

Human Trafficking And Sexual Exploitation

Ontario is a “major hub” for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Overwhelmingly, survivors are girls and young women, and people from vulnerable populations (Indigenous youth, & LGBTQ+ youth) who come from within Canada’s borders. The exploitation involves forced prostitution, exotic dancing, or production of pornography by organized crime groups, individual pimps, and even peers. Learn more by checking out Halton Collaborative Against Human Trafficking Client Centered Support Model at <http://www.savisofhalton.org/human-trafficking/>.

Key factors to know:

- Traffickers may pretend to be in a relationship, preying on insecurities to learn as much as possible about their victim in order to exploit them based on their emotional attachment.
- Traffickers are increasingly luring and recruiting victims by contacting them online. Traffickers will ask for personal information of their victims and often will pretend to be someone they are not. Once contact is made, similar to in-person recruiting, they begin to build trust with their victim.
- Be hyper aware of what you post on social media accounts, as traffickers are often able to track down their victims by using this information found online. Information provided can also be used as a way for traffickers to build a ‘relationship’ with their victims, making the victim feel like they know the trafficker personally or that they can trust them.
- Traffickers will lure and groom the person through a recruitment process of debt obligation where they are given gifts, expensive clothes, and supplied drugs.
- Once in debt to the trafficker, the person experiences ongoing coercion, deception, threats of violence to them or their family, isolation, and control.
- Survivors are often moved around by the trafficker to isolate them from family or the areas familiar to them, often being moved from hotel to hotel along major highways and cities. However, some survivors will continue to live at home with family while they are sexually trafficked in their community.
- Survivors are often influenced to engage in sexual activities to help them and their “boyfriend” until they have enough money to get out of the trade and be together with promises of marriage, a house, a family.
- Sometimes a person may start off working with the trafficker thinking it is a business relationship (escort/pimp). However, if they are forced to hand over all their money or only gets paid enough for basic needs or if the trafficker pressures them to provide services they are not comfortable with or to engage with many clients in one day in order to reach a certain dollar amount, then the arrangement has moved from escort/pimp to victim/ trafficker.
- Sex trafficking is financially lucrative for the trafficker and they will take any means necessary to protect their criminal activity, including ongoing threats to the survivor if they manage to escape or receive help from family or police.
- Survivors will often not recognize they are being trafficked or know their rights. They often are led to believe their trafficker is their boyfriend/friend, they will be fearful of law enforcement and/or organizations providing assistance, and may have a strong bond or allegiance to the person trafficking them, trauma bonding.

Understanding your rights and the law

There is a difference between prostitution and sex trafficking. Prostitution is considered to be a voluntary act, whereas sex trafficking involves coercion, threats, control, and psychological abuse to force a person into sex work. All human trafficking, including sex trafficking, is illegal, and a person's consent is irrelevant because no one can consent to their own exploitation. Recruiting anyone under the age of 18 years old for the purpose of exploitation is trafficking even if there is no coercion or deception. The Anti-Human Trafficking Act (Bill 96, 2017) increases protection for survivors of human trafficking:

- Survivors of human trafficking can apply for a restraining order to protect themselves or their children from traffickers.
- Survivors can sue their trafficker for compensation through civil court to help survivors restore and rebuild their lives.

When planning to leave a human trafficking situation

In some cases, leaving or attempting to leave a trafficking situation may increase the risk of violence. It is important to trust your judgement when taking steps to ensure your safety.

- ☐ If you are ever in immediate danger, the quickest way to access help is to call 911.
- ☐ Learn about which nearby regions have police services with specialized units to address human trafficking to help you determine when and where is a safe place to escape your situation.
- ☐ If you require immediate Crisis Support, call SAVIS 24/7 Human Trafficking Crisis Support Line at 289-837-3999. A crisis support worker will meet with you within an hour of your call.
- ☐ During violent/explosive situations, try to avoid dangerous rooms if at all possible.
 - ☐ Dangerous rooms: kitchen, garage, bathroom, basement, rooms where weapons are kept and rooms without an exit.
 - ☐ Safer Rooms: front room, yard or apartment hallway where a neighbor might see or hear an incident.
- ☐ Try to know your location at all times. If you are unsure of your location, consider the following:
 - ☐ Note street signs or sounds outside of your current location, or look at newspapers/magazines/mail that may have the address listed.
 - ☐ If being transported by vehicle between locations, notice signage along the highways or roads.
 - ☐ If in a hotel, notice logos, items with hotel name, or hotel welcome booklet for the location.
 - ☐ If safe to go outside, see if the address is listed anywhere on the building.
 - ☐ If there are people nearby and it is safe to speak with them, ask about your current location.
- ☐ If not in a private residence, notice any emergency exit plans or doors. Plan an escape route or exit strategy, and if possible rehearse it.
- ☐ If staying in a hotel and if safe to do so, find a way to be noticed or make contact with the desk or cleaning staff to get help.
- ☐ If safe to do so, keep any important documents/ID on or near you to be ready for immediate departure. If you don't have them, notice where they are being kept, and try to take a picture of them.
- ☐ If you have access to your personal belongings, and it's safe to do so, prepare a bag with important items and a change of clothes for when you need to leave suddenly.

