

# Human Trafficking

Recognition and Referral

*“We are failing because we have not identified human trafficking as the public health issue it is.*

*You see, trafficking is not a short-term affliction—it affects a survivor's whole life, families and even entire communities.”*

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MARGE AUX GRAY,  
TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR





**TAKE  
CARE OF  
YOURSELF**



“If you were to throw a frog in a pot of boiling water, it would jump out immediately. However, if you were to put a frog in a pot of regular water, and put it on the stove, allowing it to heat gradually, the frog would cook to death. That is human trafficking. Women, young men, and children, are sitting in what appears to be regular water to them. However, it is heating up all around them. If we do not start helping them identify when the water is getting hot, they will “cook to death.”

It is crucial to bring awareness and prevention to our culture so that our vulnerable people can jump out before there is further damage.”

Bender, R (2019). *Roadmap to Redemption*. Independently published.

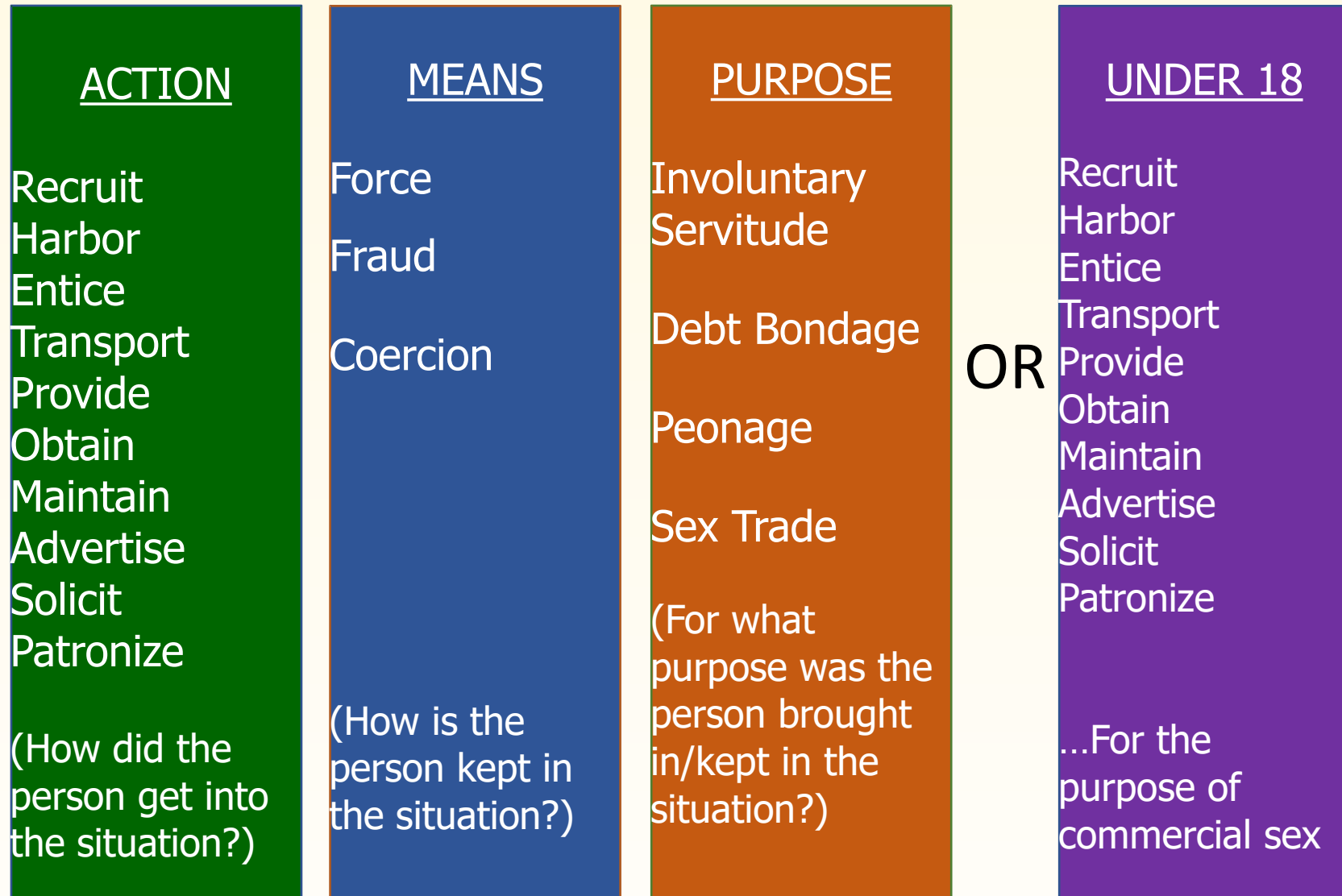
# Human Trafficking Defined

Human trafficking is a crime that involves the exploitation of a person for the purpose of forced labor or commercial sex through the use of force, fraud or coercion.

Since minors cannot consent to commercial sex, you do not need the elements of force, fraud, or coercion for sex trafficking of a minor.



# The Elements of Human Trafficking – AMP





# What is Force, Fraud and Coercion?

Force, Fraud, Coercion are the MEANS to which an individual is trafficked

How were the victims kept in the trafficking situation?

