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# EDUCATION GUIDE

Holding Candid Conversations on Child Exploitation

**EMPOWERING YOUTH**  
to Recognize Sexual Exploitation



Education for Middle, High School, College-aged Youth & Adults

# Walking Wise Education Center

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## Parents & Caregivers

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents always treat a child’s disclosure of sexual abuse seriously and contact one of the following: the child’s pediatrician, a local child advocacy center, a child protection service agency, or the police. For more information, visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.HealthyChildren.org). In addition, if there are any suspicions of child sex trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or Rescue America at 833-599-FREE (3733). For more information, visit [HumanTraffickingHotline.org](https://www.HumanTraffickingHotline.org) or [RescueAmerica.ngo](https://www.RescueAmerica.ngo).

# LESSON #11



## LESSON PLAN #11

### The Family Secret

**Objective:** To provide ideas for creating a deeper conversation that examines how circumstances can increase the risk of a family member trafficking children within the family and the manipulative tactics they use.

#### I. Emotional Readiness Acknowledgment

- A. **Educator:** To ensure readiness for exploitation prevention education, refer to the *Walking Wise Implementation Tools* and the U.S. Department of Education's guide, *Human Trafficking in America's Schools (ed.gov)*. Also, please review the classroom teaching tips to prepare for educating students about exploitation.
- B. **Parents:** To prepare for educating your children about exploitation, please review the home teaching tips.

#### II. Animated Video & Classroom PowerPoint Presentation

- A. **Educator:** Consider completing the adult learning module on this topic for additional background. Download and adapt the classroom presentation to fit your students' age and school policies.
- B. **Parents:** Review the vocabulary words (below) with your child, then watch the animated video. After discussing the lesson, consider having your child complete the 4-question survey in this lesson plan.

#### Vocabulary

1. **Family Secret:** When family members are told to keep information hidden from others, this can include situations that involve harm, unsafe behavior, or illegal activity.
2. **Family (Familial) Sex Trafficking:** When a family member or caregiver allows or arranges for others to have sexual access to the family's child/teen in exchange for something of value, such as money, drugs, or housing.
3. **Child Exploitation:** Taking advantage of a child (under 18) in an unfair or harmful way for personal gain, often by using power, trust, or a child's vulnerability.
4. **Sex Trafficking:** To force, trick (fraud), or pressure (coerce) someone into sexual activity in exchange for money or something of value; or any time a child (under 18) is involved in commercial sexual activity.
5. **Child Abuse:** Any act (or failure to act) that causes harm, potential harm, or risk of harm to a child under 18, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and neglect.
6. **Predator:** A person who abuses, manipulates, or takes advantage of others for personal gain or control.
7. **Influence:** The ability to affect someone's thoughts, decisions, or actions without using force or direct control.
8. **Mind Control:** The use of manipulation to influence a person's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs to control their behavior or actions, often without them realizing it.
9. **Generational:** Patterns of behavior, beliefs, or experiences that are repeated and passed down within the family over time—from parents to their children, to grandchildren, etc.
10. **Payoff:** Something of value, such as money, drugs, or housing, given in exchange for cooperation or silence.
11. **Foster Care:** A temporary living arrangement where children are cared for by other adults when they cannot safely live with their biological parents.
12. **Juvenile Detention:** A secure facility where young people under 18 are held after being arrested, while they wait for a judge to decide what will happen in their case.

#### III. Post Video Discussion

##### 1. Who can be involved in trafficking children within their own family?

It is important to remember that most family members are safe and caring; however, trafficking can involve many different types of family members. This may include parents or guardians (biological, adoptive, foster, or stepparents), siblings (brothers, sisters, or stepsiblings), and extended family members such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, step or distant relatives. Understanding this helps us recognize that unsafe situations are not limited to one type of person, so we can identify warning signs early and seek help from a trustworthy adult.

