

spot the signs of modern slavery

Your guide to taking
action and combating
modern slavery.

Modern slavery is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. From the clothes we wear and the food we eat to the care we receive and the services we use, exploitation is embedded into supply chains locally and around the world.

Individuals are often subjected to coercion, debt, or deceit. They are often forced to work in unsafe conditions for little or no pay, stripped of their freedom, and have their vulnerabilities exploited. It is an inhumane crime.

That is why Unseen is dedicated to ending it.

However, exploiters are highly skilled at covering their tracks, keeping their illicit activities hidden in plain sight. While exploitation can be found everywhere, it is easily overlooked.

This step-by-step guide will give you a practical toolkit for seeing the unseen. We will teach you how to spot the signs of exploitation and take action to stop it.

Together, we can create a world without slavery.

see what **three steps
you can take...**

step 1: spot the signs

While exploitation is often hidden from view, there are tell-tale signs that can help you identify potential situations of abuse.

Here are the most common signs of modern slavery and exploitation:

restricted freedom of movement

Are they rarely allowed to travel on their own?

Do they appear to be under the control of others?

Do they have few personal possessions?

Do they have limited opportunities to move freely?

Do they lack documents that would allow them to travel (passports, ID, etc.)?

isolation

Do they tend not to interact with other people?

Do they seem unfamiliar with their neighborhood or where they work?

Do they have relationships that don't seem right?

reluctance to seek help

Do they appear frightened, or hesitant to talk to strangers?

Do they fear law enforcers or deportation?

Are they unsure who to trust or where to get help?

Do they fear violence towards them or their family?

physical appearance

Are there signs of physical or psychological abuse?

Do they wear the same clothes everyday?

Do they have untreated injuries?

Are they anxious, agitated, or withdrawn and neglected?

Do they look malnourished or unkempt?

Do they wear clothes that are unsuitable for their work?

poor living conditions

Are they living in dirty, cramped, or overcrowded accommodation?

Do they work and live at the same address?

unusual travel arrangements

Are they always being dropped off at/collected from work?

Do they travel very early in the morning or late at night?

Are children being dropped off/picking up in private cars or taxis at unusual times?

Are they in places where it isn't clear why they're there?



Modern slavery is a complex and varied crime that can take many different forms, from labour and sexual exploitation to domestic servitude. With each form that exploitation can take, there are different signs to look out for.

How can you spot the signs of... labour exploitation?

- ☐ Signs of psychological or physical abuse.
- ☐ Appear frightened, withdrawn or confused.
- ☐ Appear to not be free to move and/or are always accompanied.
- ☐ Transported to and from work, perhaps with a number of people in one vehicle.
- ☐ Lack protective equipment, suitable clothing, or training to safely do their job.
- ☐ Lack access to their own documents, such as ID or passport since an employer may have confiscated them.
- ☐ Work unusually long hours.
- ☐ Do not have a contract, are paid less than the National Minimum Wage, or not paid at all.
- ☐ Forced to stay in accommodation provided by their employer, which may be unsafe or overcrowded.
- ☐ Afraid to accept money or payment.
- ☐ Legitimate wages taken by an exploiter who is outside of the business or workplace.

How can you spot the signs of... sexual exploitation?

- ☐ They may appear scared or intimidated, withdrawn or confused.
- ☐ They're closely guarded.
- ☐ They have been "branded" with a tattoo indicating ownership.
- ☐ There are signs of physical abuse, including bruising, scarring, and cigarette burns.

- ☐ They are not able to keep, have restricted or no access to their earnings.
- ☐ They have limited English vocabulary, restricted to sexualised words.
- ☐ There are male visitors who call day and night and only stay for a short time.
- ☐ There are signs of sexual activity, such as cards and advertisements nearby.
- ☐ There are a number of female foreign nationals living at the same address.
- ☐ They sleep at the premises where they work, which could indicate a brothel is operating.

How can you spot the signs of... domestic servitude?

- ☐ They're held in their employer's home and forced to carry out domestic tasks such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning.
- ☐ They are unable to leave the house on their own; their movements are monitored.
- ☐ They work unusually long hours.
- ☐ They don't have access to their own belongings, including things like ID or mobile phone, which can isolate them.
- ☐ Their employer is physically and/or verbally abusive.
- ☐ They rarely interact with the family they work for.
- ☐ They are deprived of their own living space, food, water, or medical care.
- ☐ They stand out from other family members, for example because they wear poorer-quality clothes.

