

Trafficking Red Flags for School Professionals

Many trafficked youth continue to attend school for a variety of reasons. They may be trying to present “business as usual” to avoid scrutiny. It may be the only place they feel safe, away from their exploiter or an abusive home situation. It may be where they recruit other youth into the life. School professionals need to be aware of indicators that may alert to sex and labor trafficking. There can include, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained absences from school, or an inability to attend school on a regular basis
- Sudden or gradual adverse change in academic performance
- Uncharacteristically promiscuous behavior, and/or references to sexual situations
- Use of terminology beyond age-specific norms, or use of language associated with the commercial sex industry
- Change in usual attire and/or grooming habits (especially promiscuous attire)
- New and/or more expensive material possessions
- Chronic running away from home
- Behavioral changes: Fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous, aggressive
- New relationship, especially with an older peer or partner
- Deference to another person (other than the parent) to speak for him or her, especially during interactions with school authority figures (introduced as a “relative” or romantic partner)
- Signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or other pain or suffering
- Deprivation of food, water, sleep, medical care, or other basic needs (youth who fall asleep in class, youth who are continually hungry)
- Hotel keys or key cards
- Large amounts of money/cash rolls or refillable gift cards
- Prepaid cell phone, or more than one cell phone
- Not in possession of own identification documents (including losing school ID regularly)

Interviewing Tips:

- Be aware of the **power dynamic** between you (authority figure) and the youth.
- Remember **not to take their reaction personally**. Speaking to a stranger isn't easy or comfortable and speaking about personal trauma is never comfortable.
- Be mindful when speaking to survivors of any type of sexual violence that **asking details about their experience can be intrusive** and can evoke resistance due to feelings of embarrassment, shame, self-blame, fear or anger. Only ask for details of the abuse if it is a necessary requirement for your job (law enforcement). Otherwise, knowing specific details is not necessary to provide help.

There is a Reasonable Cause to Suspect Trafficking or a Child Abuse or Maltreatment situation that resulted in trafficking: Contact the NYS Statewide Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR)

All mandated reporters who have a reasonable cause to suspect a child is being trafficked for sex must make a report to the SCR. Physicians and other medical professionals are Mandated Reporters. As per the Summary Guide for Mandated Reporters in NYS: "Mandated reporters are required to report suspected child abuse or maltreatment when they are presented with a reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or maltreatment in a situation where a child, parent, or other person legally responsible for the child is before the mandated reporter when the mandated reporter is acting in his or her official or professional capacity. "Other person legally responsible" refers to a guardian, caretaker, or other person 18 years of age or older who is responsible for the care of the child."

"A reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or maltreatment means that, based on your rational observations, professional training and experience, you have a suspicion that the parent or other person legally responsible for a child is responsible for harming that child or placing that child in imminent danger of harm. Your suspicion can be as simple as distrusting an explanation for an injury."

Contacting the SCR launches a child protective investigation that will assess your suspicions, as well as any other safety and risk factors within the family and provide safety and service plans to work towards strengthening the family. **To contact the SCR, call: 1-800-342-3720.**

If you believe the child has experienced sex trafficking, tell the SCR operator this is a **High Priority 14 case (Sex Trafficking Allegation)**. If you believe the child has experienced labor trafficking, tell the SCR operator this is a **High Priority 15 case (Labor Trafficking Allegation)**. You can also alert ACS' Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Consultation at Child.trafficking@acs.nyc.gov