

COVENANT HOUSE  
**TRAFFICK STOP**

Sharing Knowledge to End Sex Trafficking

# SEX TRAFFICKING PREVENTION

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A Guide for  
Caregivers



**Covenant  
House**



CHILDREN'S  
AID SOCIETY  
of TORONTO

LA SOCIÉTÉ  
DE L'AIDE à  
L'ENFANCE  
DE TORONTO

# INTRODUCTION

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Sex trafficking is happening in communities all across Canada. At Covenant House, we've been working with survivors of sex trafficking for nearly 40 years. Increasingly we hear from caregivers wanting to know how to protect their children. Given that victims are recruited as young as 13,<sup>1</sup> awareness and education at a young age are essential. This can start at home.

## ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

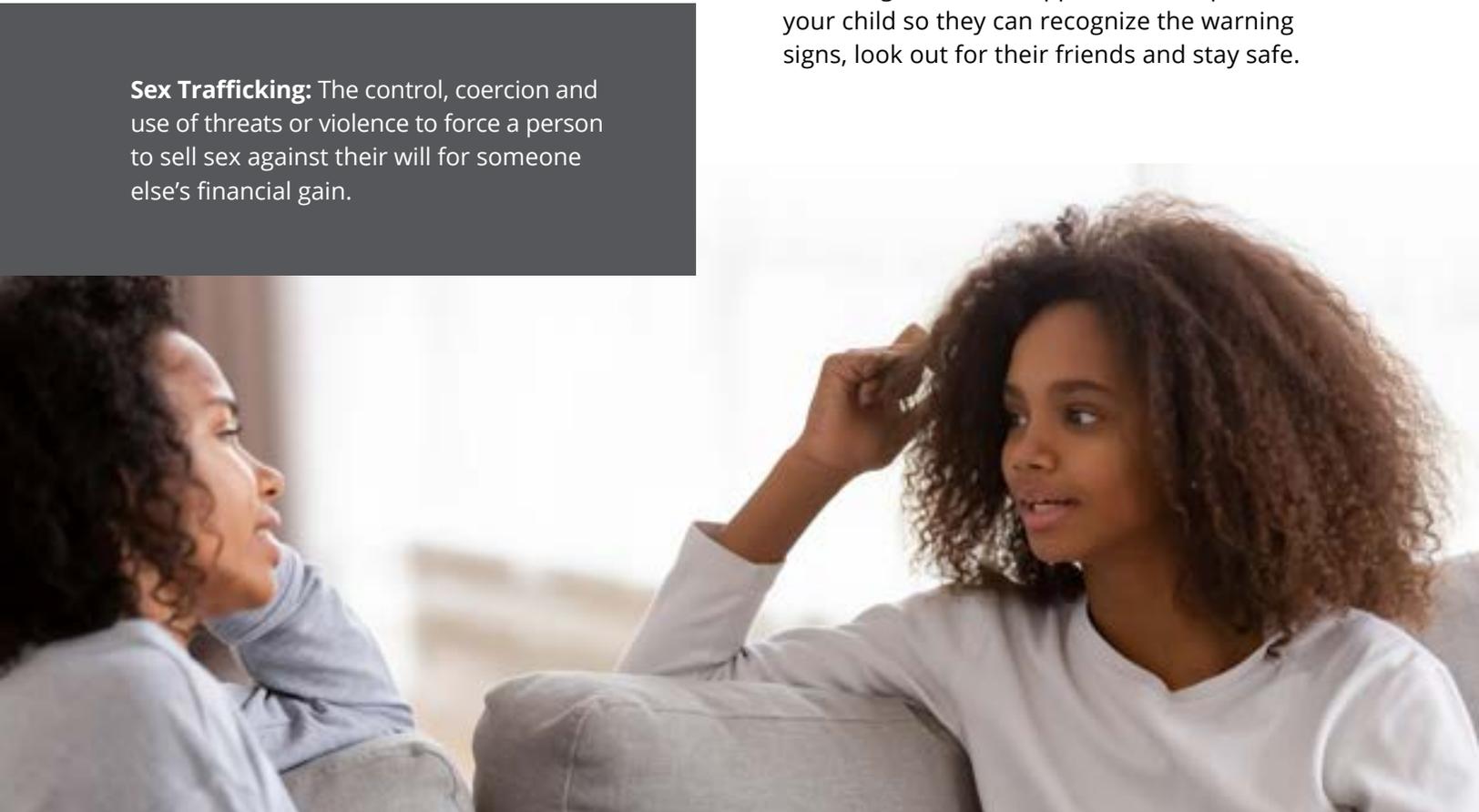
Many people believe sex trafficking can never happen to someone they know. The reality is that young people are being lured online and from local malls and schools across Canada. Traffickers shower them with love and attention. They offer the 'dream' and promises of money, security and lifestyle.

