



Barriers That Prevent Identification

Individuals who are at risk of trafficking or who have experienced trafficking are often not recognized for various reasons. These barriers to identification fall into two categories: individual-related and provider-related.

The goal is to understand the individual's circumstances and connect them to the most appropriate services and resources. The goal is not to disclose trafficking. Many individuals will not disclose due to fear, shame, and/or lack of awareness about trafficking.



Provider-Related Barriers

Provider-related barriers reflect the provider's ability to (1) recognize and understand the potential indicators of trafficking and the individual's unique needs and (2) connect the individual to resources that will meet those needs. Common provider-related barriers include:

- Lacks knowledge about human trafficking
- Has preconceived notions of how an individual who has experienced trafficking will behave or look
- "Checks off boxes" without seeing the full situation
- Inadequate understanding of federal, state, and tribal human trafficking laws
- Fears violating Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) rules
- Lacks trauma-informed care training
- Does not believe it is their role to get involved
- Lacks access to neutral, professional interpreters
- Thinks that asking will be time-consuming or too complex
- Feels the individual is unresponsive or hostile to questioning or tells a rehearsed story
- Lacks information about good referral options
- Attributes behavior(s) to harmful cultural stereotypes
- Misidentifies the case
- Presence of bias or victim-blaming attitudes

Individual-Related Barriers

Individual-related barriers may result from the individual's culture, language, past interactions with medical personnel or law enforcement, educational background, and/or mental or physical health. Common individual-related barriers include:

- Lacks awareness that what they are experiencing is trafficking
- Lacks understanding of victim and legal rights
- Lacks identification and other records
- Has a language barrier
- Fears deportation or law enforcement
- Fears that reporting could lead to being returned to an abusive home, jail, or foster care placement
- Feels complicit in an illegal act
- Fears that traffickers will cause harm to self, family, or loved ones
- Has limited literacy and education that hinders ability to communicate
- Has experienced trauma bonding with the trafficker or other victims
- Distrusts the provider or those in authority
- Feels hopeless and helpless
- Feels shame or guilt