

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking happens when people are forced, tricked, or pressured into working or providing services like sex work, cooking, and cleaning against their will. It is a serious abuse of human rights and can happen to anyone. People with disabilities may be at greater risk because of barriers they face in daily life.

Why Are People with Disabilities at Higher Risk?

People with disabilities may be more at risk for human trafficking because of certain challenges they face, such as:

- Relying on others for care or support
- Trouble communicating or getting help
- Feeling alone or left out of the community
- Struggling with money or basic needs
- Being treated unfairly or judged because of their disability

Traffickers may take advantage of these challenges to trick, isolate, or control someone.

Warning Signs of Trafficking in People with Disabilities

- Sudden changes in how they act or communicate
- Injuries, bruises, or signs that they're not being cared for
- Not allowed to move freely or access their own ID or documents
- Acting scared, nervous, or overly obedient
- Having a relationship with someone who seems controlling
- Working very long hours without getting paid
- Living in crowded or unsafe places

Trauma-Informed Response Tips

- Listen and believe them—what they share is real and valid
- Use communication that works for them—like plain language, sign language, or communication devices
- Make sure they feel safe and private when talking about their experience
- Don't assume they don't understand or aren't telling the truth
- Connect them to services and advocates who understand disability and can support their needs

Prevention Strategies

To help prevent trafficking and support people with disabilities, we can:

- Teach everyone—including people with disabilities—about trafficking and healthy consent
- Train service providers to understand disability and trauma
- Encourage people with disabilities to speak up for themselves and make their own choices
- Create easy-to-use systems for reporting abuse or asking for help
- Build strong, welcoming communities where people with disabilities feel included and supported

Resources

- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or text HELP to 233733
- Polaris Project: polarisproject.org
- Lighthouse for Life: 803-669-0110 or lighthouseforlife.org
- The Formation Project: 843-375-6635 or theformationproject.org
- South Carolina Human Trafficking Task Force: scag.gov/human-trafficking/
- Disability Rights Organizations: Local and national groups offering legal and advocacy support
 - Able South Carolina: able-sc.org
 - Disability Rights South Carolina: disabilityrightssc.org