Get in touch

Trafficking and slavery need a child protection response, and it’s vital to consult with all relevant agencies to assess the situation.

The NSPCC’s Child Trafficking Advice Centre is here for you to talk through any concerns you may have for a child. We can also deliver free awareness-raising presentations to professionals.

For more information, call 0808 800 5000 and ask for the Child Trafficking Advice Centre, email ctac@nspcc.org.uk or go to nspcc.org.uk/ctac

Stop child trafficking and slavery in its tracks

Since September 2007, the Child Trafficking Advice Centre has worked on more than 1,300 cases†, which had either clear trafficking or safeguarding concerns.

† Figure correct to September 2015

What to do if you’re concerned about a child

1 Child trafficking and slavery are child abuse, so if you have concerns, you should follow your organisation’s child protection procedures.

2 When speaking to the child, reassure them, explain that you can help them and that it’s safe for them to talk to you, as and when they’re ready to.

3 Be understanding if a child doesn’t want to speak to you. Many trafficked children will have been threatened and told not to speak to anybody about what’s happened to them. Be sensitive to the fact that the child may not want you to know all the details of their life.

4 Raise any disclosures and indicators of trafficking with the child’s social worker.

5 Discuss practical things you can do to keep the child safe with the social worker at the earliest opportunity.

6 Make sure you raise any concerns you have about the young person’s safety. The input and involvement of carers in strategy meetings is particularly important.

7 Ask whether a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (a framework for formally identifying victims of trafficking) has been made. Contact CTAC for advice on how this can be done.

8 Be more vigilant as to the child’s whereabouts, activities and who they spend time with than you may normally be for a child their age. Make sure your observations are recorded. If the child disappears, the information you have may be crucial to finding them.

9 For support, information or advice, call the Child Trafficking Advice Centre on 0808 800 5000, email ctac@nspcc.org.uk or visit nspcc.org.uk/ctac

Experiences of care for young people who’ve been trafficked

My foster carer was not supportive and told me I would starve if I lived on my own. When I moved out I didn’t feel able to ring her for help or advice because I didn’t want her to say “I told you so”. I really struggled.

It’s not about being given money or being bought things, it’s about knowing they understand it is a strange country and you are without your family. Young people know when the person looking after them cares or not.

It’s important to give a young person time to adjust and not expect a trafficked young person to fit into a routine straight away. A good carer is supportive, caring, and tries to take the stress away from the young person. They treat you as an individual, and explain what your rights are.

Advice for carers includes:

- Foster carers
- Supported lodgings providers
- Staff of residential homes/units

About NSPCC

The NSPCC is the UK’s leading children’s charity that protects, promotes and empowers all children and young people to live safe, healthy and happy lives.

Every childhood is worth fighting for


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Child trafficking is the movement of a child or children for the purpose of exploitation. It is a criminal offence under Modern Slavery legislation. A child is any person under the age of 18, and children cannot consent to being exploited. Children can be trafficked into and out of the UK, and within the UK itself. They can be trafficked by parents, extended family members, known adults from a child’s community or by strangers. Trafficking often involves organised international networks of criminal gangs.

Child trafficking is child abuse. It requires a child protection response and multi-agency working, irrespective of the child’s immigration status or whether they have engaged in criminal activity.

Children can be exploited through:

- sexual exploitation
- criminal activity (e.g., cannabis cultivation, street crime, moving drugs, benefit fraud, immigration fraud)
- domestic servitude
- labour exploitation (e.g., restaurants, nail bars, agricultural work, factories)
- illegal adoption
- forced marriage
- unreported private fostering arrangements (for any of the above exploitative purposes).

This is not an exhaustive list and children are often exploited in more than one way.

**WHAT IS CHILD TRAFFICKING?**

**IDENTIFYING TRAFFICKED CHILDREN**

Children will not always be identified as potential victims of trafficking when they are accommodated by the Local Authority. So, it’s important for their carers to recognise these risk indicators:

1. They possess money or goods and can’t explain how they got them.
2. They talk about going to or being in a place but don’t know or won’t talk about the purpose of their journey.
3. They receive phone calls/social media messages that they are secretive about.
4. They go out for long periods during the day despite not having friends or family in the local area.
5. They are known to be in contact with unrelated adult members of the same national group.
6. They say they are going out to meet relatives, but are not known by professionals to have any extended family in the UK.
7. They are excessively helpful around the house, or appear to have life or self-care skills beyond what would be expected for a child their age. This could be an indicator that they have been kept in domestic servitude.
8. They worry about having to obtain a certain amount of money. This could indicate that they owe a debt bondage to their trafficker(s). Many foreign national children also do not know that social care in the UK is free. It is important to make sure they understand they do not have to pay for things like food, accommodation and clothing while in care.

**LOOKING AFTER TRAFFICKED CHILDREN**

Child trafficking and modern slavery are not terms that most children will understand. Some children know they are being abused but others may not realise until they are out of the exploitative situation. All trafficked and unaccompanied children have different experiences and responses to what they have been through.

Children and young people are more likely to engage with you when they feel safe and feel that they can trust you. They may be afraid of traffickers, which could prevent them from opening up to you or other professionals. Even if they are in a situation where they feel safe, they still may not be able to give clear details of their experiences.

Explain to the child that you have to share information with professionals to make sure they are safe. But be careful not to mention what the child has been through to friends, family members, or any other people that you and the child may be in contact with. When explaining plans and decisions made for the child’s safety, reassure them that you’re not trying to control them, but that you need to know they’re safe.

Some children and young people may also be heavily influenced by religious, spiritual and cultural beliefs used negatively by the trafficker, or they may be afraid of UK authorities. Some young people may view the police and social workers with suspicion, rather than as professionals who can help. Some children and young people may run away from care – back to their traffickers. This can be confusing, as the child appears to be deliberately returning to an abusive environment. This behaviour should be seen in the context of grooming, and all efforts should be made to encourage the child to stay in their placement. It’s important to not take the child’s behaviour personally.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

The relationship between a child and their carer can be the most important factor in helping a trafficked child feel safe and secure – supporting them to overcome their experiences.

While they may have good self-care skills due to the nature of their experiences, trafficked children will often not have family networks, and won’t know the way processes and systems work in the UK. As a result, they may be much more reliant on their carers for emotional and practical support than other looked-after children their age.

There are many ways you can support a trafficked child:

1. Listen to the child with respect and an open mind. It can be very upsetting and stressful for them to have their age disputed or to be disbelieved by the Home Office.
2. Understand that the child may come from a background where they are unused to customs and ways of life in the UK. Social situations and life around the house may cause anxiety for a child who is not used to these situations.
3. Be aware if the child is not expressing how they feel about their placement and explore alternative ways they can voice their opinions or any concerns they may have.
4. The child may have no idea about the different roles of all the professionals asking them the same questions. You may have to reassure them and explain different roles many times.
5. The traffickers may have told the child negative things about the care system, the police, or other officials. It may be very difficult and take a lot of time to undo this fear and mistrust.
6. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing (particularly within the first 48 hours of being accommodated). Make sure safety plans are in place to minimise this risk as soon as the child is placed in your care, and are reviewed as the placement progresses.
7. Be aware of traffickers trying to reach or communicate with the child.