

SEX TRAFFICKING

MAKE THE LEAP: LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.

“Human trafficking” is the broad term that describes the illegal activity to recruit, transport, transfer, hold or receive people by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, coercion, deception, repeated provision of a controlled substance) for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour.

In many cases of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, the person being trafficked may develop “trauma bonds” with their traffickers, and may not see themselves as a victim. This is one reason why sex trafficking is believed to be a vastly underreported crime.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR FRIEND IS BEING TRAFFICKED?

Sometimes people who are being trafficked don't believe that they are being victimized. They may be too close to the situation to realize that they are being taken advantage of, or maybe they think they are in love with their trafficker, or they may not see any other options. Your friend may also tell you that they feel empowered and have the right to make money using their body. When asked about the situation, your friend may deny the warning signs because they are getting ‘stuff’ for sex and believe they are in control of the situation.

As a friend, family or community member, you are in a unique position to recognize when someone you know is in trouble. This is especially important for young people who are not living at home or who may not have enough support from their families.

WARNING SIGNS

- Someone has isolated your friend from you and other loving and supportive people
- Someone makes decisions for your friend about when your friend is free, where they can go, or who they can hang out with
- Your friend left town suddenly or they disappear from time to time with little or no explanation
- Your friend is highly secretive about a new relationship or their whereabouts
- Your friend has received expensive new gifts
- You never see your friend anymore or you can never get time alone with them
- Your friend seems frightened or nervous
- Your friend seems malnourished or ill and isn't allowed to get the treatment they need

A warning sign doesn't automatically mean your friend is being trafficked. Don't jump to conclusions. See the warning sign as red flag to look more closely, ask questions and offer support.

If you think your friend is being exploited – reach out and talk to someone you trust and who can be supportive. Your local sexual assault centre can help you figure out what to do next and they will protect your privacy.