



# SEXUAL EXPLOITATION EDUCATION

## RECRUITERS FEMALE & PEER

by WALKING WISE



### NOTE TO PRESENTER

Log in to [WalkingWise.com](https://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

### 6<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#2 Trustworthy vs. Unsafe Adult  
#3 Grooming Process

### 7<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#4 Pornography Link  
#5 Sextortion Scheme

### 8<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#6 Male Victims  
#7 Runaways as Targets  
#8 Rural Risks

### 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#9 Human Traffickers  
#10 Female & Peer Recruiters

### 10<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#11 Family Secret

### 11<sup>th</sup> GRADE

#12 Hidden Buyers

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Please delete this instruction page before presenting to audiences.

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For revision requests, please email us at: [support@WalkingWise.com](mailto: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.

Awareness increases confidence, and confidence supports safer decision-making.

# 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 gain control over 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

- Recruiter
- Shrewd
- Bottom Girl
- Love Bombing
- Trauma Bond
- Exploitation
- Peer Pressure



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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

## RECRUITER

A person who encourages or convinces others to join a group, activity, or organization.



# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**What type of organization uses recruitment to attract people?**

# ANSWER

## Legal Recruitment

- Businesses
- Military
- Colleges & Trade Schools
- Sports Teams & Clubs

## Illegal Recruitment

- Organized Crime Groups
- Street Gangs
- Labor Trafficking Networks
- Sex Trafficking Operations

Recruitment simply means trying to get people to join something. Not all recruitment is bad.

Legal organizations recruit openly, explain expectations, and allow people to say no without consequences.

Illegal recruitment often involves lies, pressure, or manipulation, especially targeting people who are vulnerable.

This discussion is meant to help students understand that traffickers use recruitment the same way businesses do—but for harm and profit.



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.

# VOCABULARY

## SHREWD

Being clever and strategic, sometimes in ways that are not completely honest or fair.



# WOLF & SHEEP METAPHOR



What does “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” mean, and how does it explain unsafe recruiter behavior?



# WOLF & SHEEP METAPHOR

## Metaphors Help Explain Ideas

- **Hidden Danger:** A “wolf in sheep's clothing” is someone who appears safe or kind but actually has harmful intentions.
- **False Appearances:** They may act friendly, supportive, or trustworthy to gain acceptance.
- **Deception:** Unsafe recruiters may use kindness, attention, or friendship to hide their true, harmful motives.

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## METAPHOR

A metaphor helps explain an idea by comparing it to something familiar or easier to understand. For example, saying “the classroom was a zoo” helps explain that it was loud or chaotic by comparing it to something people recognize.

## WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING

The phrase “wolf in sheep’s clothing” comes from a story in which a wolf disguises itself as a sheep to secretly enter the flock and harm the sheep.

This metaphor describes people who hide their true intentions by pretending to be kind, trustworthy, or safe to gain acceptance. Their goal is often to manipulate or control someone. Over time, their true intentions are revealed through their actions.

In real life, a recruiter may act like a friend, offer support, or show special attention to gain trust. In some cases, the person may even be someone familiar, such as a peer or a family member.

# VOCABULARY

## **BOTTOM GIRL**

An exploited person given a leadership role by their trafficker (pimp) to help control others and manage the operation.



# BOTTOM GIRL



What are the characteristics of a “Bottom Girl” in the commercial sex trade?



This question is about understanding manipulation—not blaming victims.

# BOTTOM GIRL

## Characteristics of the Bottom Girl

- **Position:** Placed in a leadership role within the operation.
- **Long History:** Usually has a longer history with the trafficker.
- **Trusted:** Seen as loyal and dependable by the trafficker.
- **Expectations:** Required to meet the trafficker's financial goals.
- **Control:** Often is forced to manage and recruit others.

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Shamere (2012, March 23). Unavoidable Destiny | The Reality of the "Bottom Girl Part I, Shared Hope International. Sharedhope.org.

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## CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics refer to observable roles, patterns, responsibilities, or behaviors associated with a position—not personality traits or moral qualities.

