

TRAFFICKING SCENARIOS

Human trafficking can manifest itself in many ways. Each instance is full of different indicators, victim characteristics, and offender types. Below are a few scenarios that represent possible ways trafficking may occur in schools or with school-aged children. These scenarios do not represent the entire universe of trafficking. Instead, they are used here solely as examples. Education professionals will need to rely on their training, ability to **recognize** trafficking, and methods of **reporting** to best serve Texas' children.

SCENARIO ONE: TEACHER

Chris is a 12-year-old boy who recently moved to the area and enrolled in the local middle school. After a few weeks in his new school, his teacher realizes he is performing well below grade level and his attendance is spotty. He misses class at least twice a week, but never provides an explanation. When Chris is in class, his clothes are always dirty; he is exhausted, and appears malnourished.

One day, Chris was caught by his teacher sneaking some extra snacks from the cafeteria into his bag. While the teacher had compassion for Chris' situation, other students had also seen his attempt to steal the food, and he had to face disciplinary action. The teacher gave him after-school detention. Chris became very agitated – insisting that he had to get home right after school. Through the multiple conversations between Chris and his teacher, the fear of not getting home on time was evident. Chris never elaborated on why he could not be late, and in tears, stated he had to get home to work. After the exchange, his teacher let him go home instead of serving detention.

Chris' teacher was unable to get information from Chris on his work, but the teacher was concerned by his very real fear coupled with his general appearance and the high number of absences. In addition, he was 12, and he was working at a job he would not elaborate upon. She immediately called DFPS to **report** what she believed to be a case of possible abuse or neglect. DFPS referred to the case to law enforcement after it was determined the agency did not have jurisdiction because the abuse and neglect was not at the hands of a parent, guardian, or caretaker. After a law enforcement investigation, it was determined that Chris was a victim of labor trafficking along with his two brothers and their mother. The four of them were required to work in a field for most of the night or face physical beatings. Food and water was also withheld as a tool for forcing the victims to work.

SCENARIO TWO: ADMINISTRATOR

A high school principal had reoccurring meetings to discuss academic progress with a 15-year-old sophomore named Lexi. Lexi was an average student, but in the last couple of months, her academic performance started to drop. In addition, her attitude towards teachers and other

administrators had turned to one of rebellion. Being a well-seasoned administrator, the principal assumed the issue was likely related to typical teenage behavior. But, the principal's concern increased when he realized Lexi was dating an older man – a student who was in the same high school at least 10 years ago.

The principal also began hearing rumors from students and faculty regarding Lexi's sexual behavior – specifically that she would have sex with anyone who would pay for it. The administrator did not believe the rumors. He assumed other students were bullying Lexi. One day, another student was caught looking at sexually explicit pictures on his phone, and he was sent to the office. The principal realized the student was looking at an online profile of Lexi. Lexi had taken provocative pictures of herself and posted them on Backpage.com and other social networking sites advertising what the principal interpreted to be sexual favors in exchange for money.

When the principal asked Lexi if the pictures were of her, she unapologetically said yes. She said her boyfriend wanted her to post those pictures, so she did. She also said the online responses from men made her feel beautiful and wanted. She added that she liked making money for her boyfriend. Lexi showed no signs of physical distress. Even given her outward demeanor, the principal felt Lexi was being exploited – and he knew this type of exploitation was a form of abuse.

Following state law, the administrator contacted DFPS to **report** that Lexi may be a victim of some sort of abuse. DFPS determined the case did not fall under their jurisdiction as it did not involve a parent, guardian, or caretaker and referred it to local law enforcement. After law enforcement's investigation, it was determined that Lexi was a victim of child sex trafficking, including child pornography. The administrator's intuition was correct. Lexi's boyfriend – who was almost 25 years old – had used false affection to lure her into the sex trade. While Lexi may have **appeared** to willingly engage in commercial sex acts, as an individual under 17 years of age, she cannot legally consent to such actions nor should her behavior be viewed as voluntary since she is a child who was manipulated by an offender. The "boyfriend" was ultimately arrested on charges of human trafficking, promotion of prostitution, and possession and promotion of child pornography.

SCENARIO THREE: COUNSELOR

Michelle had a troubled background that was widely known at school. She began running away from home at the age of 10. She had been in and out of DFPS custody and had been detained several times at the local juvenile detention center. Now 17, she was living in a group home and back in the foster care system. Her academic record was checkered with multiple absences, failed classes, and several alternative education programs. The guidance counselor met with Michelle frequently to try to keep her in school and to help minimize the impact of being in foster care. One day, Michelle came into the counselor's office beaming. She had just gotten a new job. When the counselor inquired where she would be working, Michelle simply replied the job was with a man she had recently met in her neighborhood. Michelle did not

seem to have a lot of information on the job – perhaps because she had not yet started– but the counselor was glad to see Michelle taking on more adult responsibilities.

