

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What Survivors Of Human Trafficking Need You To Know

AUTHORS Alex Arruda, Mackenzie Arruda, Kaitlin Bick,
Maya Casanova, Atieno Miguna, Karly Paxton

Contents



Intro

- 6 Victim Services Toronto
- 7 Foreword
- 8 Human Trafficking
- 9 The Scope of Trauma
- 11 Working With Trauma

Sector-specific guidance

- 13 Medical Professionals
- 15 Law Enforcement
- 17 Child Welfare (CAS)
- 19 Educators
- 21 Criminal Justice: Working with Survivors
- 24 Caseworkers
- 26 Hospitality
- 27 Financial Sector

Additional Info

- 30 Appendix A: Trauma-Informed Approach
- 31 Appendix B: Additional Resources
- 32 References





INTRO

Tools and approaches to strengthen your practice.



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Guiding Principles: What Survivors Of Human Trafficking Need You To Know 3



Victim Services Toronto

Victim Services Toronto (VST) is a registered charity that provides immediate crisis response, intervention, and prevention services tailored to individuals, families, and communities affected by crime and sudden tragedy.



VST provides case management, advocacy, and crisis response for survivors of human trafficking.

Additionally, we offer youth and parent workshops to help prevent human trafficking by raising awareness of the risks and how to recognize and respond to them.

Lived experience is essential in designing meaningful support strategies.

This guide was developed by VST's Peer Expert Advisory Committee, which worked directly with professionals in healthcare,

social work, law enforcement, education, criminal justice, hospitality, and finance to capture survivor-led insights.

Their voices inform every principle in this guide. This resource helps professionals provide survivor-centred support with dignity and respect.

It reinforces that each survivor's journey is unique, and every professional plays a crucial role in creating a pathway to safety and recovery.



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Foreword



This guide offers a critical shift in perspective, emphasizing the importance of lived experiences.

As we share our personal stories, we highlight the inevitability of encountering survivors and trafficking situations across multiple sectors.

Coercive control is designed to be invisible.

Traffickers are expert manipulators, using psychological tactics to create a false sense of consent and autonomy.

They prey on emotions, exploit finances, make false promises, fabricate emergencies, and reward compliance—all while maintaining a facade of normalcy and fairness.

If trafficking isn't immediately apparent, that often means the manipulation is working as intended. Many survivors don't realize they are being trafficked at first.

The experience can make them feel like they have control when, in reality, they do not. It's important to recognize that coercive control does not follow a single pattern—it manifests in many forms.

This document underscores the importance of individualized care.

It serves as a practical guide—a cheat sheet—for working with survivors, providing professionals with immediate clarity on how to offer meaningful support.

We encourage collaboration across sectors. A coordinated, community-wide response is essential to address the complex needs of trafficking survivors adequately.

"If you're struggling to see it, it's working."

"At times, it doesn't even feel like manipulation—it's so subtle that it seems like your needs are genuinely being met. The experience can leave you feeling like you're in control, but in reality, you actually have no control at all."

"They will never fully understand because they haven't lived it."

"It's something to hold close, share with colleagues, and have in workplaces to offer practical support to survivors."



Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is the recruiting, transporting, transferring, receiving, holding, concealing, or harboring of a person, or exercising control, direction, or influence over their movements, for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation.

CANADIAN CRIMINAL CODE, 1985

THIS DOCUMENT FOCUSES ON

Sex Trafficking—the non-consensual use of a person's body for monetary gain or control through sexual acts endured due to manipulation or force by a third party.

"Sex trafficking happens to everyday people in what seem like everyday situations. It is not always like what you'd see in the movie Taken."

- * No one under 18 can consent to commercial sex acts.
- * No one of any age can consent to being trafficked.



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The Scope of Trauma



WHAT IS TRAUMA?

"Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person's sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships."

—CAMH

"The severity of a person's trauma response may depend on how quickly their body is able to adjust or return to 'normal' following a traumatic event."

—THE CANADIAN CENTRE TO END
HUMAN TRAFFICKING



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Behavioural Trauma

Changes in actions, self-presentation, and ways of navigating the world.
.....
Self-harming or self-destructive behaviours.
.....
Substance use as a means of coping with trauma.
.....
Avoidance of certain topics, people, or places that remind us of trauma.
.....
Engaging in learned survival strategies, even if they're no longer necessary.