## OPERATIONS

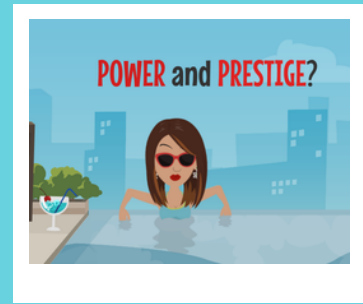
Traffickers operate illegal businesses and may assign a victim to a leadership role often called the bottom girl. In this role, she is placed in a position of authority over others and may be considered second in command. She often has a longer history with the trafficker and is expected to meet high demands and maintain control within the operation.

## Source

Shamere (2012, March 23). Unavoidable Destiny | The Reality of the "Bottom Girl Part I, Shared Hope International. Sharedhope.org. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://sharedhope.org/2012/03/23/unavoidable-destiny-the-reality-of-the-bottom-girl-part-i/>

# RESPONSIBILITIES

What are the responsibilities of the  
“Bottom Girl?”



# BOTTOM RESPONSIBILITY

TRANSPORTATION  
CONTROL MONEY POST BAIL  
RULES  
DISCIPLINE  
ARRANGE CLIENTS

## Responsibilities of the Bottom Girl

- **Recruits:** Identifies and grooms new victims
- **Schedules:** Arranges meetings with 'clients' or buyers
- **Transports:** Drives victims to locations
- **Finances:** Collects money for the trafficker.
- **Disciplines:** Enforces the trafficker's rules.
- **Legal Duties:** May post bail for the trafficker & others.

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Shamere (2012, March 23). Unavoidable Destiny | The Reality of the "Bottom Girl Part I, Shared Hope International. Sharedhope.org.

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## RESPONSIBILITIES

The bottom girl is often required to manage parts of the trafficker's operation.

Her role may include recruiting new victims, arranging meetings with buyers, collecting money from buyers, transporting victims to buyers, and monitoring or controlling others under the trafficker's control. She may also be expected to enforce rules and handle situations if arrests occur.

It is important to remember that these responsibilities are typically carried out under pressure, control, or fear—not free choice.

### Source

Shamere (2012, March 23). Unavoidable Destiny | The Reality of the "Bottom Girl Part I, Shared Hope International. Sharedhope.org. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://sharedhope.org/2012/03/23/unavoidable-destiny-the-reality-of-the-bottom-girl-part-i/>

# VOCABULARY

## LOVE BOMBING

Overwhelming someone with attention, affection, or gifts to gain control in a relationship.



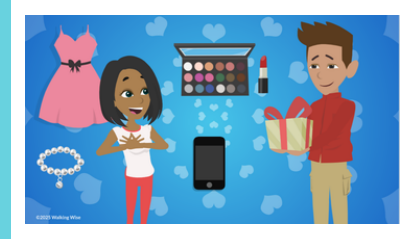
# VOCABULARY

## TRAUMA BOND

A strong emotional attachment that forms through repeated cycles of kindness and harm, making it difficult to recognize abuse or leave a situation.



# EMOTIONAL ABUSE



**How can emotional abuse lead someone to recruit their friends or peers?**



# EMOTIONAL ABUSE

## Reward & Punishment Cycle

- **Grooming:** Traffickers use attention, gifts, and praise to build trust and create a false sense of love.
- **Control:** Over time, traffickers introduce fear, threats, or harm to gain obedience and maintain control.
- **Trauma Bond:** A cycle of kindness and abuse that creates an attachment, preventing clear thinking or independent choices.

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Chambers R., Gibson M., Chaffin S., Takagi T., Nguyen N., Mears-Clark, T. (2022, January 30). Trauma-coerced Attachment and Complex PTSD: Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, Volume 10, 2024 – Issue 1, p. 43.

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## TRAUMA BONDS

Victims are often responding to control and pressure, not making free or independent choices. Trauma bonds can affect judgment and decision-making, increasing vulnerability to manipulation and control.

