

**PROGRAM STANDARDS TOOLKIT**

**Sex Trafficking Standards**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This presentation was supported by Grant Number 15JOVW-22-GG-00442-STOP (STOP) and 15JOV-22-GG-00376-SASP (SASP) awarded by the OVW, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.

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# INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is designed to help domestic and sexual violence programs develop agency protocols for providing services to victims of sex trafficking seeking help at their community domestic and/or sexual violence program. The Program Standards sections are: Organizational, Common, Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, and Sex Trafficking. Each program should attempt to meet or exceed the Organizational and Common Standards while meeting the programmatic standards for the particular services their agency provides. The Sex Trafficking Standards are designed to assist domestic violence and sexual violence programs when working with victim-survivors of domestic or sexual violence who also identify as a victim-survivor of sex trafficking.

There are direct intersections between domestic violence, sexual violence, and sex trafficking. NCEDSV acknowledges these intersections and recognizes that many domestic violence and sexual violence programs are already providing services to sex trafficking victims who may or may not be identified by staff, themselves or both as victims of trafficking. These standards are not to direct any program to work beyond their scope, instead they can be viewed as a tool to provide guidance and assistance to victim-services organization when they *do* encounter a sex trafficking victim in their course of providing services.

# SEX TRAFFICKING STANDARDS

The Sex Trafficking Standards are programmatic standards that all domestic and sexual violence agencies can work towards incorporating into their services. These principles are based on best practices developed by sex trafficking organizations. Some have been adapted by domestic and sexual violence programs to meet survivors needs while coping with and adapting to the sometimes very limited resources of their communities.

Since all programs attempt to be accessible to communities which have been traditionally marginalized communities, this document also contains information regarding accessibility throughout this toolkit. For assistance beyond that contained here, please contact the NCEDSV Technical Assistance coordinator at [loralee@ncedsv.org](mailto:loralee@ncedsv.org) with additional questions.

# PROVISION OF SERVICE

The safety of all victims, survivors, and their dependent children is the primary goal of all domestic violence, sexual violence, and dual service programs. Thus, all programs should include the discussion of safety issues and options for each person seeking assistance. All counseling and advocacy services should be respectful of and respond to each individuals’ life situations, respecting each person’s right to self-determination. As a result, programs should base their services for all victims-survivors (including those who have experience being trafficked) on an empowerment and trauma-informed service model.

As providers of victim services, (particularly those in areas lacking services specific to victims of sex trafficking) most programs will have contact with sex trafficking victim-survivors. This contact can originate in many ways, including through law enforcement, the national sex trafficking hotline, or by survivor-initiated contact. It is important to note that it is common for victims not to identify as having been trafficked.

To create opportunities for the victim-survivor to learn about and possibly self-identify as a survivor of sex trafficking it is important that advocates build consistently non-judgmental and supportive relationships with their clients. Programs can easily provide general information on sex trafficking through different methods that are readily available to clients while also confidentially accessible.

However, most domestic violence or sexual violence programs do not have the capacity to provide for the long-term needs of sex trafficking victims. For this reason, program service provision can be limited to assisting the survivor with safe shelter, and providing for their immediate needs while working with community partners to connect the trafficked person to a program with specific trafficking services that more fully meet their needs. In some cases, this may require a domestic or sexual violence program to work with programs outside of their immediate area of expertise and geography.

NCEDSV also has a trauma-informed toolkit to help programs develop trauma-informed services. It can be found in Coalition Manager. If you do not have access, please contact [loralee@ncedsv.org](mailto:loralee@ncedsv.org).

# DEFINTION OF SEX TRAFFICKING

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose 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 as act has not attained 18 years of age.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Force is physical violence or threats of physical violence.
* Fraud occurs when an individual consented to a specific situation only to have the circumstances be very different from what they originally consented to. Domestic and sexual violence programs may be working with a victim-survivor who initially sought services due to being battered by their intimate partner only to discover at a future time that intimate relationship included expectations they will in engage in prostitution.
* Coercion involves compelling someone to act in an involuntary way through the use of threats.

