



GREATER NEW ORLEANS
HUMAN TRAFFICKING
TASK FORCE

Safety Planning and Harm Reduction Protocol

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FORCE

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Overview

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this guide and protocol is to provide service providers with an overview of victim-centered approaches to reducing harm and providing safety to victims/survivors of human trafficking. This protocol provides an overview of rights based approaches to reducing harm and increasing safety for victims/survivors of trafficking, and gives resources to implement those practices internally. Given that each victim/survivor has a unique set of needs, this protocol provides promising practices, rather than a stringent set of guidelines, to ensure that each client's needs are met.

Scope of Application

- Create a personal, practical plan to avoid/reduce harm;
- Avoid further victimization by establishing measures that are victim-centered;
- Utilize promising practices for harm reduction; and
- Understand the needs associated with providing support.

Terms

Human trafficking is defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)¹ as:

- *Sex trafficking*: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, or obtaining of a person for a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not yet attained 18 years of age.
- *Labor trafficking*: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Many victims of trafficking do not self-identify as such. To identify whether a person is a victim/survivor of trafficking an intake or screening tool should be utilized².

Safety planning refers to formal or informal risk assessments, preparations, and contingency plans designed to increase the safety of a person, as well as any agency or individual assisting a victim³. A successful safety plan will:

- 1) Assess a client's current risk and identify current and potential safety concerns;
- 2) Collaboratively create strategies for avoiding or reducing the threat of harm;
- 3) Outline concrete options for responding when safety is threatened or compromised;

¹ <https://state.gov/j/tip/laws/>

² For verified human trafficking screening tools endorsed by the Task Force, visit www.nolatrafficking.org

³ <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/sites/default/files/Safety%20Planning%20At%20A%20Glance.pdf>

4) Center the plan around the victim by integrating their values and beliefs, and meeting the client where they are at.

Harm reduction is a practice used to reduce the medical, personal, social, etc. risks and harm associated with a high risk behavior at the individual level. This is a public health approach that can be used as an alternative to abstinence that can decrease morbidity and mortality for a client. This practice centers around the client's needs and values, and 'meets them where they're at'.

Victim is a term that is often used to describe people who have experienced trafficking. The term is used in legal and official terms because it grants a person certain rights because they are considered victims of a crime. However, many people who have experienced trafficking do not care for that term, and prefer other terms such as *survivor*, *survivor-thriver*, and *survivor-leader*. For the purposes of this protocol, herein the protocol will use the term *victim/survivor* or *client*. When working with a client you should always use the terms that they prefer, regardless of your interpretation of the correct term to define their experience. Allowing clients to choose their pronouns and words to define their experience is a critical part of building trust and giving them control over the process.

Promising Organizational Approaches

A victim/survivor is in control of making the decisions regarding their behavior and choices. Listed below are promising practices that can be implemented in your organization's service approach⁴. These principles can be integrated into both safety planning and harm reduction strategies.

- *Survivor/Victim Centered*→ Clients are the experts of their own lives, so we to guide them in the best way possible by providing informed options so they can make their own choices free of judgement, thus “this approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner”.⁵ A victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with the criminal justice process by providing the support of victim advocates and service providers, empowering survivors as engaged participants in the process, and providing survivors an opportunity to play a role in seeing their traffickers brought to justice.

⁴ <https://multco.us/sextrafficking/safety-planning-and-best-practices-sex-trafficking-survivors>

⁵ <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/>

- *Trauma-Informed*→ Trauma-informed care recognizes that treatment plans must understand, recognize, and respond to trauma. Trauma-informed practices require an understanding of symptoms of trauma, the prevalence of trauma in the community, and provides ongoing training to staff to ensure that they can respond compassionately⁶.
- *Strengths-Based*→ emphasizing the strengths of a client to help elicit positive change. This approach focuses on the strength and resilience of a client, rather than emphasizing their traumatic experience as their defining characteristic⁷.
- *Recognizing Change*→ knowing that each client is different and will make changes in their own time⁸. We can never force a victim/survivor to leave a trafficker or change activities, and we should not force a person to change at a certain incremental period or impose our expectations or timelines on the victim/survivor.
- *Harm Reduction*→ implementing strategies aimed toward reducing negative effects/consequences of human trafficking. Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with potentially harmful or risky behavior. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who may be engaging in harmful/risky behavior.⁹
- *Active Engagement*→ making sure to meet clients where they are at in their life and work alongside them through changes. Active engagement is the process of being available and creating an ongoing relationship with the client to assist in the trust-building process and improve client confidence in the process¹⁰. This includes regular check-ins, and ensuring that a client is informed about their cases and care on a regular basis.
- *Multicultural Awareness*→ recognizing that clients are culturally different and what works for one may not work for another. Culturally and linguistically appropriate services are critical to ensure that the client feels safe and confident in their ability to engage with a service provider appropriately¹¹.
- *Privacy*→ building rapport and establishing trust with a client is one of the most important aspects of this whole process. If a client can trust you, they may be able to trust the process more. If you are a mandated reporter make sure to speak with them about this