## Force

- Physical assault
- Sexual assault & Rape
- Confinement
- Kidnapping
- Deprivation of basic needs – food, water, sleep
- Facilitated drug use

## Fraud

- Withholding of wages
- Fraudulent employment contracts
- False Promises
  - Love, marriage
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Living conditions

## Coercion

- Threats to self, loved ones, pets
- Threats of arrest, deportation
- Blackmail
- Debt bondage
- Withholding of legal documents
- Other psychological manipulation & control



“Sex trafficking survivors face unique challenges in accessing healthcare, including fragile trust in healthcare professionals, stigma, and fear of judgment” (Lorvinsky et al., 2023; K. Price et al., 2021)

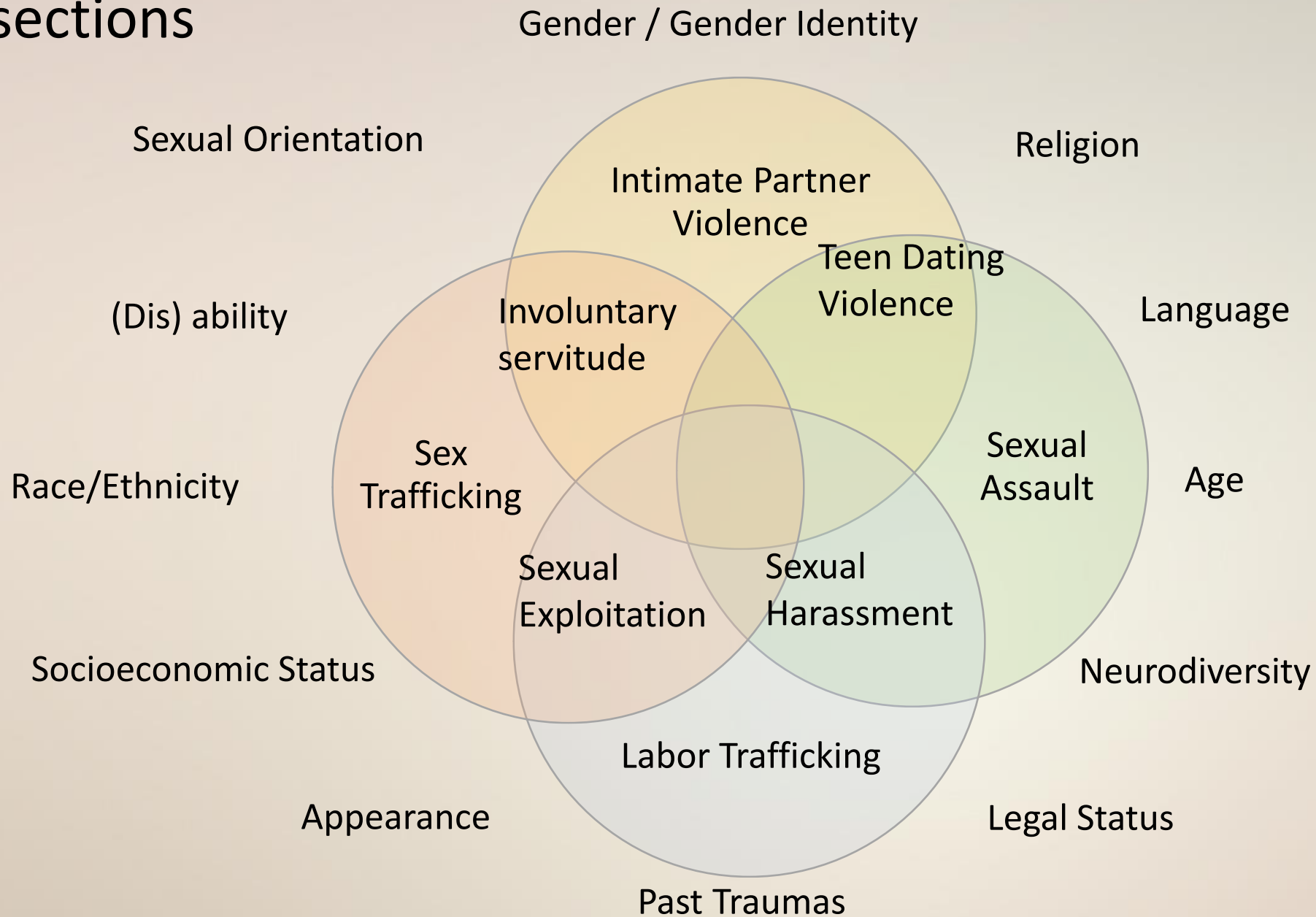


## Coercion is Hard to See When We Don't Know the Vulnerabilities

- A troubled past establishes how an individual is more susceptible to the coercive methods.
- Vulnerabilities are relevant in determining whether coercion could plausibly have compelled the victim.
- We must learn the victim's vulnerabilities – discovering vulnerability requires a lot of listening and asking the right questions.
- Reasonable Person of the same background and in the same circumstance



