

The 20 Indicators of Sex Trafficking

By John Cassells

Sex trafficking of young women is a very real concern in communities throughout Canada. Many times, the signs of grooming and exploitation by human traffickers are overlooked by parents, school teachers and other professionals. Below is a list of 20 indicators that are common in cases of sex trafficking involving young women. While young men sometimes become involved in the sex industry, as well, they are rarely trafficked and not all the indicators on this list are likely to apply to them.

Not all indicators of human trafficking carry the same weight. Those that point more strongly to the likelihood of exploitation are marked with a red diamond (◆). Trafficked girls/women may not exhibit all 20 of these signs. Also, the order in which they appear will differ case by case, but this list is arranged in a probable sequence of parental observation. A victim of prolonged sex trafficking will commonly experience/exhibit 10 or more of the following:

1. ◆ An all-consuming relationship with a new friend or boyfriend.
2. ◆ Expensive new items such as purses and designer clothing; possibly unexplained money.
3. An increased interest in looking glamorous or sexy: artificial nails, eyelashes, lingerie, etc.
4. ◆ Abnormally evasive about relationships and activities.
5. ◆ A sharp decline in relationships with family and close friends.
6. Unusually tired and irritable.
7. Skipping school or being absent from other usual activities.
8. Away from home at odd hours or for extended periods.
9. Abnormally anxious; may react with aggression or hostility.
10. ◆ Sudden loss of trust in police/authority figures.
11. Drug use or heavy drinking.
12. New use of urban slang (e.g. ho, nigga) and crude body language.
13. ◆ Changes in social media posts that raise concerns; especially those that are sexual in nature, glorify criminal behavior or show off unexplained money.
14. ◆ Cell phone records may show calls to hotels, strip clubs or massage parlors and/or frequent calls to unknown numbers, especially when her whereabouts is unknown.
15. ◆ In possession of key cards or other items from hotels.
16. ◆ Carrying an additional cell phone.
17. ◆ Has bruises, burns or other signs of physical abuse.
18. ◆ A new tattoo that could indicate loyalty to, or a claim of ownership by a trafficker. "[Pimp branding](#)" tattoos vary in style, size and where, on the body, they are positioned.
19. Declining physical health; may seem malnourished, include rapid weight loss and may occasionally binge eat.
20. Increasing mental health problems; may experience night terrors or sleeplessness.



This list may help you recognize signs of sex trafficking, but to be clear, none of these indicators, by themselves or in combination, provide proof that someone is being trafficked. In fact, adolescent females who have never been involved in the sex industry are likely to present some of the signs listed above. However, if your concern for a young woman in your family is heightened after reviewing this document, contact [PARENTS HOPE](mailto:parentshope22@gmail.com) at parentshope22@gmail.com, or call the human trafficking unit of your local police service.