



HUMAN TRAFFICKING: SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND PRACTICES FOR RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH SETTINGS TIP SHEET

BACKGROUND

Identifying youth at risk of or experiencing human trafficking in Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) settings requires programs to use holistic approaches which include formal and informal strategies. Young people experiencing homelessness may experience sex trafficking, labor trafficking, or both. Through screening and assessment, RHY programs can make appropriate referrals and connections with partner agencies to provide the best service team for each young person.

HOW PROGRAMS PREPARE TO CONDUCT SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Prior to implementing screening and assessment practices, RHY grantees should ask themselves several questions:

- What needs to be considered before we begin?
- Where will screening take place?
- Who will provide the screening?
- Do you have the appropriate staff to conduct screenings and assessments?
- What type of trainings do staff need?
 - Do staff know the definitions of sex and labor trafficking?
 - Do staff have a well-rounded knowledge of trauma-informed care?

- What informal practices does your program use that can be adapted to your screening and assessment practices?
- What functionality are you looking for in a screening and/or assessment tool? Determine this before examining various tools and establish your capacity to implement them.
- How will you adhere to your state's mandatory reporting requirements?
- How will you communicate with youth about confidentiality?
- Do you have the capacity to implement the screening tool with all youth?
- Do you have a private setting to administer the assessment?
- Is there any information, personality nuances, or background you know about the client to create a more comfortable or safe environment? (e.g., privacy, information about light, sound, calming factors, etc.)
- Have you taken the gender/age/ethnicity of the client into account when planning/designing assessment spaces?
- Do you have language access services for clients who do not speak English?
- Have you considered the length of the assessment?
- Is the practitioner conducting the assessment ensuring/building time throughout and at the assessment to assist the client with 'reorganizing' their trauma?
- Do you have a protocol in place for youth who screen positive for possibly experiencing human trafficking?
- Do you have a plan to communicate next steps with youth who screen positive?



IDENTIFYING TRAFFICKING

Young people who are experiencing a housing crisis are statistically more at risk of experiencing trafficking than their peers who are stably housed, [according to a study by The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research at the University of Pennsylvania](#). Young people who have experienced trafficking often have unique traumas that require tailored services that many RHY programs may not be able to provide. It is essential for RHY programs to conduct screening for all young people they serve so that programs can make appropriate referrals for more thorough assessments or services, or work with partner agencies to provide the appropriate services for young people. Based upon the needs of the young person, tailored services could include connections with law enforcement, safety planning, exit planning, in addition to services to meet basic needs.



Identifying young people at risk of experiencing, currently experiencing, or leaving trafficking situations begins before an assessment or screening takes place. One of the best tools providers have at their disposal for identifying young people affected by trafficking is building a relationship with the young person and having a simple, honest conversation. Discussions about a young person's life that include information such as the young person's living situation or their partner history can provide an invaluable historical context for the screening and assessment process. Additionally, all staff who have direct contact with young people, from front desk workers to direct service providers, should be trained on how to recognize the possible signs of a young person who is being or has been trafficked.

There are many behaviors or signs that can indicate someone is being trafficked, **below is a list of possible signs providers should be aware of when working with youth:**

- With a person who speaks for them
- Physically exhausted
- Physical Injuries
- Does not have control of personal identification
- Lives where they work
- Relocates frequently
- Maintains large amounts of cash
- Lies about age
- Family relationships unclear
- Abnormal work hours/No breaks
- History of STDs
- Employer holding their personal documents or pay for them
- Owes their employer money they are unable to pay back
- Fear that their family will be harmed if they do not comply with instructions
- Reports working long hours and/or in dangerous conditions
- Involved in illicit activities that they don't want to be involved in and are afraid to stop
- Living in overcrowded conditions
- Many have tattoos that function as a brand such as barcodes, dollar signs, certain numbers, etc.
- Wears clothing and/or makeup to appear older or more sexually mature



CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING AND RECOGNIZING TRAFFICKING IN RHY SETTINGS

Approximately one in every five youth experiencing homelessness are victims of human trafficking. Of those young people who reported having been trafficked, 41% were approached by their trafficker on their first night of homelessness. Trafficking often occurs alongside other forms of oppression/violence. For example, a situation that appears as intimate partner violence may actually be trafficking, based upon the way a perpetrator benefits from the power dynamic. Additionally, drug use which appears to be the result of peer pressure in a toxic friendship may, in fact, be a control tactic or means of coercion. As such, it is incredibly important for RHY settings to implement screening and assessment practices to ensure that the complex needs of each young person are identified and referrals are made in a timely manner. **There are promising practices and factors that RHY programs should keep in mind when completing screenings and assessments.**

- Ensure all staff are trained in delivering trauma-informed care and know how to administer screening and assessment tools.
- Establish a training program for multiple levels of staff who may come in contact with the youth, including direct service/support staff, reception staff, case managers, therapists, outreach workers, program leadership, and any other professionals interacting with the youth.
- Commit to avoiding questions about the details of trafficking experiences.
- Educate staff on the meaning and implications of survival experiences (i.e., trading sex to meet a basic need).
- Reading from a script should be kept to a minimum; staff conducting screenings and assessments should understand and internalize the questions to make the process more conversational and relationship-based.
- Provide regular training on confidentiality to protect the identities and experiences of young people.
- Focus less on asking questions and more on listening to the young person and partnering with them in identifying their needs.
- Remember that the goal of screenings is not disclosure, but rather to gather only the information needed to provide appropriate services and/or make relevant referrals.



IDENTIFYING TRAFFICKING BY USING VALIDATED AND EVIDENCE-BASED SCREENING TOOLS



It is crucial for programs to utilize validated evidence-based tools when assessing youth for risk of trafficking or current trafficking situations. These tools will enhance the capacity of providers to serve young people who are exiting dangerous and traumatic situations without further traumatizing them. It is also important to note that many survivors do not exhibit any overt behavior or physical signs of trafficking. Therefore, providers are required to build a rapport with the youth to learn more about their life experiences.

Below are explanations, considerations, and examples of screening tools, assessments, and universal education tools so organizations can review and determine which tools best meet their needs. Additional screening and assessment tools may be found on the RHY National Clearinghouse ["Research Screening and Assessment Tool Database."](#)

Screening Tool Example

- [Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking \(QYIT\)](#)
 - Validated for RHY youth ages 18-21
 - Screens for sex and labor trafficking

Assessment Example

- [Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measure \(HTIAM-14\)](#)
 - Scientifically validated with RHY population in a shelter setting

Screening Tool

- Identify *likely* victims or survivors of human trafficking.
- Better understand a young person's experiences so that you can provide support, not learn more about their trafficking situations.
- Simple to use tool that should be made available to any staff with direct contact with youth and young adults.

Assessment

- Conduct a thorough review of the youth's experience.
- Obtain the minimum information to provide appropriate care and/or referrals, avoid probing for unnecessary information that may be more harmful than helpful (per trauma-informed practice).
- Should only be completed by staff who are licensed and trained to complete diagnosis and treatment plans.

Universal Education Resources

- Differ from screening and assessment tools because they are typically more general and often address domestic violence
- Privacy, Engage, Ask, Respect, Respond (PEARR)
- Confidentiality, Universal Education, Support (CUES)

Universal Education

- Useful when the capacity to use screening tools is limited.
- Can be used with or without a screening tool.
- Flow of information is from service provider to youth.
- The goal is to destigmatize trafficking experiences and let youth and young adults know human trafficking can happen to anyone and **isn't something to be ashamed of**. This is crucial to trust and relationship building when assisting youth.

Young people have shared that they are concerned about the stigma around trafficking. **Trust, privacy, and relationships** are crucial components of the screening process. In addition, providers should incorporate the following practices:

- Communicate openly about privacy and what will or will not be disclosed to other parties.
- Consider making youths' human trafficking status only available to necessary staff.
- Never pressure or force a disclosure.
- Be present and attentive while practicing nonjudgmental listening.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Read the [Human Trafficking Prevention Strategies for Runaway and Homeless Youth Settings Issue Brief](#) from The Family & Youth Services Bureau.
- In [RHYTTAC's eLearning platform](#), you can search among hundreds of training topics and specific training modules by creating a free user account. After logging in, click on 'Catalog' and then filter courses using the search bar or 'Category' drop-down menu. We recommend beginning by searching for "Human Trafficking."
- Visit RHYTTAC's webpage on [The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Youth Homelessness](#).



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