



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION EDUCATION

HUMAN TRAFFICKERS

by WALKING WISE



NOTE TO PRESENTER

Log in to WalkingWise.com and refer to the Implementation Toolkit for classroom teaching tips.

Most importantly:

DEFINE SCHOOL POLICY

Establish a sexual exploitation reporting protocol with a trauma-informed response. The Walking Wise Implementation Toolkit provides a sample protocol.

AGE & AUDIENCE

This presentation can be edited by following the procedures on page 3 to align with your school policies, specific age groups, and the involvement of at-risk audiences.

SUPPORT PROCEDURE

Provide your students with guidance on how to access immediate help or arrange a private meeting with a social worker, counselor, nurse, school resource officer, or another trustworthy staff member to report concerns about themselves or a peer.

SECOND SAFE ADULT

Ensure a second trustworthy adult, such as a teacher, is present in the learning setting to observe student reactions and identify those who may benefit from a follow-up meeting. This person should remain focused and free from other duties during the presentation.

NOTE TO PRESENTER

This PDF contains the same content as the PowerPoint presentation but has been condensed into fewer pages for easier reference. For live presentations, please use the PowerPoint version. It reveals bullet points one at a time.

Meaningful learning takes time. By introducing topics gradually over several years, educators can create steady growth in awareness and understanding.

Our recommended teaching plan offers a long-term path for middle and high school students to build knowledge and confidence.



6-YEAR TRACK

PARENTS & STAFF

#1 Myths & Reality

6th GRADE

#2 Trustworthy vs. Unsafe Adult

#3 Grooming Process

7th GRADE

#4 Pornography Link

#5 Sextortion Scheme

8th GRADE

#6 Male Victims

#7 Runaways as Targets

#8 Rural Risks

9th GRADE

#9 Human Traffickers

#10 Female & Peer Recruiters

10th GRADE

#11 Family Secret

11th GRADE

#12 Hidden Buyers

NOTE TO PRESENTER

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- Insert new PowerPoint slides.
- Remove the Walking Wise logo and copyright "@2026 Walking Wise" from the new slides.
- Always add your organization's name or logo to each new slide.

Please delete this instruction page before presenting to audiences.

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NOTE TO PRESENTER

The presenter is welcome to customize this Walking Wise presentation according to the instructions provided on this page.

For revision requests, please email us at: support@WalkingWise.com.

SENSITIVE TOPICS WILL BE DISCUSSED

CONTENT NOTICE

We'll be discussing serious safety issues today.

Some topics may be difficult to hear.

If you ever feel uncomfortable, you can step out and speak with a trustworthy adult for support.

You're not alone—help is available.

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NOTE TO PRESENTER

Trauma-Informed Delivery Guidelines

To support a safe and effective learning environment, please follow these guidelines:

- Present the information in a calm, matter-of-fact way and avoid sensational or alarming language.
- Avoid graphic details. Focus on helping students understand behaviors, risk, and ways to stay safe.
- Never blame victims. Responsibility always belongs to the person who caused harm.
- Maintain a steady, composed tone. Students often mirror the presenter's emotional cues.
- Do not ask students to share personal experiences or disclosures.
- If students laugh or react awkwardly, respond neutrally and gently redirect the focus.
- Pair all risk information with needed resources, practical solutions, and support options.
- Reinforce that students are not alone and that trustworthy adults are available to help.

STATISTICS

Why Study Results Can Vary

- **Some crimes are never reported, making it hard to reveal the entire issue.**
- **Studies collect information in different ways, leading to different results.**
- **Small studies may not represent everyone.**

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In this presentation, we'll discuss statistics, but it's important to note that while statistics provide valuable insights into an issue, they cannot be relied upon entirely.

Here are a few reasons:

UNREPORTED

Victims often do not report the crimes committed against them due to fear, shame, retaliation, or manipulation. Also, many don't realize that what is happening to them is a crime.

INCONSISTENT COLLECTION

Areas may define sexual crimes in various ways or use different methods to collect data, making it hard to compare information.

FOCUS GROUPS

Small or specific focus groups participating in a study or survey may not accurately reflect the diversity or experiences of the broader population.

WHY LEARN ABOUT THIS



KNOWLEDGE serves as a powerful defense against sexual predators.

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Education is one of the strongest tools for preventing exploitation.

When young people understand how predators operate, they are better able to recognize manipulation and avoid dangerous situations.

Reinforce that awareness increases safety.

