

**NCDSS Child Welfare Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST)**  
For Recovered Runaway Youth in Care

**Background**

**Introduction and Methods:** In accordance with [N.C.G.S.14-43.11](#), Human trafficking is defined as a child who is sold, traded, or exchanged for sex or labor is an abused and neglected juvenile, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Human Trafficking of children and youth is increasingly recognized as a public health and social justice concern. In recent years, federal lawmakers have highlighted the important role of child welfare within a comprehensive systems-level response to human trafficking. Several federal policies have defined the child welfare system's role in identifying and responding to human trafficking involving children and youth using brief qualitative content analysis approach organized by open and closed-ended questions. North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services (NCDHHS/DSS) adopted the use of some of the questions from valid tools already in research and referenced within to develop this screening tool. This tool screens for risk factors, force, fraud, and coercion as required by policy ([see NCDSS Child Welfare Policy Manual, Cross Function Topics: Human Trafficking](#)).

This tool was developed with support from Hannah Arrowood, President, Charlotte Metro Human Trafficking Task Force and Executive Director, Present Age Ministries, Hannah Hopper, Human Trafficking & Sexual Assault Social Worker, Hope United Survivor Network, and Chenika Thomas, BSW Student Intern, Fayetteville State University.

**Purpose:** In response to required actions for Title IV-E agencies resulting from the enactment of the [Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022](#), NCDHHS is using a tool to screen for human trafficking in youth and young adults in foster care, kinship care, state, and private residential settings, and other out of home care, including emergency shelters, as they are at especially high risk.

Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-348) was passed into law on January 5, 2023. The law reauthorizes and amends the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), and amends Title IV-E plan requirements (*which are also included in the NC DSS Child Welfare Policy Manual - [Cross Function Topics: Human Trafficking](#)*) to the Title IV-E Plan to:

- Require more communication and details when Title IV-E agencies report missing or abducted children to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), which include maintaining regular communication with law enforcement and NCMEC to provide a safe recovery of a missing or abducted child or youth, including sharing information pertaining to the child's or youth's recovery and circumstances related to the recovery.
- Require the report submitted to law enforcement agencies and NCMEC to include, where reasonably possible: a photo of the missing or abducted child or youth; a description of the child's or youth's physical features such as height, weight, sex,

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ethnicity, race, hair color, and eye color; and endangerment information, such as the child's or youth's pregnancy status; prescription medications; suicidal tendencies; vulnerability to being sex trafficked; and other health or risk factors.

**Guidance & Instructions**

There may be times when it is not clear that a child is a victim of human trafficking. County child welfare workers should be aware of the known risk factors and indicators of human trafficking. These risk factors and indicators are to be taken into consideration when completing the HTST as found in and prescribed by policy guidance found in the Cross Function Manual.

**Risk factors:**

- History of running away or getting kicked out of the home.
- History of homelessness or housing instability.
- History of sexual abuse.
- History of physical abuse.
- History of sexual offense.
- History of delinquent or reckless behavior (involvement with law enforcement or juvenile justice).
- History of neglect or basic needs not having been met.
- History of alcohol or substance use disorder.
- Current or past involvement in the child welfare system.
- History of depression/mood disorder.
- Exposure to domestic violence.
- Family instability.
- Excessive absences from school.
- Identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).
- Has disabilities, especially intellectual disability.
- Immigration status.
- Poverty.
- Unemployment.
- Lack of transportation.

**Indicators:**

- Visible signs of abuse such as unexplained bruises, cuts, marks.
- Fear of person accompanying them.
- Wearing new clothes of any style or getting hair or nails done with no financial means to do this independently.
- Exhibits hyper-vigilance or paranoid behavior.
- A young person with a tattoo which he or she is reluctant to explain.
- Frequent or multiple sexually transmitted diseases, STIs, or pregnancies.
- Truancy or tardiness from school; and
- Unaccounted for times, vagueness concerning whereabouts, and/or defensiveness in response to questions or concerns.

The following risk factors, indicators, and vulnerabilities should be considered for foreign nationals:

- History of trauma, including civil unrest or prolonged community violence.
- Social isolation; and
- Lack of legal status (documentation).

