HUMAN TRAFFICKING 101

Best Practices Guide to Educating Youth of Middle- & High-School Age

Developed by the Public Awareness Subcommittee
of the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission

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This Human Trafficking 101 guide was developed by the Public Awareness Subcommittee of the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission. It outlines best practices for raising public awareness of human trafficking among youth who are of middle-school and high-school age. It is intended as a "how to" resource for anti-trafficking coalitions and community leaders throughout Ohio. The following individuals contributed to this guide:

High-level essentials

Educational presentations about human trafficking should:

- Start with a "content advisory/sensitive content" warning, as some of the material may be difficult for some audience members to hear.
- Ensure that the presentation is age-appropriate.
- Incorporate community and/or statewide information from credible resources that is the most current. (See resources provided in this guide.)
- Encompass information on both sex and labor trafficking throughout the presentation.
- Be survivor-informed. (Make sure that survivors are compensated fairly for their time and supported regarding self-care.)
- Define or explain:
    - Sex trafficking.
    - Labor trafficking.
    - The intersections of sex and labor trafficking.
    - Familial trafficking.
    - Types of trafficking (e.g. peer-to-peer and gang trafficking).
    - The differences between legal definitions of youth and adult trafficking. (For example: When is force, fraud, coercion required to charge someone with human trafficking?)
- Encompass diversity and cultural considerations, including:
    - Race.
    - Ethnicity.
    - Persons with disabilities.
    - Culture.
    - Environment (urban vs. rural).
    - Mental health.
- Provide inclusive language that covers all cultures and genders.
- Include information that identifies vulnerable populations (e.g. LGBTQIA+) as well as factors leading to vulnerabilities for human trafficking (e.g. homelessness, poverty, runaway youth, disabilities etc.). Be sure to focus on youth-specific risk factors.
- Discuss barriers to both identifying victims and accessing services.
- Incorporate information about local coalitions and resources, including where youth should turn if they believe they or someone they know is being trafficked.
- Include information about how to help raise awareness.
- Be aware that some youth may disclose details about their experiences with being trafficked. If possible, have a trauma-informed counselor or advocate available in case these youth want to talk to a professional.

Myth vs. fact

A simple online search of the term "human trafficking" instantly produces well over a million results. With so much information so readily available, it is important to know myth from fact when developing public-awareness materials. Many of the common perceptions of human trafficking have been debunked by leading anti-trafficking organizations and those with lived experience. For example:

MYTH: Human trafficking always involves physically forcing someone into a situation.	**FACT:** Although human trafficking can involve some physical force, it does not always. Most traffickers trick, trap, manipulate or threaten their victims into providing sexual services or labor.[2]
MYTH: Women and girls are the victims of human trafficking.	**FACT:** Human trafficking does not discriminate. Both grown men and young boys are victims, too. All gender identities are at risk, with members of the LGBTQIA+ community considered a particularly vulnerable population.[2]
MYTH: Human trafficking does not occur in the United States.	**FACT:** Human trafficking is a global concern that affects countries worldwide, including the United States. It happens in both urban and rural areas of the U.S. and can happen in any community.[1]
MYTH: Human trafficking involves moving someone from place to place.	**FACT:** Human trafficking is often confused with human smuggling, which is a crime related to unauthorized border crossings. Human trafficking is a crime against an individual that does not necessarily involve movement. Victims can be recruited and trafficked in their communities, schools or homes.[1]
MYTH: Trafficked individuals could leave their situation if they really wanted to.	**FACT:** Multiple barriers deter trafficked individuals from leaving their situations, including a lack of finances, a lack of housing, extreme fear, the threat or presence of violence, emotional blackmail centered on sexual and physical abuse of the victim's family, trauma bonding and more.[4]
MYTH: Awareness information about human trafficking is always factual and helpful.	**FACT:** The misinformation that exists can make it more difficult for communities to identify victims and for victims to identify themselves.[3]
MYTH: Traffickers usually prey on victims they don't know.	**FACT:** Trafficking situations most often involve relationships in which a level of trust exists, including familial relationships and intimate-partner relationships.[2]

Credible resources for data, content development

If you're wondering where to turn to find data and develop content, these websites are reliable sources of information. It's also important to learn about credible local resources within your community.