PREVENTION EDUCATION



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

includes grooming,
sextortion, pornography
& sex trafficking.

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SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Taking advantage of another person for their own benefit, especially in a sexual way, often using pressure, tricks, or control.

Below are different forms of exploitation:

GROOMING

Building trust, dependency, or an emotional connection to manipulate someone.

SEXTORTION

Threatening to share embarrassing or sexual images, videos, or information to pressure someone into following demands.

PORNOGRAPHY

Involving someone in creating sexual images who is under 18, or someone who is pressured, or unable/unwilling to give consent.

SEX TRAFFICKING

Manipulating or forcing someone into sexual activity in exchange for money or something of value.

Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (Legal Definition):

SEX TRAFFICKING is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person under the age of 18 for the purpose of a commercial sex act.

TVPA link: Retrieved April 14, 2026, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244e nr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

VOCABULARY



Words to Understand

- **Vulnerable**
- **Human Trafficker (Pimp)**
- **Exploit**
- **Coercion**
- **Seduce**

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Understanding vocabulary terms related to the behaviors of sexual predators can empower young people to recognize warning signs of harmful situations.

Knowing these terms helps them identify manipulative tactics that unsafe people (predators/traffickers) use to build trust and exploit vulnerabilities.

With this knowledge, young people are better equipped to spot red flags, understand that these behaviors are abusive, and feel more confident reporting predators to trusted adults or authorities, potentially preventing further harm.

VOCABULARY

VULNERABLE

To be at greater risk of harm due to a lack of protection, support, or resources.



VOCABULARY

HUMAN TRAFFICKER (PIMP)

A person who profits by making young or vulnerable people engage in commercial sex or forced labor.

PIMP is used as slang and glamorized in some songs and movies; in real life, pimps are traffickers who harm people.

VOCABULARY

EXPLOIT

To take advantage of someone's vulnerability in an unfair or harmful way for personal gain.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are the top most profitable illegal trades in the United States?

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Drug trafficking is widely considered the largest illicit market globally, while human trafficking is among the most profitable and fastest-growing forms of transnational crime (ILO, 2022; UNODC, 2023).

Sources

- International Labour Organization. (2022). Profits and poverty: The economics of forced labour. <https://www.ilo.org>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2023). World Drug Report 2023. <https://www.unodc.org>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). Global report on trafficking in persons 2022. <https://www.unodc.org>

ANSWER

#1 Drug Trafficking ~ #2 Human Trafficking
are the top most profitable illegal U.S. trades.

(#2 includes Sex & Labor Trafficking)

Illegal activities involve extremely large, organized industries that generate billions of dollars each year.

According to estimates, drug trafficking is the biggest illegal industry in the United States, involving the movement and sale of illegal drugs. It is difficult to estimate profits generated in the U.S., but the global drug trade is estimated to be worth \$426-652 billion each year.

Human trafficking – including both forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation – is often considered the second-largest illegal trade by profit, generating an estimated \$52 billion annually in the U.S. (\$236 billion globally).

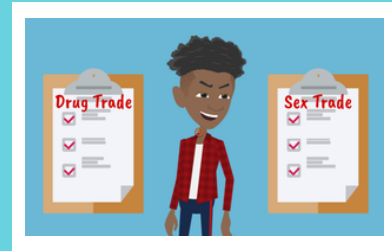
These trades harm individuals and communities by promoting addiction, exploitation, violence, and the abuse of basic human rights.

Understanding the scale and impact of these crimes helps students see why awareness, prevention, and safe reporting are so important.

Source

Major Cities Chiefs Association (2025 April). Reference Guide. Highest Grossing Criminal Trades: Volume 5, Sections 5 and 6. Retrieved January 20, 2026, from https://majorcitieschiefs.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MCCA_Highest-Grossing-Criminal-Trades-Reference-Guide_April-2025.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

ILLEGAL INDUSTRIES



Why might criminals choose sex trafficking over drug dealing?



ILLEGAL TRADES

Why Criminals Choose Human Trafficking

- **Lower Risk:** Some criminals believe they are less likely to be caught or face serious punishment.
- **Profit:** Drugs can be sold once, but a person can be exploited repeatedly for money.
- **Turf Conflicts:** Fewer turf fights compared to drug trafficking.
- **Overlap:** Criminals can be in both drug and human trafficking.

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Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities (2014), Urban Institute.