# Intersections





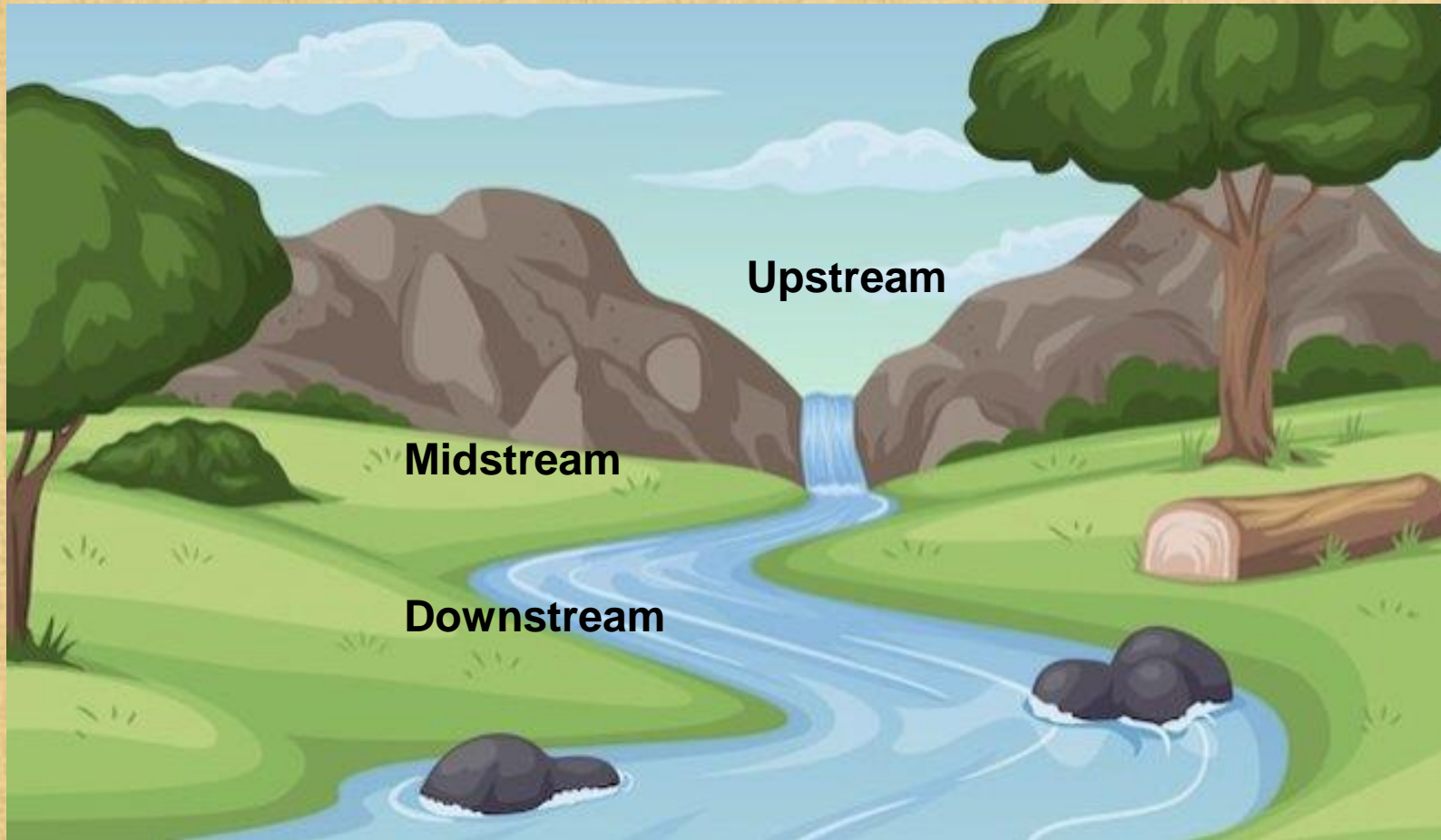
## **Intersecting Social Issues**

- Child abuse
- Neglect
- Family and community violence
- Runaway youth/young adults
- Bullying
- Lack of support network
- Limited access to resources

## **Vulnerabilities and Barriers**

- System involvement
- Gang involvement
- Relationship with the trafficker
- Unemployed
- Substance abuse
- Mental health and trauma
- Limited English proficiency/literacy
- Family or household instability

# A Public Health Approach to Inequity And Trafficking: Downstream, Midstream and Upstream





# Labor Trafficking





# Trafficking

vs.

# Smuggling

- Trafficking involves exploitation of an individual
- Crime or violation against a person
- Contains element of coercion (cannot consent to enslavement)
- Subsequent exploitation and/or forced labor
- Trafficked persons seen as victims by the law



