

The Office for Victims of Crime Human Trafficking Collective

Shifting Current Practices in the Anti-Trafficking Field

The "Red Flag" Framework

The Purpose of This Resource

The Human Trafficking Collective (HTC) developed this resource to encourage the anti-trafficking field in moving away from using **red flags** as identifiers and consider alternatives to improve identification and responses to incidences of trafficking.

All anti-trafficking professionals can use this resource to improve person-centered, culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and community-specific identification and outreach in their communities. This resource promotes building relationships with survivors and referral partners. It encourages difficult conversations about challenges and inconsistencies when **red flags** are used as an identification tool. Our goal is to improve the individual, agency, and system's response to people with lived experience.

*We are responsible for
evolving to support the
survivors we serve.*

The Use Of **Red Flags** and How We Shift

Red flags, also called indicators, symptoms, and signs, have been used as a tool to help identify survivors of human trafficking. Throughout the anti-trafficking movement, professionals in the field and the general public have been taught there is a specific list of indicators that inform you if someone may be a victim or perpetrator of human trafficking.

Recognizing **red flags** were once believed to be the best way to educate about human trafficking and identify survivors, we have since learned that vulnerability to trafficking and trafficking situations can look very different and is often based upon many factors (e.g., financial position, culture, and geographical location). This knowledge calls for a more comprehensive approach to identifying and meeting the needs of survivors.

Red flags are rooted in discriminatory assumptions that rely on stereotypes which are foundationally racist, gendered, and poverty-shaming in nature. Because of this, reliance on **red flags** has made it hard for providers to reach and support all survivors because they fail to convey the current context and nuance of the crime.

We must ensure that our approach to identifying and responding to trafficking fosters access, inclusivity, trust, and belonging. To do this, we acknowledge that solely using **red flags** as tools for identification:

- Leads to training that can have negative impacts on agencies and misidentification of survivors.
- Fails to build intentional relationships with those we hope to serve because we are not asking the right questions.
- May re-traumatize survivors by passing judgment on their experiences.
- Sees people as a checklist rather than a whole person, which will not allow all of their needs to be identified.
- Is not an adequate screening or assessment methodology to use.

We can start this shift by:

- Learning about the impact of generational, community, and historical trauma on individuals.
- Identifying systematic barriers to address challenges in services and support.
- Changing the **red flag** framework in our screening and training practices.

OVC HTC created this document in partnership with the expertise of the National Survivor Network (Chris Ash), Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (Wade Arvizu), ICF staff (Crystal Bennett), and HTC staff (Aubrey Lloyd, Katie Shaver, Morgan Rumpel-Whiting, and Suleman Masood)

A Shift in Framework

Red flags are often used in two ways: training and screening. Shifting how we talk about red flags in training, screening, and with partners increases identification and creates more pathways to healing and justice for survivors. Using the red flag framework approach is a learned skill that we all must work to change. We must dedicate time and intention to understanding the community- and society-level conditions that create risk factors for individuals. Below are some tips for implementing change in your training and screening practices to enhance data-driven knowledge and more effective responses to human trafficking.

Training

Training is a way to educate and build understanding around what human trafficking is, the scope of how it impacts survivors in communities, and your role in responding. When considering your training objectives, ask yourself: "How am I framing the most current context of trafficking?" If we shift the framework and our partners and communities think about trafficking differently, we can increase identification and change responses to trafficking to better serve those in need. Consider discussing topics that specifically apply to the training audience and are based on current data and best practices such as:

- Identifying barriers to survivors accessing resources
- Engaging and incorporating a diverse range of survivor expertise
- Increasing specialized training to build skills and awareness for partners
- Building community relationships and increasing service options for victim safety

For additional information on training best practices, you can visit OVC HTC's website at www.ovchtc.com or check out our [Developing Effective Human Trafficking Training Materials](#).

Screening

Screening is a process used to signal whether or not a person needs additional support, referrals, and/or a more thorough assessment. As a reminder, OVC grantees have time to confirm eligibility and with that in mind, initial screening should focus on asking questions that allow for relationship and rapport building to better understand a person's immediate needs. For example, do we need to know when the last time an individual exchanged sex for food or shelter when they walk through our doors, or do we need to know if they are hungry or need shelter?

Consider these questions as we shift away from the red flag framework:

- Is the question I am asking informing me whether or not an individual is experiencing trafficking, and is it my professional or community role to know that now?
- Would asking these questions help build trust and rapport within my role and my partners' roles as applicable?
- How do my questions provide the most informed response to an individual's immediate needs?
- Is the question I am asking duplicative across community partners? i.e., if I ask a question that our medical provider will also ask, am I causing re-traumatization to the survivor by having them repeating sensitive information and/or creating challenges for engagement with my partners?

Asking these questions when thinking about the implications of using red flags can help us understand the "why" we are moving beyond this approach. To think more about the impact of our initial screening questions refer to the [Supporting the Whole Person Pre-Screening Guide Accompaniment](#).

For more information on screening tools:

- [PEARR Tool | HEAL Trafficking: Health, Education, Advocacy, Linkage](#)
- [Adult Human Trafficking Screening Tool | National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking](#)
- [Trafficking Victim Identification Tool | Vera Institute of Justice](#)
- [CAST Screening Questions for SS Providers](#)

Reminders

Staying informed about recent trends and current best practices will ensure you are effectively supporting survivors of human trafficking. Consider how you are learning about human trafficking and current trends in your community and with resources you are using/sharing, how do you ensure they are relevant and factual?

To dive deeper into these concepts and resources available to you, connect with the OVC Human Trafficking Collective at www.ovchtc.com.

To learn more about resource relevancy: [Key Considerations for Developing and Assessing Human Trafficking Resources](#)