



BUSING ON THE LOOKOUT (BOTL)

School Bus Drivers

The problem:

Human trafficking — or modern-day slavery — is the exploitation of human beings through force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of commercial sex or forced labor. There are an estimated 40 million victims of human trafficking globally, including thousands of school-age children in the United States and Canada. While all children are vulnerable to the manipulative and forceful methods pimps/traffickers use, children in foster care, the homeless, LGBTQ, or those who come from abusive homes are particularly susceptible.

Pimps/traffickers recruit out of schools, online, in shopping malls, as well as the streets and other locations, including bus stops and terminals. As half of American and Canadian school children ride the bus daily, some victims will continue attending school during the day — and riding the school bus — even while they are being trafficked or groomed at night.

The response:

Busing on the Lookout (BOTL) recognizes that members of the bus industry — commercial and school — are uniquely positioned to provide an extra set of eyes and ears for law enforcement in recovering victims and arresting traffickers.

- School bus drivers see students almost every day as they transport them between home and school. They are often keenly aware of changes in students' behavior, moods, physical appearance, and attendance. School bus drivers are uniquely positioned to see if new or different people are waiting to pick up a student at the bus stop or at school and may even observe signs of controlling or manipulative behavior.
- School bus drivers should pay attention to red flags, such as students who have begun to accumulate frequent absences or who have started demonstrating symptoms of irritability or panic that weren't there before. Drivers may observe physical signs, such as inappropriate dress for the weather or school, bruising or physical trauma, and markings or tattoos that could be a pimp's branding. During the grooming process, students may show up with the latest gadgets, designer clothes, or other material items they didn't have previously. Drivers could also overhear comments about having a pimp or needing to make a quota.

All school personnel should be trained on how to detect signs of human trafficking – not only school bus drivers – however, the driver is in places where the principal, teachers and counselors are not.

The method:

Train all school bus drivers with BOTL materials by showing them the 30-minute BOTL training video and obtaining a BOTL wallet card for every driver. These materials describe the crime of human trafficking, outline a series of red flags and tips of what to look for, and explain how to effectively report the situation to law enforcement and the National Human Trafficking Hotline. For more information see www.busingonthelookout.org or contact Annie Sovcik, program director for Busing on the Lookout, at asovcik@truckersagainsttrafficking.org.