In trafficking situations, responsibility always lies with the trafficker. When victims recruit peers, it is typically connected to fear, survival needs, or emotional control—not true choice.

## Source

Chambers R., Gibson M., Chaffin S., Takagi T., Nguyen N., Mears-Clark, T. (2022, January 30). Trauma-coerced Attachment and Complex PTSD: Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, Volume 10, 2024 – Issue 1, p. 43. Retrieved April 24, 2024, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2021.2012386>

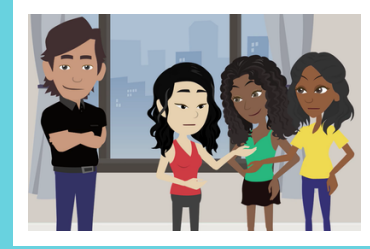
# VOCABULARY

## EXPLOITATION

Taking advantage of someone in an unfair or harmful way for personal gain; abusing power, trust, or a person's vulnerability.



# RIVALRY



**Why do traffickers (pimps) create rivalries among the people they control?**



# RIVALRY

## Creating Competition for Control & Profit

- **Flaunt Status:** Traffickers may single out the Bottom Girl to make it seem like she has power, rewards, or privilege.
- **Create Competition:** Favoritism can cause jealousy and pressure others to compete for approval or a higher position.
- **Increased Profits:** Traffickers use rivalry to push people to work longer and take greater risks to make more money for themselves.

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## RIVALRY

Creating rivalry is a common control tactic used in trafficking situations. By encouraging competition and creating a false sense of ranking or status, traffickers can isolate victims from one another and reduce trust within the group. This makes it harder for victims to support each other or recognize the trafficker's control. As a result, victims may become more compliant and dependent on the trafficker for approval, safety, or a sense of belonging.

The bottom girl may appear to receive special treatment or status, which can lead others to want her position. Traffickers may show favoritism by giving her more attention or authority, which can create jealousy and pressure within the group. This competition can push others to work harder or take greater risks in an effort to gain approval. Ultimately, the trafficker uses rivalry to increase control and make more money.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**Can women be involved in human trafficking  
by operating as traffickers?**

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Can women operate as sex traffickers?

- A) YES
- B) NO
- C) UNSURE

# ANSWER

**Yes,** women can be involved  
as human traffickers.

Trafficking is based on behavior—not gender. Both men and women can use manipulation and control to exploit others.

Women can be involved in trafficking in different ways, including organized operations, family-based exploitation, and online recruitment.

Female traffickers may use trust, caregiving roles, or deception to recruit victims. They may appear more approachable or less threatening, which can make it easier to gain trust—especially with other girls. This is why it's important to focus on behaviors and warning signs, not assumptions based on gender.

Their involvement shows that trafficking is not limited by gender, and the tactics used are often similar to those used by male traffickers.

# FEMALE TRAFFICKERS

## Different Roles & Methods

- **Madams:** Some women may run brothels, escort services, or illicit massage parlors.
- **Family Trafficker:** In some cases, women exploit children within their own families.
- **Online Recruiter:** Some may use fake job offers or pretend to be an online-only friend or girlfriend.
- **False Caregiver:** Some may pretend to be a trusted adult or behave like a mother figure.

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Shamere (2012, March 23). Unavoidable Destiny | The Reality of the "Bottom Girl" Part I, Shared Hope International. Sharedhope.org.

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## FEMALE TRAFFICKERS

Women of different ages can be involved in sex trafficking. In some cases, they may appear less threatening, which can make it easier to gain trust and deceive victims. The term “madam” is often used to describe a female trafficker.

Rather than presenting as a “boyfriend” figure, women may take on roles that feel familiar or safe, such as a caregiver, mentor, friend, or romantic partner. They may also present themselves as successful or glamorous to attract attention and build influence.

## FAMILY TRAFFICKING

In some cases, women exploit children or other family members. This may be influenced by financial pressure, manipulation, or coercion from others.

## ONLINE PLATFORMS

Some women use social media or messaging platforms to recruit victims. They may use fake job offers, modeling opportunities, or pretend relationships to build trust and lure individuals into unsafe situations.