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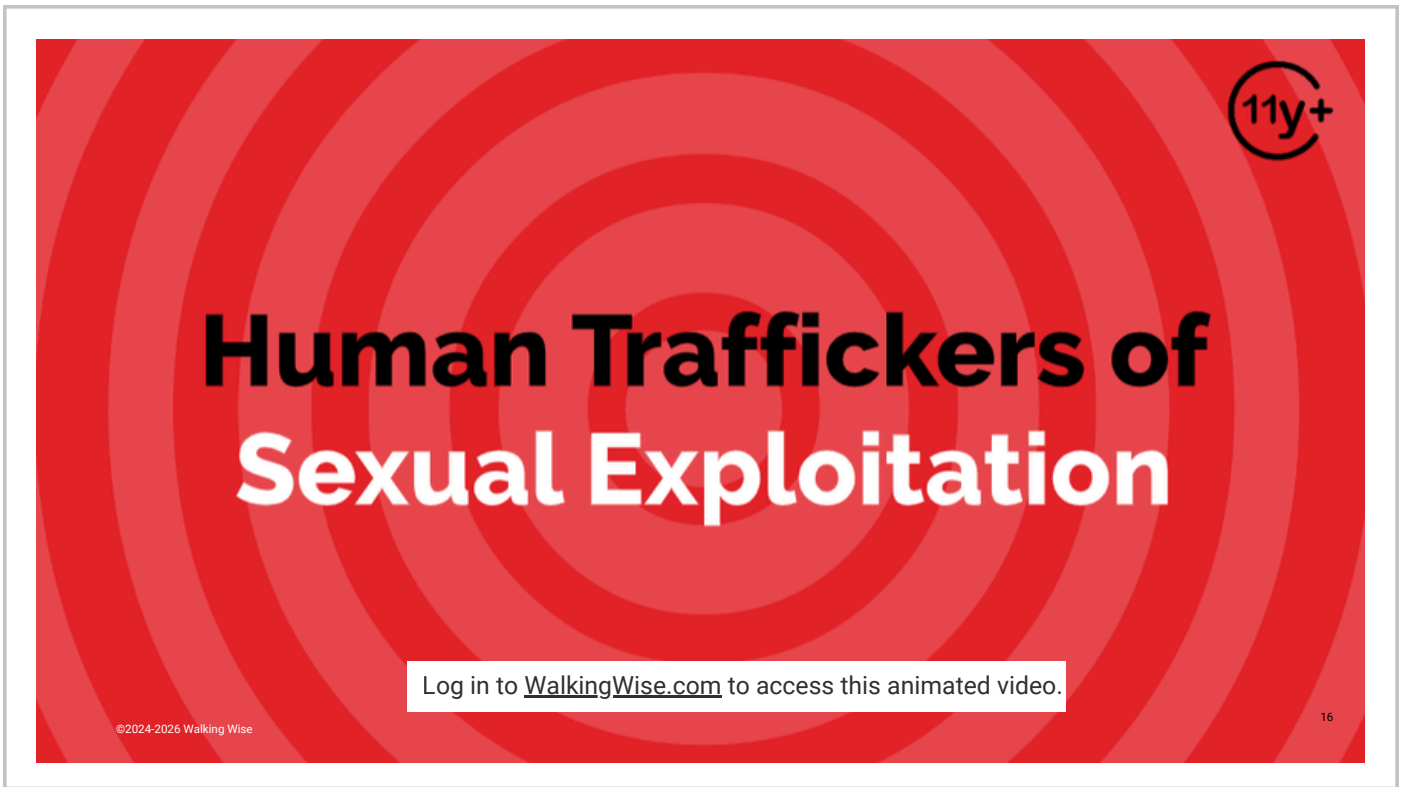
Traffickers often believe they can make more money trafficking people compared to selling drugs because an individual can be sold repeatedly.

Human traffickers often perceive drug dealing as riskier in terms of legal penalties compared to trafficking vulnerable or young people, where they believe the risk of arrest is lower. (1)

Sex traffickers often coincide peacefully with each other, compared to the territorial behavior of drug dealers.(1)

Source

1. Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (March 2014). Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities. The Urban Institute. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>



This 3-minute Walking Wise animated video series teaches how sexual predators use manipulation, intimidation, and coercion to exploit young people.

NOTE

Log in to Walking Wise.com to watch the three-minute animated video with audiences.

Is animation appropriate for teens?

Yes, even businesses worldwide use explainer-style animation as a training tool for their employees.

TRAFFICKERS



Who can be human traffickers?



