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Protecting God's Children for Adults



Human Trafficking 102 – How can human trafficking exist here?

By [Christine Commerce](#)

Editor's Note: *This is the second article in a series about human trafficking. The first article described the reality of human*



trafficking, while this article will identify how it can happen in our environments. The third article will describe online exploitative environments.

People often ask the question “How can human trafficking exist here”? In part, it is due to a trafficker’s greed for wealth, control, and power. Also, in part, there is a high demand for these types of “products” of people and cheap goods. Consumerism is also a root cause of the problem, when people are willing to buy other people for sex and when many people constantly seek to cut corners with costs of other types of goods. It is simple Economics 101. Without either of these demands, there would be no supply of people and children for sex, and no low-cost goods that contribute to labor trafficking.

Labor Trafficking exists in almost every facet of our lives, when people are not paid a just wage for their work, or when their work environment is abusive, unsafe or unhealthy. People working in nail salons, massage parlors, in domestic servitude, in the agricultural industry, or in construction are at a particular risk of experiencing labor trafficking. Children also have been involved with labor trafficking. This includes in meat packing plants, in the agricultural industry and even being recruited to do door-to-door selling of trinkets and candy from the dollar store or magazines under the guise of a fundraiser. Girls have been lured with the promise of a job in modeling but have found themselves in a trafficking situation such as in the cases of Jeffrey

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Christine Commerce

Christine Commerce has worked in the non-profit world with volunteer management, education and outreach, program expansion, event planning, marketing, and public relations for more than 14 years before joining the Alliance to End Human Trafficking. She most recently served as coordinator of the Diocese of Orlando Human Trafficking Task Force, which had received the Polaris Star Award for its collaboration and education efforts in the community.

She has conducted presentations and trainings on human trafficking both locally and nationally to a variety of audiences including parents, school staff, medical staff and volunteers, students, and community groups. Commerce has conducted trainings with the Diocese of Orlando School principals and counselors on the issue of human trafficking and how it impacts our youth. In addition, she conducted a Speaker’s Training and a breakout session on Special Events during the 2025 “Pathways to Prevention” National Human Trafficking Conference in Baltimore, MD and served as the Keynote speaker on labor trafficking during UNC Pembroke’s Labor

Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell.

Traffickers make promises of work and a better life to capitalize on their victim's vulnerabilities. They may promise them better job opportunities, but that "American dream" quickly turns into a nightmare. The victims realize they are not going to be paid what was promised, their documents and passports have been confiscated, or the job offer is not what was promised. Some are also forced into sex trafficking or forced labor, while making very little or no pay at all.

Traffickers will take those who are most vulnerable and manipulate them and their situation in a grooming process that includes physical needs to emotional needs. For example, traffickers will take potential victims on shopping sprees, isolate them from friends, and introduce them to drugs. In addition to meeting physical needs, traffickers will exploit emotional needs as well, including a need to belong and be loved, as seen in this poem excerpt, "America's Daughter," written by a Polaris trafficking client.¹

"You will do anything to feel like his everything. And he promises you everything. And the things he convinces you to do, they don't seem that bad if afterwards he shows you how much he loves you... And as long as your profits meet expectations, you will have what you've wanted your whole life: Love."

Traffickers emotionally abuse and manipulate victims into "the life" and use their dreams to manipulate and convince them to do the one thing they thought they would never do – sell themselves. To understand the stages of commercial sexual exploitation, watch Karly Church's TedTalk on [Domestic Sex Trafficking](#). Are our kids getting the love, attention and validation that they need so they don't seek it from someone else?

While most girls are trafficked by a pimp or intimate partner, boys often are trafficked through "survival sex" but also can be trafficked through gaming devices and social media and can be groomed just like girls for sex trafficking. Shame and cultural norms of what it means to be a man keep many boys in silence, which is why it is so underreported.

Just as victims can be anyone, so can the traffickers. They can look like those we know and trust. They can be men and women, any age, those in authority, teachers, politicians, family members, celebrities, law enforcement, religious leaders, or even other teenagers (who are typically being exploited or abused themselves). They can be young or old. They can be someone you already know. Statistics vary but **26-47% of trafficked children are sold by parents, legal guardians or relatives.**²

Trafficking can happen at shopping malls, sporting events, natural disasters, movie theaters, hotels, airports and more but most trafficking happens online. It is important to note that many trafficking victims do not leave a trafficking situation due to the extreme manipulation they experience, and *may even still be living at home with their parents.*

Trafficking Conference.

She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and communications from the University of Florida, enrolled in the Public Relations Certificate Program at the University of South Florida and has participated in and attended several Human Trafficking training conferences since she began her work in this field nine years ago. You can find more information on the Alliance to End Human Trafficking by visiting <https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org/>.

There are many reasons why victims do not report including:

- Having a bond with “Romeo Trafficker” (where the victim believes they are in a romantic relationship with their trafficker)
- Extreme manipulation or coercion by the trafficker
- A lack of understanding of their situation
- Feeling helpless and afraid
- Their trafficker may have threatened to harm them, their family or their friends
- They may have been beaten, starved, drugged, or experienced other trauma by their trafficker

Because of the prevalence of human trafficking, it is important to recognize the potential indicators of trafficking in victims:

- Declining grades
- Frequent unexplained school absences
- Wages – Controlling their money; is paid far less than promised; Does not receive pay; Victims often must work to pay off a debt
- Expensive new clothes, shoes, accessories
- Secret cellphone, or is very secretive about their cellphone
- Much older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Injuries or signs of abuse
- Branding or tattoos, jewelry – Traffickers will use tattoos to brand their victims because they see them as a piece of property not a human being.
 - Ask what their tattoo means. If they are hesitant, then that’s a red flag
 - Traffickers may also give them a bracelet with a charm on it
- Change in character – Someone who was once outgoing could now become withdrawn, or someone who was once happy all the time is suddenly depressed or anxious
- Avoiding eye contact and appearing nervous – is being threatened by an employer with deportation or arrest
- The person they are with may answer for them – appears to have been coached on what to say to law enforcement or other officials
- Lack of personal information or documents such as: social security number, birth certificate, or passport – Traffickers take victims’ personal documents which restricts freedom of movement and opportunity
- Freedom – is not allowed to socialize with neighbors/family/friends or attend community events
- Working & Living conditions – Is doing a different job than expected; appears to have been deprived of food, water, sleep, medical care, or satisfactory living conditions

These indicators may not always be signs of trafficking but also could be signs of something else like abuse or other harm—in which the child or an adult also needs help.

If you suspect human trafficking, call the National

Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-373-7888, your local law enforcement trafficking unit or text: INFO to BeFree (233733), Web Chat - <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/chat>. For online exploitation, visit www.CyberTipline.org or call 1-800-THE-LOST.

For more information on this topic and how to get involved, visit the AllianceToEndHumanTrafficking.org.

References

- 1 <https://polarisproject.org/press-releases/human-trafficking-survivors-video-highlights-exploitation-resilience/>
- 2 This study comes from the International Organization on Migration, <https://www.iom.int/>, and can be accessed directly at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd12616/files/2018-07/Counter-trafficking%20Data%20Brief%20081217.pdf.

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1) If you suspect human trafficking, what should you do?

- A) ☐ Immediately confront the person you suspect is trafficking people and threaten to call the police.
- B) ☐ Sneak into where you think it is happening to try and get more information.
- C) ☐ Nothing because there is nothing you can do to stop human trafficking.
- D) ☐ Contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center or local law enforcement.
- E) ☐ All of the above.

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