- [Ohio Attorney General Yost's Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI)](#)
- [Ohio Attorney General's Standard of Services for Trafficked Persons](#)
- [Governor DeWine's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force](#)
- [Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice](#)
- [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#)
- [Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program (ICAC)](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)
  - Call: 1-888-3737-888
  - Text: 233733
- [Polaris Project](#)
- [Blue Campaign](#)
- [Victim Connect Resource Center – Human Trafficking](#)

A checklist for trainings

Training presentations to youth should be age-appropriate, with these foundational components serving as a starting point:

Imagery and language

- Choose imagery that is age-appropriate, reflects reality and avoids depictions of bondage and captivity.
- Include a "sensitive content" disclosure — verbal and/or written — before starting the training.
- Use factual language provided by credible resources (see above).
- Incorporate storytelling that is ethical and, as such, respects the privacy of those with lived experiences.
- Cover both sex and labor trafficking in the discussion.
- Use language that suits the comprehension level of a youth audience.
- When talking about victims and survivors, avoid words such as *prostitution*, *prostitute*, *child prostitute*, *illegals* and *criminals* — and explain why they're problematic.
- Explain the importance of avoiding the word *rescue*, noting that it could invite harm to a victim. Emphasize that the goal is to support and provide available resources.
- Define words common to human trafficking, including *john*, *pimp*, *track*, *the life* or *the game*, *brothel*, *circuit*, *escort*, *trick* and so on. For other common terms, please see this Shared Hope International webpage: https://sharedhope.org/the-problem/trafficking-terms/.
- Use language that is inclusive of all cultures, ethnicities and genders.

Overview of human trafficking

- Define and explain both sex and labor trafficking; offer examples.
    - If the presentation calls for focusing on only one type of trafficking, provide a disclaimer that the presentation doesn't encompass all forms of trafficking.
    - Explain that, with commercial sex, anyone under 18 or with a developmental disability is a victim of human trafficking regardless of force, fraud or coercion. This could include survival sex, such as being forced to have sex for food or a place to sleep. Know the law: [Ohio Revised Code 2905.32](#).
- Share relevant information from credible resources.
- Limit the use of statistics. If used, cite only credible resources and explain that statistics within this population aren't always accurate due to a lack of understanding and/or lack of reporting.
- Discuss how human trafficking has evolved with websites, online gaming and social-media apps and in relation to major events, such as immigration policy changes and COVID-19.
- Discuss the intersections of sex and labor trafficking, such as massage parlors, strip clubs and/or drug trafficking.
- Explain that other criminal activity (such as drug trafficking) is typically associated with human trafficking and that youth might be introduced into the other forms of delinquency because of their age or relationship to the trafficker.

Entry points to human trafficking

- The internet, online gaming and social media
    - Human traffickers use online gaming and social media to groom victims. A quick internet search can lead to a youth's identifying information, which some traffickers use to identify vulnerabilities (unmet basic needs, emotional needs, substance use) in potential victims.
    - With vulnerabilities identified, traffickers use direct messaging to build trust with potential victims. Apps such as Snapchat and Instagram feature disappearing chats, allowing traffickers to have discreet conversations with their targets.
    - Traffickers might use an internet or social-media exchange of photos or videos to lure a young victim. Traffickers might persuade youth to meet them in person — and then coerce those youth into sex or labor trafficking.
    - Apps that facilitate a virtual exchange of money allow traffickers to profit from someone without ever having to meet that person.
    - Certain apps have been demonized as tools commonly used by human traffickers, but the reality is that virtually any app can be used to groom youth if safeguards aren't used.
    - Some apps — OnlyFans, PornHub and Skip the Games, for example — exist expressly for the exchange of sexually explicit content. They're intended for adults, but there are countless cases of youth being exploited on these sites due to weak regulations and limited oversight.