- ☐ Keep a written copy of important numbers in your possession in case your phone is taken or destroyed. Memorize the numbers if possible.
- ☐ Develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal) to use with a trusted neighbour, relative, friend, or service provider to notify them that you are in danger.
- ☐ If you have children who are also in the trafficking situation, explain to them that it isn't their responsibility to protect you, make sure they know how to call someone for help, where to hide during a violence incident, and practice your departure plan with them.
- ☐ Think about the next steps after you leave the situation to help you manage the barriers and impacts to your emotional, physical, and financial safety.
 - ☐ Contact a trusted friend/relative to ask for assistance.
 - ☐ Contact Ontario Human Trafficking Helpline at 1-833-999-9211 or Chrysalis Network at 1-866-528-7109 to obtain local referrals to support services.
 - ☐ Contact SAVIS of Halton Human Trafficking Crisis Support line at 289-837-3999.
 - ☐ Contact Mobile Support Worker at Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Toronto by calling 416-312-6938.
 - ☐ Go to a hospital emergency department and ask for Nina's Place for immediate medical care and support for recent partner assault or sexual assault. www.ninasplace.ca or 905-632-3737 x5708.

Safety tips after exiting a human trafficking situation

- ☐ Keep your residence locked at all times. Consider changing the locks if the person who exploited you is able to access your residence.
- ☐ Contact local services that can connect you to resources that can pay the costs associated with increasing the safety of your residence (i.e. Victim Quick Response Program).
- ☐ If you require housing support, emergency safe shelter may be available at Halton Women's Place. (905-847-5520)
- ☐ In Halton, survivors of human and sex trafficking can obtain special housing priority- for more information call Halton Region at 1-866-442-5866.
- ☐ If you are moving residence, only disclose your address to people you trust and who have no contact with the person you are fleeing from.
- ☐ Consider getting a no-contact order or peace bond against the person who trafficked you prohibiting them to contact you. Have this court order copied and keep with you at all times. If this person breaches the court order, contact 911.
- ☐ Track all unwanted contact by the person who exploited you made to you or your friends/family (calls, texts, sightings) and save any voicemails and text messages that are threatening in nature. Consider taking screen shots of the contact and share with a trusted friend.
- ☐ Learn more about how to keep your social media and technology safe (see Technology insert).
- ☐ Consider changing your phone number, passwords, and social media usernames.
- ☐ Keep a cell phone or emergency phone on you at all times.

- ☐ Develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal) to use with a trusted neighbour, relative, friend, or service provider to notify them that you are in danger.
- ☐ Trust your instincts, and ask for help or emergency response if you feel unsafe.
- ☐ Create a safety plan with your children to prepare them for what to do if they are approached by the person who exploited them and you.

Resources

- ☐ Report the person anonymously through Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 or on-line.
- ☐ If you have concerns for children/youth involved in sex trafficking or child pornography, contact the Canadian Centre for Child Protection at 1-866-658-9022 or online at www.cybeertip.ca.
- ☐ If you are a child or youth, contact a counsellor anonymously at the Kids Help Line at 1-800-668-6868 or online at www.kidshelpphone.ca.
- ☐ Ontario has a confidential Human Trafficking Helpline at 1-833-999-9211 for legal advice and support.
- ☐ SAVIS of Halton Human Trafficking Crisis Support line at 289-837-3999.
- ☐ The Chrysalis Network offers a free, confidential telephone counselling service to women, men, and youth who have been trafficked for the purposes of forced commercial sex or labour. 1-866-528-7109 or www.chrysalisnetwork.org/.
- ☐ Covenant House in Toronto has many services specifically for youth being sexually exploited or trafficked. Email endht@convenanthousetoronto.ca or call the 24/7 helpline at 416-593-4849.
- ☐ Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Toronto at 416-312-6938 for services specific to survivors of sexual exploitation.

Healing from being sexually exploited and trafficked

- ☐ Access counselling from someone who understands the dynamics of sex trafficking. Victim Quick Response Program can arrange for counselling sessions with a skilled counsellor to support you through your healing.
- ☐ If drugs and alcohol were part of your experience, consider drug and alcohol treatment.
- ☐ Consider attending programs offering skill building classes and education support services.
- ☐ Remember healing will take time due to the repeated abuse, including psychological control (trauma bonding) that leads you to be loyal to the trafficker but also fearful of them.
- ☐ Remember what happened to you does not mean anything about you and doesn't define you.
- ☐ Seek out medical or naturopathic or dental care to address stress disorders, nutrition, reproductive and sexual health concerns and any other preventative health care.