⁶ <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/41-using-a-trauma-informed-approach/>

⁷ <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/assessment-and-eligibility/strengths-based-approach/what-is-a-strengths-based-approach.asp>

⁸ <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

⁹ <http://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>

¹⁰ http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/321616/research_active_engagement.pdf

¹¹ https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/brief_enhancing_cultural_competence_final_022114.pdf

ahead of time. Keeping confidentiality when disclosure happens can build rapport with the client. If a client discloses something that you're required to report, be honest with the client and engage them in the reporting process to maintain trust.

- *Collaboration*→ Every client is different it is important to involve multiple service providers when coming up with an individual safety plan to meet needs. Utilizing collaborative case management strategies, and working with the client to create a plan that they believe in, can increase the client's confidence in the plan.

Refer to the resources section at the end of this protocol to see examples of organizations working in the Greater New Orleans area that are implementing promising harm reduction and safety planning practices.

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Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is a public health strategy that was initially created for adults with substance abuse issues for whom abstinence was not possible¹². Harm reduction is an approach that tries to make a potentially harmful or risky behavior less harmful by offering alternative behaviors that emphasize health, social and economic outcomes rather than abstinence. This approach has been proven to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with risky behaviors by 'meeting the client where they're at'. Today this process is applied in many contexts outside of substance abuse, including sex work, HIV positive individuals, and people experiencing domestic violence. Harm reduction strategies can be implemented to meet the individual and specific needs of human trafficking survivors/victims, in an attempt to reduce the impact of risky behavior or circumstances they may be involved in¹³.

Having the support of service providers who are maintaining contact with survivor/victim and giving the client the choice to make their own decisions can elicit change. In order to reduce harm, a strategy needs to be put in place that is to be followed up with an individualized safety plan.

- *Informed consent*→ Make sure client is informed of all the risks associated, and know how to overcome or prevent them can provide them opportunity to want to elicit change.

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528824/>

¹³ Hickie, K., & Hallett, S. (2015). Mitigating Harm: Considering Harm Reduction Principles in Work with Sexually Exploited Young People. *Children & Society*, 30(4), 302-313. doi:10.1111/chso.12145

- *Maintain contact*→ Maintaining contact with a client regardless of whether they are receiving services or actively involved in risky behaviors. It is important to offer help continually, making sure they know that have the choice.
- *Provide opportunities to change behavior*→ providing resources and facilitating contact with services can give the client control over their behaviors. Providing opportunities such as education, vocational training, employment, peer support groups, mental health services, medical services, etc.
- *Establish a support system*→ service providers are key to promoting harm reduction, because they have the tools to enable change. Service providers have to be able to provide emotional support and safety free of judgement.

Harm Reduction Approach

Different clients will have very different needs in their harm reduction planning. For all victims/survivors of trafficking, keep the following in mind:

- Avoid judgement and stigmatization;
- Avoid invasive questions that are based out of curiosity rather than helpful to the harm reduction plan;
- Consider different harms that could be facing the client, including: substance use or abuse, domestic violence, trafficking;
- Center the client’s concerns at the heart of the planning process to ensure they have confidence in the process;
- Use motivational interviewing techniques to share information and resources with the client;
- Recognize that the harmful behavior may be caused by larger pressure on an individual such as criminalization, homelessness, or poverty- and that the harmful behavior cannot be fully addressed without acknowledgement of the systemic harms the person may be facing;
- Identify culturally and linguistically appropriate services within your agency that may be the best fit for the client;
- Let the client choose the language for their experience and themselves.

Harm Reduction Strategies

Trafficking victims/survivors may have an array of experiences or behaviors that harm reduction can be used for. These can include: commercial sex or risky sexual activity; substance use or abuse; domestic violence and other inter-partner violence; and homelessness. Here are some example topics to consider when you and your client are safety planning:

Substance abuse:

- Discuss dosage and how often/how much they use;
- Identify safe person to accompany or safe location for drug use;
- Consider safer options when using substance;
- Discuss plans for an emergency situations or overdose.

Commercial sex (forced or consensual)

- Discuss contraception and disease prevention options;
- Brainstorms ways to screen sexual partners prior to engagement;
- Consider clothing to stay safe- avoiding items that can be pulled, stuck, or limit movement;
- Identify potential buddies or partners to work with;
- Discuss how client will determine price and time negotiations to keep client safe.

