



**Child Sex Trafficking** as defined by the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining 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 an act has not attained 18 years of age.

**"Commercial Sex Act"** means any sex act in which anything of value is given to or received by any person. If a child exchanges a sex act for anything of value they are a victim of child sex trafficking, and force, fraud or coercion does not have to be proven.

## Who are Sex Traffick Victims?

Youth who are victims of sex trafficking can be in situations that one would not expect. Victims can be tricked by intimate partners, family members, peers or a marriage proposition. Some of the risk factors for youth include:

- Runaways
- Isolation
- Emotional distress
- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Family dysfunction
- Substance abuse
- Bullying
- Rejection by peers and/or family
- Community violence
- Physical abuse and neglect
- Mental illness
- Learning disabilities
- Developmental delay
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Promotion of sexual exploitation by family members or peers
- Lack of social support

Without someone to take notice of red flags, youth can easily fall into these dangerous environments. Victims of human trafficking come from all walks of life and can be anyone, regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, or citizenship status. Traffickers frequently prey on individuals who are poor, vulnerable, living in an unsafe situation, or are in search of a better life.

## Federal Protections Against Trafficking

Federal law 18 U.S.C. § 1591(a)(1) makes it a crime when a person "recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, obtains, advertises, maintains, patronizes, or solicits by any means" a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act. There is no requirement to prove that force, fraud, or coercion was used to secure the victim's actions if the victim is a minor. The law has been refined and strengthened since its enactment in 2000 and reflects the best approach to criminalizing child sex trafficking. State laws that address this crime specifically and separately from other criminal sex offenses avoid the confusion of relying on a patchwork of laws that were not crafted specifically to apply in these cases and help law enforcement identify, investigate, and prosecute these crimes.



victims, providing a range of services equipped through training, education and funding to connect that young person to the most appropriate service plan.

## Myths and Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions surrounding human trafficking that need to be debunked:

- Only women are victims
- Victim knew what they were getting themselves into
- Victim had freedom of movement and opportunities to escape
- If a trafficked person consented to be in their initial situation, they cannot be trafficked.
- Victims are always poor
- It can't be trafficking when the trafficker and victim are related, married or in an intimate relationships
- Human trafficking victims will self-identify
- US citizens are not trafficked outside of the US
- US citizens cannot be trafficking victims – only foreign nationals or immigrants can be trafficked
- Trafficking must involve some form of travel, transportation or movement across state or national borders
- Victim was paid for services
- Human Trafficking is only Sex Trafficking



For some children whose lives are otherwise characterized by instability and lack of safety or security, schools can and should be safe havens. Possible behavioral indicators include:

- an inability to attend school on a regular basis and/or unexplained absences
- frequently running away from home
- references made to frequent travel to other cities
- bruises or other signs of physical trauma, withdrawn behavior, depression, anxiety, or fear
- lack of control over a personal schedule and/or identification or travel documents
- hunger, malnourishment, or inappropriate dress (based on weather conditions or surroundings)
- signs of drug addiction
- coached or rehearsed responses to questions
- a sudden change in attire, behavior, relationships, or material possessions (e.g., expensive items)
- uncharacteristic promiscuity and/or references to sexual situations or terminology beyond age-specific norms
- a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" who is noticeably older and/or controlling
- an attempt to conceal scars, tattoos, or bruises
- a sudden change in attention to personal hygiene
- shyness

Therefore, teachers, principals, social workers and all school staff have an opportunity to identify behaviors that might indicate a child or youth is being trafficked. "I had a feeling that my teacher knew something was wrong in my life. I would notice her looking at me...almost like she wanted to say something to me. I wanted to open up to her, but I was afraid she would judge me. I was afraid that she wouldn't understand." – Child sex trafficking survivor, 16 years old

Training is available for both adults and youth. The DCF's HART has developed training for Law Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Medicine, and Foster Parents. HART also has specific curricula for youth: Youth Awareness on Child Trafficking, and Youth Prevention - Not a #Number. Anyone interested in these trainings should contact DCFHART@ct.gov.

## The Youth Survivor

In most cases, victims' perception of justice for themselves differed from their perceptions of justice for their traffickers. Many did not support traditional forms for justice for traffickers and felt instead, that justice should be focused on prevention. Many survivors felt the best form of justice for them is "the ability to move on from their trafficking experiences and find autonomy and empowerment through achieving self-defined goals".

In addition, youth survivors of domestic sex trafficking shared some of the perspectives of the process and what was important to them. Many of them had high levels of distrust often due to past mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement and others.

The biggest surprise for some reading this brief many be the things survivors had to say about their experience.

"I don't want people getting hurt like the same way I get hurt. ...It doesn't matter where you're from or where you come. I don't want any human being to go through what I went through". (Site 6, survivor 8, survivor of labor trafficking)

"For me, justice does not mean that my trafficker [is] put in jail or pay the consequences of the thing that she did to me. For me, justice is my freedom, for me to be able to do anything that I want". (Site 7, survivor 4, survivor of labor trafficking)

"I want to move forward, change my life. ...I just want to forget when I was a victim. Now I'm not a victim anymore. Now I can do whatever I want when I feel like it". (Site 6, survivor 8, survivor of labor trafficking)

In addition, the following are major themes shared by youth survivors:



## Youth Survivor Perspective – Major Themes



Youth survivors had a fear of law enforcement and expressed that their limited exposure was due to a lack of trust and negative experiences with being treated as criminals. Victims did not see police as a place for help.



Comfort was paramount! Survivors desired a balance of rules and comfort given the important role that service providers play in their lives. The youth emphasized that an honest opinion was needed along with a longer term support system. The adults in their lives changed often and bonds were frequently broken.



The message to Judges was to look beyond what is on paper and listen to the survivor's perspective. Youth wanted to be more involved in the process and to speak directly to the Judge. "Judges typically lock up youth," which youth were open about and cited as the reason to continue running.



Survivors overwhelmingly agreed that they did not have a say in the types of services received, nor did they feel in control of their own lives/care.



## What still needs to be done

Connecticut is in need of stronger legislation that will ensure child victims are treated as such and ensure traffickers are prosecuted. Shared Hope International produces an annual report card based on the Protected Innocence Challenge Legislative Framework, and sets a national standard of protection against domestic minor sex trafficking. In 2018, Connecticut dropped from a B to a C with a score of 79. (You can learn more about the legislative framework at [sharedhope.org/reportcards](http://sharedhope.org/reportcards).) That's not acceptable.

Since 2012, Connecticut has passed laws intended to strengthened the protections for victims of human trafficking but are missing some important components. For example, the "rape shield" law, which reduces the trauma of cross-examination for testifying