- Schools
  - Peer-to-peer recruitment is not uncommon in trafficking cases that originate in schools. Traffickers might coerce their underage victims to use the promise of a better life and money to recruit peers. Such trafficking cases are easy to overlook because the recruiter and new victim are of similar age.
  - Grooming by a school authority figure — a teacher, coach or classmate's parent or guardian — also occurs.
- Juvenile detention centers, group homes, shelters and foster homes
  - Youth in juvenile detention centers are vulnerable because of their incarceration, but they also might have had pre-existing vulnerabilities that landed them in the detention center. Some youth commit crimes on behalf of their trafficker and, if not identified as victims or offered alternatives, end up doing time for those crimes. Similarly, group homes, shelters and foster homes house youth with vulnerabilities that traffickers might try to exploit.
  - A trafficked youth who ends up in a detention center, group home, shelter or foster home might continue to hear from the trafficker. The trafficker might contact the juvenile, supply the youth with money or other items, and otherwise attempt to continue the relationship.
- Family members, significant others and friends
  - Traffickers groom by building trust with those they exploit — which explains the hard reality of traffickers who prey on a young victim within their own family unit. (NOTE: The complexities of generational trafficking should be discussed in this context.)
- Employers
  - Labor trafficking takes place in both legitimate and illegal businesses.
  - In some cases, the employment opportunity may involve a legitimate business — and the employer then becomes the trafficker.
  - Businesses may not be trafficking all employees.
  - *NOTE: Keep in mind that discussions of labor trafficking should be taking place throughout the presentation.*
- Gangs
  - Gangs are often involved in illegal activities that allow them to profit. Just as they use drug trafficking to make money, gangs might use human trafficking to do the same.

Grooming process

- Discuss how traffickers are experts at working angles, manipulating reality, leveraging fears and finding people's moments of vulnerability. (Use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to discuss vulnerabilities.)
- Explain the trauma bond that results from this grooming process and why it is difficult for some victims to leave or even recognize that they are being trafficked.
- Explain that grooming can take place anywhere, in person or online, in public or in private, as the process is very gradual.

The dangers of social media/online gaming

- Identify the positive aspects of having and using social media responsibly.
- Discuss *average screen time per day* and what's missing that could help support mental health.
- Review privacy and safety points with social-media accounts/online games.
    - What does a profile picture reveal about you?
    - Is your page private? If public, it's important to avoid providing personal identifiers, such as home address, phone number, age, location, passwords, location of school, hangouts and so on.
    - Is your location enabled on apps?
    - With whom do you chat?
    - Who are your "friends"? If you don't know them in real life, don't add them.
    - How much information-sharing is too much?
    - What images are you taking and sharing?
        - Safety considerations with both social media and online gaming
        - Permanency of social-media posts (screenshots, sharing, etc.)
    - Who can tag you in photos and posts?
    - What are best practices for internet safety?
- Explain sexting and sextortion.
    - Define each and discuss the ramifications, including legal implications.
    - Emphasize that legal implications shouldn't deter youth from talking about sexting and sextortion because safety is paramount in such situations.
    - Make sure there's an understanding of the privacy parameters regarding the sending and receiving of messages.
    - Emphasize the importance of knowing who is messaging you. Rule of thumb: If something sounds too good to be true, it likely is.
    - Encourage youth to identify a trusted adult with whom they can discuss online gaming, social media and related safety concerns.
- Reinforce the importance of checking on friends and being a leader, not a follower.
    - Make sure youth understand when they need to talk to an adult on behalf of a friend — that keeping quiet to protect a friend (from online predators or various other dangerous behaviors, such as drug use) can put the friend at risk of greater harm.
    - Encourage students to empower their peers to make safe, responsible choices online. Empower confidence and responsibility in decision-making related to the use of any online platform.
- Discuss the potential pitfalls of dating apps.
    - Risks associated with meeting people online include personal-information sharing; not knowing the person with whom you're conversing; grooming; isolation, due to lack of face-to-face interaction; impact on self-esteem; and increased vulnerability to dangerous situations and potential offenders.
    - Sending explicit pictures of yourself or sharing explicit pictures someone sent you violates laws governing child-sexual-abuse material (CSAM).

- o CSAM is sometimes used to exploit trafficked youth on webpages, with perpetrators and traffickers trading CSAM for drugs, money, etc.
- Discuss a different kind of empowerment — one that challenges youth to refrain from screen time and instead seek out new hobbies and/or face-to-face engagements with other young people in safe environments that promote learning.

Other considerations

- Discuss familial trafficking and being trafficked by people they know, including risk factors, such as:
    - o Parents, a guardian or caregivers who are substance users.
    - o Youth who have previously experienced abuse or neglect, especially sexual abuse.
    - o Youth who are substance users.
- Explain the warning signs to look for in both their peers and the adults in their lives and/or their peers' lives (such as their friends' parents).

