

SAFETY PLANNING AND PREVENTION

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESOURCE CENTER (NHTRC) 1-888-3737-888

INTRODUCTION

Safety planning refers to formal or informal risk assessments, preparations, and contingency plans designed to increase the safety of a human trafficking victim or an individual at-risk for human trafficking, as well as any agency or individual assisting a victim. A successful safety plan will:

- 1) Assess the current risk and identify current and potential safety concerns;
- 2) Create strategies for avoiding or reducing the threat of harm;
- 2) Outline concrete options for responding when safety is threatened or compromised.

Safety planning is important at various stages in a human trafficking situation – while a **victim is in the situation, during the process of leaving, and once the victim has left.** The following document presents general guidelines for conducting safety planning with victims of human trafficking as well as those who may be considering a suspicious employment or relationship situation and may be at risk for human trafficking. The suggestions below do not guarantee an individual's safety or the prevention of trafficking. Each individual is in the best position to assess his/her own current level of safety and safety planning should be tailored to his/her unique circumstance.

SAFETY PLANNING & HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Definition of Human Trafficking from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA):

In order to understand the unique safety concerns of trafficking victims and plan for safety accordingly, it is essential to start with the definition of human trafficking:

- **Sex Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, or obtaining of a person for a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, **or** in which the person induced to perform such an act has not yet attained 18 years of age. ¹
- **Labor Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. ²

Victims of both labor and sex trafficking have multiple safety concerns that should be addressed in the context of developing a safety plan:

- Isolation, abandonment;
- Movement, disorientation, unfamiliarity with current location;
- Lack of food, medicine, clothing, or safe shelter;
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, or other crimes;
- Confiscation of money and/or identity documents;
- Physical harm or violence to the victim(s) or others;
- Abduction, kidnapping, confinement, restraint.

Note: Controllers pose a significant and constant threat to the safety of the victim(s), but it is also important to consider the threat posed by others who may not be engaged in the trafficking situation, but may take advantage of the victim's vulnerability.

¹ 22 U.S.C. § 7102.

² *ibid*

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PREVENTATIVE SAFETY PLANNING

Potential Red Flags for Human Trafficking Situations:

The following scenarios are red flags for relationship and/or employment situations that may develop into human trafficking. The presence of one or more of these indicators may indicate that an individual is at-risk for human trafficking. This list is not exhaustive and is intended to encompass both sex and labor trafficking. The term “partner” refers to an intimate relationship.

- Partner/employer comes on very strongly and promises things that seem too good to be true – i.e. promises extremely high wages for easy work.
- Partner/employer expects that you will agree to the employment or relationship on the spot, and threatens that otherwise the opportunity will be lost.
- Partner/employer is unclear about the terms of employment, location of employment and/or the company details/credentials.
- Partner/employer denies access to information about your rights.
- Partner/employer denies contact with friends or family; attempts to isolate you from your social network.
- Partner/employer constantly checks on you and does not allow you access to your money.
- Partner/employer asks you to do things outside of your comfort zone such as performing sexual favors for friends.
- Partner/employer displays signs/characteristics of a dangerous person including: attempts to control movement and behaviors, exhibits jealousy, lashes out or delivers punishment in response to non-compliance, is verbally/emotionally/physically abusive.
- Partner/employer uses threats or displays of violence to create a culture of fear.

General Safety Tips:

- Trust your judgment. If a situation/individual makes you uncomfortable, trust that feeling.
- Let a trusted friend/relative know if you feel like you are in danger or if a person/situation is suspicious.
- Keep all important documents and identification in your possession at all times. Your partner/employer does not have the right to take or hold your documents without your permission.
- Keep important numbers on your person at all times, including the number of someone you feel safe contacting if you are in trouble.
- Make sure that you have a means of communication (cell phone or phone card), access to your bank account, and any medication that you might need with you at all times.
- If you think you might be in immediate danger or you are experiencing an emergency, contact 9-1-1 first.

Safety Tips for Suspicious Employment

Some employment opportunities may raise red flags for human trafficking. When considering new employment:

- Request information about the position, scope of work, and hours/conditions of the position.
- Do not provide personal information (address, SS#) to the employer if you do not feel comfortable.
- If meeting with the employer, make sure a trusted friend/relative knows where you are going and what time you expect to return.
- Plan to meet the employer in a public place where others are around.
- Verify that the business is legitimate by asking for the Employer Identification Number (EIN). This information can be checked by calling the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at (800) 829-4933 (for U.S. businesses only).

- Ask to speak with former employees/clients about their experience with the company. This can be particularly important for positions abroad.
- If the employment opportunity involves travel to another country, make sure you obtain the appropriate visa. Depending on the country and the nature of the employment, you or your employer may be responsible for securing the visa – make sure to check with the country’s regulations to confirm before accepting an offer.