- Smuggling involves transportation of an individual
- Unauthorized border crossing
- No coercion
- Facilitated illegal entry of person from one country to another
- Smuggled persons seen as criminals by the law

“Labor trafficking is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services. Labor traffickers often prey on those with vulnerable life circumstances and economic hardships. Labor trafficking victims can be found in legal and illegal labor industries, as well as hidden behind closed doors and in plain view.”

[https://cops.usdoj.gov/labor\\_trafficking](https://cops.usdoj.gov/labor_trafficking)



# Forced Criminality is a form of labor trafficking

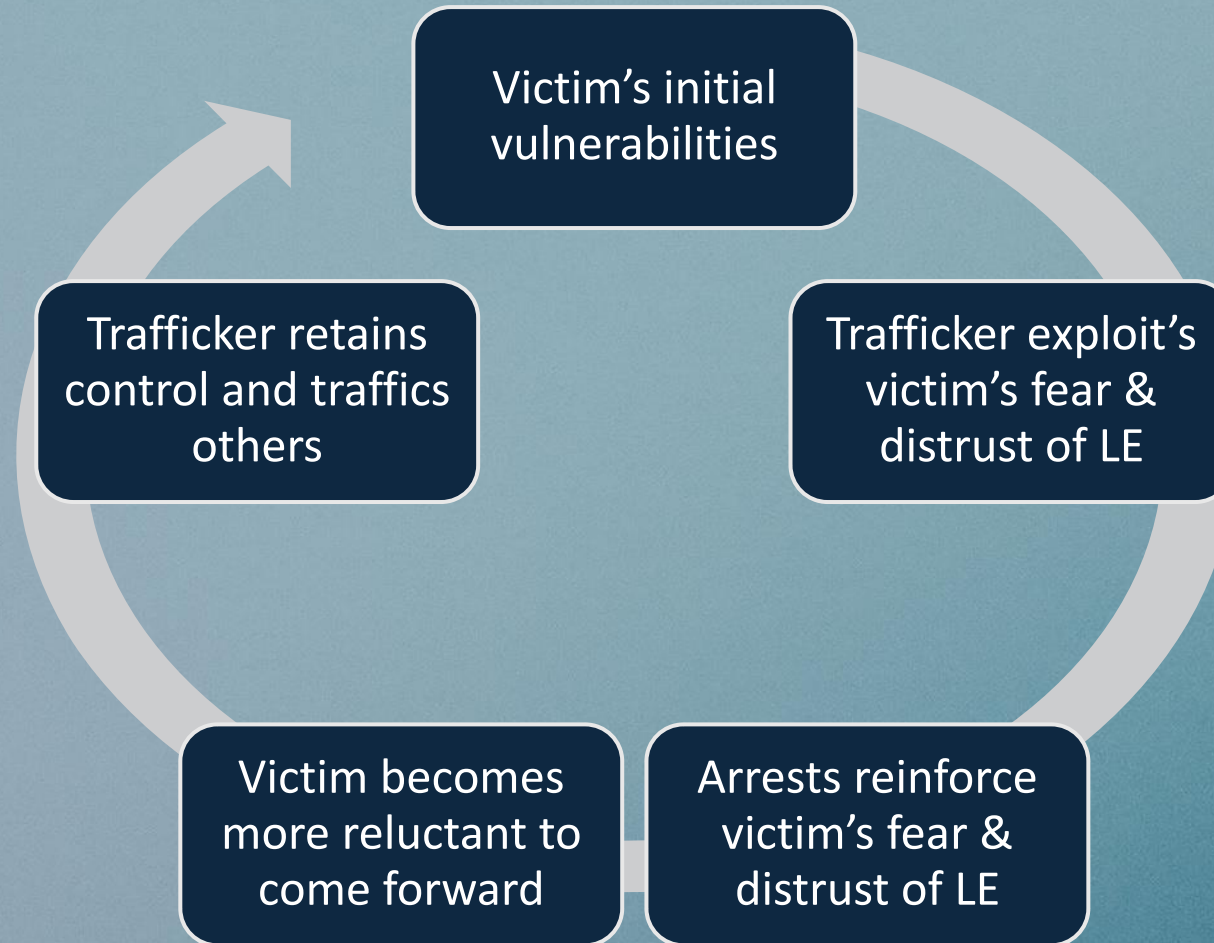
“A type of trafficking where the “victim is exploited through forced engagement in illegal activities, such as street crime or drug trafficking” (Villacampa & Florez, 2017)

