

**“Investigating and Interviewing”**  
**The Crime of Human Trafficking: A Law Enforcement Guide, Segment 3**  
**Written Transcript**  
**International Association of Chiefs of Police**

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

No matter whether you're in a jurisdiction with 30,000 police officers on the force or in a jurisdiction with three police officers on the force, you can stumble across a human trafficking case.

**Jessica Donohue (Program Director, Trafficked Person Assistance, YMCA):**

It's very easy to see a picture, even a photograph, and you immediately think you know what's happening in that scenario. But when you start to ask: *Why are you here? When do you go home? Do you have a debt?* All of a sudden the picture pans out in panoramic view.

**Leah Brack (Deputy, Collier County Sheriff's Department):**

We were dispatched to a disturbance. When we arrived, it was a little bit chaotic. It took quite a bit of time on scene of the initial call to actually figure out what was going on.

**Bill Rule (Commander, Collier County Sheriff's Department):**

You may not realize what you have. You may not completely understand what you have. But document it and start looking for help.

**Leah Brack (Deputy, Collier County Sheriff's Department):**

Their captors had come and were threatening if they didn't pay \$5,000 per person, they would kill the family and burn down the house.

**Edwin Chapuseaux (Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Department):**

Every patrol man should have a camera. Take pictures. Take pictures of people. Take pictures of scenes. Take pictures of vehicles. Be as detailed as possible with your pen and with your camera.

**Leah Brack (Deputy, Collier County Sheriff's Department):**

I don't even think I did anything that big. I just did a report. I just did my job.

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

I'd urge everybody to call their federal partners very early in the process. Whether it's an FBI agent, or a nice agent that you have a relationship with, or whether you call us at the Civil Rights Division for assistance, we can actually be a force multiplier for what you're finding on the ground.

**Maria (human trafficking survivor):**

I was seeking help. I was wanting help, but I didn't think anyone can help me.

**Thomas Anello (Group Supervisor, Hostage Rescue Team, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):**

Our primary concern is officer safety and the safety of others. If it means going in fast and hard in order to make sure everybody is safe, we will do that. You know if we can attack it from a different way that isn't as traumatic, we would definitely explore those avenues.

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

We've had cases where victims have actually smuggled notes out saying please have someone come and help me. And then if the police show up too aggressively, they'll withdraw and never tell their story.

**Thomas Anello (Group Supervisor, Hostage Rescue Team, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):**

Do what you need to do. Remove them from that situation. Get to an area where you can come down on a one on one level with them. You can't get on a personal level with somebody in full battle gear.

**Edward Gallagher (Assistant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice, Southern District of Texas):**

Each of those individuals must be approached as a possible potential trafficking victim, every one of them.

**Hilary Axam (Federal Prosecutor, U.S. Department of Justice):**

We've had officers take video tapes of the brothels they've raided. The psychological and physical trauma on these young women and girls is tremendous.

**Kyle Jackson (Captain, Los Angeles Police Department):**

We want victims to feel that they can come to us and that they won't be violated twice.

**Maria Jose Fletcher (Supervising Attorney, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center):**

This is a crime like no other. This is a crime that your evidence is a human being. So by taking care of the victim's needs, you're really taking care of your investigation.

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

When victims of trafficking are found and rescued, all of their needs need to be addressed. Almost simultaneously, it's almost like a cascade: housing, mental health issues, health care.

**Hilary Axam (Federal Prosecutor, U.S. Department of Justice):**

Until we really come in and listen sensitively and address her issues, her immediate concerns for her own health and safety, she's not going to be in a condition to confide.

**Esperanza (human trafficking survivor):**

Cooperating with law enforcement, they said we will take care of your safety. Everything they promised me was true. I felt comfortable. I believe in them. I trust them.

**Hilary Axam (Federal Prosecutor, U.S. Department of Justice):**

That is why we rely so heavily on the NGOs to come in as quickly as possible and try to meet her immediate concerns.