Hoping the job would help provide some stability for Michelle, the counselor was troubled when Michelle began to miss school for days at a time. It had also been reported to the counselor that Michelle had left class multiple times after receiving text messages and not returned. The counselor called her into her office to check on her. Michelle was visibly upset about the questioning and only stated that she was working – providing the names of several cities to which she had traveled in the last few weeks for work. Not only was Michelle irritable, she was borderline hostile toward the counselor. When the counselor asked if there was anything she could do for Michelle, Michelle’s response was that she was not worth helping. Then, Michelle promptly left.

Michelle’s counselor was concerned for her. Though she had a history of academic disruptions, the teacher was worried something more serious was at play – Michelle just was not herself. Michelle’s foster care status also raised concerns with the counselor given the fact that she was traveling to different cities and away from the group home. She called DFPS and made a **report**. DFPS began its investigation – bringing in the case manager and the regional investigator. The facts indicated that Michelle was likely being exploited, so the team worked with the local regional human trafficking task force to investigate further. The law enforcement investigation yielded evidence that Michelle was a victim of labor trafficking. The job she had secured from the man in her neighborhood was selling magazines door-to-door in cities across the state. She worked long hours with no pay. She was also beaten and had food withheld when she failed to obey her trafficker’s commands or produce enough revenue.

SCENARIO FOUR: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Reserved, with a lack of self-confidence, Teresa – at 14-years-old – seemed like most high school freshman. However, unlike most high school freshman, within a matter of weeks after the start of school, Teresa had become known to a group of juniors and seniors. A school resource officer noticed Teresa had made friends, but he was concerned because the older students had been suspected of having gang affiliations. Every day, Teresa would leave school with two of the older students – one male and one female – both known around school for their disruptive behavior. Teresa never appeared to enjoy her time with the two, but she also never complained about them to anyone and appeared to go willingly.

As the officer began to observe Teresa over a series of weeks, he began to wonder about her safety. Teresa’s long-sleeved clothing seemed out of place for the warm weather conditions, and she was hanging around a rough crowd, but never engaging with them. When the officer mentioned his concerns to the girls’ basketball coach, it was brought to her attention that lately she has always been the last student in and out of the dressing room and she has become very physical with the other girls during practice. It was as though she feared being seen changing, but was very aggressive when given the opportunity. The coach had also overheard students questioning if she was pregnant, but was unsure if it was true.

The police officer's instincts about Teresa's situation were only validated after speaking with the coach. The officer spoke with his supervisor, and he began to look into the matter. After speaking with several other school personnel and other law enforcement officers familiar with the older students involved in the gang, he uncovered information suggesting Teresa was a victim of child sex trafficking. He immediately contacted local law enforcement to handle the investigation. Thanks to officer's quick actions, Teresa was rescued from the traffickers – her fellow students. At trial, it was shown that Teresa was forced into prostitution on a daily basis by the older students as a way for the gang to make money. She was subjected to multiple sexual assaults a day and beatings if she did not make as much money as required by the gang.

SCENARIO FIVE: SCHOOL NURSE

Mrs. Johnston was a school nurse at a small, suburban school. Although she didn't know all of the students, she knew most of them fairly well. During her career, Mrs. Johnston had seen almost everything from abdominal pain to vertigo. Most of the ailments she addressed were minor and routine; however, one incident in her school stood out as different from the rest.

As school began for the new academic year, Mrs. Johnston noticed a 12-year-old seventh grader named Amanda. Amanda had only moved to town and started school there near the end of the previous academic year. While Mrs. Johnston did not know a lot about Amanda, she did notice her appearance. She consistently looked very tired and emotionally beleaguered. Other faculty and staff had also noticed the same things and had discussed whether or not she might be having a tough time transitioning into her new school.

A couple of weeks into the new school year, Amanda came to Mrs. Johnston's office. Amanda was clearly in pain. She was complaining of nausea and pain in her lower abdomen. Mrs. Johnston asked Amanda several questions to help figure out what may be ailing her. During their discussion, Mrs. Johnston felt Amanda may be suffering from the effects of pregnancy and possibly a sexually transmitted infection. Mrs. Johnston thought she was misreading symptoms given Amanda's young age, but felt obligated to ask if she was sexually active so she could take the proper next steps.

Responding to the question, Amanda began to cry and kept saying "This wasn't supposed to happen. It was just supposed to be a couple of times". Unsure as to what she was referring, Mrs. Johnston asked Amanda what she was talking about. At that point, Amanda confided that since she was 9-years-old, her mother had been forcing her into prostitution to support her drug habit and help pay the bills.

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, and her obligation to report, Mrs. Johnston immediately called the DFPS abuse hotline where she repeated her story to intake personnel. DFPS promptly began investigating the claim, and, in consultation with local law enforcement, determined Amanda was a victim of child sex trafficking. The crime was facilitated by her mother and had been occurring for over three years in two different towns.