Safety Tips for Domestic/International Travel

Some employment and relationship opportunities may involve travel to a different city, state, or country. When considering a suspicious travel opportunity, take the following additional steps to secure safety:

- Request address information for employment and/or housing.
- Request information about travel arrangements and who is expected to pay for travel and any visa or other entry fees.
- Make copies of important documents for yourself and to provide to a trusted friend/relative.
- Make sure that you have a ticket home in your name and keep it in a safe place.
- Provide a trusted friend/relative with information about your travel arrangements.
- Arrange a time to contact a trusted friend/relative to let them know you arrived safely.
- Make sure you have access to a bank account and have a way to maintain control of your own funds.
- Take a map of the city you are traveling to and make sure you know how to get from your residence to the bank, Embassy or Consulate (for international travel), police department, or hospital in case of emergency.
- If traveling internationally, make sure you know basic phrases in the local language.
- If traveling internationally, make sure you know how to access emergency services in that country. If there is an emergency number (equivalent to 9-1-1 in the U.S.), memorize this number or keep it in a safe place. Memorize the address and contact information for your Embassy or Consulate in that country.
- If traveling internationally, U.S. citizens should visit the U.S. Department of State website for information on how to register their travel details with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP): <https://travelregistration.state.gov>.
- For additional tips on safe international travel, visit: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html. For U.S. citizens experiencing emergencies overseas, contact the local Embassy or Consulate, or the U.S. State Department Office of Overseas Citizen Services at 888-407-4747 (from the U.S. or Canada) or 202-501-4444 (from overseas).

Safety Tips for Suspicious/Controlling Relationships

Some relationships that exhibit many of the typical signs of abuse and control, as well as those with promises of a better life, may have the potential to develop into situations of human trafficking.

- If your partner asks you to do things you are uncomfortable with (forceful sex or sex acts, videotaping sexual activity/nudity, engaging in commercial sex or sex acts with his/her friends/strangers, abusing drugs/alcohol, etc.), let your partner know it makes you uncomfortable and inform a trusted friend/relative.
- Make sure a trusted friend/relative knows where you are when with your partner, especially if you are traveling with this person or going to an unfamiliar location.
- Maintain access to all of your documents (driver’s license, ID card, birth certificate, passport, or visa), your bank account and all important phone numbers and do not provide this information to your partner if you do not feel comfortable.

SAFETY PLANNING WITH HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

Safety Tips when Leaving 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 judgment when taking steps to ensure your safety.

- If you are ever in immediate danger, the quickest way to access help is to call 9-1-1.
- If you are unsure of your current location, try to determine any indication of your locality such as street signs outside the residence/place of employment or newspapers/magazines/mail that may have the address listed.
 - If it is 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 them about your current location.
- Plan an escape route or exit strategy and rehearse it if possible.
- Keep any important documents on or near you to be ready for immediate departure.
- Prepare a bag with any important documents/items and a change of clothes.
- Keep a written copy of important numbers on you at all times in case your phone is taken or destroyed at any point. Memorize important numbers/hotlines if possible.
- Think about your next steps after you leave the situation.
 - Contact trusted friends/relatives to notify them or to ask for assistance if you feel comfortable.
 - Contact the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC)** 24-hour hotline at **1-888-3737-888** to obtain local referrals for shelter or other social services and support.
- If you would like assistance from law enforcement, you may also contact the NHTRC to report your situation and/or connect with specialized local law enforcement referrals.
 - Please note: if you are ever in immediate danger, contact 9-1-1 first.
- During violent/explosive situations, try to avoid dangerous rooms if at all possible.
 - Examples of Dangerous Rooms: kitchen (knives, sharp utensils, pots), garage (tools, sharp objects), bathroom (hard surfaces, no exits), basement (hard surfaces, no exits), rooms where weapons are kept and rooms without an exit.
 - Examples of Safer Rooms: front room, yard or apartment hallway where a neighbor might see or hear an incident.
- Develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal, etc.) to use with a trusted neighbor, 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 that they know how to call someone for help, where to hide during a violent incident, and practice your plan of departure with them.

Safety Tips after Exiting a Human Trafficking Situation

- Keep your residence locked at all times. Consider changing your locks if the controller has a key or may be able to access your residence.
- If moving to a new residence, only disclose your address to people that you trust and consider accessing the Address Confidentiality Program (ACP).
- Consider taking out a protective order against the controller so that he/she will be legally prohibited from contacting you.
- Contact the NHTRC at **1-888-3737-888** to find the service provider nearest you that can assist you in long-term safety planning, including taking out a protective order or accessing the ACP in your state.

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- If the controller has made unwanted contact, document the contact made (calls, texts, showing up at your work/home, etc.) and save any voicemails and text messages that are threatening in nature.
- Consider changing your phone number to a number unknown by the controller. Most cell phone carriers will allow you to change numbers at no cost, but will seldom allow you to block a particular number.
- Keep a cell phone or emergency phone on you at all times.
- If you feel comfortable, tell your neighbors/employer/friends to call the police if they see the controller near, in, or around the residence/you.
- Develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal, etc.) to use with a trusted neighbor, relative, friend or service provider to notify them that you are in danger or need help. This can be the same safety signal used while exiting the situation or something new.
- If you have children who were also in the trafficking situation, create a safety plan with them making sure they know what do if the controller makes unwanted contact and how to call someone for help.
- If your child still has ongoing contact with the controller, discuss with your child a safety plan and how to keep themselves safe while with the controller.