



# **Breaking the Chains: Understanding, Identifying, and Overcoming Human Trafficking**

A guide for all ages on how to recognize the signs, find freedom, and support survivors.

◆ Written with compassion and clarity for communities, families, and individuals ◆

***By: Thriving Survivors Network***

## Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the greatest injustices of our time. It robs individuals of freedom, dignity, and hope — but together, we can make a difference.

This book was created to raise awareness, teach communities how to recognize the signs, and provide clear steps for getting help and supporting survivors. It is written for **all ages** — because awareness is everyone's responsibility. Whether you are a parent, student, teacher, faith leader, or neighbor, you can play a role in ending trafficking.

Most importantly, we want survivors to know: **you are not alone**. Healing is possible, freedom is possible, and there are people and organizations ready to walk with you every step of the way.

As you read, you will learn not only about the dangers of trafficking but also about the **strength of survivors** and the **power of community support**. Each chapter closes with a simple overview — quick checklists, reminders, and encouragement to make the lessons clear and memorable.

This is more than a book. It's an invitation:


- To **learn**.
- To **protect**.
- To **support**.
- And to **stand with survivors**.

Together, we can shine light into darkness and create a safer world where every person can thrive.

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### A Call to Action

If you would like to join this mission in a practical way, please consider supporting **Thriving Survivors Network**, a nonprofit dedicated to helping survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence rebuild their lives through **financial literacy, advocacy, and healing services**.

 **Every donation makes a difference.**

Your support directly funds survivor programs and is **100% tax-deductible**.

 Donate today at: [www.thrivingsn.org/donate](http://www.thrivingsn.org/donate)



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## Chapter 1: What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is sometimes called “modern-day slavery.” It happens when someone uses **force, lies, or threats** to take away another person’s freedom and make them work or perform acts against their will. Instead of being free to make choices, victims are controlled by traffickers who benefit from their pain.

Trafficking does not always look like the movies, where someone is kidnapped and locked away. In reality, traffickers often know their victims. They may be friends, romantic partners, family members, employers, or people whom they met online. The control can be emotional, financial, or physical. What makes it *trafficking* is the **exploitation** — someone is being taken advantage of for another person’s profit.

### Two Main Forms of Human Trafficking

#### 1. Sex Trafficking

This is when someone is forced, tricked, or pressured into commercial sex (meaning sex in exchange for money, goods, or favors).

- If the victim is under 18 years old, **any involvement in commercial sex is automatically trafficking**, even if no threats or force are used.

#### 2. Labor Trafficking

This happens when people are forced to work in jobs under unfair and unsafe conditions, often without proper pay or freedom to leave. Common industries include:

- Agriculture and farming
- Factories and sweatshops
- Domestic work (like cleaning or childcare)
- Construction or restaurant work

### Myths vs. Facts

- **Myth:** Trafficking always involves kidnapping.  
**Fact:** Many victims are manipulated by people they know or trust.
- **Myth:** Only women and girls are trafficked.  
**Fact:** Boys and men can also be trafficked, both for labor and for sex.
- **Myth:** Victims could just leave if they wanted to.  
**Fact:** Traffickers often use threats, violence, lies, or debt to keep victims trapped. Fear and trauma make leaving extremely difficult.

## Why It's Hard to See

Victims of human trafficking may not call themselves “victims.” They may not even realize they are being trafficked. Instead, they may just know that they feel **afraid, controlled, or hopeless**. Because traffickers use powerful methods of control — like isolation, violence, or taking away identification documents — the situation is often hidden from the outside world.

This is why **awareness is so important**. By learning what human trafficking really looks like, communities can be better prepared to identify the signs, protect one another, and offer support to those in need.

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💡 ***Remember: Human trafficking is not the victim's fault. Every person has the right to safety, freedom, and dignity.***

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## Chapter 1 Overview

### ✅ Quick Checklist: What to Remember

- Human trafficking = someone takes away another's freedom to exploit them.
  - Two main forms: sex trafficking and labor trafficking.
  - Victims may not realize they are being trafficked — but they know the fear and control.
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### 📌 Call-Out Reminder:

If a person under 18 is involved in commercial sex — it is automatically trafficking.

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### 💡 Encouragement:

Human trafficking is **never the victim's fault**.  
Everyone deserves **freedom, dignity, and safety**.  
Awareness is the first step to helping others.

## Chapter 2: Who Can Be a Victim?

One of the most important things to understand about human trafficking is that it can happen to **anyone**. Traffickers don't look for one type of person — they look for **vulnerabilities** they can exploit. These vulnerabilities might be emotional, financial, social, or even connected to someone's age or life situation.

