counselor's room, an empty classroom, etc.). A confidential space is a secure environment where potential survivors can express their needs and share their experiences without fear of their identity being disclosed.
- 3 If language interpretation is needed, arrange for a certified interpreter or service.
- 4 Review the below screening tool tips, questions, and response steps. **You do not need to ask every question.** Identify which questions make the most sense to ask the potential survivor, given what you may know about them already.
- 5 You do not need to ask questions word for word. Please **reword or rephrase questions** to include **age-appropriate language** or in a way the student can understand.
- 6 **Shred any notes or delete any information** you may have written down for the purposes of reporting a suspected trafficking situation.



## Relationship building tips

- ✓ Create a safe space. A safe space is a non-judgmental environment where the potential survivor can receive unconditional support, express all feelings and emotions, and determine which solutions they find to be helpful.
- ✓ Use active listening skills (attentiveness, reflection, clarification, resource sharing)

## Important tips when screening

- ✓ Explaining your role and all relevant details about the screening process will help ensure the potential survivor has the information they need to make decisions on what they would like to share with you.<sup>18</sup>
  - Explain mandated reporting requirements.
  - Explain that this screening is standard and that you are checking in with the student to offer support and assistance if needed. This will prevent the student from feeling singled out.
  - Explain that the screening is voluntary and confidential.
- ✓ Minimal fact interviewing: Please do not probe the student for unnecessary details and respect personal boundaries. The student and potential survivor may decide which details of their story to share and with whom they feel comfortable doing so.
- ✓ Students come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and may speak different languages. If needed, arrange for a certified interpreter and offer culturally and linguistically appropriate service referrals.
- ✓ The purpose of this screening tool is not simply to obtain disclosure. Youth survivors may not recognize their situations as exploitative or may not present themselves as a victim in need of help. It can sometimes take years for survivors to disclose what trauma they may have experienced. Please focus on the safety, education, and support needs of the student, regardless of whether human trafficking indicators are observed.
- ✓ Address any concerns raised by the student when reporting suspected trafficking or abuse. Are there any steps that can be taken prior to engaging with the potential survivor? What types of support can be offered through the reporting process?
- ✓ Take care to prevent any actions that may inadvertently retraumatize the survivor. (Common triggers include feeling threatened, vulnerable, frightened, shameful, feeling a lack of control, and experiencing unexpected change.)

<sup>18</sup> National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center. (n.d.) *Adult Human Trafficking Screening Tool and Guide*. Administration for Children & Families Office on Trafficking in Persons. [https://nhhtac.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/adult\\_human\\_trafficking\\_screening\\_tool\\_and\\_guide.pdf](https://nhhtac.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/adult_human_trafficking_screening_tool_and_guide.pdf)



# Youth commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking screening questionnaire<sup>19</sup>

- 1 **Interviewer:** Start with open-ended questions to assess the student's safety & potential support needs.

*How do you care for yourself when you're hungry or need a place to stay?*  
*Where do you feel safe?*  
*Do you feel safe at school? At home? At work?*  
*Who do you feel safe to be around?*  
*Do you feel safe around people you interact with at school? At home? At work? Online?*

- 2 *Sometimes, young people who face challenges in meeting their basic needs — such as accessing food, clothing, shelter, protection, or other needs — may find themselves pressured or forced by others to engage in activities like exchanging sex or sexual acts for those needs. Have you ever experienced this, or are you in a situation where you think this could happen?*

**Answers: Yes / No / Declined to Answer / Don't Know**

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 3 *Sometimes, people try to repay someone who gave them something they needed, such as food, transportation, or shelter. The person they owe money to may pressure or force them to do certain things if they have trouble paying off the debt. Have you ever experienced this, or are you in a situation where you think this could happen?*

**Answers: Yes / No / Declined to Answer / Don't Know**

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>19</sup> Chisolm-Straker, M., Sze, J., Einbond, J., White, J., & Stoklosa, H. (2019). Screening for human trafficking among homeless young adults. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 98, 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.014>

- 4 Sometimes, people are made to do unfair, unsafe, or even dangerous work or stay in dangerous situations because if they don't, someone might hurt them or someone they love. Have you ever experienced this, or are you in a situation where you think this could happen?

**Answers: Yes / No / Declined to Answer / Don't Know**

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 5 Sometimes, people might be pressured or forced to pose or perform for photos or videos that make them uncomfortable. This can also happen online, where someone might pressure someone else to send them photos or videos. Have you ever experienced this, or has anyone ever taken a photo or video of you that you were uncomfortable with?

**Answers: Yes / No / Declined to Answer / Don't Know**

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 6 Sometimes, employers don't want people to know about the kind of work they have young employees doing. To protect themselves, they ask their employees to lie about the kind of work they are involved in. Has anyone ever pressured you to lie about the work you do?

**Answers: Yes / No / Declined to Answer / Don't Know**

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Response protocol

**\*Disclaimer: This protocol does not substitute for internal or mandated reporting requirements, nor does it guarantee safety. In an emergency, please contact 911.**

If the student has answered yes to any of the questions in this screening tool or has provided additional information that may indicate a situation of trafficking, exploitation, or abuse:

- 1 Focus on the safety and support needs of the student.
- 2 Make a report:
  - **Call ChildLine** (1-800-932-0313) or file an electronic report through the **[Child Welfare Information Solution \(CWIS\) System](#)**.
  - Report the suspected trafficking to the **Pennsylvania State Police Human Trafficking Hotline** (1-888-292-1919).
  - In an emergency, **call 911**.
- 3 For additional resources and information, please contact the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** by calling or texting 233733 (befree) or 1-888-373-7888, available 24/7.
- 4 Offer to connect the student with an advocate or mental health professional for safety planning and support, therapy/counseling, legal services, and additional resources for families. To find your local rape crisis center, visit **<https://pcar.org/help-in-pa>**
- 5 Please **shred any notes or delete any information** you may have written down for the purposes of reporting a suspected trafficking situation.







## FAQs

### **When should this screening tool be used?**

This screening tool should be used, with the consent of the potential survivor, if you recognize signs or symptoms of human trafficking, abuse, and/or exploitation.

### **What if some indicators are observed, but it is determined that the child/youth is not a trafficking survivor?**

Check in with the student to determine safety needs and offer additional support. If you suspect a situation of abuse, follow your mandated reporting requirements.

### **What if the potential trafficking situation occurred outside of the U.S.?**

Suspected human trafficking should be reported to officials regardless of whether the situation occurred in or outside of the U.S. Please follow mandated reporting requirements and additional reporting guidelines in the event of a suspected trafficking situation.

### **How can I find local support services for survivors in Pennsylvania?**

[Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect](#)

[Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

[PA 211 Contact Helpline](#)



## Additional resources

[Safety Planning with Foreign National Children & Youth Survivors of Trafficking](#)

[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#)

[National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center](#)

[SOAR Guiding Principles | Trauma-Informed Approach](#)

[OVC: Shifting Current Practices in the Anti-Trafficking Field](#)

[National Human Trafficking Hotline | Myths & Facts](#)

[United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime](#)

(List of human trafficking indicators)

[PEARR \(Privacy, Education, Ask, Respect, & Respond\) Tool](#)

(This tool includes a fill-in referral sheet with local services and support options, national hotlines)

[The Life Story | Sharing the Voices of Survivors of Sexual Exploitation](#)

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