UNDERSTANDING SURVIVORS' TRAUMA

Trauma affects survivors in many ways across multiple areas of our lives.

Physical Trauma

Lingering physical injuries, including chronic pain and untreated wounds.
.....
Traumatic brain injuries, nerve damage, and extreme fatigue.
.....
Muscle tension, hypersensitivity, tingling, or numbness.
.....
Sleep disturbances, difficulties with eating and digestion.
.....
Rapid or irregular heart function, irregular breathing patterns.
.....
Struggles with completing daily living tasks due to physical symptoms. flashbacks.

Social Trauma

Deep reliance on a trafficker, often isolating us from all other relationships.
.....
Disconnection from family, friends, and support networks.
.....
Withdrawal from social interaction and mistrust of others, even those we once trusted.

Emotional Trauma

Extreme emotional responses, ranging from overwhelming emotions to complete numbness.
.....
Increased or decreased fear responses, heightened or dulled anger.
.....
Misplaced guilt, prolonged sadness, and shame.
.....
General emotional dysregulation, making it difficult to process feelings in expected ways.

Cognitive Trauma

Changes in thinking patterns, belief systems, and personal understanding.
.....
Distrust of professionals and other individuals who are traditionally considered "trusted."
.....
Loss of sense of self or self-worth.
.....
Heightened fight-or-flight survival responses, making it difficult to assess danger appropriately.
.....
Desensitization to harm, which may lead to riskier behaviour or situations.
.....
Distorted rationalizations, hallucinations, or delusions.
.....
Intrusive thoughts, misremembering events, flashbacks, and dissociation.



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Working With Trauma

Understanding Trauma Timelines

Trauma does not follow a predictable or linear path. Each of us experiences trauma differently, and there is no universal timeline for healing.

As professionals, it is crucial to avoid imposing expectations on how or when we should recover.

Instead, focus on listening, validating our experiences, and meeting us where we are in our healing journey.

Applying Trauma-Informed Care

A **trauma-informed** approach means acknowledging the impact of trauma with empathy and without judgment. As you work with us:

- * **Recognize** that less-than-optimal coping mechanisms may have been essential survival tools.
- * **Avoid victim-blaming**—what may seem like unusual behaviour is often a response to trauma.
- * **Ensure we maintain** choice and agency in decision-making about our care and support.
- * **Move at our pace.** Do not pressure us to disclose our experiences—instead, focus on supporting our current needs
- * **Shift your focus** from the traumatic events themselves to how trauma is currently affecting us and what support we need to move forward.

Practicing Self-Awareness as a Professional

- * **Trauma-informed care** requires self-awareness. Recognize how your identity, values, and beliefs shape your professional judgment and decision-making.
- * **Understand that your** intended interaction with us may differ from how we experience it. Our identity, values, and past experiences influence our perceptions.
- * **By practicing self-awareness,** you help create a trauma-informed environment where we feel safe, heard, and in control of our own journey.

If you are a law enforcement or criminal justice professional conducting an investigation, you may need to prioritize collecting information by obtaining the trauma story.

Please view guiding principles tailored to your profession to implement trauma-informed approaches during these instances.



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SECTOR- SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

How practitioners can play a meaningful role in
supporting survivors.



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Medical Professionals



Many of you will encounter us in healthcare settings—emergency rooms, clinics, and hospitals—at some point during our trafficking experiences.

These moments can be life-changing, but we're often dismissed, misunderstood, or not given a safe opportunity to ask for help.



Recognizing Signs of Trafficking

I "Communications with survivors should be non-judgmental and informative."

We often present with signs that may be overlooked or misunderstood. Recognizing these indicators can be the first step in offering us meaningful support.

Behavioural & Situational Indicators

- * **The person with us** seems controlling, answers questions for us, or doesn't allow us privacy.
- * **We might not** have a stable home address, or it frequently changes.
- * **We might not** have access to our own identification or health cards.
- * **We may struggle** to answer questions about our daily activities or personal history.

Physical & Health-Related Indicators

- * **Lack of** personal hygiene, untreated infections (such as STIs), or frequent medical visits for similar conditions.
- * **We may have** blunt trauma injuries, in sensitive areas like the genitals, neck, chest, inner thighs, or face.
- * **We might not** have appropriate clothing for the weather or location.

