



**SAFE
RELATIONSHIP**
Guide

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking is the illegal trade of human beings. It's the recruitment, control, and use of people for their bodies and for their labor. Human trafficking is hidden, fast-growing, and complex—generating billions of dollars each year through the exploitation of millions of men, women, and children. All over the world, the vulnerable are being recruited and exploited at the hands of traffickers.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN FORMS TRAFFICKING?

| SEX TRAFFICKING | LABOR TRAFFICKING |
|---|---|
| Forcing, deceiving, or coercing a person to perform a commercial sex act. Any minor under the age of 18 who is induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of human trafficking according to U.S. law, regardless of whether there is force, fraud, or coercion. ¹ | Forcing a person to work in captivity for little or no pay. It is recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. |

WHERE CAN HUMAN TRAFFICKING OCCUR?

Victims of human trafficking can be deceived, forced, or coerced to work in both legitimate and illegitimate industries. Sex trafficking specifically may occur in the following industries:

- “escort services, illicit massage services, outdoor sexual solicitation, residential brothels, bars and strip clubs, pornography production, personal sexual servitude, and livestreaming of sexual exploitation.”²

WHAT ARE COMMON SEX TRAFFICKING RECRUITMENT METHODS?

Sex trafficking can be understood through three elements: acts, means, and purpose.³

- Acts: when a trafficker recruits, harbors, transports, provides, obtains, patronizes, or solicits another person to engage in commercial sex
- Means: when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion
- Purpose: to engage in a commercial sex act

¹Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), Pub. L. No. 106-386, 103(s)(A), 114 Stat. 1470 (2000), 22 U.S.C.A. 7102(s)(A).

²Blue Campaign, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ht_101_one-pager_.pdf

³US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/what-is-trafficking-in-persons/>



TABLE 1: Means of Trafficking

| FORCE — POWER | FRAUD - DECEPTION | COERCION - MANIPULATION |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threats • sexual abuse • physical abuse • substance abuse • mental abuse • control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exploiting youthful curiosity about sex • grooming for trust • seduction; wooing into romantic relationships (loverboy) • false promises of a better life (financial, protection, emotional security) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shame and fear • threats and pressure • blackmail • intimidation • sextortion |

WHO IS AT RISK OF BECOMING A VICTIM OF SEX TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking victims can be any “age, race, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, and socioeconomic class.”⁴ Victims will not always come forward to seek help if they are in a position to do so because of vulnerability, language barriers (where foreign victims are involved), or fear of law enforcement.⁵ In other instances, individuals may be abused, exploited, or trafficked by family or close friends, and not identify as a victim for a number of reasons, such as familial relationships.

While anyone can become a victim of human trafficking, there are certain groups of people who are more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation because of their situation.

⁴ Department of Homeland Security, Blue Campaign, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ht_101_one-pager_.pdf

⁵ Department of Homeland Security, Blue Campaign, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ht_101_one-pager_.pdf



People at higher risk of becoming a trafficking victim may include:

- Persons with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that include stressful or traumatic events that occurred during childhood
- Persons identified as migrants, irregular migrants, stateless populations, refugees, or foreign-born, and other minority population, including racial and ethnic minorities
- Persons with physical or intellectual disabilities
- Persons facing employment instability, financial insecurity, and debt
- Children, unaccompanied minors, minors in child welfare systems
- Youth who identify in the population of LGBTQ+
- Persons with low self-esteem (self-concepts)
- Persons with substance abuse and addictions
- Children and youth in foster care or runaways
- Persons experiencing housing instability, poverty, or strain from low income

HOW CAN SEX TRAFFICKING HAPPEN?

The loverboy method of trafficking, also known as the romeo method of recruitment, appears at first to be a healthy relationship, often (but not always) involving an older man pretending to be a loving boyfriend. However, over time, it turns into an unhealthy relationship that leads to sex trafficking. Traffickers gain trust and then exploit the victim by luring them into trafficking under the pretenses of a romantic relationship through grooming and abuse.⁶ It is important to note that even though the term "loverboy" is used, traffickers are not only males just as victims are not only females.

Survivors in A21's Aftercare program who have been exploited using this tactic have predominantly been between the ages of 18-25. Next to trafficking for forced labor through false job opportunities, the 'loverboy' tactic is the second-highest identified method across all A21 aftercare cases globally.

WHERE ARE VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING RECRUITED?

While recruitment can happen anywhere, some places are more dangerous than others, including:

- Online platforms such as dating sites, apps, and social media that provide the opportunity for traffickers to establish contact with and gather information from vulnerable people
- Group homes, shelters, and detention centers because loverboys understand they are collections of vulnerable people who are often experiencing hardship
- Popular places such as schools, malls, parks, or concerts that contain large gatherings of youth⁷

⁶ Polaris Project, <https://polarisproject.org/love-and-trafficking/>

⁷ Department of Homeland Security, Blue Campaign, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/blue_campaign_youth_guide_508.pdf

Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships

WHAT ARE HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS?

Loverboys approach vulnerable victims and deceive them into what appears to be a healthy relationship, pretending to be a friend or a boyfriend/girlfriend. The process of recruitment can happen quickly or take place over an extended period of time. In reality, these relationships are unhealthy.