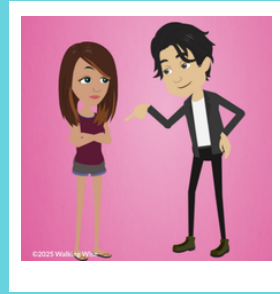
# VOCABULARY

## PEER PRESSURE

Influence from friends or peers that encourages someone to act in a certain way to fit in or be accepted.



# FRIEND RECRUITMENT



**What are ways a peer may recruit friends or acquaintances into a trafficking situation?**



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## RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Peer recruiters often exploit trust, friendship, and shared goals to manipulate friends into trafficking.

Tactics include normalizing exploitation, gradually introducing peers to trafficking environments, offering promises of independence, and connecting them to adults or authority figures who will exploit them.

These strategies leverage emotional bonds, peer influence, and unmet needs to gain compliance.

# FRIEND RECRUITMENT

## Builds Trust & Influence

- **Normalize:** Makes harmful behavior acceptable or “normal.”
- **Imposter:** Pretends to be a supportive or trustworthy friend.
- **Manipulate:** Uses friendships or situations (such as group hangouts) to lower defenses.

## BUILDS TRUST & INFLUENCE

Recruitment often begins with building trust. These behaviors may feel normal or even supportive at first, which is why they can be difficult to recognize.

**NORMALIZE:** A peer may make harmful behaviors seem acceptable or common by saying things like “everyone is doing it” or “it’s no big deal.” This lowers a person’s guard and makes risky situations feel normal.

**IMPOSTER:** A recruiter may pretend to be a caring, supportive, or trustworthy friend. They may listen, offer help, or show special attention to gain trust before introducing harmful situations.

**MANIPULATE:** A peer may use friendships or social situations—like group hangouts or double dates—to gradually influence someone’s decisions. This can make the situation feel safe, even when it is not.

### 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 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# FRIEND RECRUITMENT

## Creates Appeal

- **Glamorize:** Makes the lifestyle seem exciting or successful.
- **Easy Money:** Talks about quick or easy ways to earn money.
- **Promises:** Offers a better life, freedom, or independence.

## CREATES APPEAL

Recruiters often make the situation look attractive or exciting to draw others in. They focus on what someone wants or is missing, making risky situations seem appealing.

**GLAMORIZE:** A peer may make the lifestyle look exciting, successful, or fun—showing off money, clothes, or attention to create interest.

**EASY MONEY:** They may talk about how quickly and easily money can be made, without explaining the risks or harm involved.

**PROMISES:** A recruiter may promise a better life, more freedom, independence, or escape from current problems. These promises are often misleading or false.

## 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 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# FRIEND RECRUITMENT

## Uses Pressure & Access

- **Invitations:** Invites friends to unsafe social events.
- **Substance Use:** Offers drugs, alcohol, or access to parties involving adults.
- **Connections:** Introduces friends to adults who pose as a boyfriend or boss.

## USES ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY

Recruiters may create situations that make it easier to introduce someone to unsafe people or environments. These situations often feel social or harmless at first.

**INVITATIONS:** A peer may invite someone to parties, hangouts, or trips where the environment is less supervised or unfamiliar. These settings can be used to introduce risk without raising concern.

**SUBSTANCE USE:** They may offer drugs, alcohol, or access to parties. Substance use can lower awareness and decision-making, making someone more vulnerable.

**CONNECTIONS:** A peer may introduce friends to adults who seem important or trustworthy, such as a boyfriend, boss, or job recruiter. These introductions can be a setup for manipulation or control.

## 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 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# FRIEND RECRUITMENT

## Targets Vulnerability

- **Vulnerable Friends:** Focuses on young people with limited support or unstable housing.
- **Personal Challenges:** Targets those going through difficult emotional, mental, or physical situations.

## TARGETS VULNERABILITY

Recruiters often pay attention to who might need extra support or connection. They may take advantage of difficult situations or unmet needs.