# WHY SEX TRAFFICKING EXISTS

The [causes of human trafficking](https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/trafficking) are complex including economic, social and political factors. Sex trafficking is essentially a market-driven criminal industry which is based on the principles of supply and demand. Sex trafficking is fueled by the demand for commercial sex. As such, sex traffickers perceive there is little risk to their criminal activity. When individuals are willing to buy commercial sex, they create a market and make it very profitable for the traffickers to exploit others. [[2]](#footnote-2)

# WHO ARE THE TRAFFICKERS

Traffickers come from all genders, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. They may be intimate partners, family members, friends, bosses, or spouses. They can be dressed as a businessperson or outfitted as a high school student. There is no particular way to tell who is a trafficker.

# WHO ARE THE VICTIMS

Victims of sex trafficking can be of any race, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. While there is no certain profile of a sex trafficking victim, certain risk factors may present a higher risk for being trafficked. These risk factors can include:

* A history of physical or sexual abuse.
* Family rejection related to identifying as LGBTQIA+.
* Exposure to parents or guardians engaged in drug use.
* Current or past connection to the child welfare system.
* Runaways and homeless youth.
* Children in the welfare or juvenile justice system.
* American Indians and Alaska natives.
* Migrant workers.
* People with intellectual developmental disabilities[[3]](#footnote-3).

# RECRUITMENT TACTICS

* **Intimate partner**– The trafficker convinces the victim that they are their regular companion in a romantic or sexual relationship. They may shower the victim with gifts and attention, manipulate them with love, promise the victim that they are the only one for them, or try to convince the victim that if they really loved them then they would do this for them. At some point threats of and actual physical violence may occur.
* **Helper** – This trafficker finds a runaway and convinces them that they will help them, they might offer them a place to sleep or live, money, drugs, and convinces the victim-survivor they are the only one who can keep them safe.
* **Isolation** – This recruitment technique involves the trafficker isolating the victim from family, friends and the outside world. They control every aspect of the victim’s life including monitoring their cell phone or prohibiting them from having a cell phone, monitoring social media or prohibiting social media. Frequently victim-survivors may be moved to geographical areas where they have no friends or family.
* **Groomer** – This tactic generally begins with the trafficker engaging in “grooming” a child. The trafficker gains their trust, takes them to do fun things, then slowly begins to talk about sex, begins to expose them to pornography, or forces the child to engage in sexual activities and eventually forces the child into prostitution.[[4]](#footnote-4)

# COMMON SEX TRAFFICKING SITES

Although sex trafficking takes place anywhere, the following places may be the most common:

* Motels and hotels
* Illicit massage businesses
* Legal brothels
* Truck stops
* Trafficking houses
* Casinos

# WORKING WITH VICTIMS

When working with survivors’ advocates must understand trauma and trauma-informed care. Trauma is defined as mental or emotional distress caused by an event or a series of events experienced by the person as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening. Individual trauma may have lasting adverse effects on the person’s functioning and mental, physical, social, and emotional health. Trauma-informed approaches are meant to be delivered with an understanding of the experiences the victim has suffered. With a trauma-informed method, advocates recognize the signs of trauma within the victim-survivor who might not realize that what they experienced was trauma. Trauma-informed approaches prioritize restoring the feeling of safety for the victim-survivor, and giving them choices so that they will feel in control of their life.

It is common for victims not to identify as experiencing trafficking although they are being forced against their will to perform commercial sex acts. As previously noted, traffickers are likely to use methods of misinformation, manipulation, and mental or physical abuse. Using terms such as boyfriend, girlfriend or suggesting they are the only one may contribute to the survivor not identifying as a trafficked victim. While the victim might never identify as being a trafficking victim, it is important that they have access to all of a program’s resources for their healing journey. [[5]](#footnote-5)

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# RED FLAGS & INDICATORS OF SEX TRAFFICKING

The suggestions and indicators below are not exhaustive ways to identify someone who is currently being or has been trafficked. They do not necessarily always indicate a potential trafficking situation since many of these signs are also common for victims of domestic and/or sexual assault.