TRAFFICKERS

Types of Human Traffickers

- Family Members
- Caregivers
- Authority Figures
- Acquaintances
- Strangers
- Online Connections



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Sprang, G., Cole, C. (2018, February 13). Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking Conditions, Clinical Presentation, and System Involvement, p. 1.

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Source

Sprang, G., Cole, C. (2018, February 13). Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking Conditions, Clinical Presentation, and System Involvement, p. 1. Retrieved March 9, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323158066_Familial_Sex_Trafficking_of_Minors_Trafficking_Conditions_Clinical_Presentation_and_System_Involvement

VOCABULARY

COERCION

To pressure, manipulate, or threaten someone to make them do something against their will.



TRAFFICKER BEHAVIORS



What are some common traits or behaviors of human traffickers?



TRAFFICKER BEHAVIORS

Common Behaviors

- Sense of entitlement or **rules don't apply to them**
- Expect others to **meet their demands**
- Lack of empathy or has **no concern for others**
- Exploit or **use others** for personal gain
- Display **sexual aggression** or hostility



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American Psychiatric Association (2022); Zeigler-Hill, V. et al. (2013).

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Traffickers often do not see others as equals; they see people as tools to get what they want, or even property they own.

They often believe rules do not apply to them and expect others to meet their needs without question. This sense of entitlement can show up as controlling or demanding behavior.

A key warning sign is a lack of empathy. Traffickers may not show real concern for how their actions affect others, even when harm is obvious.

They often focus on personal gain, using relationships, attention, or pressure to benefit themselves rather than care for others.

Some may also show signs of aggression or hostility, especially when they feel they are losing control.

These behaviors can be hidden at first, so it's important to pay attention to patterns over time, not just first impressions.

Source

American Psychiatric Association (2022, March 18). APA releases Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR).

Sprang, G., Cole, C. (2018, February 13). Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking

Conditions, Clinical Presentation, and System Involvement, p. 1. Retrieved April 17, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323158066_Familial_Sex_Trafficking_of_Minors_Trafficking_Conditions_Clinical_Presentation_and_System_Involvement

EXPLOITATION TACTICS

it might seem like a **CHOICE**



What are three common tactics traffickers use to exploit someone?



EXPLOITATION TACTICS

Illegal Tactics Used by Traffickers

- **Force:** Physical violence or trapping someone
- **Fraud:** Trick someone by using lies
- **Coercion:** Pressure, manipulate, or threaten someone



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Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7102 (2000).

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FORCE: This means using physical violence or physically trapping someone so they cannot leave or protect themselves.

FRAUD: This involves tricking someone using lies or false promises, such as pretending to offer a job, relationship, or opportunity.

COERCION: This means pressuring, manipulating, or threatening someone to make them do something against their will.

Source

Polaris. (n.d.). Human trafficking definitions. <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/>

Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7102 (2000).

Retrieved on April 7, 2026 from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244enr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What tactic must be used before person is charged with trafficking a child or teen (under 18)?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What tactic must be used before person is charged with trafficking a child or teen (under 18)?

- A) Force (violence/trap)**
- B) Fraud (lies)**
- C) Coercion (pressure)**
- D) None of the above**

ANSWER

None of the above. A child (under 18) is always protected. They never have to prove the trafficker used force, fraud, or coercion.

Force, fraud, and coercion are often grouped together because they explain how exploitation happens.

When a minor is involved in a sex act for anything of value, the law considers it trafficking even if none of these tactics are used.

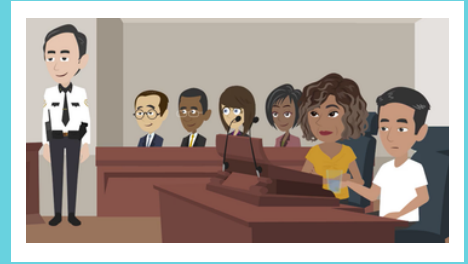
Source

One Hundred Sixth Congress of the United States of America at the Second Session (2000, January

24) Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. GovInfo.gov. Retrieved January 20, 2026,

from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244enr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

TRAFFICKING LAWS



How do U.S. laws protect people from human sex trafficking crimes?



TRAFFICKING LAWS

Legal Accountability

The law punishes sexual predators who cause an adult or child to become involved in a sexual exchange as follows:

- **Adults (18+):** If force, fraud, or coercion is used to exploit an adult, the abuser is charged as a sex trafficker.
- **Minors (Under 18):** Any time a child is involved in a sex act for something of value, the abuser is charged as a sex trafficker.

