



Anti-human Trafficking 101 for School Staff

Department of Public Instruction

Student Services Prevention and Wellness Team

Basic Questions and Answers

This document provides questions and answers on the basics of human trafficking, how school staff can recognize warning signs, how staff should handle disclosures, mandated reporting responsibilities, and steps for prevention. Additional resources and links for further learning are included.

1. What do we mean when we say human trafficking? And how does the law apply to minors?

- The term “human trafficking” includes two types of trafficking: labor trafficking and sex trafficking.
- Legal Definition -
 - Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age. (22 USC. sec. 7102).
 - Per Wis. Stat § 940.302(1)(a), a commercial sex act means any of the following for which anything of value is given to, promised, or received, directly or indirectly, by any person:
 - Sexual contact
 - Sexual intercourse
 - Sexually explicit performance
 - Any other conduct done for the purpose of sexual humiliation, degradation, arousal, or gratification
- Plain language definition -
 - Human trafficking is the misuse of other people and in sex trafficking; it occurs for the purpose of using people for sexual activities. Sex trafficking occurs when a person or group of people try to persuade or manipulate a minor to do something sexual for money or other resources. Sometimes the youth keeps the money or resource or part of it; sometimes the youth doesn't get to keep any of the money or resources at all.
- The law is clear that while traffickers often threaten, force, and lie to youth, they don't need to do any of that for it to be sex trafficking. Anytime someone pays for sex with a minor, or tries to, it's automatically considered sex trafficking in Wisconsin even if there is no third-party trafficker. You don't need to prove that a minor was forced or made to do it.

2. We know that there is a sex trade industry in other countries. Is this really an issue for Wisconsin students? How widespread is the issue?

- National Data
 - From 2007 to 2017, the National Human Trafficking Hotline, operated by [Polaris](#), has received reports of 34,700 sex trafficking cases inside the United States.



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- During the 15-month period from June 1, 2017, through August 31, 2018, there were 422 allegations of child sex trafficking across Wisconsin.
- It happens everywhere including rural, suburban, and urban locations; statewide.
- Trafficking does not require travel from one place to another. Someone can be trafficked in their own home.
- Trafficking happens to people of all ages.
- In a national, multi-city study published in 2016, researchers interviewed 949 youth ages 13-24 and found that youth are diverse in their identities and in their experiences.
 - First involvement: 75 percent of respondents had been under 18, 23 percent over 18, and the average of first involvement was 15.8 y.o.
 - The average age is higher than we see in other studies and may be in part due to older youth reporting, not only minors. When asking minors, the average age would naturally be lower.
 - Gender Identity: 60 percent cisgender females, 36 percent cisgender males, 3 percent trans-females, <1 percent trans-males
 - Sexual Orientation: 53 percent heterosexual, 47 percent LGBTQ+ (36 percent bi, 9 percent gay, 2 percent other)

3. Can you describe a typical Trafficker? What type of people are traffickers?

- Traffickers can be of any sex or gender and various ages.
- Traffickers can be known or unknown to the person being trafficked. Sometimes the trafficker is well-known like a neighbor, and even can be a parent or relative.
- Sometimes traffickers work together and play different roles. There might be an attractive person who recruits a young person into thinking they are in a relationship together. This attractive trafficker might be working with another person who sets up the exchange or becomes the primary trafficker.
- Sometimes young people being trafficked recruit other young people for various reasons. So, a trafficker could be a classmate or a friend of a friend.
- Traffickers are both people who appear attractive and people who do not. Traffickers can be all types of people.

4. People of all sexes and genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and income levels can experience sex trafficking. It's not a true choice for youth to get involved. Traffickers prey on the vulnerable, often with promises of a better life. Are there certain life experiences or risk factors that make a student more vulnerable?

- Children and youth can be vulnerable for a variety of reasons.
 - Youth have an increased risk of victimization if they:
 - Are involved in systems, such as Child Protective Services (CPS) or Youth Justice,
 - Experience maltreatment including physical/sexual abuse or neglect in the course of their lives,
 - Live with a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse disorder,



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- Have special education needs, or
- Have friends or family involved in trafficking or the sex industry.
- Run-away, “throw-away,” and homeless youth are extremely vulnerable as they have tangible needs that are not being met such as food, shelter, and transportation.
- When someone is a member of one, or multiple, marginalized communities, they may experience harms like racism, homophobia, bullying, and other discrimination that impacts self-worth and contributes to other harms that put them more at risk.

5. How are traffickers successful at recruiting youth? Why would youth get involved?

- To answer this question we first have to acknowledge that our society has long accepted, and at times very much encouraged, people paying for sexual activities. In many ways we have normalized this behavior through the media and popular culture even though it is harmful.
- There are many tactics traffickers use to lure youth into these situations. They have complex networks in place to deceive youth into increasingly harmful situations. Grooming is often used to lower the guard of youth. Traffickers start by building a relationship, often providing tangible resources that a young person needs, or love and affection. When rapport is established, the power dynamics can quickly shift.
- They may exploit youth through force, fraud, abuse of power, control, drug use, or violence. It is common for traffickers to threaten people the youth cares about, or to threaten to expose past behavior of the youth to their loved ones. Sometimes they use a younger person/peer to recruit others and persuade them. They use peer pressure and groupthink. They encourage a strong sense of loyalty in those working for them.

6. How does sex trafficking hurt students?

- Traffickers target already vulnerable and hurting youth who have some sort of need.
- These individuals claim they will fix problems youth are facing, including lack of basic resources and money, though in the end the youths' lives are not improved.
- Traffickers sexually abuse youth over and over resulting in severe traumatic responses (hypervigilance, extreme fear, inability to trust...).
- Traffickers work to isolate a target by separating youth from their families and broader support systems including school and other communities.