Ongoing Support & Trust-Building

- * **Remind us that** we can follow up anytime, even without immediate medical needs. Provide clear contact information.
- * **Before concluding interactions,** explicitly state that it's safe and confidential to speak further if needed. Establishing trust can encourage future disclosure.

Medical professionals can uniquely recognize and support us when others can't. One compassionate interaction can change our lives.



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Creating a Safe Environment for Disclosure

We may not immediately disclose our experiences due to fear of judgment or retaliation. Providing a safe and private environment helps us seek support.

- * **Always examine us** privately, separate from anyone who might be controlling us.
- * **Be explicit about** your limitations to patient privacy. Advise us that as patients in your care, we deserve to have informed consent and control throughout our healthcare experience.
- * **Be mindful that** not all physical symptoms result from trauma
- * **Address physical symptoms** directly, respecting our understanding of our own bodies.
- * **Validate our experiences.** If we disclose exploitation, believe us.
- * **Ask without pressure.** If you suspect trafficking, gently ask if we want information or support—don't force disclosure.
- * **Offer options for** safety planning rather than assuming immediate exit is the best or the only option.

Cultural Awareness & Racial Considerations

- * **If we disclose** trafficking, involve specialized professionals familiar with trafficking for support.
- * **If English isn't** our first language, we should use a professional interpreter, especially if others present may control us.
- * **Consider racial and** cultural complexities in assessing injuries— injuries may present differently depending on skin pigmentation.

Providing Trauma-Informed Medical Care

A trauma-informed approach helps us feel safe, understood, and in control. This requires clear communication, cultural awareness, and respect for our autonomy.

Communication & Consent

- * **Consent needs to** be present throughout our care. Ensure you've asked and received our consent for any procedure or examination.
- * **Be aware of** stigmas and avoid victim-blaming while providing care.
- * **Explain why you** are completing specific exams or procedures. Providing context helps build our trust, making it more likely that we will share sensitive information with you.



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Law Enforcement



*"You will run into this. It's inevitable.
If you think you haven't, you probably
have—you just didn't recognize it."*

Primary response officers are often the first professionals we interact with—during routine traffic stops, domestic violence calls, or noise complaints.

Trafficking doesn't always appear as you might expect. Some of us are too scared to say anything, and others might not even recognize our situation yet.

Your initial response can determine whether we feel safe enough to seek help later. Your compassionate interaction can be our first crucial step toward freedom.

Recognizing Signs of Trafficking

We often exhibit warning signs that can easily be overlooked. Identifying these is critical for providing proper support.

Behavioural Indicators

- * **We may seem** overly concerned about who can overhear us.
- * **We might struggle** to fully explain our situation or look to someone else before answering.
- * **We may hint** at restricted freedom or limited decision-making power.

Situational & Environmental Indicators

- * **You might encounter** repeated domestic violence or abuse calls at specific hotels or involving the same individuals.
- * **We may appear** significantly younger or older than the people we're with.
- * **Even if we** identify as sex workers, trafficking could be a factor, particularly in IPV/DV-related calls.



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Interacting with Survivors

How you engage with us matters greatly. The more trauma-informed and survivor-centered your approach, the more likely we are to trust you and seek your help.

Creating Safety in the Environment

- * **Please inform us** of how to get to the station, the entrances, and what to expect from the interview environment when we visit. Consider meeting us outside to reduce fear.
- * **Ensure privacy**—allow us to speak without other officers present.
- * **Offer basic comforts** like food and water to build trust.
- * **Ask us directly** where we feel safest speaking.

Creating Safety in Communication

- * **Communicate sensitively and non-judgmentally.** Allow us to share as much or as little as we feel comfortable.
- * **Do not pressure disclosure.** Respect our pace and readiness.
- * **Clearly explain** how our information will be used so we can make informed choices.
- * **Do not force** the "victim" label. This may prevent us from engaging if we don't identify that way.
- * **Respect our decisions.** If we are not ready to leave, focus on reducing harm.



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Child Welfare (CAS)



We recognize that CAS workers must balance agency policy, provincial and federal laws, and the best interests of the families and children you work with.

