

Understanding Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Understanding the mindset of child human trafficking victims is important to helping them restore their lives.

Their reasons for coming to the U.S. vary, but consistently, children succumb to exploitation under the guise of opportunity—children may believe they are coming to the United States to be united with family, to work in a legitimate job or to attend school. Additionally, children may be subject to psychological intimidation or threats of physical harm to self or family members.

Child victims of human trafficking face significant problems. Often physically and sexually abused, they have distinctive medical and psychological needs that should be addressed before advancing into adulthood. Taught by those who traffick them to fear government officials—and in particular, law enforcement and immigration officers—they are often distrustful of the system.

Children have the most impressionable minds, and the road to recovery is long. Understanding their mindset and building trust through open dialogue is the first step to rescuing and restoring their faith in a new beginning.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**
Administration for Children and Families



Support for Child Victims of Human Trafficking

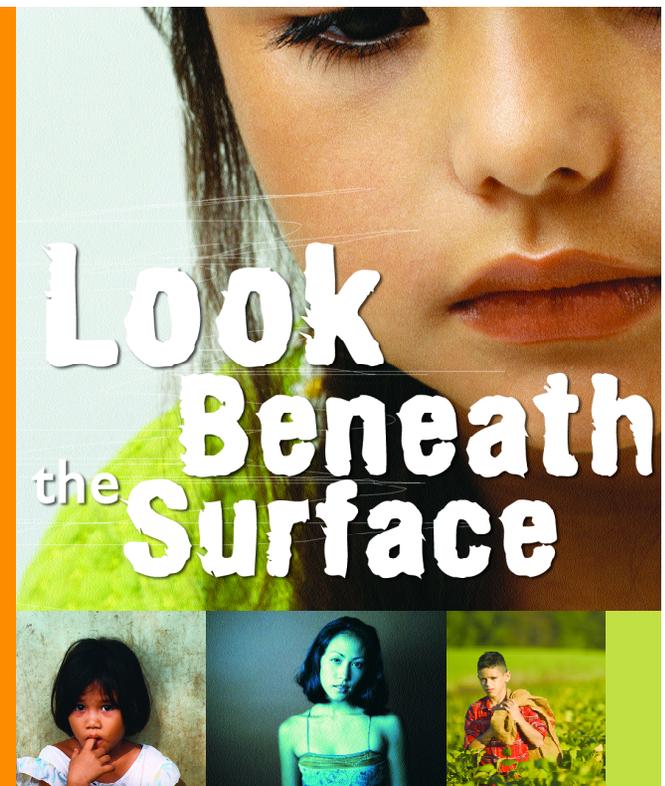
If you suspect a child is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at **1.888.3737.888**

to obtain information and to access supportive services through the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2006 (TVPRA). This hotline will help victims safely and securely rebuild their lives by connecting them to basic services related to:

- Immediate shelter/specialized foster care
- Health care
- Immigration assistance
- Food
- Legal assistance

Child victims of trafficking may be eligible for the T visa, which allows them to remain in the U.S. and may adjust their status to lawful permanent resident after three years. Through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), unaccompanied trafficked children also are eligible for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program, which provides a comprehensive range of services for children and places them in culturally appropriate foster homes, group homes, or independent living arrangements, appropriate to their developmental needs.

For more information about human trafficking, visit www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking.



Can you recognize child victims of human trafficking among the people you help everyday?

As a law enforcement officer, a health care professional or a social service provider, you can help rescue and restore the future for victims of human trafficking.

Human Trafficking is Modern-Day Slavery

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women.

Approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually are trafficked across international borders worldwide according to U.S. government estimates. **More than half of these victims worldwide are children**, according to the U.S. Department of State.

Child victims of trafficking are often exploited for sexual purposes, including prostitution, pornography and sex tourism. They are also exploited for forced labor, including domestic servitude, sweatshop factory work and migrant farming.

Child victims of trafficking can be found in:

- Commercial sex
- Domestic servitude (servants)
- Sweatshop factories
- Construction
- Farming or landscaping
- Fisheries
- Hotel or tourist industries
- Panhandling
- Janitorial services
- Restaurant services

Identifying Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Children who are victims of human trafficking may be mistaken for prostitutes, runaway youth, migrant farm workers or domestic servants. By looking beneath the surface, picking up on the right clues and asking the right questions, you may uncover children who are being exploited.

- Children exploited for labor are often hungry or malnourished to the extent they may never reach their full height or they may have poorly formed or rotting teeth.
- Children exploited for sexual purposes may show evidence of untreated sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, urinary tract infections, and kidney problems.
- Children who are victims of trafficking can also be identified by environmental factors, including whether the child is living at the workplace or with an employer, living with multiple people in a cramped space, or not in school, attends school sporadically or has a significant gap of schooling in the U.S.
- Forced labor may expose children to physical abuse or leave signs such as scars, headaches, hearing loss, cardiovascular/respiratory problems and limb amputation. They may also develop chronic back, visual and respiratory problems from working in agriculture, construction or manufacturing.
- The psychological effects of exploitation include helplessness, shame and humiliation, shock, denial and disbelief, disorientation and confusion, and anxiety disorders including post traumatic stress disorder, phobias, panic attacks and depression.

Communicating with Child Victims of Human Trafficking

When communicating with children who have been exploited, it is important to remember child victims have special needs and may assume what has happened to them is their own fault. Often, child victims of trafficking may not establish trust easily due to their experiences. They may have been coached to answer your questions in a certain way. With the guidance and involvement of a child welfare expert, asking some of the following questions may help you determine if you are dealing with child victims of trafficking:

- Why did you come to the U.S.? What did you expect when you came? Were you scared?
- Do you have any papers? Who has them?
- Are you in school? Are you working? Can you leave if you want?
- Where do you live? Who else lives there? Are you scared to leave?
- Has anybody ever threatened you to keep you from running away?
- Did anyone ever touch you or hurt you?

While these questions provide a beginning to a challenging dialogue, it is vital to remember that the child should be approached in a manner that reflects his or her age, development, culture, language and what is known about the nature of his or her experience.