2. **Referencing the video, what are examples of a “charmed life” versus “harsh circumstances”?**
  - **Charmed Life (Safer Environment):** A child may feel safe and supported by trustworthy adults, not have to worry about access to basic needs like food or housing, and be physically and emotionally cared for. They may enjoy school and have positive family relationships with parents, siblings, and friends.
  - **Harsh Circumstances (Higher Risk Environment):** A child may experience stress or instability at home, such as financial hardship that affects access to food, clothing, or shelter. They may be exposed to unsafe adult behavior, substance misuse, or unhealthy environments. Other challenges can include loneliness, learning or physical difficulties, or exposure to inappropriate content (such as pornography) at home. In more serious situations, this can include different forms of abuse, including violence or sexual abuse.
3. **How common is sexual abuse among children and teens?**

Most young people are surrounded by safe adults, but sexual abuse is more common than most people realize. In the United States, about 1 in 4 girls (25%) and 1 in 6 boys (16%) experience sexual abuse ([Dube, S. et al., 2005](#)). In most cases (91%), the abuser is someone the child or their family knows and trusts ([CDC.gov, 2026](#)).
4. **How often are victims trafficked by someone in their own family?**

Even though trafficking by a family member does happen, most families are not involved in these crimes, or often, family members may not be aware that harm is occurring. Studies show that a significant number of victims, about one-third (33%) in some research, are recruited or trafficked by a family member ([Polaris Project, 2021](#)). Other studies report that about 15% to over 40%, depending on how the data is collected and defined. This shows that while the exact number varies, trafficking can and does occur within families.
5. **How is sexual abuse different from sex trafficking?**
  - **Sexual Abuse:** When a young person experiences sexual abuse, it is a crime of child abuse involving harmful or inappropriate sexual behavior. Child abuse includes sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, as well as grooming and neglect.
  - **Child Sex Trafficking:** This is also a form of child abuse, but it involves exploitation for something of value. This means a person, sometimes a family member or another individual, allows or arranges for others to have sexual access to a child/teen in exchange for something of value, such as money, drugs, or housing. This can include sex trafficking, sextortion, grooming, child sexual abuse material, or forced labor.
  - **Laws:** Both types of child abuse are serious and must be reported. The key difference is that sex trafficking includes an exchange or benefit, which makes it a separate crime under the law with additional penalties.
6. **What situations can increase a young person’s vulnerability to family (familial) trafficking?**
  - Living with family members who misuse drugs or alcohol
  - Extreme financial hardship (poverty) or unstable housing
  - Experiencing mistreatment, including violence, abuse, or neglect
  - Caregiver involved in criminal activity or making illegal activity seem normal
  - Being involved in the child welfare system (foster care) or juvenile justice system
  - A history of running away from home
7. **What dangerous conditions might cause a parent to feel forced to exploit their child?**

In some cases, individuals may feel extreme pressure, but there is never a valid reason to exploit a child. For example, a family member may be under the control or influence of a trafficker, gang, drug dealer, or someone making threats or demands. Understanding these conditions helps explain how trafficking can happen, but it does not excuse harm or make it acceptable.
8. **How do family traffickers control young people to keep the abuse hidden?**
  - **Parental Authority:** Young people are often taught to trust and obey adults in their family, which can make it harder to question unsafe behavior.

- **Normalization:** If harmful behaviors are present in the home or community, they may be made to seem normal or acceptable over time.
- **Threats and Fear:** Tactics like isolation, threats, or emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse can make a young person feel afraid or unable to say no.
- **Loss of Family:** Young people may fear rejection by other family members or fear being kicked out of their home.
- **Financial Pressure:** A child may be told they must help provide money for the family’s needs, hearing threats of losing their house or not having enough food.
- **Substance Use:** Alcohol or drugs may be introduced or encouraged to lower resistance, affect memory, or create dependence.

**9. Why might young people NOT realize that sexual demands placed on them are wrong and illegal?**

In some cases, harmful behavior may begin at a young age, making it difficult for a child to recognize that something is wrong. Grooming and manipulation can cause a young person to believe that certain behaviors are normal or expected. Children may be told they are “special” or that they are helping their family, especially when there is pressure related to money, food, or housing. These messages can make it difficult for them to question what is happening. Because of this confusion and pressure, many young people do not fully understand that what is happening to them is wrong or illegal until they are older.