**Sex Trafficking:** The control, coercion and use of threats or violence to force a person to sell sex against their will for someone else's financial gain.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

We know from working with survivors that caregivers can play a critical role in educating their children. Open dialogue helps build trust so that your children will talk to you when something doesn't feel right.

This guide includes information about sex trafficking and how to approach this topic with your child so they can recognize the warning signs, look out for their friends and stay safe.



# EDUCATING YOURSELF ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

Sex trafficking is complicated. It's not always easy to spot the warning signs and understand why victims can't leave once trafficked. Protecting your child starts with educating yourself so you can equip and empower them to recognize the warning signs and reach out for help.

## WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

From our experience working with survivors, we know that there is no such thing as a 'typical' victim. It can happen to anyone regardless of age, culture, income, orientation, gender or neighbourhood. The common denominator is some type of vulnerability.

## TYPES OF TRAFFICKERS

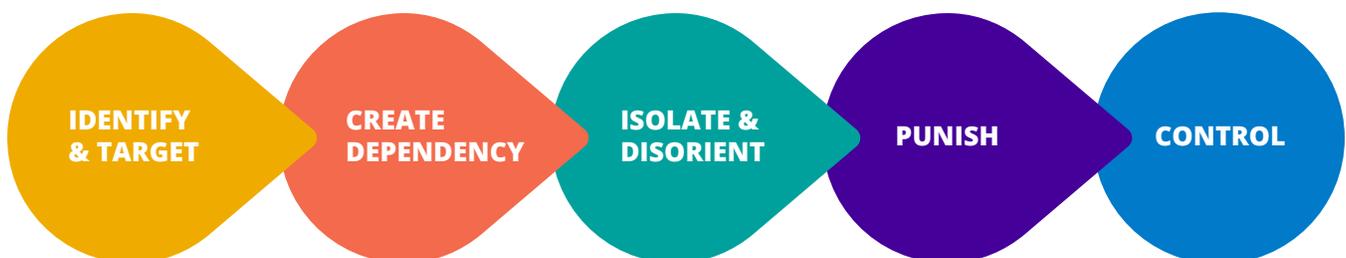
Much like victims, there is no one type of trafficker. They can be peers, family or gang members. Victims are often recruited by someone they know. A recent study showed that one third of victims were recruited by someone they consider to be a boyfriend and another 25% were recruited through friends, often victims themselves.<sup>2</sup>

## CYCLE OF EXPLOITATION

Traffickers are master manipulators. First they target an individual, gain their trust and identify what need they can fill. They shift between acting caring and threatening as a way to maintain control. This ensures victims will feel both loyal and intimidated. They become paralyzed by fear and believe that they cannot survive on their own without the traffickers' help.

**For more information on What Makes Someone Vulnerable and Why Victims Can't Leave, visit:**

[covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop](https://covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop)



## WARNING SIGNS

The signs of luring and trafficking can be hard to spot, but knowing them is the first step toward prevention. If you notice one or more of these signs or something just doesn't feel right, it is worth looking into.

### SIGNS OF LURING AND GROOMING

- Receives lots of expensive gifts like purses, clothes, jewelry or manicures
- Has a lot of 'unexplained' cash
- Withdraws from family and friends
- All consuming relationship with new friend or boyfriend
- Skips school and misses curfew
- Increased interest in appearance
- Does things out of character like drinking or drugs
- Secretive about activities and new friends or boyfriend
- Has a new or unusual tattoo

Often luring and grooming starts with small shifts in appearance and behaviour which can be difficult to separate from typical adolescent traits. Traffickers work hard to lure victims so they can gain their trust and slowly try to distance them from their support networks. It's important to trust your gut if you feel your child is at risk.





