

Identifying and Referring Human Trafficking Victims and Survivors: Red Flags for Title X Clinicians



This job aid describes red flags in a client's social and health history that may indicate human trafficking. Title X agencies can leverage existing expertise to respond. Follow the steps below to assess if a client is a potential trafficking victim and in need of referrals to additional services. One indicator does not confirm human trafficking, but multiple indicators may compel you to report a case and/or to seek support from the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. Remember that traffickers use coercion and threats to dissuade victims from seeking or accepting help.

Step One – Notice Red Flags

If the client presents a combination of the following indicators, proceed to Steps Two and Three, and/or refer to your agency's established human trafficking response protocol.

SOCIAL HISTORY INDICATORS

- Scripted or inconsistent history
- Signs of controlling or dominating relationships (excessive concern about pleasing a family member, romantic partner, or employer)
- Age-inappropriate partner, significant other
- Companion who speaks for the client or does not permit language interpretation services
- Fearful behavior
- Inability to provide an address
- Missing identification documents
- Lack of control of their own money; pay or wages withheld
- Involvement in the commercial sex industry and expresses fear, a desire to leave, feeling trapped, or is a minor
- Sex traded for housing, food, drugs/alcohol, money, or items of value like electronics or clothing (particularly if under 18)
- Inadequate breaks, food, or water while at work
- Required to live in housing controlled by employer

PHYSICAL AND HEALTH HISTORY INDICATORS

- Signs of physical abuse: bruises, cuts, burns, broken bones
- Abuse at work or threats of harm by an employer or supervisor
- Signs of self-harm: bruises, scars from repeated cutting
- Signs of malnourishment or dehydration
- Unwillingness to answer questions about an injury or illness
- Tattoos or other forms of branding, e.g., that say "Daddy," "Property of...", "For sale," etc.
- Unusually high number of sex partners

Step Two – Establish Trust and Safety

- Build trust by demonstrating warmth, care, and non-judgemental interest and concern
- Ensure client has time alone with providers and access to language interpretation
- Leverage your expertise to carry out trauma-informed, patient-centered screening for violence, including intimate partner violence, trafficking, and sexual or physical violence
- Refer to existing institutional protocols for victims of violence

Step Three – Take Action

- Follow your institutional policies for reporting to law enforcement in situations of immediate danger
- Consult agency protocols for human trafficking and [mandatory reporting](#)
- Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text BEFREE (233733) for additional support and referrals
- Ensure client has referral and agency contact information
- Follow up on the client's case. A potential victim may require fulfillment of some basic needs—such as food, clothing, or temporary shelter—in order to take next steps, and may not be ready to accept help right away.

This document was adapted from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center's Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking: What to Look for in a Health Care Setting for use by Title X funded agencies.

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