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Safety Planning

Safety Planning can be integrated into various stages in a trafficking situation: while a victim is in the situation, during the process of leaving a trafficker, and once the victim/survivor has left. A safety plan does not guarantee a victim's safety or prevention of further victimization, but can provide a victim/survivor with informed options that gives them the opportunity to evaluate their current level of safety as well as the freedom to make a choice on how they want to protect themselves. It is important to give the victim/survivor ownership of their own safety and allow them to make the decision with making considerations to their relationship with their trafficker as well as their personal life.

The goal of safety planning is to:

- Remove barriers to receiving support and safety;
- Create a personalized, practical plan to avoid or reduce harm; and
- Build rapport and cultivate sources of support.

Victims/survivors of both labor and sex trafficking have multiple safety concerns that should be addressed in the context of developing a safety plan:

- Isolation or abandonment;
- Movement, disorientation, and unfamiliarity with current location;
- Lack of food, medicine, clothing, or safe shelter;
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, or other crimes;
- Confiscation of money and/or important documents;
- Physical harm or violence to the victim(s) or others;

- Abduction, kidnapping, confinement, restraint;
- Emotional harm and lack of support system.

Safety Planning: Implementation

This safety plan represents a desire or need to increase safety and prepare in advance for the possibility of violence. This safety plan is informal and can be personalized to the individual and their situation. All of these are questions you can ask the client you're working with in order to prepare for whatever safety concerns they may have. Safety planning can be used to address the physical and emotional well-being of a client.

Remember that clients are in control of their own safety. Let them make decisions free of judgement, and don't ask them to give any more details than they are willing to provide.

Considerations for service providers working with clients¹⁴:

- Don't assume gender, sexual orientation, class, access to resources, language, or culture of a client;
- Everyone is at a different stage in their process, healing is not linear and may happen on a different timeline and will likely involve relapse;
- Ambivalence and negativity toward the process is a normal reaction;
- Minimization is normal- if a client is expressing fear take that very seriously, and also recognize a client may minimize the harm they could be facing;
- Avoid promising or being overly optimistic about a client's safety;
- Self-determination and client choice in the process is a critical component of building trust;
- Trauma affects memory, cognition, and a person's ability to make decisions;
- Avoid demonizing the trafficker, abuser, or person causing harm in the client's life;
- Don't judge a person's coping mechanisms or decisions ;
- Be genuine about your concern, but don't be patronizing or infantilizing toward the client;
- Recognize that service providers are not responsible for a client's safety and life.

¹⁴ Adapted from the NOFJC's Domestic Violence/ Sexual Assault Safety Planning process

General Safety Plan: Adult Victims/Survivors of Human Trafficking

The following are general safety planning questions that you can use to work with clients and identify a safety plan.

1. “What are you going to do in the next hour to stay safe?”
2. “I hear that you want to leave tonight, where are you going to stay to be safe?”
3. “If your boyfriend (exploiter/pimp/trafficker) is your safest option of where to stay tonight, what can you do to stay safe?”
4. “How might you like things to be different?”
5. “When you go to visit that person what will you say if they ask you to come back?”
6. “I know last week you were struggling with wanting to go back to your partner, where are you at this week?”
7. “If you are in need of support, who are the people you can call?”
8. “What are some ways that will help you in being safe if you go back?”
9. “What are some strategies that have kept you safe so far?”
10. “What are some supports that have kept you from going back?”
11. “What are some things that relax you- even when things are stressful?”
12. “What places can you go to nearby in the event you end up in an unsafe situation?”
What are you going to do if you decide to leave?
13. “What tools are available to help screen if someone is a safe person to be with or not?”
14. What do you believe are some of your strengths?
15. How have you been able to keep yourself safe in the past?
16. Who are some of your support people? Who supports you being here?
17. What are some ways you can you keep the location of shelter (advocacy center, etc.) confidential?
18. Is there anyone in the community that feels unsafe to you? How can we identify them and are there steps you would like staff to take?
19. What parts of town, transportation lines, or places could be uncomfortable, unsafe, or dangerous for you?
20. Have you ever had any gang involvement? If so, which gang(s)?
21. What are some things that make you feel unsafe? How could you tell staff if/when you do not feel safe?
22. What do you need from staff to feel safe? From your case manager/advocate? From your community?

Safety Tips: Leaving a Trafficking Situation

In some cases, leaving or attempting to leave a trafficking situation may increase the risk of violence. It is important for victims/survivors to trust their judgement and ensure their safety.

- If you are ever in immediate danger, the quickest way to access help is to call 9-1-1.
- If you are unsure of your current location, try to determine any indication of your locality such as street signs outside the residence/place of employment or newspapers/ magazines/ mail that may have the address listed.
- Plan an escape route or exit strategy and rehearse it if possible.
- Keep any important documents on or near you to be ready for immediate departure.
- Prepare a bag with any important documents/items and a change of clothes.
- Keep a written copy of important numbers on you at all times in case your phone is taken or destroyed at any point. Memorize important numbers and hotlines if possible.
- If you have children who are also in the trafficking situation, explain to them that it isn't their responsibility to protect you, make sure that they know how to call someone for help, where to hide during a violent incident, and practice your plan of departure with them.