The realities of trafficking are complex, and there's rarely a clear-cut path. You are navigating deeply layered family dynamics, often with limited information and time.

As survivors of trafficking, we know that many children experience multiple forms of harm and may not recognize, or be ready to name, what's happening to them.

Indicators of Child Sex Trafficking

"When someone shows up with curiosity instead of assumptions, it's easier to believe they might really listen."

The truth is, we may not always be ready to open up. But how we're treated in early interactions can shape whether we ever do.

Your compassion, patience, and ability to create a safe space make a difference—even if we can't say it at the time.

Here are some signs that may indicate a child is being trafficked:

- * **Connections to individuals** involved in trafficking or gang culture, possibly using terms like "uncle," "john," "trick," "trap," or "telly."
- * **Unexplained access** to transportation—rides from unknown adults or use of transportation services that caregivers aren't paying for.
- * **Noticeable changes** in appearance—either dressing provocatively or modestly, weight loss, or a decline in hygiene.
- * **Sudden shifts in** self-esteem or behaviour, either becoming overly confident or withdrawing, often paired with signs of physical or sexual abuse.
- * **Frequent or extended** absences from home or school, repeated running away, or increased disappearances.



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Supporting Child Safety While Navigating Policy

We understand CAS workers must navigate complex policies and legal requirements. You're aware that trafficking can occur within families.

Here are some questions to consider when you meet with families to assess whether trafficking may be occurring.

Assessment Considerations

- * **Is there anything** in the home environment that's inconsistent with what's been reported?
- * **Are there any** assumptions, about the gender or behaviour of victims or traffickers, that's influencing how I'm viewing the home environment?
- * **What are my** instincts telling me about what's happening in the home environment?

Creating Space for Children to Speak

As you know, children often don't disclose harm right away. Sometimes, we're still figuring out what's happening ourselves.

Other times, we're afraid. Here are some ways you can help us open up about trafficking that may be happening in our homes.

- * **Reinforce that even** though we're young our voice matters. Use informal chats about school, hobbies, or day-to-day life to help build comfort with us.
- * **Because we're already** unsafe, investigations may make us more vulnerable. Consider inviting us to speak without our caregivers present.
- * **We may not** yet understand what's happening to us. Words like "trafficking" may not be in our vocabulary or may not resonate. Remain curious and encourage us to share, in our own words and our own way.
- * **Recognize that just** because we're quiet or introverted, we may have something to share.

REFER TO APPENDIX B:
ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON INDICATORS RELATED TO
THE CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT
(ONTARIO).



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Educators



You see us daily—whether as secretaries, school social workers, guidance counsellors, early childhood educators, child and youth workers, or teachers.

Because we interact with you regularly, you may notice when something changes—when we start missing school, seem withdrawn, or act differently. These shifts can be early warning signs that something is wrong.

Recognizing the Signs

I "Survivors are the authors of their own stories. They need to be reminded of that."

Remember, vulnerabilities and warning signs can vary greatly among individuals, and age significantly influences how these signs present.

Physical Appearance & Hygiene

- * **You might notice** drastic changes in our appearance, such as weight loss or a sudden decline in hygiene.

Changes in Possessions or Resources

- * **We may start** bringing expensive gifts to school—purses, clothing, jewelry, or new technology—without a clear explanation of how we got them.
- * **Someone unfamiliar might** start picking us up, or we might switch between different vehicles.

Behavioural & Emotional Changes

- * **Our attendance may** become inconsistent, or we may start missing school, curfews, or deadlines.
- * **Our personalities may** shift—some of us withdraw and become quiet, while others become more outspoken or irritable.
- * **We might start** openly discussing sexualized topics or engaging in behaviours that seem out of character.

Shifts in Relationships or Social Interactions

- * **We might start** talking about a relationship that seems to have an unusual level of influence over us.
- * **You may hear** us using terms related to the sex trade or gang culture (e.g., john, trick, trap, uncle, telly).



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How You Can Support Us

Supporting Our Return to School

- * **Some of us want** to continue school, but our sense of safety can change throughout the year. We may need flexibility to attend and re-engage at our own pace.
- * **Give us space** to emotionally regulate and adjust as we settle back into routines.
- * **Work with us** (and, when safe, our caregivers) to create learning environments where we feel comfortable—this might mean a classroom with a trusted teacher, a separate study area, or home learning options.