- Forced criminality can include criminal acts of:
  - drug offenses
  - forced begging
  - theft
  - credit card fraud
  - violent crimes



*Understanding the Trafficking of Children for the Purposes of Labor in the United States (April 2024)*

Vicious cycle: “My trafficker created a scheme to ensure the legal system saw me not as a victim but treated me as a criminal for the crimes he forced me to commit (Shamere McKenzie, 2022).”









# Role of Substances in Trafficking

- Substances may be used as a way to further exacerbate an individual's vulnerability (trafficker benefits from the individual's relationship with substances)
- Substances are used as a reward/punishment in order to keep control (force)
- Forced substance use:
  - Drug dependencies can create drug “debts”
  - May incapacitates individuals
  - Can nearly guarantee the individual will become dependent



# Substance Use as Coping

- Substances may be used by the individual as a way of coping with the significant exposures to traumatic events and material
- Coping can look like:
  - Avoiding/being under the influence for traumatic incidents
  - Using substances to cope with the overwhelming emotions and feelings in the hours, days and weeks following a traumatic incident
  - Using substances for the long-term feelings and emotions of shame, guilt, responsibility, self-blame an individual may experience for years following traumatic incidents



# Significance of Stigma and SUD

What we know:

## **Stigma makes it more difficult for individuals with SUD to receive help**

- Stigma for an individual that using substances and continues to be involved in criminal activity through their trafficker
- Healthcare providers may be less likely to believe a patient's self report if there is SUD present
- Individuals are less likely to return for medical care or mental health treatment after a stigmatizing or negative experience with a provider





Dynamics of Exploitation



# Who Commits Acts of Trafficking?

- Neighbors, friends, relatives, community leaders, peers
- Family members and partners
- Organized crime
- ANYONE who profits
- Looks for vulnerable individuals
  - Preys on potential victims with low self-esteem and minimal social supports
  - Willing to invest a great deal of time and effort into their victims to break down natural resistance and suspicion

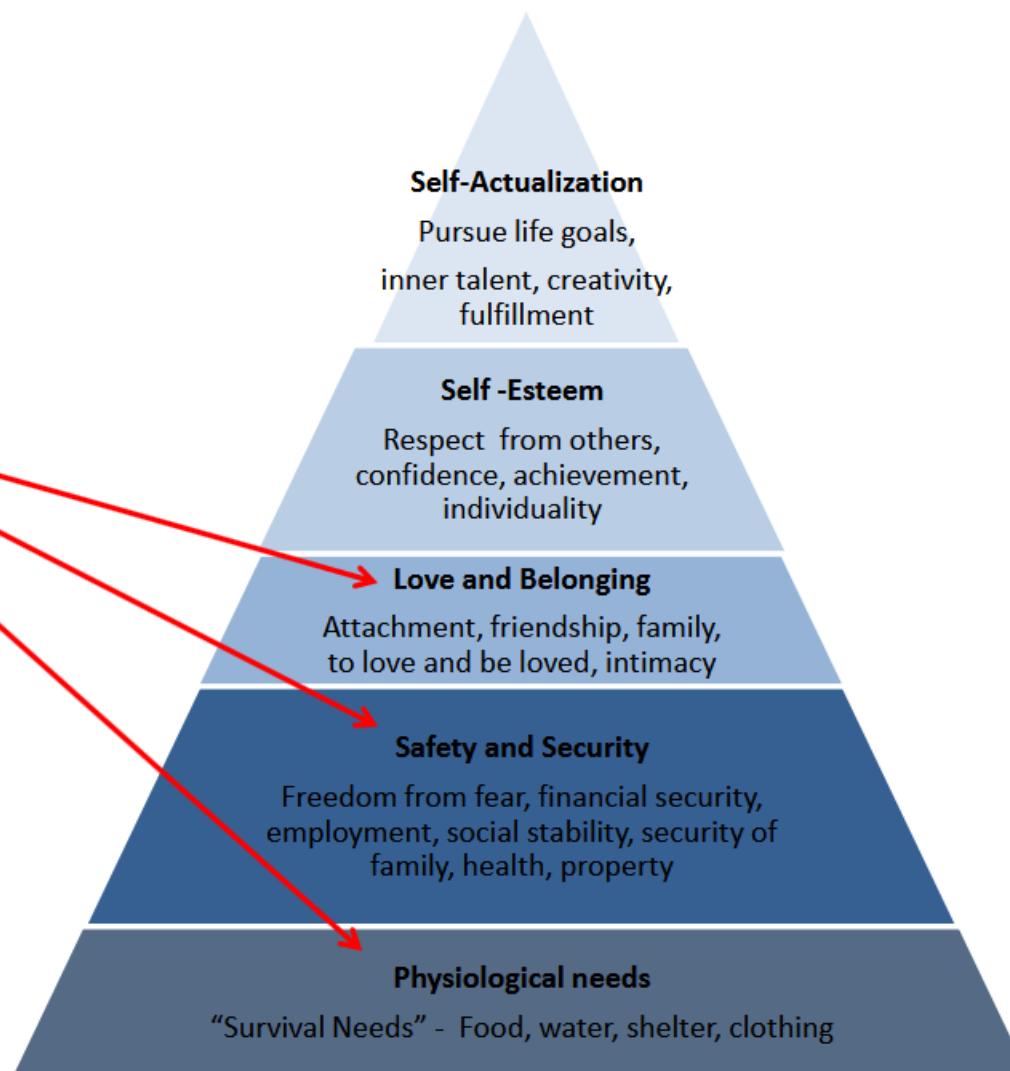


# How Sex Traffickers Lure Victims

**“My job is to make sure she has what she needs, personal hygiene, get her nails done, take her to buy an outfit, take her out to eat, make her feel wanted...but I keep the money.”**