In the United States, human sex trafficking is addressed through both federal and state laws.

Federal laws (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act) create a nationwide standard for identifying trafficking crimes and prosecuting offenders, especially when crimes cross state lines.

Individual states also have their own laws that may add protections, increase penalties, or provide specific support for victims.

Together, these laws are designed to protect victims and hold abusers legally accountable.

Source

One Hundred Sixth Congress of the United States of America at the Second Session (2000, January 24). Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. Govinfo.gov. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244enr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which term is NOT used to describe how human sex traffickers operate?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

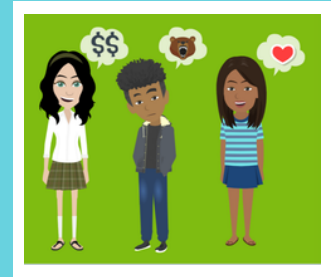
Which term is NOT used to describe how a human sex trafficker operates?

- A) Romeo Pimp
- B) Liberty Pimp
- C) Gorilla Pimp
- D) CEO Pimp

ANSWER

Liberty Pimp is NOT a real term.
Traffickers operate by taking a person's
freedom, independence, and ability to choose.

TRAFFICKER STYLES



What strategies might the 3 types of traffickers use to keep control over their victims?



TRAFFICKER STYLE

Romeo Pimp - The Groomer

- **Builds Trust First:** Gives attention, kindness, and fulfills unmet needs.
- **Creates Emotional Bonds:** Uses gifts, promises, and affection to manipulate.
- **Shifts to Control:** Gradually isolates the victim and harms their self-esteem to create an emotional dependence.

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Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (2014). Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities. Urban Institute.

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These “styles” describe patterns of behavior, not labels traffickers use for themselves. A trafficker may use multiple styles over time, and each style is a form of manipulation and control.

Romeo Pimps are known for the grooming techniques they use to gain their victims' trust. They are often kind, empathetic, and good listeners.

The emotional connection Romeo traffickers create makes it hard for victims to recognize the situation as harmful, and it is extremely difficult for them to leave.

“Romeo” refers to the famous romantic character in the tragic love story by William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, published in 1597.

Source

Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (2014). Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>

TRAFFICKER STYLE

Gorilla Pimp - The Abuser

- **Uses Fear & Violence:** Relies on physical force, fear, or physically traps victims to maintain power.
- **Forced Crime:** They may require the victim to commit crimes such as theft or drug-related activities.

Gorilla traffickers use fear, threats, and violence to control victims.

They commonly isolate victims from family and friends and force them into criminal activity such as drug trafficking and theft.

Source

Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (2014). Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>

TRAFFICKER STYLE

CEO Pimp - The Groomer

- **Business Manipulation:** Pretends to be successful, inviting the victim into a business opportunity or partnership.
- **Appears Confident & Influential:** Brags about connections in industries such as finance, entertainment, or fashion.

The acronym "CEO" stands for Chief Executive Officer, the highest-ranking person in a company.

CEO traffickers use a business-like approach to fool their victims.

They display confidence, demonstrating intelligence and connections to influential people across industries.

Source

Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (2014). Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>

TRAFFICKER STYLE

CEO Pimp - The Groomer

- **False Promises:** Promises of success, money, fame, or a better life.
- **Isolation & Control:** Separates victims from family and friends to create a dependence.

Source

Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., & Yu, L. (2014). Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities. Urban Institute.
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>

VOCABULARY

FLATTER

To give excessive or insincere praise to gain someone's trust or to influence their behavior.



VOCABULARY

SEDUCE

To persuade or pressure someone using charm, attention, or manipulation to do something they might not normally do.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of female victims were trafficked by 'boyfriends' or husbands?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of female victims were trafficked by 'boyfriends' or husbands?

- A) 9%
- B) 19%
- C) 29%
- D) 39%

ANSWER

~39% of female victims were trafficked by a boyfriend, romantic partner, or husband.

Referred to as: Boyfriending, Romeo Trafficker, or Romeo Pimp.

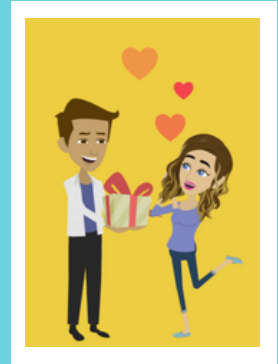
According to the Polaris Project, about 39% of female trafficking victims were trafficked by a boyfriend, romantic partner, or husband. This highlights how traffickers often use romantic relationships and trust as a way to groom, control, and exploit victims rather than relying only on force.