**10. How can sexual exploitation continue from one generation to the next?**

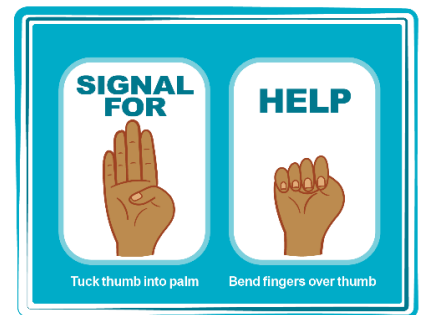
- **Learned Behaviors:** Young people learn what they think is “normal” based on what they see or experience at home or in their environment.
- **Continued Exposure to Risk:** Living in environments where harmful or unsafe behavior exists can increase the risk that the young person may repeat the behavior when they raise a family.
- **Protective Factors:** Education and safe relationships can teach young people to recognize unsafe situations and ask for help, breaking harmful patterns and protecting young family members in the future.

**IV. How to Ask for Help**

There are safe ways to get help if you or someone you know is being threatened or harmed.

**Options:**

- If you are in immediate danger, dial 911.
- If the sexual predator is NOT a family member, tell a parent or guardian.  
If the sexual predator IS a family member, tell a trustworthy adult.
- If you are a student, tell a trustworthy teacher, coach, school nurse, social worker, officer, principal, or guidance counselor.
- To gain internet access for help, use a computer at school or a public library.
- If you are in public, consider hand-motioning the “Signal for Help” to alert bystanders to call the police.



**24-Hour Hotlines for HELP**

- National Human Trafficking Hotline ..... 1-888-373-7888 or Text “BEFREE”: 233733
- Rescue America ..... 833-599-FREE (3733)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline ..... 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [Hotline.RAINN.org/online](https://www.hotline.rainn.org/)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children..... 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline..... 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TEXT: 88788
- National Runaway Safeline ..... 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

## VIDEO SCRIPT #11

### The Family Secret of Child Sex Trafficking

*Link: [The Family Secret of Child Sex Trafficking](#)*

*Note: The bolded words are defined in the video vocabulary list under section II.*

Does it seem like only kids in the movies get to live a charmed life? While in reality, some kids live under harsh circumstances.

Parents and other family adults are supposed to help keep you safe. But sadly, that's not the case for everyone. There are many children who experience sexual abuse at home.

Some family members **escalate** sexual abuse by sex trafficking their own children. We'll refer to this offense as "**family trafficking**."

Sex trafficking becomes a family's guarded secret, sometimes harming children from one **generation** to the next.

Family traffickers target the most vulnerable children whom they hold power over.

Even mothers and fathers can be family traffickers. That means some moms, dads, aunts, uncles, siblings, and grandparents allow others to sexually harm their children in exchange for a payoff. They receive drugs, money, rent, and other necessities for giving predators access to their children.

Often, kids who are trafficked by family members have lived in difficult situations, such as poverty, homelessness, **foster care**, or **juvenile detention**. These conditions can make kids more vulnerable to **sexual exploitation**, especially when financial pressures cause some desperate parents to make painful choices.

Some family **predators** cleverly fool others into believing they're admirable people. They can even hold positions of authority or strive to be **influential** and popular."

Here's how family traffickers might work to trap young people under their control:

- They may pretend that children having sex with adults is normal.
- They could destroy a child's self-confidence, making them feel worthless and deserving of abuse.
- OR – praise their victim, saying they were chosen because they're so special.
- Often, traffickers blame children...and vow to hurt people they love if the truth gets told.
- Sometimes, they make threats, declaring that the family will lose their home or will be unable to put food on the table if the victim refuses to cooperate.

What family traffickers don't want kids to know is that they're the criminals, and children are the victims!

If this is your experience, reach out to a trustworthy adult.

Dial 911 if you're in immediate danger.

Or hand-motion the 'Signal for Help' to alert bystanders.

Otherwise, contact a 24-hour hotline for help.



## SURVEY #11

### The Family Secret

*Please mark an **X** in the box next to the best answer:*

**1. Which statement is TRUE about sex trafficking when family members are involved?**

- A. Trafficking family members only happens in households outside the United States.
- B. Family trafficking often involves someone the young person loves or trusts.
- C. Trafficking only happens when a child is kidnapped by strangers.
- D. Trafficking only affects children who run away from home.