Victims are often ordinary people — children, teens, or adults — who are struggling with something in their lives. A young person may feel lonely or misunderstood. An adult may be facing job loss or housing instability. Migrants may be searching for opportunity but lack protection or legal support. These challenges create openings for traffickers to step in, pretending to offer friendship, love, work, or stability, but in reality setting a trap.

It is also important to remember that **boys and men** are victims, too. While women and girls are disproportionately affected, many males are trafficked for both labor and sexual exploitation. Because society often overlooks them, their suffering is less visible, but no less real.

Traffickers prey on people's need for safety, belonging, or hope. But it is never the victim's fault. Trafficking is about someone abusing power and taking advantage of vulnerability.

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### Chapter 2 Overview

#### ✔ Quick Checklist: Who Can Be a Victim?

- Children and teens, especially those who:
    - Run away or are in foster care
    - Feel isolated, lonely, or unsupported
    - Spend a lot of unsupervised time online
  - Adults facing:
    - Poverty, homelessness, or job loss
    - Immigration struggles or lack of support
  - **Boys and men** — often overlooked but also victims.
  - In truth: **anyone can be trafficked if someone exploits their vulnerability.**
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✦ **Call-Out Reminder:**

“Trafficking does not discriminate. Age, gender, race, or background — anyone can be targeted.”

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✦ **Encouragement:**

Being vulnerable is part of being human.  
What matters most is knowing that **help exists**,  
and that **no one should ever carry this burden alone**.



## Chapter 3: Signs of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking can be difficult to spot because traffickers often hide their control and victims may not feel safe asking for help. Still, there are signs that can raise red flags. Being aware of these warning signals can help protect yourself and others.

Victims may show **physical, emotional, or behavioral signs**. They may also be controlled in ways that seem unusual to outsiders. Sometimes these clues are subtle, but taken together they can reveal a bigger picture.

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### Warning Signs in Children & Teens

- Suddenly has new clothes, money, or gifts they can't explain.
  - Skips school often, or suddenly drops out.
  - Spends time with an older boyfriend/girlfriend or new group of friends.
  - Becomes secretive about online activity or late-night texting.
  - Appears fearful, anxious, depressed, or withdrawn.
  - Seems coached on what to say, or avoids answering personal questions.
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### Warning Signs in Adults

- Works long hours in poor conditions, without fair pay.
  - Is not allowed to speak for themselves; someone else answers questions for them.
  - Lives where they work, or with many people in a cramped space.
  - Lacks control of their own money, documents, or transportation.
  - Shows signs of physical abuse or neglect.
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### Signs in the Community or Online

- Businesses with locked doors, barred windows, or unusual security measures.
  - People who appear fearful of law enforcement or outsiders.
  - Online ads for sex that feature very young individuals.
  - Job offers that sound “too good to be true” or require paying money upfront.
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Recognizing the signs doesn't mean you confront the trafficker yourself — it means you know when to **reach out for help**. Awareness can save lives.

## Chapter 3 Overview

### ✅ Quick Checklist: Signs to Watch For

- **Kids/Teens:** unexplained gifts, secrecy, skipping school, older “friends.”
  - **Adults:** controlled by someone else, unfair work, no documents, physical abuse.
  - **Community/Online:** suspicious businesses, shady job offers, online ads with minors.
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### 📌 Call-Out Reminder:

“One sign alone may not mean trafficking, but **multiple red flags together** should never be ignored.”

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### 💡 Encouragement:

Trust your instincts. If something feels “off,” it’s worth paying attention.  
Your awareness could be the first step in **helping someone find freedom.**

## Chapter 4: How Traffickers Control Victims

Human trafficking is not just about physical captivity. In many cases, traffickers use **psychological, emotional, and financial control** to keep their victims trapped. This control can be invisible to outsiders but feels very real and overwhelming to the person experiencing it.

At the core, traffickers use three main tools: **force, fraud, and coercion**.

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### Force

This includes physical violence, threats of violence, or abuse. Victims may be hit, locked in rooms, deprived of food, or constantly monitored. Sometimes traffickers also threaten a victim's loved ones to keep them silent and obedient.

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### Fraud

Fraud happens when traffickers lure someone in with **false promises**.

- “This job will pay well.”
- “You’ll have a better life if you come with me.”
- “I love you — we’ll build a future together.”

The promises may sound hopeful at first, but they are lies designed to trap.

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### Coercion

Coercion means using **threats, intimidation, and psychological pressure** instead of chains. Traffickers might:

- Threaten to call immigration on someone without papers.
  - Say the victim owes them money (“debt bondage”).
  - Use shame, guilt, or humiliation to control them.
  - Convince them that no one will believe their story.
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Control is powerful because it attacks both the **mind and heart**. Even when victims have physical opportunities to escape, fear, trauma, and manipulation can make them feel like freedom is impossible. Understanding these tactics helps us see why “just leaving” is not as simple as it may sound.