**\*Note:** Above lists may not be inclusive of all risk factors, indicators, and vulnerabilities. Immediate safety issues may include but are not limited to: • Access of the trafficker to the child(ren) • Child(ren) or youth's lack of safe housing or a safe place to stay • Safety issues in the home of the parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker • Risk of child(ren) or youth running away. **If a safety issue in the home is identified, please follow proper policy guidance for reporting.**

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**Completing the HTST**

***Note: The HTST is meant to be used upon the safe recovery of a youth from runaway status. This tool is NOT meant to be used if it is known that the youth is already identified as a trafficked youth and is being assessed through the child welfare intake and assessment process.***

1. Complete the HTST within 24 hours of the youth's return from runaway status. If the youth is returned on the weekend, the form should be completed by the on-call worker.
2. Complete the screening with input from the youth to determine if risk and indicators of possible sex trafficking are present.
3. **Immediately file a new CPS report** if the HTST yields a positive response, if the youth discloses being trafficked, or if there is suspicion that the youth is being/has been trafficked. A full assessment will be conducted and recommended evaluations and referrals for services made.
4. Document the youth's case record in CWIS or NC FAST electronic record notification to the appropriate parties, which may include, law enforcement, parents, caretakers, NCMEC, GAL, and the court. Follow Reporting Requirements protocol located in the Permanency Planning Manual under "Agency Plan for Abducted and Runaway Children."

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**Human Trafficking Screening Tool (DSS-5402)**

Youth's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County of Custody: \_\_\_\_\_ County Case# \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Runaway Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Return: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of HTST: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How **safe** did you feel while you were away from home? (Discuss "safe" in terms of environment/surroundings and people). Please describe your experience.
2. What was your sleeping arrangement? (Identify: Where (floor/bed)? With whom? Did you sleep regularly (8-10 hrs. or sporadically?)).  
Were sleeping arrangements provided in exchange for sexual favors or labor? Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
3. Sometimes people are not allowed to keep or hold on to their own identification, travel documents, or given false identification to hide their age and identity. Did anyone ever offer to hold onto your information to keep them safe, or FALSIFY documents for you, or are you currently in a situation where you think this could happen? Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
4. Sometimes people are **hurt**, **threatened**, or **forced** (Discuss/example what "hurt" "threatened" and "forced" means) to do things they do not want to do to make money for themselves or someone else. Was this something you encountered or were expecting to happen? Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
5. Was/is your communication ever restricted or monitored (i.e., encouraged to stop communicating)?  
Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*  
  
Were/are you allowed to call or communicate with friends, family, trusted professionals, or caregiver? Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
6. Has anyone ever locked doors or windows or anything else to stop you from leaving work or home?  
Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
7. While you were away, were you physically beaten, slapped, hit, kicked, punched, burned, harmed, or corrected for getting out of line in any way by someone to get you do something they wanted?  
Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
8. During this most recent time you were away (missing/runaway status), did you ever engage in sexual activity to make money for you and your friends? Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
9. Did someone offer/give you substances to maintain a high in exchange for something?  
Yes  No  *If yes, explain:*
10. Did anyone take sexually explicit pictures of you with or without your permission? Yes  No   
*If yes, explain:*

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**SCREENING TOOL - INDICATORS CHECKLIST**

<b>Indicators Present?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Displaying visible signs of abuse such as unexplained bruises, cuts, or marks.			
Presenting with fear of person accompanying them.			
Wearing new clothes of any style, getting hair or nails done with no financial means to do this independently.			
Exhibiting hyper-vigilance or paranoid behavior.			
New tattoo (or marking) which he or she is reluctant to explain.			
Disclosed frequent or multiple sexually transmitted diseases, STIs, or pregnancies.			
Truancy or tardiness from school.			
Unaccounted for times, vagueness concerning whereabouts, and/or defensiveness in response to questions or concerns.			
<b>Total # of Indicators Present:</b>			

If you answered **YES** to any of the questions or indicators, **a new CPS report is required.**

Date new CPS report was made:

Additional Comments:

Completed By: \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned Child Welfare Worker:

Date:

Reviewed & Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Worker Supervisor:

Date:

**Note:** For high-risk youth, additional support and resources specifically related to human trafficking should be included in the youth's case plan. A list of supports and resources can be obtained from the link below or located in the Cross Function Policy Manual under Human Trafficking: [Service Providers and Other Referrals in Human Trafficking Cases by County](#).