

# 20 Indicators of Sex Trafficking



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, schoolteachers and other professionals.

Females account for nearly all detected cases of domestic human trafficking (Statistics Canada, 2022). Below is a list of 20 indicators that are often seen when young women are commercially sexually exploited. While young men can also be trafficked, not all the indicators on this list are likely to apply to them.



**Note:** 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 are not likely to exhibit all 20 of these signs. Also, the order in which they appear will differ case by case

This list is arranged in a probable sequence of what might be observed by parents/family members or close friends. 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 when discussing relationships and activities.
- 5.◆ A marked deterioration 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 words, derogatory terms - especially in reference to self for other females, and crude body language.
13. ♦ Changes in the nature of social media posts; especially messages or pictures that are overtly sexual, glorify criminal behaviour or show large sums of 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 seems uncharacteristic and could be a 'pimp branding tattoo'. Branding tattoos often include crowns, diamonds, the initials of a trafficker or the nickname he goes by. These tattoos can vary in style, size and where, on the body, they are positioned.
19. Declining physical health and changes in eating habits - may involve rapid weight loss and occasionally binge eat.
20. Increasing mental health problems; may exhibit anxiety, sleeplessness or night terrors.



**#13: Social media posts can provide clues that a young person is being exploited in the sex industry.**



**#18: Trafficking victims may be given branding tattoos to identify them as property of a pimp**

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, after reviewing this document, if you have increased concerns for a young woman in your family circle, contact [Parents Hope](mailto:parents.hope@lifeworthy.ca) at [parents.hope@lifeworthy.ca](mailto:parents.hope@lifeworthy.ca) or call your local police service.

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