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## Chapter 4 Overview

### ✅ Quick Checklist: Tools of Control

- **Force:** Violence, threats, confinement.
  - **Fraud:** False promises of love, jobs, or opportunity.
  - **Coercion:** Intimidation, debt, threats against family, emotional manipulation.
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### 📌 Call-Out Reminder:

“Not all chains are physical. Emotional and psychological control can be just as powerful — and just as damaging.”

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### 💡 Encouragement:

Control is meant to break hope, but **hope is never lost**.  
Every story of survival proves that freedom is possible,  
and help exists for anyone who feels trapped.

## Chapter 5: How to Get Help and Find Freedom

Escaping human trafficking is not easy, but it is possible. Many survivors have found freedom, rebuilt their lives, and are now thriving. The first step is knowing that **help exists** and that no one has to walk this path alone.


Victims may feel trapped because of fear, threats, or shame. They may believe no one will believe them, or that reaching out will make things worse. These feelings are real and powerful — but they do not erase the truth: **there are safe people and organizations ready to help.**


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### Safe Ways to Seek Help

- Call or text a hotline that specializes in trafficking.
  - Reach out to a trusted teacher, counselor, doctor, or faith leader.
  - Go to law enforcement if it feels safe to do so.
  - Connect with victim service programs that provide housing, counseling, or legal support.
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### The National Human Trafficking Hotline

 **1-888-373-7888**

 Text **233733 (BEFREE)**

 [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org)

- Available **24/7**
  - Free, confidential, and anonymous
  - Help is offered in **multiple languages**
  - Can connect callers to resources and services in their area
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### If You Suspect Trafficking

If you think someone may be a victim:

- Do not confront the trafficker directly — it could put the victim in more danger.
  - Instead, call the hotline or local authorities.
  - Share what you've seen or heard — even small details can help.
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Freedom begins with **one step of courage**. Whether that step is making a phone call, telling a trusted adult, or confiding in a friend, it can open the door to safety and healing.

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## Chapter Overview

### ✓ Quick Checklist: How to Get Help

- Use safe hotlines: **1-888-373-7888** or text **233733 (BEFREE)**.
  - Reach out to trusted adults: teachers, doctors, counselors, faith leaders.
  - Contact law enforcement if safe.
  - Remember: do not confront traffickers directly.
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### ✦ Call-Out Reminder:

“One phone call can change everything. Help is always available, day or night.”

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### ✦ Encouragement:

Finding freedom is not about strength alone — it’s about connection.  
There are people waiting to help, believe, and walk with survivors toward healing.  
**You are never alone.**

## Chapter 6: Support Systems for Survivors

Escaping trafficking is only the first step. Healing and rebuilding life afterward requires support, patience, and resources. Survivors often face challenges such as trauma, financial instability, lack of housing, or distrust of others. That's why **strong support systems** are so important — they provide safety, stability, and hope for the future.

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### Emotional and Mental Health Support

Trauma leaves deep emotional scars. Survivors may struggle with fear, depression, shame, or nightmares. Counseling, support groups, and trauma-informed therapy help them rebuild confidence, process what happened, and learn coping skills for daily life.

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### Safe Housing and Shelter

Many survivors need a safe place to stay away from traffickers. Shelters, transitional housing programs, and survivor-led safe homes give people a stable foundation where healing can begin.

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### Legal and Financial Support

Survivors may need help with:

- Clearing criminal records from trafficking-related arrests.
  - Accessing and clearing their personal credit to repair financial harm caused by traffickers.
  - Changing names or identification documents for safety.
  - Accessing compensation or financial aid programs.
  - Finding stable employment through job training and education.
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### Community and Belonging

Healing is not only about services, but also about **connection**. Survivors thrive when surrounded by supportive communities — whether through faith groups, advocacy organizations, or survivor networks where people share similar experiences.

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## Chapter 6 Overview

### ✓ Quick Checklist: Key Support Systems

- **Emotional:** Trauma-informed counseling, therapy, support groups.
  - **Housing:** Safe shelters, transitional housing, survivor-led safe homes.
  - **Legal/Financial:** Record clearing, name changes, compensation, job training.
  - **Community:** Belonging through faith, advocacy, or survivor networks.
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### ✦ Call-Out Reminder:

“Healing takes time. Support systems give survivors the tools and safe space to rebuild their lives.”

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### ✦ Encouragement:

Recovery is a journey, not a race.  
Every step forward — no matter how small — is a victory.  
With the right support, survivors can move from **trauma to triumph**.