—Convicted pimp, Antoin Thurman, as quoted in the *New York Times* investigative series, *Running in the Shadows: Children on Their Own* (2009)

*Many sex traffickers lure victims by providing basic survival needs. They systematically provide distorted versions of higher needs to manipulate victims. Using threats, force and coercion, traffickers exploit the fact that, for many victims, “the life” may be their first experience of ‘family’ and belonging.*



Dr. Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



# How traffickers groom and control victims

- Targeting – identifying people with noticeable vulnerabilities and needs
- Gaining Trust – investment of time, breaking down natural resistance and suspicion. Trafficker will gain trust and collect information that can be used to manipulate victims
- Meeting Needs – fulfilling needs allows traffickers to gain power, the power to provide and the ability to take away what the person thinks they've gained

# How traffickers control victims

- Isolation – distancing victims from anyone who might weaken their influence
- Exploitation – expansion of boundaries, may be gradual, “quick money”
- Maintaining Control – gain full control over the victim and manipulate them into cooperating in their own exploitation

# Human Trafficking

## Traumatic Bonding

The ultimate effect of these techniques is to convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance.

The goal of the perpetrator is to instill in his victim not only fear of death but also gratitude for being allowed to live.

- Judith L. Herman, M.D., *Trauma and Recovery* (1997)



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Engagemen

ENGAGEMENT



TIME

TIME TO ENGAGE!



ENGAGEMENT



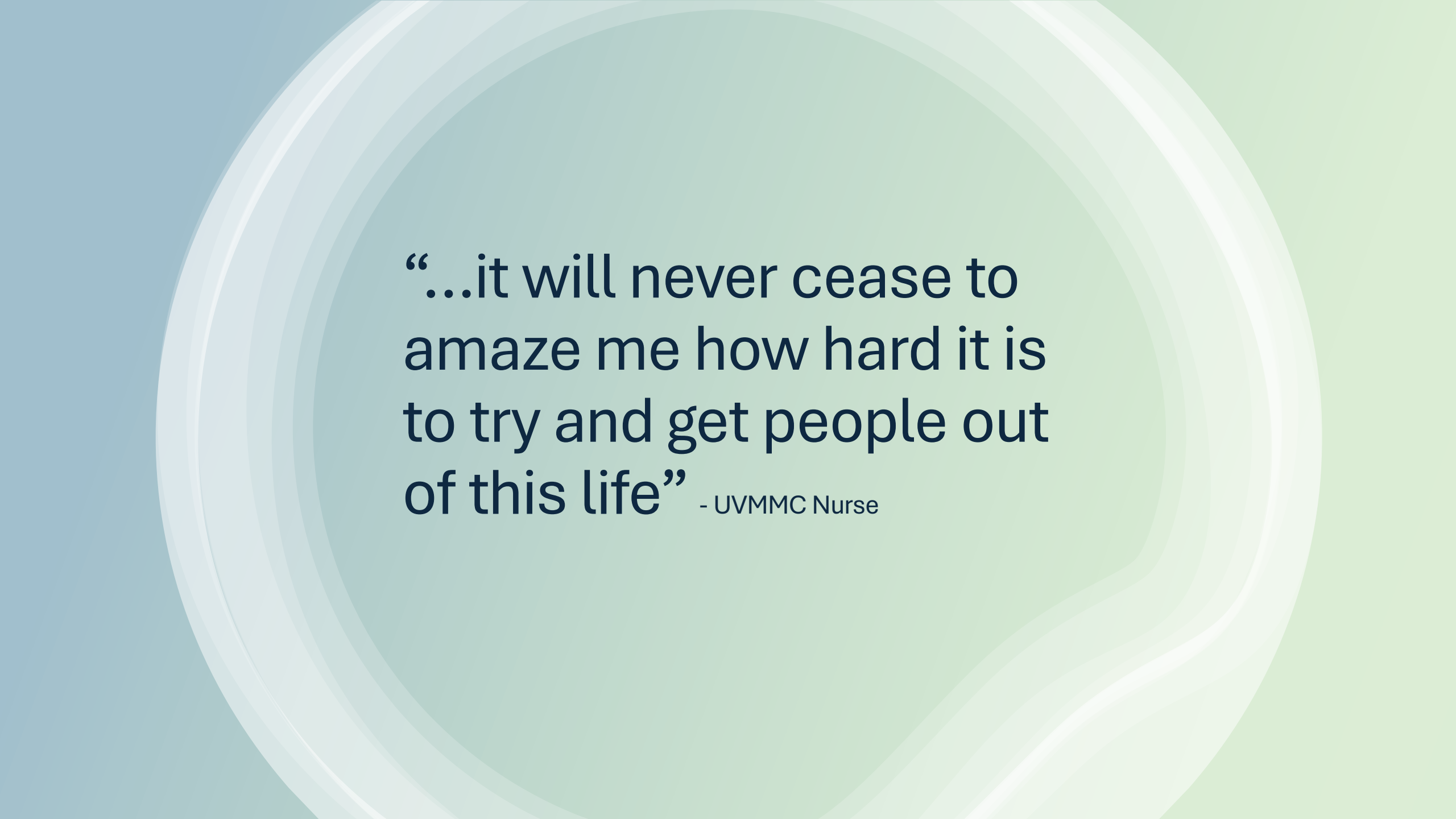
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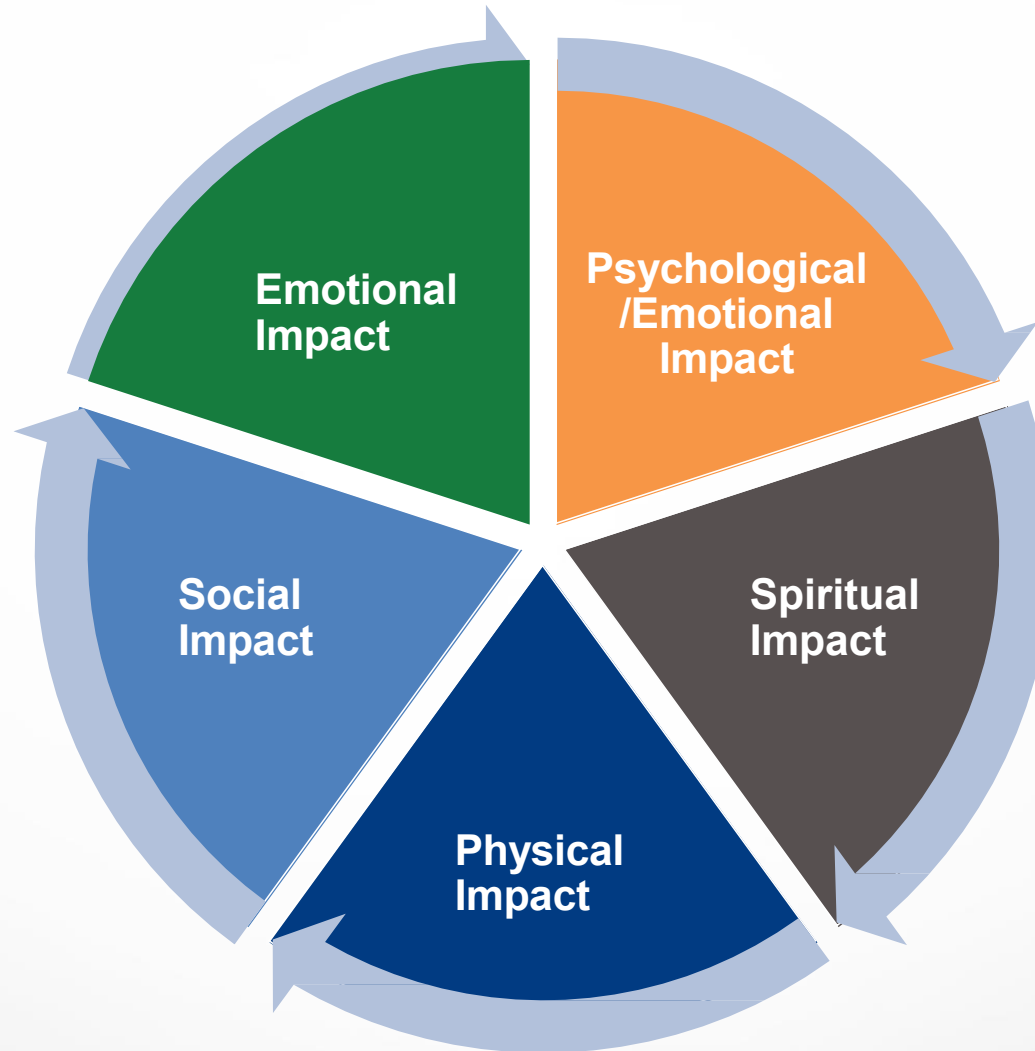
ENGAGE