* Inconsistencies in their story about where they live, when they came to their current location and a lack of knowledge about their current city or state.
* No access to personal documents or identification (ID, Visa, Passport, Birth Certificate, etc.).
* No access to a bank account or any other money.
* Not allowed to contact friends or family.
* Not allowed to leave their living or working situation unless monitored or someone is with them.
* Signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, malnourishment, or torture.
* Not allowed to speak for themselves with a 3rd party speaking or translating for the individual. [[6]](#footnote-6)

# ADDITIONAL CONTROLLING TACTICS

* Shame – Convinces the victim they are worthless, they cannot do anything else, threatens to tell friends and family what they are doing.
* Obligation – The victim’s highest priority must be the trafficker, they “owe” them, they need to pay their way, while traffickers supply them with drugs to keep them “in line”.
* Financial – The trafficker keeps all the victims earning and does not let them have money.
* Violence – The trafficker uses physical violence with the victim. This could include physical assault, rape, and branding or tattooing the victim to show their ownership. Traffickers may also threaten to inform law enforcement exposing the victim to arrest or may threaten to put pictures and movies of the victim online.

# SEX TRAFFICKING INDICATORS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT CLIENTS

Domestic and sexual violence programs may come across clients who describe activities and exhibit signs of forced commercial sex by an intimate partner. A victim may be an individual who:

* Has been forced by an intimate partner or their family member to provide sexual favors or engage in commercial sex through online websites, escort services, street prostitution, and informal arrangements, in home or external brothels, or massage parlors or strip clubs.
* Indicates that they are involved in the commercial sex industry and have a controller (boyfriend, pimp, manager, or “daddy”) or mentions having to meet a nightly quota.
* Is under 18 years of age and engaging in commercial sex acts.
* Exhibits poor health and/or has multiple untreated sexually transmitted diseases/infections or related injuries.
* Has had to terminate one or more pregnancies over a short period of time. Or if pregnant, hesitates to answer who the father may be or seems unsure of who the father is.
* Exhibits signs of branding such as tattoos with the controller’s name and/or burn marks.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# RECOMMENDATIONS OF ASSESSMENT AND INTAKE

Victims of sex trafficking may reach out to domestic and sexual violence programs for services while in the trafficking situation or when exiting a situation. Again, while many of these signs are also common for victim-survivors of domestic or sexual violence they also suggest the client could be a victim of sex trafficking.

* Programs should have a written policy and referral procedure if a victim of sex trafficking is identified in the screening process or while receiving services.
* If a client is identified through the screening process but does not self-identify as a sex trafficking victim, the program should continue to work with the client as a domestic or sexual violence client, while continuing to maintain the clients’ confidentiality.
* Advocates should consult with a sex trafficking program for information on how to best work with the survivor. This can include local resource or others in nearby communities. National resources for trafficking information can also offer ideas and support to advocate staff.
* If through their screening process a client is identified as a trafficking victim and the client does self-identify, a program may give temporary shelter to keep the victim safe until space in a sex trafficking program or other suitable location can be found.
* Until the victim of sex trafficking can be safely transferred to a sex trafficking program, within 24-48 hours domestic violence and sexual violence programs should conduct screening for further risks of violence to the individual, minor children, or any other vulnerable family member. At this time advocates should also engage in safety planning with the client.
* If no specific shelter for trafficking victims exists, with an appropriate confidentiality release, the advocate can work with other agencies with the client.

# SHELTERING

When temporarily sheltering victims of sex trafficking in a domestic violence shelter, it’s important to make every effort to provide a room for the client that is separate from domestic violence victims. Sex trafficking victims need their own space. Prior to entering shelter, they may have been housed with other trafficked victims in one room and will need time to decompress away from other victims. Being in a room with other women could be triggering for them. They also may have a lack of trust in others and be fearful others may disclose to their trafficker where they are. It is important not to shelter in a hotel/motel if possible as the victim may have been forced to have sex in a hotel/motel room continuously and this could be triggering for them. In addition, their trafficker might be looking for them at hotel/motels. Safe Homes should never be used.

# SEX TRAFFICKING SAFETY PLANNING

Safety planning refers to formal or informal risk assessments, preparations, and contingency plans designed to increase the safety of a sex trafficking victim or an individual at-risk for sex trafficking, as well as any agency or individual assisting a victim. A successful safety plan will:

* Assess the current risk and identify current and potential safety concerns;
* Create strategies for avoiding or reducing the threat of harm;
* Outline concrete options for responding if or when safety is threatened or compromised.