- ▶ **A healthy relationship** is one that is based on respect, honesty, trust, communication, compromise, commitment, healthy boundaries, and a mutual building of each other’s self-confidence.⁸ Establishing strong protective factors like personal identity of one’s value, purpose, and worth through self-concepts are essential in healthy relationships. Protective factors are conditions or attributes that help promote well-being within a relationship and reduce or prevent the risk of a problem or harm in a situation.
- ▶ **An unhealthy relationship** demonstrates one partner forcing the other partner to sacrifice friendships, family, school, personal goals, or even their emotional well-being while in the relationship. These relationships can be physically, emotionally, and mentally abusive, often leading to a Trauma Bonding cycle. This can appear as a deep bond, loyalty, or emotional attachment between a person (victim) and the other person in the relationship (loverboy/abuser) that is ultimately destructive.

Illustration 1: THE CIRCLE OF TRUST

Healthy relationship behaviors are highlighted in the inner circle and unhealthy relationship behaviors are listed around the outer circle.

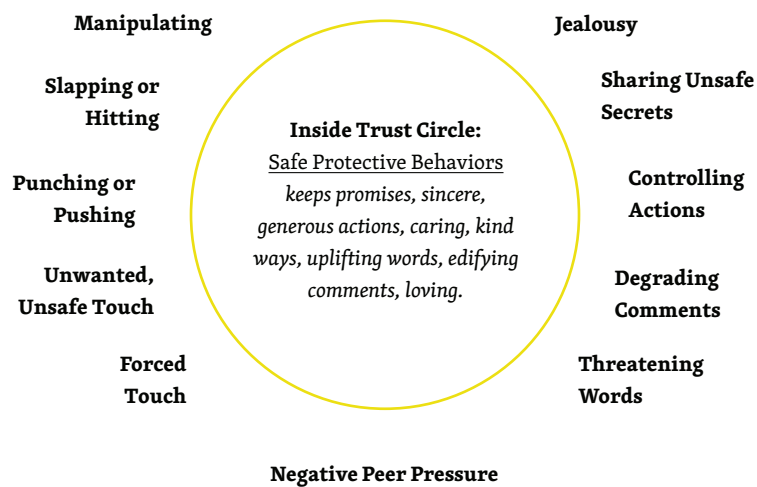


TABLE 2: Relationship Indicators and Safeguards

Unhealthy relationships have the potential to develop into human trafficking, making it important to put healthy safeguards in place.

| UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS | HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS |
|---|--|
| <p>01 Manipulates Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner uses seduction to deceive and “woo” someone into a relationship • Partner creates emotional ties, but does not share a great deal of personal information about themselves <p>02 Forces Isolation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner thrives on possessiveness, jealousy, or control over their partner • Partner tries to distance their partner from family, friends, and community <p>03 Demands Intimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner requires the other partner to do things they are uncomfortable with (forceful sex or sex acts, videotaping sexual activity/nudity, posting pictures for money, engaging in commercial sex or sex acts with his/her friends/strangers)⁹ <p>04 Requires Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner limits or removes access to the other's personal bank accounts or documents (driver's license, ID card, birth certificate, passport, or visa) <p>05 Utilizes Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner is physically aggressive privately and/or publicly (grabbing, pushing, hitting, slapping) | <p>01 Strengthens Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner respects open and honest conversations with their partner • Partner shares personal information (job, family history, childhood memories) <p>02 Maintains Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners trust each other and allow each to have other relationships with family and friends • Partners share mutual friendships <p>03 Respects Boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners establish consent boundaries • Partners can express openly about their emotional and physical needs and what makes them feel comfortable <p>04 Promotes Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner gives their partner space to have their own opinions and interests • Partners feel heard and that their voice matters <p>05 Supports Each Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners use respectful language and are attentive and supportive of one another • Partners work through disagreements by listening and seeing each point of view without violence |

⁸ United States Government, Youth.Gov Characteristics of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence/characteristics#:~:text=Respect%20for%20both%20oneself%20and,sexual-ly%2C%20and%20for%20emotionally.&text=Healthy%20relationships%20share%20certain%vcharacteristics%20that%20teens%20should%20be%20taught%20to%20expect>

⁹ Polaris Project, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Safety%20Planning%20At%20A%20Glance.pdf>

Relationship Safeguards

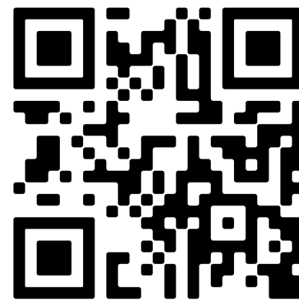
- Have a safety network (circle of trust) and maintain relationships with your safety network by sharing about your new relationship.
- Ask questions about your partner to get to know them personally.
- Keep important numbers on your person at all times, including the number of someone you feel safe contacting if you are in trouble.
- Protect your rights. Your identification documents and personal property belong to you.
- Let your partner know if something makes you uncomfortable. If your honesty is met with aggression or punishment, inform a trusted friend/relative or the police.
- Be aware of your surroundings to identify potential safety concerns. Trust your judgment.
- Establish consent boundaries, allowing you to use assertive communication to make personal decisions.
- Create a preventive plan on how to avoid dangerous situations and think of protective ways to respond rather than react if danger arises or you feel threatened.
- Ask for help. Contact the police or a trusted friend.



*Loverboy Recruitment
Video (Minor)*



*Loverboy Recruitment
Video (Adult)*



*Additional
Safety Guides*

TAKE ACTION

If you or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, or if you suspect human trafficking could be taking place, respond by:

- Contacting someone in your safety network/trust circle
- Reporting suspected sex trafficking by calling: 1-888-373-888 or texting: BeFree (233733)
- For immediate danger or in case of an emergency, call 911

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.