



Essential Knowledge for Firefighters and First Responders (EMTs, Paramedics) on Human Trafficking

- Human trafficking is a **crime of exploitation, not movement**, and first responders frequently encounter victims during emergencies, calls for service, or medical responses without realizing it at first. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- Victims may be **injured, ill, or in crisis while still under the control of traffickers**, making emergency scenes a critical window for identification. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[fbi.gov\]](#)
- Trafficking rarely involves visible restraints; control is most often maintained through **fear, threats, debt, manipulation, or psychological coercion**. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- Red flags at emergency scenes include **someone answering questions for the patient, refusing separation, controlling medications or ID, or closely monitoring conversations**. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[fbi.gov\]](#)
- Patients may provide **inconsistent or rehearsed stories**, appear fearful of authority, or show reluctance to explain how injuries occurred. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[fbi.gov\]](#)
- **Any minor involved in commercial sex is legally a trafficking victim**, regardless of consent, demeanor, or the presence of an adult claiming guardianship. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[state.gov\]](#)
- Indicators of labor trafficking may include **exhaustion, dehydration, untreated injuries, fear of job loss or deportation, or injuries inconsistent with stated employment**. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- Trauma responses such as **shut-down behavior, agitation, dissociation, or unusual calmness** should be interpreted as possible survival responses, not noncompliance. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- First responders should **never attempt to confront or rescue from a trafficker on scene**, as this can escalate danger for the victim and responders. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- When possible and lawful, **separating the patient from others during routine medical care or transport** can create safer opportunities for disclosure. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)
- Indicators must **never be treated as a checklist**, and patterns, environment, power dynamics, and patient behavior over time matter most. [\[fbi.gov\]](#), [\[justice.gov\]](#)
- Proper response requires **following agency protocols**, documenting concerns clearly, and notifying appropriate supervisors, medical staff, or investigators. [\[justice.gov\]](#), [\[un.org\]](#)

- First responders play a vital prevention role by **approaching patients with calm, respect, dignity, and trauma-informed care**, which may be the first safe interaction a victim has experienced. [[un.org](#)], [[state.gov](#)]
- For immediate danger call **911**, and to report tips you can call the HSI Tip Line at **1-866-347-2423**. [[dhs.gov](#)]
- To get help or share concerns, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at **1-888-373-7888** or text “**BEFREE/HELP**” to **233733** (24/7, confidential support). [[humantraffickinghotline.org](#)], [[dhs.gov](#)]

Blink3 is the **Universal nonverbal SOS** for victims of human trafficking and abuse, blinking 3 times is a way to ask for help. Please see <https://blink3.org/> for more information, and free courses