

CHURCH LEADER TOOLKIT

Recognizing and Responding to Human Trafficking

Understanding Human Trafficking

What it is:

Human trafficking is the exploitation of people through force, fraud, or coercion for labor or sexual purposes. It is a form of modern slavery that affects millions worldwide, including in every community.

Key Facts:

- Trafficking occurs in all neighborhoods, cities, and communities.
- Most victims know the person who trafficks them; it's rarely a stranger abduction.
- Victims may be children, teens, or adults, male or female.

Biblical Perspective:

- God calls us to defend the vulnerable: Psalm 82:3, Proverbs 31:8–9
- Justice and mercy are inseparable: Micah 6:8
- Jesus' ministry focused on freedom for the oppressed: Luke 4:18–19

Signs to Look For

Red Flags for Potential Trafficking Situations:

- Frequent absences from school, church, or social life
- Withdrawal, fear, or anxiety around certain adults
- Being accompanied by a controlling or much older person
- Unexplained money, gifts, or material possessions
- Signs of abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual)
- Lack of access to personal identification documents
- Living or working in controlled or unsafe environments



Tip: One sign alone doesn't confirm trafficking; look for patterns and context.

What to do if You Suspect Trafficking

- Ensure safety first. Do not confront suspected traffickers directly.
- Call emergency services if there's immediate danger.
- Contact trained experts: 888-373-7888
- Local law enforcement and child protection agencies.
- Document observations carefully (dates, situations, details).
- Partner with trained organizations for intervention and support.
- Offer ongoing pastoral care and prayer for victims and their families, without pressuring them.

Prevention – What Churches Can Do

Strategies for Building Safe, Awareness-Focused Communities:

- **Education:** Teach congregations, youth, and families about trafficking risks.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Promote online safety, healthy relationships, and personal boundaries.
- **Family Support:** Strengthen at-risk families and mentorship programs.
- **Safe Spaces:** Create welcoming, accountable environments where individuals feel seen and known.
- **Advocate Against Exploitation:** Address issues like pornography, labor exploitation, and abuse in your community.

Supporting Survivors

Guidelines for Walking Alongside Survivors:

- Listen first, believe always. Avoid assumptions or judgment.
- Respect autonomy and confidentiality. Healing is personal and may take time.
- Offer trauma-informed care: Patience, empathy, and professional counseling.
- Provide practical help: Housing, transportation, childcare, job training.
- Foster community and belonging: Invite survivors into safe spiritual and relational spaces.

Scripture for restoration: Isaiah 61:3 – “To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes...”

Resources & Partnerships

National & International Hotlines:

- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 888-373-7888/TXT “BEFREE”
- The Freedom Collective, thefreedomcollective.org
- Shared Hope International: sharedhope.org
- A21: a21.org

Local Partnerships: Seek organizations in your city that offer survivor services, prevention education, and advocacy support.



A Call to the Church

Practical Action Steps:

1. Incorporate awareness and teaching into your ministry programs.
2. Launch mentorship, discipleship, and job readiness programs for at-risk individuals.
3. Pray, give, and volunteer with organizations fighting trafficking.
4. Keep conversations alive — prevention and support are ongoing commitments.

Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives...”