**VULNERABLE FRIENDS:** A peer may focus on someone who feels isolated, has limited support, or is going through challenges at home. They may offer friendship or a sense of belonging to build trust.

**PERSONAL CHALLENGES:** Recruiters may target individuals dealing with emotional, mental, or physical challenges. They may present themselves as someone who understands or can help, while leading the person into a harmful situation.

## 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 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**Who is most commonly responsible for recruiting victims into sex trafficking situations?**

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Who is most often responsible for recruiting victims into sex trafficking situations?

- A) Classmates**
- B) Boyfriends**
- C) Female Friends**
- D) Family Friends**

# ANSWER

**Boyfriend.** Older boyfriends, in particular, are known to create fake romantic relationships.

In many cases, traffickers pretend to be romantic partners. These “boyfriend recruiters” build trust and emotional connection before using manipulation or control.

Some “boyfriend recruiters” operate as part of a larger trafficking network and collaborate with peers, gangs, or adults within the commercial sex trade. This highlights that exploitation can be both personal and organized.

## 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), 189–190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# COMMON RECRUITERS

## Boyfriend Recruiters

- **Financial Gain:** Some traffickers pose as boyfriends and pressure their partners into commercial sex to make money.
- **Control:** Some use manipulation, threats, or pressure to gain power and maintain control in the relationship.
- **Criminal Connections:** Some have ties to gangs and use the relationship to introduce victims into trafficking situations.

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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.

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## COERCION

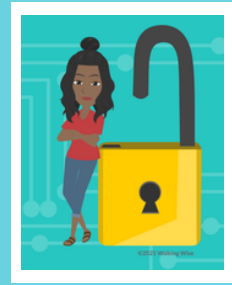
Boyfriend recruiters often take advantage of trust and emotional attachment to gain control. They may build what feels like a real relationship, then use pressure, manipulation, or threats to influence decisions. In some cases, they push their partner into commercial sex for financial gain or use connections to maintain control.

These tactics rely on the emotional bond that has been created, making it difficult to recognize the manipulation. What may seem like a caring relationship at first can actually be a way to control and exploit someone.

## 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 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>

# VICTIMS TARGET PEERS



**Why might a victim involve someone they know in a trafficking situation?**



# VICTIMS TARGET PEERS

## How Manipulation Affects Decisions

- **Unrecognized:** They may not realize they are being exploited or that a crime is occurring.
- **Normalized:** Over time, the situation may feel normal, making it harder to see the harm.
- **Coerced:** They may feel pressured, threatened, or believe they have no choice.

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Chambers R., Gibson M., Chaffin S., Takagi T., Nguyen N., Mears-Clark, T. (2022, January 30). Trauma-coerced Attachment and Complex PTSD: Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, Volume 10, 2024 – Issue 1, p. 43.

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## PEER RECRUITMENT

Recruiting peers is not about someone choosing to hurt others; instead, it reflects how control, fear, and manipulation can affect a person's decisions.

Victims may feel pressure to comply, believe they have no other options, or think their situation is normal. In some cases, they may believe they are helping or protecting themselves.

### Source

Chambers R., Gibson M., Chaffin S., Takagi T., Nguyen N., Mears-Clark, T. (2022, January 30). Trauma-coerced Attachment and Complex PTSD: Informed Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, Volume 10, 2024 – Issue 1, p. 43.

Retrieved April 24, 2024, from

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2021.2012386>

# VICTIMS TARGET PEERS

## Why Target Peers

- **Threats:** Victims may be pressured by the trafficker.
- **Safety:** Cooperating may feel like the safest way to avoid harm.
- **Quotas:** Recruiting may lower the financial demand on them.
- **Status:** Some may receive rewards or better treatment.
- **Unaware:** Victims might not realize they're putting peers at risk.

## PRESSURE

Victims may be forced or pressured to recruit others due to threats, manipulation, or demands to meet quotas. In some cases, cooperating can seem like the safest way to avoid harm or punishment.