Safety Tips: After Exiting a Trafficking Situation

- Keep your residence locked at all times. Consider changing your locks if the controller has a key or may be able to access your residence.
- If moving to a new residence, only disclose your address to people that you trust
- Consider taking out a protective order against the controller so that he/she will be legally prohibited from contacting you.
- If the controller has made unwanted contact, document the contact made (calls, texts, showing up at your work/home, etc.) and save any voicemails and text messages that are threatening in nature.
- Consider changing your phone number to a number unknown by the controller. Most cell phone carriers will allow you to change numbers at no cost, but will seldom allow you to block a particular number.
- Keep a cell phone or emergency phone on you at all times.
- If you feel comfortable, tell your neighbors/employer/friends to call the police if they see the controller near, in, or around the residence/you.
- Develop a special signal (lights flickering on and off, code word, code text message, hand signal, etc.) to use with a trusted neighbor, relative, friend or service provider to notify them that you are in danger or need help. This can be the same safety signal used while exiting the situation or something new.
- If you have children who were also in the trafficking situation, create a safety plan with them making sure they know what do if the controller makes unwanted contact and how to call someone for help.
- If your child still has ongoing contact with the controller, discuss with your child a safety plan and how to keep themselves safe while with the controller.

Safety Planning & Harm Reduction Protocol:

- First 24 hours: Complete intake process, and conduct initial safety plan to address the client's immediate needs for safety
- First week: Identify potential harms the client may be facing, and assess if a harm reduction plan should be implemented for the client
- Ongoing:
 - *Implement a safety plan at each meeting with the client*, or on a regular basis if you are seeing the client daily. The client will have different safety needs based on changes in situation and changes in the client's needs.
 - *Utilize an information sharing document*, such as the "Task Force Information Sharing Protocol" when sharing any information with other service providers or enforcement to maintain the client's confidentiality.
 - *Prepare for a potential relapse*, return to dangerous situation, and other setbacks with your client. This is a normal part of the recovery process. By preparing for a process that won't be linear, you'll be able to assist the client with each recovery in a non-judging, harm-reducing way.

Harm Reduction and Safety Planning Resources

- “Personalized Safety Plan for Adults”. Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline. https://www.wrcnrv.org/content/uploads/2017/05/safetyPlan_adult.pdf
- *Safety Planning and Prevention for Human Trafficking At-A-Glance*. Polaris Project: 2011. <http://traffickingresourcecenter.org/sites/default/files/Safety%20Planning%20At%20A%20Glance.pdf>
- *Safety Planning and Best Practices for Sex Trafficking Survivors*. Multnomah County Department of Community Justice. <https://multco.us/sextrafficking/safety-planning-and-best-practices-sex-trafficking-survivors>
- *Human traffic, human rights: redefining victim protection*. Anti-Slavery International: 2002. http://antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/hum_traff_hum_rights_redef_vic_protec_final_full.pdf
- “Pathway to Safety: What is a safety plan?” National Domestic Violence Hotline. <https://thehotline.org/help/path-to-safety/>
- Safety Planning for Sex Workers”. National Domestic Violence Hotline: Aug 15 2017. <https://thehotline.org/2017/08/15/safety-planning-with-sex-workers/>
- Harm Reduction. https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/harmreductionFS_Apr10.pdf
- Harm Reduction for Individuals in the Sex Industry. Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) Chicago: https://www.heartlandalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2016/07/swop_presentation.pdf
- Trauma-informed Approaches Guide: http://www.traumacenter.org/clients/projectreach/H-O%20Trauma-Informed%20Case%20Study_final.pdf

- *Greater New Orleans organizations utilizing promising harm reduction and safety planning practices:*

Sexual Trauma, Awareness, and Response (STAR)

Mission: To support survivors of sexual trauma, improve systems response, and create social change to end sexual violence.

Website: www.star.ngo

Hotline: 855-435-STAR

New Orleans Family Justice Center (NOFJC)

Mission: New Orleans Family Justice Center is a partnership of agencies dedicated to ending family violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and stalking through prevention and coordinated response by providing comprehensive client-centered, empowerment services in a single location.

Website: www.nofjc.org

24 hour crisis hotline: 504-866-9554

Louisiana statewide hotline: 1-888-411-1333

Women with a Vision:

Mission: WWAV is a community-based non-profit founded by a grassroots collective of African-American women in response to the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. Created by and for women of color, WWAV is a social justice non-profit that addresses issues faced by women within our community and region. Major areas of focus include: sex worker rights, drug policy reform, HIV positive women's advocacy, and reproductive justice outreach.

Website: www.wwav-no.org

Phone: 504-301-0428