“...it will never cease to  
amaze me how hard it is  
to try and get people out  
of this life” - UVMMC Nurse

# Understanding the impact





# Survivors Possible Systems Involvement

## Criminal Justice System

- Law Enforcement
- Prosecution & Legal System
- Probation or Parole
- Prisons and Juvenile Detention

## Social Services System

- Child Welfare Services
- Domestic/Sexual Violence Services
- Anti-Human Trafficking Services

## Healthcare System

- Emergency Room and Clinics
- Mental Health Services
- Substance Use

## Educational System

- Vocational Training
- Specialized Ed. Programs

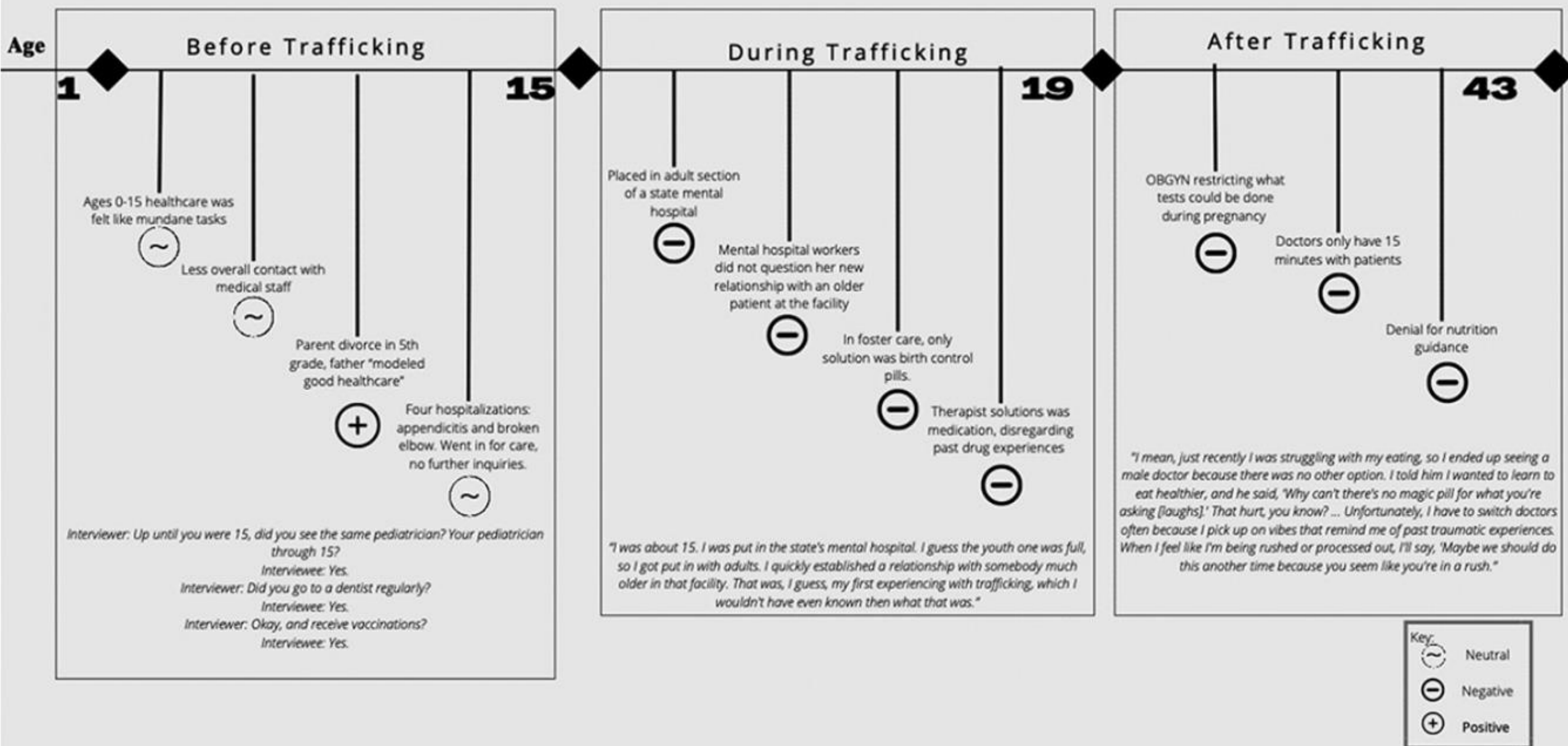
## Housing and Shelter System

- Emergency Shelters
- Long-Term Housing Prog
- Trauma-Informed Shelters

## Employment and Workforce Development

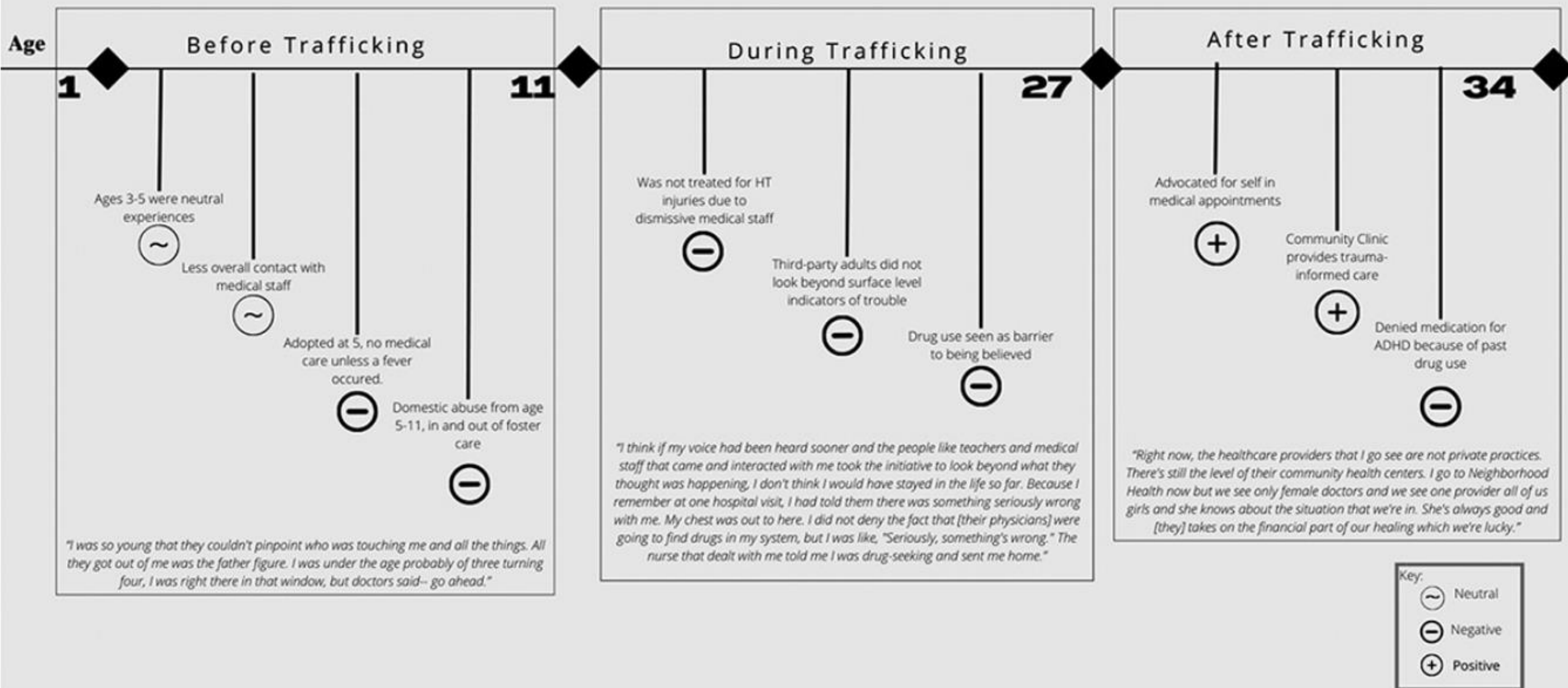
- Job training & Employment

# INTERVIEW 4 - EXAMPLE HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCE TIMELINE ( 43 YEARS OLD, STRAIGHT, MIXED, FEMALE, EAST COAST)





# EXAMPLE HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCE TIMELINE (34 YEARS OLD, BISEXUAL, WHITE, FEMALE, SOUTH)



# Red Flags to look out for

- 1. STI's stomach problems, physical trauma, multiple pregnancies
- 2. Signs of physical abuse, such as bruises or burns
- 3. Patient doesn't speak for themselves
- 4. paranoia, anxiety, and/or nervousness
- 5. Numerous inconsistencies in the patient's story
- 6. Medical issues that haven't been treated in a timely manner
- 7. Frequent flyer