Acting as a recruiter may temporarily improve their safety or status within the situation. Many victims do not fully understand the impact of their actions and remain under the trafficker's control throughout the process.

## Source

Family and Youth Services Bureau. (2022). TIPSHEET: Peer-to-Peer Human Trafficking Recruitment in RHY Settings: Trauma-Informed Response. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved January 23, 2026, from <https://www.childrensmentalhealthmatters.org/files/2022/11/Tipsheet-on-Peer-to-Peer-Recruitment-human-trafficking.pdf>

# MISTAKEN MENTOR



**Why might some recruiters believe they are helping rather than harming others?**



# MISTAKEN MENTOR

## How Mindset Can Be Shaped

- **Past Harm:** Experiences like neglect or abuse can affect how someone understands relationships and behavior.
- **Normal Lifestyle:** Growing up around exploitation can make it seem like a normal way to live or make money.
- **Mistaken Help:** Some may believe they are helping friends by offering access to money, housing, or drugs.

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## PAST ABUSE AND EXPERIENCES

Peer recruiters and bottom girls are often survivors of earlier harm, including neglect or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. These experiences can shape how they understand relationships, trust, and behavior.

Over time, exposure to harmful environments can make exploitation seem normal or acceptable. As a result, a recruiter may not fully recognize that bringing friends into the trafficker's circle is harmful.

In some cases, they may believe they are offering access to a better life or meeting immediate needs, such as money, housing, or stability. They may also think they are helping friends who are struggling, even when those actions lead to further harm.

# EXPLOITED RECRUITERS



How can a recruiter be just as victimized?



# EXPLOITED RECRUITERS

## When Recruiters are Also Victims

- **Victims Themselves:** Many recruiters are trafficked and controlled, either before or while they recruit others.
- **Pressure to Comply:** Traffickers place intense pressure on recruiters to follow rules and meet demands.
- **Consequences:** If expectations are not met, recruiters often face punishment, threats, or harm.

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## EXPLOITED RECRUITERS

Recruiters can be exploited and controlled just like other victims, often experiencing manipulation, intimidation, and coercion.

For example, a trafficker may threaten or harm them if they do not meet financial demands, recruit others, or maintain control over those in the operation. These expectations are often enforced through fear and pressure, not free choice.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**OPINION:** Do you think recruiters should be held legally responsible for their role in human trafficking?

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think recruiters should be held legally responsible for their role in human trafficking?

- A) Yes**
- B) No**
- C) It Depends**

## OPINION

This question is designed to encourage critical thinking about accountability and the complexity of human trafficking. In some cases, recruiters may be held legally responsible, while in others, they may also be victims who are being controlled or exploited.

Encourage students to think about factors such as intent, pressure, and level of control:

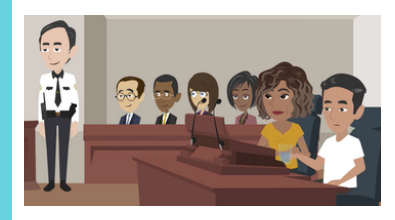
Did the person understand that their actions were harmful?

Were they being pressured, threatened, or manipulated?

Did they have the ability to make independent choices?

Remind students that these situations are often complex, and decisions in the legal system are made on a case-by-case basis.

# EXPLOITED RECRUITERS



**What factors should be considered when deciding responsibility?**



# EXPLOITED RECRUITERS

## Legal Consequence

- **Recruitment of Minors:** Recruiters can be charged as traffickers if they involve anyone under age 18 in commercial sex.
- **Force, Fraud, or Coercion:** Recruiters can be charged if they use pressure, deception, or threats to exploit adults.
- **Victimized Recruiter:** They may be considered a victim if they were trafficked as a minor or forced or controlled as an adult.

## THE LAWS

Legal frameworks recognize that recruiters can have dual roles as perpetrators and victims. Laws distinguish between recruiting minors, coercing adults, and situations in which the recruiter was previously trafficked.