Building resilience

- Realize that some students might already have experienced trauma in their lives.
- Identify adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); explain what they are and how they apply.
- Explain that, even though childhood trauma has a lifelong impact, a survivor can heal and learn to regain the power and autonomy that their trauma stole from them. Explain that trauma needn't dictate their lives or define who they are. Victims don't get a choice in the bad things that have happened to them, but survivors do get to choose who they become after those bad things happen.
- Define resilience and explain the importance.
- Employ age-appropriate techniques for building resilience.
- Help youth identify external supports.
    - o Strong relationships. The key is developing ties with trusted adults, family or family of choice (because not everyone's biological family is healthy), school staff, peers who make positive choices, coaches, etc.
    - o Stability. Are life's basic needs being met for youth? What resources are available to assist?
    - o Rules at home. (Take care with this because the topic could be detrimental for youth living in abusive situations.)
    - o Role models. Having role models and being a role model are both important.
- Help youth identify inner-strengths.
    - o Do they have hope and belief?
    - o Do they care about others?
    - o Do they care about themselves?
    - o What makes them proud about themselves?
    - o What do their friends, relatives, teachers or others like about them?

- Emotionally and interpersonally, help youth learn how to:
  - Communicate well, especially in expressing feelings, fears and questions (learning how to have difficult conversations).
  - Solve problems effectively.
  - Read "the room" and individuals.
  - Identify healthy relationships versus unhealthy relationships
  - Build self-esteem by recognizing their potential.
- Discuss boundaries.
  - What are boundaries?
  - What's the difference between healthy and unhealthy boundaries?
  - Why do we need them?
  - How do we set them?
- Explain self-care.
  - Examples of recreational activities that can be forms of self-care: taking walks in nature, exercising, reading, writing, arts and crafts, joining clubs and organizations that promote self-care, positive socialization, and pursuing opportunities to learn.
  - Learn to express yourself. Not everyone can articulate their feelings in a journal or in person but encourage youth to try to express themselves in ways that make them feel comfortable. Suggest that they share a song with a trusted person to let that person know how they feel. Or, drawing a picture to express oneself can be therapeutic.

  Presenters: Keep in mind that you may have someone in your audience who has experienced trauma, and this technique may work well for them. Some individuals can't talk about what happened to them because of trauma's effects. If they are re-living or processing a past trauma, the speech part of their brain might shut down.
- Explore ways to improve self-awareness.
- Emphasize the importance of those working with youth knowing what trauma-based behaviors are — that behavior is often the way youth communicate that they're hurting.
- Empower students by encouraging them to use their voice.
  - Give them the necessary tools/resources to identify and report human trafficking.
  - Explain that they have agency over their own bodies.
  - Identify what a trustworthy adult should and should not do — help them to see the difference so they can seek out help if needed.
  - Demonstrate ways that they can advocate for themselves and others by:
    - Effectively communicating their needs and wants, including physical and mental-health needs, school needs and other needs (which should be explored during the discussion).
    - Speaking up for themselves or others if they believe something is wrong.

Resources for youth

- Identify teachers, coaches, school officials, church officials or other community members who represent a safe sounding-board for youth — someone they know they can go to and trust with their concerns.
- Include the official local, state and national resources for youth to contact if they or someone they know are being abused, neglected and/or trafficked.
  - Human Trafficking Hotline
  - Child Abuse Hotline
  - Child Protective Services (CPS) for their county
  - Local human trafficking task force or other law enforcement
- Besides an agency name and phone number, include social-media sites, websites, and other types of resources that youth may be more comfortable accessing but will still provide reliable information and/or a contact for help.

A message of inspiration, hope and gratitude

In the words of poet and activist Amanda Gorman:

> *"There is always light. Only if we are brave enough to see it. There is always light. Only if we are brave enough to be it."*

When awareness efforts involve sensitive content such as human trafficking, it is imperative that we, as invested community members and service providers, remember the experiences and feelings of survivors as we speak. It is equally important that we remember the feelings of our audience members, as they may be battling emotions related to previous lived experiences.

This content can be heavy and, as such, can impact people in distinct ways. But these presentations can also provide hope — and be the light that helps prevent human trafficking through education, strength and action. When presenting to youth, remember that they represent the voice of the future. We need to empower them, to encourage them to use their voices to help end human trafficking.

In doing this meaningful work, collaboratively, we can be a light in the dark by sharing a message of hopes that leaves others feeling inspired.

The Public Awareness Subcommittee of the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission appreciates your use of these guidelines, as it reinforces your commitment to awareness efforts that are grounded in best practices.

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