**Jessica Donohue (Program Director, Trafficked Person Assistance, YMCA):**

What we do to help law enforcement is to create a stable environment for victims, to help them get to a place mentally and emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, where they are a good witness.

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

At the end of the day these are people who have to be approached with respect, with dignity, and really try to get to the bottom of what it was that happened to them. The number one rule about interviewing a trafficking victim is to put them at ease.

**Edwin Chapuseaux (Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Department):**

Don't get up too close or touch them. Try to get them to relax and make them feel that they're safe; you're not going to hurt them.

**Laura Germino (Coordinator, Anti-Slavery Campaign, Coalition of Immokalee Workers):**

Some of the questions we ask are:

*What did you do in the country you were from?*

*Are you getting paid?*

*Are you able to keep your pay?*

*Do you have control over your identification?*

*Do you have control over your own housing?*

*Are you free to leave?*

If it's an argument over a debt, ask what the debt is about. What was it for?

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

Leave the immigration questions until you've built up a rapport already with them. If you ask them straight away, you're not going to get any good information.

**Ruben Perez (Assistant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice, Southern District of Texas):**

Many times they think that because they're not citizens, they're not entitled to the full protection of the United States' laws. We need to tell them, if you're on the soil of the United States of America, you are fully protected by our laws and constitution.

**Maria Jose Fletcher (Supervising Attorney, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center):**

You may say something like, I am a police officer, I'm here to protect any individual in the community, so we're going to look into what happened to you, and we're going to try to find you help.

**Edwin Chapuseaux (Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Department):**

Even those that open up, they won't tell you everything. They'll give you a little bit. Then maybe, in the second interview or the third interview, a little bit more.

**Laura Germino (Coordinator, Anti-Slavery Campaign, Coalition of Immokalee Workers):**

Be sure you're asking in a situation where the person is able to talk freely, and there's not people around. Use an interpreter who's not there or a work site or the housing place that you went to.

**Esperanza (human trafficking survivor):**

Please, please, please, for the officers, don't allow the employer to be a translator for this person.

**Sean Doty (Sergeant, Lynnwood Police Department):**

There was a significant reluctance on their part to even tell us what happened and why it happened. It wasn't till the translators arrived till they told us where they lived together in this apartment and there's a whole bunch of people that live at this apartment. And we were asking why is that so, and then they were the ones who had kind of uncovered it for us that, well, that they were brought over here to work for this person in this restaurant to pay off a fee. It just broke it wide open.

**Edward Gallagher (Assistant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice, Southern District of Texas):**

The key to a successful approach is finding the right personality that can establish the rapport with the potential victim. If you do not succeed, allow the NGOs and social service organizations to have an attempted interview before you take any attempts to deport.

**Edwin Chapuseaux (Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Department):**

If you care about the victims, it will show. If you're just doing the job, that'll show, too.

**Thomas Anello (Group Supervisor, Hostage Rescue Team, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):**

These cases take a lot of man hours; it takes a lot of sweat and tears. The end result is worse, the sweat.

**Esperanza (human trafficking survivor):**

I don't know who the person was who tipped the police, but with all my heart I thank the person who did it.

**Lou de Baca (Involuntary Servitude and Slavery Coordinator, U.S. Department of Justice):**

The following are key points from this segment:

Human trafficking may come to your attention when investigating crimes such as—

- Racketeering
- Extortion
- Kidnapping
- Zoning violations
- Money laundering
- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Homicide

When interviewing those involved in a potential trafficking situation:

- Use a professional independent interpreter.
- Try to put the victim at ease.
- Allow the victim to tell her story.
- Leave immigration questions until you have built a rapport.
- Be prepared to conduct victim interviews over multiple sessions. It will take time to get the complete story.

For more information, please refer to IACP's guidebook: *The Crime of Human Trafficking: A Law Enforcement Guide to Identification and Investigation*.

Or contact the IACP at 1-800-THE-IACP or [www.theiacp.org](http://www.theiacp.org)