Building Trust Through Communication

- * **Be upfront about** your willingness to support us and avoid judgment about our experiences.
- * **Respect how we prefer** to communicate and be honest about any limits on what you can do.

Creating a Safe & Inclusive Classroom

- * **Recognize that stigma** and bullying can make it harder for us to return to school. Educating classmates about trafficking can foster empathy and respect.
- * **If possible, designate** a trusted person we can turn to when we need support. A safe word or phrase can help signal when we're struggling.
- * **Work with us** to create personalized learning goals, focusing on small, immediate steps rather than overwhelming long-term expectations.

Educators play a powerful role in our lives. One person noticing, listening, and supporting us can make all the difference.



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Criminal Justice: Working with Survivors



If we end up in the criminal justice system—as witnesses, defendants, or survivors seeking protection—you play a critical role in how we experience the process.

As defence lawyers, crown prosecutors, court staff, and other legal professionals, you can make us feel heard, safe, and respected.

Legal proceedings can feel overwhelming, especially if we've experienced trafficking. Your approach matters deeply to us.

Survivor Safety & Support

- * **Ask explicitly if** we would like a support person involved. Allow us discretion, but remain mindful of whom we choose to ensure they're not connected to our trafficker.
- * **Consider offering professional** emotional support like court-approved therapy dogs or victim support workers.
- * **Provide regular breaks** during meetings and court proceedings.
- * **Advocate proactively if** we need additional breaks or support, especially when our emotional or physical needs aren't being adequately addressed.

Duty to Report Considerations

- * **Clearly explain confidentiality** limits upfront and regularly check our understanding, especially before disclosures.
- * **Explicitly explain when** and why reporting must happen, providing full transparency.
- * **When escalation is necessary**, revisit confidentiality terms, validate our concerns, and restore our sense of agency by clearly communicating precisely what will and won't be shared.



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Geographic Restriction Considerations

- * **Our safety should** remain a priority before, during, and after court proceedings.
- * **Traffickers may have** connections within courtrooms or in community settings outside detention centres, potentially threatening our safety.
- * **Stay vigilant and** actively mitigate any harmful intent from traffickers or their associates during court processes.

The Importance of Building Rapport

- * **Engage with us** initially through neutral, comfortable conversation topics like pets, school, weekend plans, or interests. This genuine personal connection helps build trust.
- * **Allow us to guide** the conversation pace and depth of detail we share.
- * **Prioritize relationship-building** alongside case-related discussions.

The Importance of Transparency & Predictability

- * **Inform us clearly** about each step of the legal process, what's required, timelines, and possible changes.
- * **Explain any unexpected** changes or requirements, respecting our time and emotional resources.
- * **Provide clear expectations** and options, empowering us to make informed decisions about participation and disclosure.

Qualities & Actions That Build Trust

- * **Consistently treat us** respectfully, prioritize our agency, and remain curious rather than judgmental about our experiences.
- * **Pay attention to** basic needs, providing or facilitating access to food, water, or space as required.
- * **Understand and acknowledge** that trauma can create memory distortions. Maintain a non-judgmental stance regarding honesty and inconsistencies in our stories.



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Survivor As Victim: Recognizing Coercion

It's essential to recognize that we often become involved in criminal cases due to coercion by traffickers—not by choice.

Understanding and recognizing these signs can ensure your approach remains supportive rather than punitive:

- * **We may have** a history of running away or experiencing interpersonal violence.
- * **We might demonstrate** extreme self-blame or be reluctant to discuss anything beyond our personal responsibility.
- * **If we're of** school age, we may frequently miss school.
- * **We may experience** recidivism, frequently return to areas known for sex work, or be coerced into crimes that increase our likelihood of arrest.
- * **We may lack** legal employment or have minor criminal convictions that prevent employment—tactics used by traffickers to keep us dependent.
- * **We might show signs** of transience, with no family ties, inconsistent peer relationships, or instability marked by migration.
- * **We often lack** access to personal identification or documents.
- * **We might be involved** in sex work where someone else controls our finances, movements, or choices, and we might refer to this person as our "pimp."

