

WHAT SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT LABOR TRAFFICKING

This document, focusing on child labor trafficking, is intended to be a supplementary resource to TAT's human trafficking training materials for school transportation.

Learn more here: www.tatnonprofit.org/school-transportation.

What is Labor Trafficking?

Human trafficking – or modern-day slavery – is the exploitation of human beings through force, fraud or coercion for the purposes of commercial sex or forced labor. Labor trafficking is often characterized by factors such as:

- Extremely long hours with few or no breaks;
- Confiscation of identification documents (e.g. passports, driver's license, etc.);
- Receiving little or no pay, unreasonable sales quotas, wage theft;
- Excessive or unexpected fees/deductions taken from paychecks;
- Isolation of workers (e.g. withholding information, limiting contact with outsiders, etc.);
- Unsafe or hazardous work conditions;
- Housing at the worksite that appears sub-standard and closely monitored; and/or
- Verbal, physical or sexual abuse (or threats of abuse).

Child labor trafficking occurs in many settings – restaurants, factories, agriculture, construction, peddling operations, begging, domestic servitude, street vending, etc. Minors can be engaged in employment legally, or can experience other types of harm/exploitation through employment, such as when there are violations of child labor laws or a minor is engaged in illegal work or work that is harmful to them. In order to be considered labor trafficking, force, fraud or coercion must be present. (This is important to note as it differs from child sex trafficking, where force, fraud or coercion do not need to be proved.)

Victims of Child Labor Trafficking

Victims are often lured into labor trafficking through false promises about employment and opportunity. Youth are especially at risk as they may lack the experience and knowledge to recognize abusive employment practices or suspicious job offers. While immigrants are highly vulnerable to all forms of human trafficking, the crime does not require the crossing of an international border.

There is no standard profile of a child labor trafficking victim. Trafficked minors include young children and adolescents; children of any race and gender; U.S. citizens and foreign nationals. Nevertheless, several risk factors make certain children more susceptible to labor trafficking:

- Recent migration or relocation
- Undocumented or unstable immigration status
- Unaccompanied minor
- Physical disability, learning disability or developmental delay
- Current or past involvement in the child welfare system
- Poverty, lack of social support
- Family dysfunction or instability
- Runaway or homeless status

School Transportation and Labor Trafficking: Intersections

Child victims of trafficking (both sex and labor) may continue attending school while being trafficked behind the scenes. School bus drivers, monitors, aids and other transportation staff have a unique opportunity to not only notice potential signs of trafficking in the children they transport every day, but also to observe the living situations of students as they pick them up and drop them off at home.

School transportation staff might notice the following in the students they transport that could indicate labor trafficking:

- Missing school because they “have to work”;
- Working long hours; explanation of work situation doesn’t make sense or seems scripted;
- Someone else controls their money or collects their earnings from work;
- Living with or accompanied by people who are not their parents or guardians or with whom their relationship is unclear;
- Unusual living/work space (i.e. tinted windows, security cameras, barbed wire, sleeping/living at worksite);
- Wearing the same clothes daily, or routinely wearing clothes inappropriate for the weather conditions;
- Exhausted, hungry, malnourished; showing signs of abuse or lack of medical care;
- Fearful, anxious, submissive, nervous or tense; and/or
- Confused about where they are or what day it is (because of access to information being so limited by trafficker).

Case Examples¹

- Fatima enters the US on a student visa and becomes the family housekeeper; she sleeps in the laundry room and is isolated from her family and friends. Her employer holds her passport for “safe-keeping.”
- Sam is kicked out after coming out as transgender. They meet a homeless couple who befriends them and offers them a place to stay at a tent encampment. Soon they are asked to sell drugs to “help-out” and are skipping school to meet the couple’s demands.
- Lin is forced to sell prescription drugs by her mother who takes all the profit. Sometimes she runs away, couch surfs or stays at a local youth shelter.
- Jamon’s family is tricked into believing he will have a better life in America by a fraudulent adoption agency. His teacher notices he can barely stay awake at school and learns it’s because of the long hours he has to work in the family’s business.

What can you do?

- Get trained on how to recognize signs of human trafficking.
- Be observant, listen and believe someone when they tell you they need help.
- If you believe a student on your bus is being trafficked (for labor, sex or both) make a report to the proper contact according to school policy regarding suspected trafficking and/or child abuse.
- For suppliers and manufacturers, consult the toolkit developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and A21 outlining a series of steps businesses can take to root out labor trafficking within their operations or supply chains.²

Notes

1. Excerpted from: <https://cfpic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Child-Labor-Trafficking-Mini-Desk-Guide-1.pdf>
2. <https://www.uschamber.com/employment-law/anti-human-trafficking/us-chamber-of-commerce-and-a21-labor-trafficking-toolkit>