## Source

Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464 (2000). Retrieved January 23, 2026, from <https://www.congress.gov/106/plaws/publ386/PLAW-106publ386.pdf>

# PROTECTING MINORS



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



# PROTECTING MINORS

## Safe Harbor Laws

- **Federal Protection:** Minors (under 18) are protected by federal law when involved in trafficking situations.
- **Always Victims:** Minors are legally considered victims and do not have to prove they were forced, tricked, or threatened.
- **Safe Harbor Laws:** These laws help ensure minors are treated as victims (not criminals) and connected to support services.

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H.R.3244 - Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000

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## SAFE HARBOR LAWS

In the United States, federal law recognizes minors involved in sex trafficking as victims and encourages protection rather than punishment.

Each state has its own Safe Harbor Laws, which explain how minors should be treated within that state's justice and child welfare systems.

While federal law sets the overall expectation, states are responsible for establishing and enforcing their own Safe Harbor policies, including access to services such as counseling, shelter, and legal support.

Minors can never legally consent to commercial sex, which is why their protection under the law is stronger, in that it does not require that children prove that the use of force, fraud, and coercion was used against them.

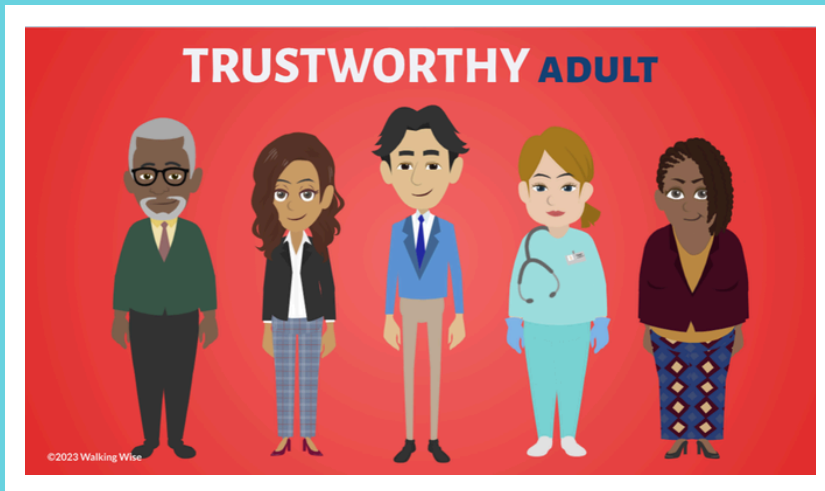
## Source

H.R.3244 - Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/3244>

Safe Harbor Laws can protect individuals from being prosecuted for certain crimes committed while they were trafficked.

# ASK FOR HELP



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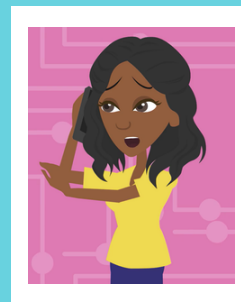
Walking Wise asked a focus group of survivors:  
What do you think young people should know about sex trafficking?

## 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)

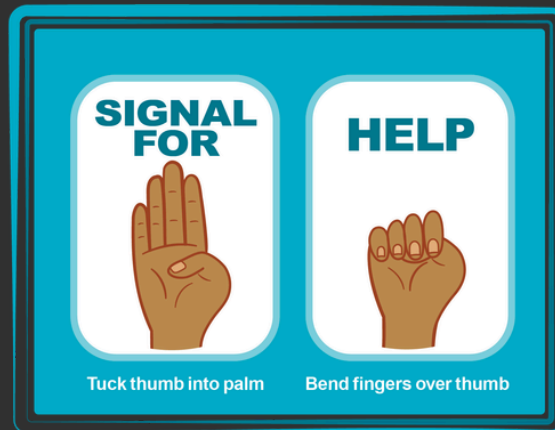
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## NOTE TO PRESENTER

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 female and peer recruiters, please refer to the last page of Lesson Plan #10 on the Walking Wise Learning Platform.

We welcome your feedback at [support@WalkingWise.com](mailto:support@WalkingWise.com).