Always approach us with sensitivity, recognizing coercion shapes our actions deeply and influences our openness about our experiences.

Your compassionate, trauma-informed approach can profoundly impact our recovery, helping us feel genuinely supported, respected, and empowered.



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Caseworkers



As caseworkers—in housing support, crisis response, mental health and addictions services, community work, and outreach—you often meet us at critical moments.

You have the chance to recognize what's happening and make a real difference.



Recognizing the Signs

Changes in Behaviour & Appearance

- * **Our mood might** shift suddenly—we may seem withdrawn, irritable, or emotionally reactive.
- * **We might look** consistently exhausted, dishevelled, or, at other times, unexpectedly dressed up.

Signs of Financial & Personal Control

- * **We might receive** frequent online orders without a clear way to pay for them.
- * **We may mention** owing someone money or being in debt, even if we don't seem to have an income.
- * **Someone else might** control our identification or personal documents.
- * **We could have** multiple phones or talk about receiving a phone from someone else.

Health & Wellness Concerns

- * **We may have** frequent untreated STIs, UTIs, or reproductive health issues.
- * **We might avoid** medical care, even when we obviously need it.

How to Support Us

Engaging in Supportive Conversations

- * **Start conversations that** are open-ended and non-judgmental.
- * **Understand that we** may struggle to articulate our situation fully, but your patience and support matter.



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Navigating the Intake Process

- * **Sharing personal information** can be difficult for us.
- * **Let conversations unfold** naturally rather than asking rapid-fire questions.
- * **Offer breaks** so we can regulate our emotions without having to ask for them.
- * **Respect our decision** if we need to pause or step away—forcing disclosures can make us shut down.

Positive Day-to-Day Interactions

- * **Offer choices whenever** possible—this helps us regain a sense of control.
- * **Adjust your approach** based on how we're feeling in the moment.
- * **Respect that our** worldview may be different from yours.
- * **Above all, treat** us with kindness, empathy, and humanity.

Navigating Agency Policies & Procedures

- * **Rigid policies**—like eligibility requirements, cell phone restrictions, curfews, and food rules—can feel like the same control we experienced from our traffickers.
- * **Acknowledge the impact** of these rules and be clear about why they exist.
- * **If policies challenge** our autonomy, advocate for flexibility when possible.
- * **Understand that restrictive** policies, like strict shelter hours, can put us at greater risk. If we don't have a safe place to go, direct us to community spaces like libraries or coffee shops.

Maintaining Connections During Setbacks

- * **Exiting trafficking isn't** a straight path—we will likely make mistakes along the way.
- * **If we violate** a policy, avoid accusatory language. Instead, be curious and non-judgmental about what happened.
- * **Advocate for flexibility** where possible, especially for minor infractions.

Supporting Trauma Responses in the Moment

- * **Be clear and respectful** when setting boundaries with us.
- * **If we react** strongly, know that it's likely a trauma response. Try not to take it personally.
- * **Stay patient and open**, validating our emotions while maintaining professional boundaries.



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Hospitality



Noticing & Responding

"Don't assume someone else will do something. If you're seeing a red flag, then flag it."

If you work in hotels, motels, or other hospitality settings—as a cleaner, front desk staff, door greeter, room service provider, or bartender—you may see things others don't.

You are in a unique position to notice when something feels off. Your awareness could change the course of our lives.

Don't ignore that feeling—small cues can mean something bigger.

Signs We May Need Help

If you notice these signs, staying alert and showing simple acknowledgment, like making eye contact or smiling, can significantly affect our sense of safety.

- * **You might notice** the same young adults repeatedly accompanied by older adults.
- * **Some of us may** stay frequently or for extended periods, often with different guests.
- * **A young person** may be staying with multiple older adults over time.
- * **We might be** dressed inappropriately for the weather or surroundings.
- * **Some guests may** frequently appear heavily intoxicated or under the influence of substances.

How You Can Support Us

If something feels off, even small interactions—like making eye contact or offering a friendly smile—can help us feel seen and remind us we're still human.

Noticing & Responding

- * **Trust your instincts.** If you sense something is wrong, take note and, when safe, flag it to someone in a position to act.
- * **If we seem** uncomfortable, scared, or controlled by someone else, small signs of acknowledgment can make a difference.