Source

Polaris Project (n.d.). Love and Trafficking: Grooming, Exploitation, and Control. Retrieved May 8, 2025, from <https://polarisproject.org/love-and-trafficking/>

POWER OF LOVE

Why can feelings of 'love' make it harder for victims to break free from traffickers?



POWER OF LOVE

Love's Chemical Reaction

- **Brain Reward System:** The brain releases chemicals (like dopamine) that create feelings of connection and trust.
- **Emotional Bond:** These feelings can form a powerful bond that makes separation feel painful.
- **Love Bond:** Traffickers may create this bond by acting like a romantic partner, caring adult (parent figure), or close friend.

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Love and the Brain (2015), Harvard Medical School, hms.harvard.edu.

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TRAFFICKER BONDS

This bond is not real or healthy love. It is a form of manipulation that uses normal brain responses to control someone. The victim is not choosing this bond; it develops because of the brain's response to attention, care, and attachment.

LOVE & THE BRAIN

Love is chemically induced through the brain's reward circuit, where dopamine and other hormones flood the brain.[1]

Traffickers often insincerely romance their victims because they understand that the brain-triggered emotions involved with falling in love create a bond that is extremely difficult to break.

Traffickers patiently nurture their victims with false love until this manipulation takes control over the victim's emotional independence.

Source

Love and the Brain (2015).

Harvard Medical School

<https://hms.harvard.edu/news-events/publications-archive/brain/love-brain#:~:text=Being%20love%2Dstruck%20also%20releases,use%20of%20cocaine%20or%20alcohol>

POWER OF LOVE

Trauma Bond Process

- **Trust:** Traffickers build trust by acting supportive and caring.
- **Love:** They may act romantic or protective, making victims feel valued and special.
- **Fear:** Over time, they introduce threats or violence to gain control.

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Cleveland Clinic (2023, March 29). Here's What Trauma Bonding Really Is and How To Recognize the Signs.

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Traffickers rarely begin with fear. They often start by meeting emotional needs, offering attention, support, or understanding that may be missing in a young person's life.

The mix of positive and harmful behavior can make it difficult for a victim to recognize danger or leave the situation.

This pattern is intentional. It is designed to create dependence and make control feel harder to escape.

SOURCE

Cleveland Clinic (2023, March 29). Here's What Trauma Bonding Really Is and How To Recognize the Signs. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/trauma-bonding>

POWER OF LOVE

Trauma Bond Process

- **Loyalty:** By switching between kindness and harm, traffickers can create emotional confusion and dependence.
- **Trauma Bond:** Confusion can make victims feel attached and unable to leave, trying to recapture the love they once felt.

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Cleveland Clinic (2023, March 29). Here's What Trauma Bonding Really Is and How To Recognize the Signs.

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A trauma bond can form when a person experiences repeated cycles of harm followed by moments of kindness or affection. These mixed signals can create confusion and strong emotional attachment.

Over time, this pattern can lead to a cycle of love and fear, where the victim feels connected to the trafficker despite being harmed.

Victims may become loyal or attached because they hope the kindness they experienced will return.

This bond is not a healthy relationship—it is a form of control created through manipulation.

SOURCE

Cleveland Clinic (2023, March 29). Here's What Trauma Bonding Really Is and How To Recognize the Signs. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/trauma-bonding>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which is NOT a common bond used by traffickers to control victims?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which is NOT a common bond used by traffickers to control victims?

- A) Trauma Bond**
- B) Debt Bond**
- C) Support Bond**
- D) Drug Bond**

ANSWER

Support Bond is NOT a recognized form of bonding used by human traffickers to gain control.

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Source

Baird, K., & Connolly, J. (2023). Recruitment and Entrapment Pathways of Minors into Sex Trafficking in Canada and the United States: A Systematic Review, *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 24(1), 189–202. Retrieved January 20, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

DEPENDENCE

Debt Bond Process

- **Financial Dependence:** Victims may have little or no money and rely on the trafficker for basic needs, making it hard to leave.
- **Debt:** Traffickers may create fake or growing debt for things like food or housing, making victims feel they must repay it.
- **Stolen ID:** Traffickers may take documents (like an ID), making it difficult for victims to leave or earn money on their own.