Safety planning is important at various stages in a sex trafficking situation – while a victim is in the situation, during the process of leaving, and once the victim has left. The following presents general guidelines for conducting safety planning with victims of sex trafficking. The suggestions below do not guarantee an individual’s safety nor the prevention of trafficking. Each individual is in the best position to assess their own current level of safety and safety planning should be tailored to their unique circumstance.

Victims of sex trafficking have multiple safety concerns that should be addressed when developing a safety plan:

* Isolation, abandonment;
* Movement, disorientation, unfamiliarity with current location;
* Lack of food, medicine, clothing, or safe shelter;
* Increased vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, or other crimes;
* Confiscation of money and/or identity documents;
* Physical harm or violence to the victim(s) or others;
* Abduction, kidnapping, confinement, or restraint.

It is important to note that traffickers pose a significant and constant threat to the safety of the victim(s), but it is also important to consider the threat posed by others who may not be engaged in the trafficking situation, but may exploit the victim’s vulnerability.

# SAFETY TIPS WHEN LEAVING A SEX TRAFFICKING SITUATION

In some cases, leaving or attempting to leave a trafficking situation may increase the survivors risk of experiencing violence. It is important they trust their judgment when taking steps to ensure their safety. Victim-survivors can be encouraged to consider the following: If in immediate danger, the quickest way for them to access help is to call 9-1-1.

If victim-survivors are calling for assistance and are unsure of their current location, suggest they try to find any indicator such as street signs or items that may have the address listed. If there are people nearby and it is safe to speak with them, they can be asked about their current location.

When working with a victim survivor who is planning to leave or come to shelter, the following should be included in the safety plan. In addition, the safety plan should include information pertaining to any unique conditions or social factors that the survivor may be dealing with.

* Plan an escape route or exit strategy and have the victim rehearse it if possible.
* Advise them to keep any important documents on their person or very near to them to be ready for immediate departure.
* Suggest the victim prepare a bag with other important documents, medications or records along with a change of clothes.
* Survivors should be encouraged to keep a written copy of important numbers and other contact information for family or friend on their person at all times in case their phone is taken or destroyed at any point.
* Memorizing important numbers/hotlines can be a challenge when they are in trauma related to their upcoming exit.
* Recommend the victim keep a cell phone or emergency phone on them at all times.
* Survivors can be guided through what their next steps could be after they have left the situation.
* Victims can be asked about contacting trusted friends/relatives to notify them or to ask for assistance if they feel comfortable and it’s safe to do so.
* Alert survivors to avoid dangerous rooms with potential during violent or escalating situations if at all possible.
* Give victims examples of dangerous rooms: kitchen (knives, sharp utensils, pots), garage (tools, sharp objects), bathroom (hard surfaces, no exits), basement (hard surfaces, no exits), rooms where weapons are kept and any areas without an exit.
* Share with the survivor’s examples of Safer Rooms: front room, yard or apartment hallway where a neighbor might see or hear an incident. Ask them where they have felt the safest and why.
* Suggest to the victim that they develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal, etc.) to use with a trusted neighbor, relative or friend to notify them that you are in danger.
* Talk with the survivor about if there are children present they can explain to them that it isn’t their responsibility to protect the survivor. Survivors and the children may be able to agree on a code word for them to know if they haven’t been swayed by the trafficker. They can be shown how to call for help, and where to hide during a violent incident. Suggest they practice their plan of how they’ll leave together.
* Introduce the survivor to the possibility of a protective or restraining order so their abuser or trafficker will be legally prohibited from contacting them.
* Remind the victim that if the person has makes unwanted contact they should document the contact made (calls, texts, showing up at your work/home, etc.) and save any voicemails and text messages that are threatening in nature.