**2. How do family traffickers often make others believe they are trustworthy or good people?**

- A. They often act friendly and build positive relationships with others.
- B. They may hold positions of authority that help them earn trust and respect.
- C. They can be influential, making others less likely to question them.
- D. All the above.

**3. Which is NOT a common way FAMILY traffickers manipulate or control their children?**

- A. They expose the young person to unsafe situations to make it seem normal.
- B. They kidnap other young people from outside the community.
- C. They make the young person feel “chosen” or special.
- D. They pressure the young person to make money to help support the family.

**4. How do family traffickers often control young people to keep the abuse hidden?**

- A. By making the young person feel afraid to tell anyone.
- B. By encouraging the young person to talk with others openly.
- C. By giving the young person freedom to make their own decisions.
- D. By ignoring the young person.

## **SURVEY #11**

### **The Family Secret**

The survey can be administered either after the lesson discussion or as a pre- and post-survey before students watch the video.

### **ANSWER KEY**

KEY #11

- 1) B
- 2) D
- 3) B
- 4) A

## RESOURCES #11

### The Family Secret

Visit us online at [WalkingWise.com](https://www.walkingwise.com).

#### Other Resource Links – Websites accessed 11/2022

The Samaritan Woman, Institute for Shelter Care – [InstituteForShelterCare.org](https://www.instituteforsheltercare.org): Domestic Minor Familial Sex Trafficking: A National Study of Prevalence, Characteristics, and Challenges across the Justice Process (2022)  
<https://humantraffickingsearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Familial-Trafficking-Study-FINAL.pdf>

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – School of Government: *Human Trafficking by Families*  
[https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/reports/PMB%2024\\_Henderson.pdf](https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/reports/PMB%2024_Henderson.pdf)

OnWatch™ – [IamOnWatch.org](https://www.iamonwatch.org): Video Module 2 – *Child Sexual Abuse and Familial Trafficking*  
<https://www.iamonwatch.org/training/overview>

U.S. Department of State – *Navigating the Unique Complexities in Familial Trafficking*  
[https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Navigating-the-Unique-Complexities-in-Familial-Trafficking\\_LOW.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Navigating-the-Unique-Complexities-in-Familial-Trafficking_LOW.pdf)

The Exodus Road – [TheExodusRoad.com](https://www.theexodusroad.com): *Familial Trafficking: A Crime Against Children*  
<https://theexodusroad.com/familial-sex-trafficking-a-crime-against-children/>

Guardian Group – [GuardianGroup.org](https://www.guardiangroup.org): *Familial Trafficking*  
<https://guardiangroup.org/familial-trafficking/>

Face It – [FaceItAbuse.org](https://www.faceitabuse.org): *Familial Sex Trafficking: Victims Hiding in Plain Sight*  
<https://faceitabuse.org/2020/01/09/familial-sex-trafficking-victims-hiding-in-plain-sight/>

International Maritime Organization – [IMO.int](https://www.iom.int): *Family Members are Involved in Nearly Half of Child Trafficking...*  
[https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/MAD/Counter-trafficking%20Data%20Brief%20081217.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/MAD/Counter-trafficking%20Data%20Brief%20081217.pdf)

Teen Trauma – [TeenTrauma.com](https://www.teentrauma.com) – *Familial Trafficking: What Happens When Sex Trafficking Starts at Home?*  
<https://teentrauma.com/familial-trafficking-and-complex-trauma/>

Journal of Family Violence – [SpringerLink.com](https://www.springer.com): *Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking Conditions...*  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10896-018-9950-y>

United Nations – [News.un.org](https://www.news.un.org): *Family members linked to nearly half of child trafficking cases...*  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/11/637532-family-members-linked-nearly-half-child-trafficking-cases-new-un-backed-data>

Bridge Hope – [BridgeHopeNow.org](https://www.bridgehopenow.org) - *What is familial trafficking?*  
[BridgeHope-FamilialTrafficking.pdf \(windows.net\)](https://www.bridgehopenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/BridgeHope-FamilialTrafficking.pdf)

Shared Hope International – [sharedhope.org](https://www.sharedhope.org) – *Familial Trafficking Warning Signs*  
[https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SHI\\_Warning-Signs-of-Familial-Trafficking.pdf](https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SHI_Warning-Signs-of-Familial-Trafficking.pdf)

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