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End Slavery Now (n.d.). Bonded Labor. Retrieved April 23, 2025.

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Financial dependence can develop when a victim have no money for basic needs. This reliance can make leaving feel impossible.

Debt bonds are designed to make victims feel they can never “catch up” or leave. The debt is not real or fair—it is a tool used to maintain control.

Traffickers create a debt bond or economic dependence on their victims by imposing debt that continually accumulates and can be difficult or impossible to repay.

Traffickers often withhold victims' legal documents, demanding sex work until they pay a debt in full or simply preventing them from working outside of the traffickers' control.

SOURCE

End Slavery Now (n.d.). Bonded Labor. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <http://www.endslaverynow.org/learn/slavery-today/bonded-labor>

DEPENDENCE

Drug Bond Process

- **Grooming:** Traffickers may offer free drugs to build trust or create dependence.
- **Exploitation:** Victims may be pressured or forced into sexual activity in exchange for drugs.
- **Targeting Vulnerabilities:** Traffickers often target people who are recovering from substance use.

Drug bonds are a form of control. Traffickers use substances to create dependence, fear, and shame, making it very difficult for victims to leave. The goal is always to manipulate and exploit, not provide help.

Drug bondage can occur when drug dealers coerce users into sex trafficking in exchange for drugs. Some sex traffickers are known to loiter outside drug rehab centers, seeking recruits.

Source

Langton L, Planty M, Banks D., Witwer A., Woods, D., Vermeer M., Jackson, B. (2022, February 24). Sex Trafficking and Substance Use, Rand.org. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA108-13.html

RECRUITMENT LOCATIONS



Where do traffickers commonly target vulnerable people?



RECRUITMENT LOCATIONS

Common Public Places

- Where teens spend time with **little or no adult supervision:**
 - Near Schools & Bus Stops
 - Parks & Playgrounds
 - Malls & Convenience Stores



RECRUITMENT LOCATIONS

Higher-Risk Environments

- Places where individuals may be **more vulnerable**:
 - Juvenile Centers
 - Rehab Clinics
 - Homeless Shelters
 - Drop-in Centers
 - On the Streets



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Traffickers look for locations where people may be more vulnerable or in need of support.

In these environments, people may be experiencing challenges such as instability, the lack of resources, or emotional stress.

Traffickers often try to take advantage of vulnerable people in these situations.

RECRUITMENT LOCATIONS

Online Spaces

- Digital spaces where **predators start friendly conversations:**
 - Social Media
 - Gaming Platforms
 - Messaging Apps



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Traffickers are highly active in online spaces where young people spend time.

These digital environments allow traffickers to easily start conversations that seem friendly, supportive, or even flirtatious.

Awareness of how these interactions begin can help young people recognize warning signs and seek help from a trustworthy adult if something feels uncomfortable.

RISK FACTORS

What situations are commonly targeted by traffickers?



RISK FACTORS

Factors That Traffickers May Target

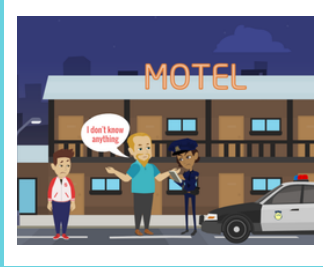
- **Lack of basic needs or stability**
- **Unsafe or difficult home environments**
- **Emotional struggles or isolation**
- **Substance use or addiction**
- **Limited support or protection**
- **Desire for change or new opportunities**

These situations can increase vulnerability, but they are never the victim's fault.

Traffickers often look for unmet needs, such as a lack of safety, support, or stability, and take advantage of those situations.

UNREPORTED

Why do victims often hesitate to report traffickers to law enforcement?



UNREPORTED

Reasons Victims May Not Speak Up

- **Obligation:** Victims may feel a sense of love, loyalty, or believe they “owe” the trafficker for providing their basic needs.
- **Fear & Intimidation:** Victims may be afraid of physical harm or retaliation if they try to leave or seek help.
- **Physical Dependence:** They may develop a drug bond to the trafficker, making it difficult to leave their access to substances.

