

Connected for Freedom

The Patients in Your Care: Identifying and Responding to Human Trafficking Key Takeaways



Identifying Victims



Ideal Victim

Oftentimes, we may expect trafficking to look obvious or a victim to act like a “victim”, however this limits identification efforts. We need to build trust and look beneath our idea of the “ideal victim”. Don’t forget about often overlooked populations like boys/men or individuals with disabilities.



Patterns over Checklists

Trafficking often presents through healthcare complaints rather than direct disclosures of victimization. When providers contextualize medical complaints within broader social and behavioral patterns, identification becomes more possible.



Addressing Intersections

Trafficking often intersects with substance use and mental health, complicating identification. Substance use may be coping or a control tactic, as traffickers may provide or withhold drugs. Mental health symptoms may also be exploited to undermine credibility or worsen distress.

Our Response



Trauma Informed Response

The goal is not to force a disclosure, but to create a safe moment, offer resources, document concerns, and leave the door open for future help. Using neutral supportive phrasing like “I’m concerned about your safety”.



Documentation and Evidence Matters

Providers should document concerns even without disclosures, document objective facts (injuries, quotes, behaviors, companion actions) avoid labeling without evidence, and include the patient’s words verbatim when possible to document safety concerns.



Mitigating Barriers

Practical solutions for addressing provider barriers and survivor barriers include implementing protocols, training all roles, normalize asking safety questions routinely, and building partnerships with local victim service providers.

Top Priorities

Speak privately with the patient and use professional interpreter as needed

Create clear referral and resource pathways to local victim service providers, LE, and basic need resources.

Use Trauma-informed communication avoid blame, shame, or chastising patients.

Screening Tools



Rapid Appraisal for Trafficking (RAFT)

“A validated, four-item screening tool designed for use in emergency departments (EDs) to identify potential victims of labor and sex trafficking.”

[Access Article Here](#)



CSE-IT

“The Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool created by WestCoast is a validated screening tool that helps identify children who are commercially sexually exploited (CSE).”

[Learn More Here](#)



PEARR Tool

“The PEARR Tool is a structured, trauma-informed conversation guide designed to help healthcare professionals recognize and respond to human trafficking and other forms of violence.”

[Learn More Here](#)