## Chapter 7: How You Can Help Stop Trafficking

Ending human trafficking is not something one person can do alone — but together, communities can make a real difference. Each of us has a role to play, whether as a student, parent, professional, or neighbor. Awareness, action, and compassion are powerful tools in the fight against exploitation.

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### For Kids and Teens

- **Stay Safe Online:** Don't share personal information with strangers.
  - **Look Out for Friends:** If a friend is in a risky situation, encourage them to talk to a trusted adult.
  - **Speak Up:** If something doesn't feel right, say something.
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### For Adults

- **Educate Yourself:** Learn the signs of trafficking and how to report it.
  - **Support Survivors:** Volunteer, donate, or partner with organizations that serve survivors.
  - **Advocate:** Encourage your workplace, school, or community to raise awareness and provide resources.
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### For Communities

- **Create Safe Spaces:** Support shelters, hotlines, and survivor-led programs.
  - **Promote Awareness:** Host events, workshops, or school programs to spread knowledge.
  - **Work Together:** Partner with law enforcement, service providers, and nonprofits to create a safety net for vulnerable people.
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Every action, no matter how small, contributes to the larger fight. When people speak up, share resources, or support survivors, they are helping break chains of exploitation.

## Chapter 7 Overview

### ✓ Quick Checklist: How You Can Help

- **Kids/Teens:** Stay safe online, protect friends, speak up.
  - **Adults:** Learn the signs, support survivors, advocate in your community.
  - **Communities:** Create safe spaces, spread awareness, build strong partnerships.
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### 📌 Call-Out Reminder:

“You don’t have to do everything, but everyone can do something.”

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### 💡 Encouragement:

Together, we can shine a light where traffickers hide.  
Every act of awareness, kindness, or advocacy helps build a world  
where **freedom, dignity, and safety belong to everyone.**

## Resources for Help and Support

If you or someone you know may be experiencing human trafficking, you are **not alone**. There are safe, confidential resources available 24/7 to provide help, guidance, and connection to local services.

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### National Hotlines

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline**  
Phone: **1-888-373-7888**  
Text: **233733 (BEFREE)**  
Website: [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org)
    - Available 24/7
    - Free, confidential, anonymous
    - Services in multiple languages
    - Connects callers to local shelters, legal help, and victim services
  - **National Runaway Safeline**  
Phone: **1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929)**  
Website: [www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org)
    - Support for runaway and homeless youth
    - Crisis counseling and connection to safe housing
  - **National Domestic Violence Hotline**  
Phone: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**  
Website: [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)
    - Support for survivors of domestic violence
    - Confidential, available 24/7
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### Trusted Organizations

- **Polaris Project** – [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)  
Advocacy, survivor services, and data on human trafficking.
- **Covenant House** – [www.covenanthouse.org](http://www.covenanthouse.org)  
Housing and services for homeless and trafficked youth.
- **Thriving Survivors Network** – [www.thrivingsn.org](http://www.thrivingsn.org)  
Focuses on **financial literacy and empowerment after trauma**, helping survivors rebuild stability and independence.

- **Love146** – [www.love146.org](http://www.love146.org)  
Prevention education, survivor care, and advocacy.
  - **International Justice Mission (IJM)** – [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)  
Global organization working to end trafficking and violence.
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### **Local Resources (Fill in Your Own)**

Use this space to write down local services in your area. Having this information ready can save precious time in an emergency:

- Local Law Enforcement Contact: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Nearest Shelter or Safe House: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Local Victim Services Program: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Community or Faith-Based Resource: \_\_\_\_\_
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### **Call-Out Reminder**

“Help is available, day or night. You don’t have to face this alone.”

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### **Encouragement**

Reaching out for help is a brave and powerful step.  
There are people and organizations ready to listen, believe, and support you.  
**You are worthy of freedom, healing, and hope.**

## Closing Message

Human trafficking thrives in silence — but awareness, compassion, and action break that silence. By reading this book, you've taken an important step toward understanding the issue and learning how to be part of the solution.

Remember:

- Victims are never to blame.
- Healing and freedom are always possible.
- Every act of awareness and support matters.

You have the power to protect, to educate, and to stand with survivors. Even the smallest step — sharing what you've learned, looking out for a friend, or supporting an organization — can create ripples of change.

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### 💡 A Final Invitation

If you are moved to take action, please consider supporting **Thriving Survivors Network**, a nonprofit dedicated to helping survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence rebuild their lives through **financial literacy, advocacy, and healing services**.

💜 **Every donation makes a direct impact.**

Your gift is **100% tax-deductible** and helps provide survivors with resources to heal, grow, and thrive.

🌐 Give today at: [www.thrivingsn.org/donate](http://www.thrivingsn.org/donate)

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Together, we can create a world where **every person is free, safe, and valued**.



Scan the QR Code to support our mission