Distrust should be expected

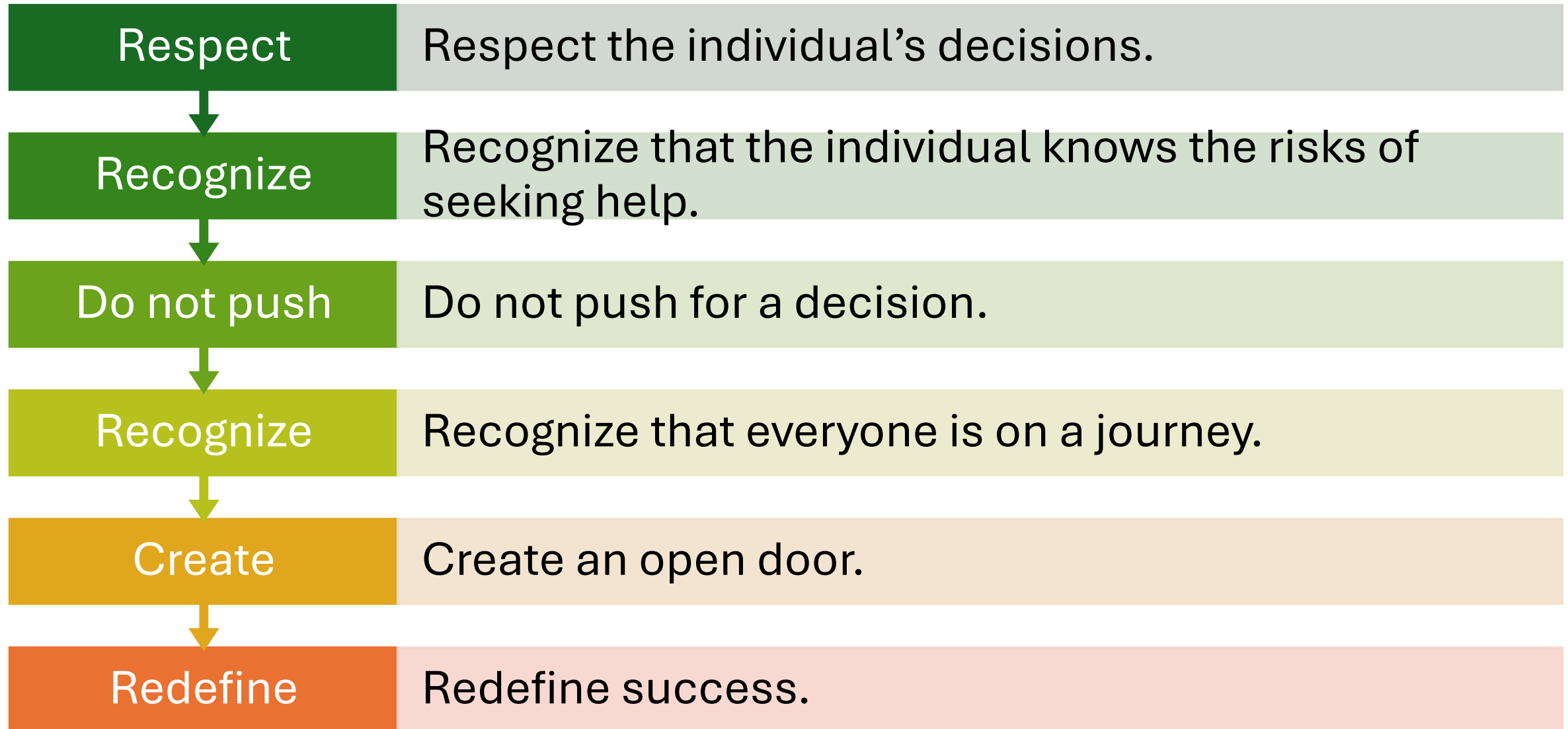
You are being assessed:

- Can you be trusted?
- Why should you be trusted?
- Do you care or just pretend to care?
- What are your interests and priorities?

Victims need to know that there is someone who cares  
and will **listen** carefully



# Strategies for Supporting Individuals Who Decline Services to Address Trafficking or Risk





# Manage your expectations

Hostility, deception,  
manipulation

Affection for and  
loyalty to their  
trafficker  
(Trauma bond)

Shame and/or  
embarrassment

Changing the subject

Identifying other  
victims

Fear of being  
identified as a snitch




# Building rapport

- Keep it basic! Don't overthink it
- Allow space for the to talk without interruption – be OK with sitting in silence
- Listen to understand, not to reply
- Provide patient with what they need in that moment
- Let the individual guide the conversation and tell YOU what they need







# Challenges Service Providers Might Have

- Service providers may experience feelings of frustration and helplessness upon discovery that clients are rarely willing to leave their traffickers despite their dire situations.
- Understanding human trafficking
- Asking uncomfortable questions
- Traffickers' direct ability to coerce someone using drugs
- Intersections of trauma and drug/alcohol addiction
- Forced Criminality getting the victims to commit crimes is a strategy used by the trafficker to keep the victim in their control.
- Desire to rescue –We are walking beside them, not pulling them

# Power and Privilege

- **Power** is the ability to influence and make decisions that impact others
- **Privilege** is advantages and benefits that individuals receive because of social groups they are perceived to be a part of. Privilege is often a result of systematic targeting and/or marginalization of another social group.



# Power and Privilege



When someone is trafficked, there is an inherent loss of power that occurs (i.e. force, fraud, coercion). Loss of power (real or perceived) can be a trauma trigger.

- Providers hold immense power and can perpetuate harm unintentionally
- Acknowledge the role that privilege and power (i.e. “authority figure”) impacts survivors.

**You cannot exert power and expect to empower**

# Putting it all into practice

- Creating connection
- Safety and belonging
- Acceptance /non-judgmental –know your biases!
- Choice let survivors have control of their healing
- Give space to redefine love, sex and identity
- Create and model healthy relationships



# Resources

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Thank You