Remember: It's the traffickers that hurt students, both third-party and those who pay for sexual acts. Remember to hold the right people accountable - traffickers for their abuse, not youth for any perceived misbehavior.

7. This is a complex topic that can be difficult to talk about. Are school staff trained to be able to discuss this with students?

- Though difficult, staff have the training and experience to understand how to talk to youth about sensitive topics such as bullying, sexual health, and more.



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- Sex trafficking/commercial sexual exploitation are harms that involve dynamics similar to sexual abuse, bullying, and dating violence.
- If an individual staff member cannot have a conversation about this with young people, then it is their responsibility to find someone who can. Staff need to know about these issues to keep all students safe and should seek out additional training as needed.

8. Suspected sex trafficking must be reported by school staff to child protective services or law enforcement. What signs should staff be looking for?

- Refer to the [Indicator and Response Guide](#).

Is there additional training for mandated reporters on this topic?

- Yes. Information about reporting sex trafficking is included in the two DPI Mandated Reporting [online modules](#).

9. Do young people use the term Trafficking? How should we talk to students about it?

- While adults use the term “trafficking,” young people rarely use this terminology. Instead, they may refer to it as “the life,” “doing what I have to do to survive,” “getting money,” “hustling,” “finessing people out of money,” or talk about someone “helping them out” or “going out of town to work.”
- Avoid using the terms “prostitute/prostituting,” “selling yourself,” or “trafficking yourself.”
- Language is ever-evolving and terms will inevitably change and when using the terms above, staff can say “some youth have referred to it as...”

10. What does it look like when students disclose involvement?

- Students will most likely not use terms like “trafficking” to describe their experience.
- Students might share experiences without knowing it was considered trafficking or a trafficking attempt, for example an adult soliciting them online on social media.
- Students might be bullied by others or be labeled with a reputation; a supportive response to the bullied student by school staff could lead to greater information about sexual abuse or exploitation.
- Students might share concerns about a friend.
- Students might share related concerns like lack of resources or a safe place to sleep and trafficking, or attempted trafficking, might become apparent within their experience.
- Students might share as a result of education offered by your school or once they realize you are a safe person to speak with.

11. How can staff best respond to a disclosure?

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Allow the student to share without interruption.
- Document the student’s exact words, including slang.
- Avoid stigmatizing the student by implying doubt what they said is true.



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- Avoid using the words “alleged” when speaking to the youth. Instead, use “reported” or “stated” as in, “you reported that your neighbor approached you....”
- Do not make negative comments about the alleged offender, as the student may have an emotional connection to that person, which is a natural response to grooming. Remember, if the trafficker approached a student in a threatening manner, it is likely that the student would run the other way. As such, traffickers will often build rapport prior to introducing the young person to a trafficking situation.
- Youth in difficult situations can think that exchanging sex for money is the only way to support themselves. We want to support them to get the resources they need and hold the adults who abuse teens responsible.

12. Could you give an example of how a school staff member could ask a student about their suspicion?

- “Sometimes we hear about people who trade sex, go on dates, or do sexual things for money, clothes, a place to stay, drugs, or other things they need. Others say they have been asked or forced to let other people do sexual things to them. Have you ever heard of this? Has this ever happened to someone you know or a friend?”
- “If you have experienced any of these things, please know that it’s not your fault and there is a way out no matter what others tell you. If you are worried about something you have done, I can connect you to an advocate who you could talk to about your situation.”

13. What are some other things staff should know about students involved in trafficking?

- Youth who are being exploited or trafficked may:
 - Not identify as a victim and may believe they made the “choice” to get involved,
 - Be defensive or aloof,
 - Not accept assistance,
 - Run away from home or placement after receiving intervention, and
 - Express love or loyalty towards the trafficker.

14. How can school staff best help prevent trafficking?

- Similar to other primary prevention measures, staff can:
 - Maintain a safe, caring environment at school
 - Work to increase adult connections and professional relationships with students
 - Provide students with activities to get involved with at school
 - Create and maintain a Trauma Sensitive School system
 - Create and maintain a culturally responsive and anti-racist school system
 - Train all staff in AHT basics and how to respond and support students
 - Engage in proactive cross-agency work with child welfare, law enforcement, advocates, and community agencies.



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- Teach students social and emotional skills, and content on trafficking specifically such as how to recognize unsafe situations and how to get help
- Advocate for AHT legislation such as “Safe Harbor” law, increased funds for youth-serving advocates and equitable resource allocation.

Further Resources

- AHT Trainer of Trainers (TOT) for facilitating student lessons offered by DPI
- [Department of Children and Families Webpages](#) on Anti-Human Trafficking
- [Reducing and Responding to Sexual Violence in Schools](#) - DPI
- [Human Trafficking 101 for School Administrators and Staff](#) - U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Education
- [Human Trafficking of Children in the United States: A Fact Sheet for Schools](#), U.S. Department of Education
- [Sex Trafficking of Minors: What Schools Need to Know to Recognize and Respond to the Trafficking of Students](#), National Center for Homeless Education
- [Myths and Facts about Human Trafficking](#) - Polaris Project
- [On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking](#) - Polaris Project
- [Child Marriage in the United States: A Serious Problem With a Simple First-Step Solution](#) - Tahirih Justice Center
- [Human Trafficking: Online Safety](#) - National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments
- Youth Involvement in the Sex Trade: A National Study
 - <https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/youth-involvement-sex-trade-national-study>
 - <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/249952.pdf>