Meaningful Interaction Practices

- * **Your consistent, compassionate** interactions can remind us that we are more than our circumstances.
- * **Simple greetings or** acknowledging our presence can remind us that we matter beyond transactional interactions.
- * **Asking about our** day and genuinely listening can help us feel like people, not just objects to be used.
- * **Keep conversations natural** and without pressure. Building trust takes time, and even small acts of kindness can make a difference.

SEE APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR MORE DETAILS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING, COERCIVE CONTROL, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERACTIONS.



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Guiding Principles: What Survivors Of Human Trafficking Need You To Know 24



Financial Sector



If you work at a bank or financial institution, you may be in a position to notice signs of trafficking-related financial control.

Many of us have traffickers who monitor or restrict our access to money, identification, and banking services. You might be one of the few people who see what's happening.

Recognizing Financial Exploitation

Behavioural & Emotional Indicators

- * **We may approach** the counter looking anxious or distressed as if we're under pressure to withdraw money or apply for credit.
- * **Someone else might** answer questions for us, direct our financial decisions, or pressure us into specific banking activities.

Transactional & Financial Patterns

- * **We might withdraw** large sums of money and immediately hand it to someone else.
- * **Our withdrawals may** be frequent and in specific amounts, possibly dictated by a trafficker.
- * **We may attempt** to withdraw more money than usual, even if we don't seem to have the funds available

How You Can Support Us

Trusting Your Instincts

If something feels off, trust your gut. If an interaction seems unusual or unsafe, discreetly escalate the situation or consult a supervisor.

Engaging with Us Thoughtfully

- * **If we're accompanied** by someone, introduce yourself clearly and ask for our name. This can help you gauge whether we feel comfortable speaking for ourselves.
- * **If we seem uneasy**, it may be because someone is controlling or monitoring us.

Providing Empathy & Validation

- * **Financial exploitation can** leave us feeling trapped. Acknowledging our distress—without judgment—can help us feel seen.



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Identifying & Addressing Financial Control

- * **If you suspect** we're being financially controlled, give us a safe and private way to speak with you. If necessary, offer written information about financial resources we can discreetly take.

Responding to Financial Issues

- * **If our accounts** are frozen due to suspected fraudulent activity, reassure us that this isn't our fault. Explain the situation transparently and outline clear steps for regaining control.

Offering Financial Empowerment

- * **Many of us** have never had the opportunity to learn how to manage money. If it's safe to do so, offer simple, clear information about banking, saving, and financial resources that might help us regain independence.



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ADDITIONAL INFO

Tools and approaches to strengthen your practice.



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Appendix A: Trauma-Informed Approach

4 R'S OF TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH

Realizing how prevalent trauma is and the barriers that exist to recovery.

Recognizing how trauma affects every aspect of life and how systems interact with that trauma.

Responding to trauma by using culturally relevant practices and policies and ensuring that all knowledge is relevant to the individual.

Resisting re-traumatization of Survivors.

Principles

- * **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety.
- * **Choice:** Client has choice and control.
- * **Collaboration:** Making decisions together and power sharing.
- * **Trust:** Clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries.
- * **Empowerment:** Prioritizing empowerment and skill building.

Principles in Practice

- * **Common areas** are welcoming, and safety is respected.
- * **Provide a clear** and appropriate message about rights and responsibilities.
- * **Offer Survivors** a significant role in planning and program evaluation
- * **Maintain respectful** and professional boundaries.
- * **Create an environment** where individuals feel validated and affirmed.



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Appendix B:

Additional Resources

These resources have been compiled to complement the Guiding Principles. Click on the links below to engage with more information on indicators and impacts of human trafficking, coercive control, and effective, supportive professional skills related to these topics.

- * [Common Misconceptions of Human Trafficking](#)
- * [Love Bombing Infographic](#)
- * [Coercive Control Fact Sheet](#)
- * [Trauma-Informed Interviewing for Law Enforcement](#)

- * [Sex Trafficking Prevention: A Guide for Educators](#)
- * [A Handbook for Criminal Justice Practitioners on Trafficking in Persons](#)



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Victim Services Toronto

40 College Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2J3

416-808-7066
info@vstoronto.com
www.victimservicestoronto.com



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