How can you spot the signs of... criminal exploitation?

- ☐ There are large groups of adult or child beggars being moved daily to different locations but returned to the same one at night. This could indicate forced begging.
- ☐ They are being transported to or from the scene of a crime, including shoplifting, pick-pocketing, or forced begging.
- ☐ They don't benefit from money or items obtained through crimes they've been forced to commit.
- ☐ They are being forced to cultivate cannabis.
- ☐ Their freedom of movement may be restricted, including being locked in a room.
- ☐ They don't speak English, or have a limited vocabulary.
- ☐ They are being forced or manipulated out of their home by drug dealers, who use the home as a base to sell drugs.
- ☐ In some cases, they are young people who are forced to carry and sell drugs across county borders.

How can you spot the signs of... child exploitation?

- ☐ They have mood swings, including being angry, upset, or withdrawn.
- ☐ They display inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- ☐ They are dressing inappropriately for their age.
- ☐ They are going missing at night or weekends and not being clear about their whereabouts.
- ☐ They are failing to attend school.
- ☐ They have gifts, presents, or expensive items which they can't explain.

While these signs may not necessarily mean that someone is being exploited, one of several of them are enough to raise suspicion.

So, what do you do if you suspect that you or someone you know is being exploited?

step 2: contact the Helpline

Unseen runs the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline. Our expert Helpline advisers provide information, advice, and guidance about any modern slavery issue. It is open and accessible to anyone, from professionals and businesses to members of the public and potential victims and survivors. The service is free, confidential, open 365 days a year, and available in over 250 languages.

The Helpline is a lifeline for anyone stuck in exploitation.

Call the Helpline at 08000 121 700
or [report concerns online](#)

Our trained advisers can help you with a range of options, including:

- Helping you or someone else get access to support services.
- Reporting something you've seen or are concerned about.
- Providing advice about abuse, exploitation, or modern slavery.
- Getting more information about training and raising awareness.

"Some callers need immediate intervention or referral to ongoing support, while others may simply need validation of their concerns or signposting to resources. The Helpline provides a safe, accessible, and confidential space for those who may have nowhere else to turn."

Geethika, Helpline Adviser, Unseen

a day in the life of a Helpline advisor could look like:

8.15 am

A short message submitted via our website with vital information on a case of sexual exploitation.

11.40 am

A call from a solicitor who suspects her client is being forced to grow cannabis in a flat where he's locked in.

12.00 pm

Good news that a referral has led to the arrest of two individuals and safeguarding of a female victim.

4.15 pm

An urgent call: an individual known to be in forced labour is ready to work with police. He's just escaped his situation and wants safeguarding and assistance before his potential exploiter finds him.

7.35 pm

Staying on the line for over an hour, comforting a caller who is having difficulty talking about their situation.

You can also [fill out our online form](#) or [report via the Unseen app](#).

khadija's story

For over a decade, Khadija* endured unimaginable hardship – working gruelling hours without pay, subjected to violence, and confined to a life of servitude. She was told she owed a debt for being brought to the UK, a lie used to control her.

When Khadija finally escaped, she faced new challenges. With nowhere to go and receiving constant calls from her exploiters, she was fearful for her safety. Khadija eventually became destitute, forced to sleep on the streets.

It was at this critical moment that a charity worker connected Khadija with the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline. Our Helpline adviser worked closely with Khadija, guiding her to a police station and providing real-time advocacy once she arrived. The adviser, acting as the missing link between the survivor and the police, explained the police's statutory duties as first responders under the National Referral Mechanism, including their role in referring potential victims for support and protection.

This collaborative approach led to a breakthrough: Khadija was finally safeguarded and offered a place in a safe house. Today, Khadija is safe, receiving the care and assistance required to rebuild her life.

* Some details changed to protect identity.

step 3: support Unseen

There are so many ways that you can support our mission to create a world without slavery. You can:

- Give a [gift](#) or become a [regular donor](#).
- Run your own [fundraiser](#) or take on one of Unseen's [challenges](#).
- Use our [free will writing](#) service to leave a legacy in your will.
- Become a [corporate partner](#).
- Involve your faith group, rotary, or other community club.
- Engage with our [business services](#).
- Stay up to date through our [newsletter](#).

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You can also advocate for our work and raise awareness on social media:



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