Once the victim-survivor has left their home and/or place they were trafficked, they will move into new housing and should consider these safety measures again and prepare for another round of safety planning. At this time conversation should take place with the survivor about some of the following:

* Suggest they consider accessing the Confidential Address Program (CAP). CAP helps victim-survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, sex trafficking or stalking from being located by their trafficker through public records.
* Remind the survivor to only disclose their new address to people that they trust implicitly.
* Discuss with the survivor if they should change their phone number. Most cell phone carriers will allow changing numbers at no cost.
* Process w/the survivor the possibility (if it’s safe and they’re comfortable to tell neighbors, employers, and friends to call the police if they see the trafficker near or around their residence, work, place of worship, etc.
* Suggest the survivor (if safe) again develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal, etc.) to use with a trusted neighbor, relative, or friend to notify them that you are in danger or need help. This can be the same safety signal used while exiting the situation.
* If there are children who were also in the trafficking situation help the survivor to create a safety plan with them making sure they know what do if the trafficker/abuser makes unwanted contact and how to call someone for help.
* If a child still has ongoing contact with the trafficker/abuser and have not been compromised by them suggest that the survivor discuss with them a simple safety plan and how to keep themselves safe while with the other person.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This toolkit in not inclusive of all information for working with sex trafficked victims or with those domestic or sexual violence survivors who have also been trafficked. This Sex Trafficking Toolkit has been adapted from the original NCEDSV Program Standards.

# APPENDIX A: GENERAL SAFETY TIPS FOR THE SURVIVOR

* Trust your judgment. If a situation or individual makes you uncomfortable, trust that feeling.
* Let a trusted friend or relative know if you feel like you are in danger or if a person or situation is suspicious.
* Keep all important documents and identification in your possession at all times. Your partner or employer does not have the right to take or hold your documents without your permission.
* Keep important numbers on your person at all times, including the number of someone you feel safe contacting if you are in trouble.
* Make sure that you have a means of communication (cell phone or phone card), access to your bank account, and any medication that you might need with you at all times.
* If you think you might be in immediate danger or you are experiencing an emergency, contact 9-1-1 first.

# APPENDIX B: SAFETY TIPS FOR SUSPICIOUS OR CONTROLLING RELATIONSHIPS

Some relationships that exhibit many of the typical signs of abuse and control, as well as those with promises of a better life, may have the potential to develop into situations of sex trafficking.

* If your partner asks you to do things you are uncomfortable with (forceful sex or sex acts, videotaping sexual activity/nudity, engaging in commercial sex or sex acts with his/her friends/strangers, abusing drugs/alcohol, etc.), let your partner know it makes you uncomfortable and inform a trusted friend/relative.
* Make sure a trusted friend/relative knows where you are when with your partner, especially if you are traveling with this person or going to an unfamiliar location.
* Maintain access to all of your documents (driver’s license, ID card, birth certificate, passport, or visa), your bank account and all important phone numbers and do not provide this information to your partner if you do not feel comfortable.

1. (22 U.S.C. § 7102(11) (A)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. N.A. (2022, September 28). *What is human trafficking?* Human Trafficking. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/what-is-human-trafficking#:~:text=Victims%20of%20human%20trafficking%20can,education%20level%2C%20or%20citizenship%20status> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Staff, P. T. (2020, July). *Human trafficking outreach toolkit: OVC*. Office for Victims of Crime. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://ovc.ojp.gov/library/publications/human-trafficking-outreach-toolkit> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. N.A. (2012, April 16). *Convicted sex offender sentenced to 20 years for additional crimes against a child*. FBI. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/atlanta/press-releases/2012/convicted-sex-offender-sentenced-to-20-years-for-additional-crimes-against-a-child> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. N.A. (2022, September 28). *What is human trafficking?* Human Trafficking. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/what-is-human-trafficking#:~:text=Victims%20of%20human%20trafficking%20can,education%20level%2C%20or%20citizenship%20status> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Paxton, K. (n.d.). *Red Flags for Sex Trafficking*. Red Flags for Sex Trafficking | Office of the Attorney General. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from [https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/human-trafficking-section/signs-trafficking/red-flags-](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/human-trafficking-section/signs-trafficking/red-flags-sextrafficking#:~:text=Person%20seems%20overly%20fearful%2C%20submissive,sexual%20or%20inappropriate%20for%20weather.) sextrafficking#:~:text=Person%20seems%20overly%20fearful%2C%20submissive,sexual%20or%20inappropriate%20for%20weather [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Chapman, L. L. (2017). *PROGRAM STANDARDS TOOLKIT HUMAN TRAFFICKING STANDARDS*. Retrieved October 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)