

THE TRAFFICKING OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

What Youth Service Providers Need to Know



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Organizations serving youth are likely to encounter human trafficking. Youth with disabilities are at higher risk than their peers for being exploited by traffickers.

Youth with disabilities are often trafficked for financial gain by those they love and trust the most— relatives, guardians, caregivers, drivers, and employers. Traffickers may also be coaches, teachers, religious leaders, intimate partners, or gang members.

As youth service providers, we all must work together to keep the young people in our organizations and communities safe. This booklet provides basic information about the trafficking of youth with disabilities and resources you can access to learn more.

We know our providers serve a variety of ages and stages, but the guidance in this booklet is directed at **youth**, which in this case, refers to young people aged 10-24 years old. A **minor** is a person aged 0 (birth) to 18 years of age. While we do not go into detail here, babies and toddlers can also be survivors of human trafficking.



Did you know that youth with disabilities are **at least 3 times** more likely to be abused or neglected than their peers without disabilities?¹

It's not just girls. Youth of all races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and LGBTQ+ youth are targeted.

WHY ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES TARGETED?

¹ Lund, E. M., & Vaughn-Jensen, J. (2012). Victimization of children with disabilities. *The Lancet*, (380)9845, 867-869.

These aspects of our society contribute to putting youth with disabilities at higher risk for being targeted by traffickers:

- Socialized by caregivers, teachers, and parents to follow an able-bodied authority.
- Gaps in education about safety, healthy relationships, human trafficking, rights, and the value of a person's labor.
- Negative myths and stereotypes exist against people with disabilities.

WHERE ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES TARGETED?

- Online — Traffickers can pretend to be anyone online, including a peer of the youth. This is one of the most frequent recruitment centers.
- Homes or schools
- Substance abuse treatment centers
- Social security & benefits offices
- Group homes
- Mental health facilities

This list is not exhaustive, and trafficking can happen anywhere.

Human trafficking can involve sex or labor. In sex trafficking, youth with disabilities are targeted by traffickers to perform commercial sex acts including prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, exotic dancing, or posting a youth online engaged in sexual activity.

Under federal law, any commercial sex act involving a minor is considered human trafficking. Force, fraud, or coercion do not need to be present.

In labor trafficking, of youth with disabilities, traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to make youth perform some sort of work.

Common examples of labor trafficking include forcing youth to work in fields or restaurants, assemble products, clean houses, beg, or sell items such as trinkets or magazine subscriptions in parking lots or door to door.

WHAT ARE FRAUD, FORCE, AND COERCION?

Force. Involves physically restraining or harming a youth. Examples are hitting, kicking, punching, or shoving.

Fraud. Intentionally deceives a youth about certain aspects of their employment such as job duties, work conditions, and payment. Examples are promising a youth a job as a restaurant server, but the job is actually exotic dancing; or, promising to take the youth

to school but then forcing them to clean the classrooms.

Coercion. Includes threats of serious psychological or physical harm to the youth or their loved ones. Also includes real or threatened abuse of the legal system. Examples of coercion include threatening to harm a youth, youth's family, or loved ones if they do not follow orders.

Labor trafficking can happen in ANY industry.

THE GROOMING PROCESS

A trafficker deliberately targets victims they think will be easy to isolate and control. As a result of pervasive stigma and stereotypes surrounding youth with disabilities, traffickers view them as easy targets.

Traffickers will often present themselves as potential friends, romantic partners, or employers. A youth may be targeted both in person or online, where a trafficker may present as peers or youth with similar interests. Once the traffickers have gained the youth's trust, they isolate them from their support networks and then begin abusing them. This process is known as **grooming** and can take place over a number of hours, days, weeks, or months depending on the situation.

The youth often does not know that they are being groomed.





Would you know if a youth with disabilities is being trafficked?

Screening is important. It is recommended that organizations serving youth with disabilities find a screening tool they are comfortable to use, and build their capacity to respond to disclosures.

Organizations must ensure that their screening tools and methods are accessible to the widest range of users, including youth with disabilities.



If agencies are not screening, human trafficking often goes undetected. This is especially true when working with youth with disabilities who are at even greater risk.



THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

If you suspect trafficking is happening to a youth with disabilities, always prioritize safety. Please follow your state's protocol for mandated reporting.

If there is immediate danger, call 911.

If you have questions about a potential trafficking situation, you can get more information by contacting the [National Human Trafficking Hotline and Resource Center](#).

This hotline can help you:

- Report human trafficking in youth with disabilities.
- Assess whether you may have encountered a victim of human trafficking.
- Identify local community resources to help victims.
- Coordinate with local social service

The hotline is toll-free, confidential, available 24/7, & is accessible.

Call: 1-888-373-7888

TTY: 711

Text: 233733

Web: humantraffickinghotline.org

How you and your agency can support trafficked youth with disabilities:

1. Build partnerships with trauma-informed human trafficking services providers
2. Partner with local disability organizations to conduct access reviews and create barrier removal plans for your organization.
3. Train staff on how to best respond to and meet the needs of youth with disabilities, including providing accommodations and assistive technology, and trauma-informed care.



THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA)

Email: info@iofa.org

Web: iofa.org

Facebook: [@iofa1](https://www.facebook.com/iofa1)

Twitter: [@iofa1](https://twitter.com/iofa1)

Referrals, training, technical assistance, resources

The National Human Trafficking Hotline

Call: (888) 373-7888

SMS: 233733 (Text "HELP" or "INFO")

Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Languages: English, Spanish, +200 more

Report human trafficking, find service providers in your area, connect with law enforcement, other resources

National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group

Email: nhtdwg@iofa.org

Web: <http://iofa.org/national-trafficking-disabilities-working-group/>

Resources, training, and support for professionals and organizations working to address the intersection of disabilities and human trafficking

National Disability Rights Network

Web: <https://www.ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies/>

Protection and advocacy for people with disabilities, legal support, and technical assistance for providers.

Centers for Independent Living

Web: <https://www.calsilc.ca.gov/independent-locator>

Resources and information about individuals with disabilities