For more information on what to do If You Suspect Your Child Is Being Trafficked, visit the Traffick Stop resource hub.

[🔗 covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop](https://covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop)

## SIGNS OF TRAFFICKING

- Unusually fearful, anxious or irritable
- Avoids eye contact
- Not allowed or able to speak for themselves
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Without money or ID
- Possesses a second cell phone
- Poor physical health and hygiene
- May seem malnourished
- Shows signs of exhaustion and/or addiction
- Seems disoriented and unaware of time and place
- Shows signs of physical or sexual abuse
- Inconsistencies in their stories
- Is seen picked up by different cars
- Has sexualized content on their social media profiles
- Evasive about where they're going and who they're going with

If these signs are present, they may indicate that someone is entrenched in trafficking. They may be controlled by their trafficker and faced with many barriers that make it difficult for them to leave their situation.

**It is important to note that victims do not need to necessarily show all these warning signs to suggest they are being lured or trafficked.**

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

The more your child knows about sex trafficking, the better equipped they are to protect themselves. It's about making them aware, not afraid. Here's how to get the conversation started.

## 1 DEFINE IT

Sex trafficking is when a person is lured, tricked or manipulated into selling their body for sex to make money for someone else. A Covenant House study shows that teens protect themselves more when they are familiar with what sex trafficking is.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 IDENTIFY THE WARNING SIGNS

Many survivors didn't understand what was happening to them. Help your child recognize how and where sex trafficking happens so they can stay safe and look out for friends. It's often much easier to spot the signs with someone else.

## 3 TALK ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Some survivors didn't know what a healthy relationship looked like, which made them vulnerable to being lured. Help your child understand consent, setting boundaries, resolving conflict and the signs of a healthy relationship, such as respect, honesty, trust, equality and open communication.

## 4 CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

Help them recognize the tactics that traffickers use and how to protect themselves, including identifying trusted adults and practicing online safety. You might develop a 'code word' for your child to use if they are in an uncomfortable or unsafe situation. Decide in advance the action plan if they use this word.

## 5 ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK HELP

Survivors didn't always know where to get help or were too afraid to ask. Let your child know:

- Sex trafficking is never their fault
- It's okay to ask for help
- They can come to you any time, even if they have 'broken a rule'

Survivors told us that they didn't always know how to describe what was happening to them. This is language you can teach your child to say if they are ever in doubt:

- "I am being made to do things I am not comfortable with, that I don't consent to"
- "I feel like I don't have a choice"
- "My gut doesn't feel right"
- "I feel disrespected or powerless"

# GETTING HELP

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Asking for help can be difficult. Keeping your child safe and supporting your entire family through this process is important.

If you suspect or if your child is being trafficked, here are ways to connect for support and services.

## 911 OR LOCAL POLICE

If there is immediate danger, call 911 or your local police.

Victims of sex trafficking may often disappear for extended periods. If you are unable to locate your child, you can contact your local police to file a missing person report.

## CANADIAN HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

Canada's national hotline can help caregivers to report tips or access information about sex trafficking, local support services, law enforcement and emergency services across the country.

- Call the confidential 24-7 hotline at: 1-833-900-1010 or visit: [canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca](https://canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca)
- To find services in your community, visit the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline's National Referral Directory

## COVENANT HOUSE

Covenant House provides young women (between the ages of 16 – 24) with the health care and housing services needed to recover, heal from intensive trauma and move forward with their lives. We also provide referrals to other community-related services.

If you are interested in a consultation or help with service navigation:

- Email our anti-trafficking team at: [endht@covenanthouse.ca](mailto:endht@covenanthouse.ca) (Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.)

**For more information, visit:**

[covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop](https://covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop)



Funding for this project was received through the Teddy Bear Fund from the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada.

1 Gabriele, F., et al. (2014). The Incidence of Human Trafficking in Ontario, Ontario Coalition Research Initiative  
2 Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). "No More": Ending Sex Trafficking in Canada, Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/our-work/sector-resources/>  
3 Covenant House Toronto, & Ipsos Public Affairs. (2018). A National Sex Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Study