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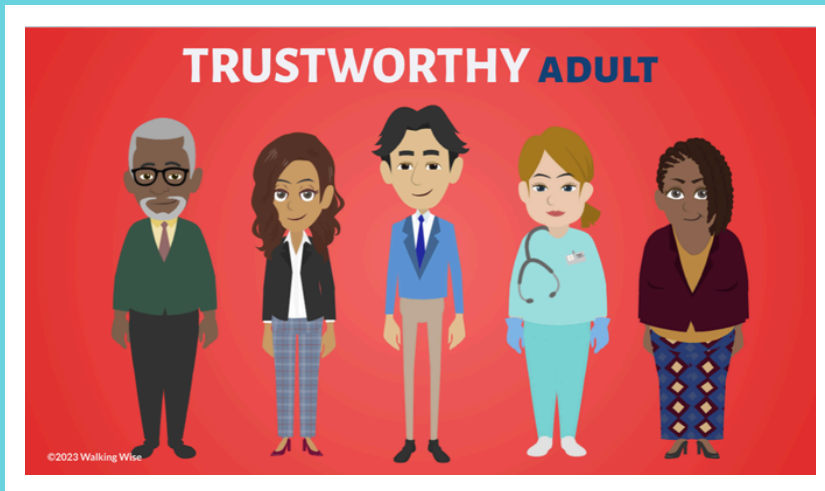
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Victims often do not report traffickers because of control, not choice. Sometimes they don't report because of the emotional bond or love they have for the trafficker.

Hesitation to seek help is a result of manipulation, fear, and dependence—not weakness or unwillingness.

Understanding these barriers helps society see why victims need support and safe options, rather than judgment.

ASK FOR HELP



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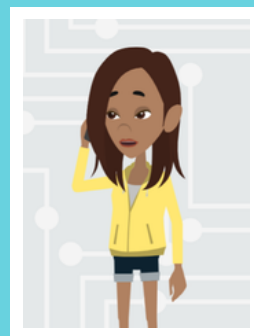
Walking Wise asked a focus group of survivors:
What do you think young people should know about sex trafficking?

ANSWER

The survivors agreed that the most vital information teens should know is how to ask for help.

At the top of their list:
Tell a TRUSTWORTHY adult.

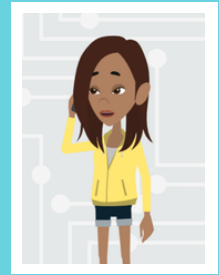
ASK FOR HELP



What are ways young people can ask for help?

ASK FOR HELP

How to Ask for Help



- If you are in immediate danger, dial 911.
- If the sexual predator IS a family member, tell a trustworthy adult.
- If the sexual predator is NOT family, tell a parent or guardian.
- If you are a student, tell a trustworthy teacher, coach, school nurse, social worker, counselor, resource officer, or principal.
- To gain internet access for help, use a computer at school or a public library.

24-Hour Hotline for Help

- ✓ National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888 or TEXT 233733
- ✓ Rescue America 833-599-FREE (3733)
- ✓ National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- ✓ National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
- ✓ National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE or TEXT 88788
- ✓ National Runaway Safeline 800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

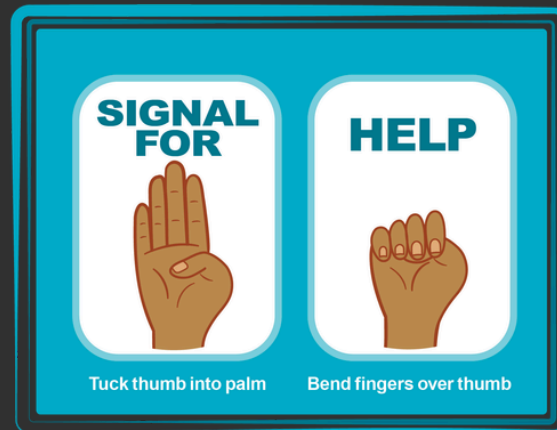
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NOTE TO PRESENTER

Presenters may ask their audience to consider adding a few "hotline for help" phone numbers to their cell phone contacts or take a photo of this slide.

HAND SIGNAL FOR HELP



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Source: Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

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Although the hand signal for help has not yet achieved universal recognition, it may quietly get someone's attention in urgent situations.

SILENT

It can be used silently.

UNTRACKABLE

It leaves no digital footprint.

CONCEALED

It can be done secretly when a perpetrator is in the vicinity.

SIGNALS DISTRESS

A distressed facial expression can help others recognize that help is needed if the hand signal is not understood—but it is important not to alert the predator/trafficker, causing harm.

Source

Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

Thank you!

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NOTE TO PRESENTER

To access additional resources about human traffickers, please refer to the last page of Lesson Plan #9 on the Walking Wise Learning Platform.

We welcome your feedback at support@WalkingWise.com.