

Human Trafficking Awareness

What Educators Need to Know to Keep Students Safe

Since January marks National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, it is a critical time for schools to strengthen their role in keeping students safe and promote awareness for students and the community.

What Is Human Trafficking?

There are multiple types of human trafficking. The definitions below display the different characteristics.

- **Human Trafficking:** The act of exploiting individuals through force, deception, or coercion for the purpose of involuntary labor, sexual exploitation, or both
- **Child Sex Trafficking:** Causing a minor under the age of 18 to engage in a commercial sexual act, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is involved
- **Child Labor Trafficking:** Forcing, deceiving, or coercing a minor under 18 to perform work or services against their will

Vulnerable Students

Traffickers often target vulnerable youth, especially those experiencing instability or unmet needs. Since educators and other school staff interact with students daily, you may be the first person to help a student get out of these dangerous situations.

A student is more likely to be at risk of being trafficked if they:

- Are living in a home that is instable or in poverty
- Have abuse or substance abuse within their home
- Have experienced forms of neglect or abuse previously.
- Do not have support socially.
- Have low self-esteem.
- Are currently homeless
- Have been in foster care or other government programs
- Have disabilities or notable differences
- Are a part of migrant families



Teaching Students about Trafficking and Safety

The first step schools can take is promoting awareness of trafficking and healthy habits for students. Schools can do this several ways.

Create a Safe Space

- Foster trust by listening without judgment, and ensure students know where to go for help.
- Display posters and resources about trafficking awareness in common areas.

Educate Students

- Discuss healthy relationships and boundaries.
- Encourage students to speak up if they feel unsafe.

Establish Clear Reporting Protocols

- Make sure all staff know the steps to take if they suspect trafficking.
- Keep emergency contacts and procedures easily accessible.

Elementary School

- Use the buddy system. Make sure you always have a buddy (someone with you).
 - Make plans for if students get separated from staff, especially during trips.
 - Make sure students know their information (phone number, address, full name, etc).
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Middle School

- Engage in safe online and texting behavior. Do not send information to people you do not know. Do not send inappropriate images to others.
 - Teach students about what might be inappropriate for someone to ask them to do.
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High School

- Discuss the definitions of trafficking and what that might look like
- Safety measures to take when going places alone.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- If you are being trafficked or know someone who might be, tell a trusted adult.



GENERAL TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

The third step is observing students for signs of trafficking.

- Signs of fatigue, depression, or post-traumatic stress
- Poor physical condition or evidence of malnutrition
- Visible injuries such as bruises, scars, or other physical harm
- Untreated health problems, including sexually transmitted infections, work-related injuries, or exposure-related illnesses
- No personal control over finances, documents, or daily schedule
- Engages in harmful or self-destructive behaviors
- Provides answers to questions that appear scripted or rehearsed

SEX TRAFFICKING SIGNS

- Regular travel to different cities or across state lines
- Frequently observed at motels or hotels
- Noticeable drop in school performance
- Sudden changes in personality, behavior, or social connections
- Sudden possession of new or expensive items
- Altered grooming habits or personal hygiene
- Displays sexualized behavior or language that is inappropriate for their age

LABOR TRAFFICKING SIGNS

- Works without pay
- Receives extremely low wages or is compensated only through tips
- Allows employer to make personal or educational decisions on their behalf
- Assigned chores or duties that are excessive or unsuitable for their age
- Contributes to family expenses, such as for rent, food, or clothing
- Has insufficient living conditions while having a job

REFERENCES

Human trafficking in America's schools.

<https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/human-trafficking/human-trafficking-americas-schools.pdf>

Kid-safe conversations about human trafficking. SOS International. (2024, January 18). <https://sosresponds.org/blog/kid-safe-conversations-about-human-trafficking/>

