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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

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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 #12

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LESSON PLAN #12

The Hidden Buyers

Objective: To provide ideas for exploring factors that drive people to purchase sex, and to show how their behavior financially contributes to the commercial sex trade and causes harm to young and vulnerable people.

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 student survey in this lesson plan.

Video Vocabulary

1. **Commercial Sex Trade:** An illegal system where sexual activities are bought, sold, or exchanged for money or something of value.
2. **Human Trafficker (Pimp):** A person who uses force (violence/held captive), fraud (tricks/lies), or coercion (pressure), or targets someone under 18, to make them engage in commercial sex or forced labor for profit.
3. **Sex Buyer:** A person who pays money or gives something of value in exchange for sexual activity; also referred to as a client, customer, trick, or john.
4. **Exploitation:** Taking advantage of someone in an unfair or harmful way for personal gain – using power, trust, or a person’s vulnerability against them.
5. **Grooming:** A process where someone manipulates a person by building trust with the intent to exploit or abuse them.
6. **Sexual Innocence:** Having little or no knowledge or experience of sexual behavior, often due to being young or unaware.
7. **Trauma:** A deeply upsetting experience that affects a person's thoughts, feelings, behavior, and how the body responds long after the event.
8. **Depression:** A lasting feeling of deep sadness, hopelessness, or loss of interest that affects daily life.
9. **Identity:** The way a person is recognized, including personal information such as names, address, passwords, and other private details.

III. Post Video Discussion

1. **How does purchasing sex connect someone to the commercial sex trade?**
Buying sex is funding and growing an illegal system known as the commercial sex trade. People known as “sex buyers” pay money or give something of value in exchange for sexual activity. This creates demand, which motivates traffickers to exploit and control vulnerable individuals to make a profit, often using force, fraud, or coercion. When people buy sex, they often contribute to the harm and victimization of another person.
2. **How do “supply” and “demand” affect the commercial sex trade?**
An industry exists when people are willing to pay for something (demand), and others are willing to provide it (supply) to make money. In the commercial sex trade, sex buyers create the demand by paying for sex, and traffickers respond by supplying victims to profit from that demand.
3. **What are some common characteristics among people who purchase sex?**
There is no single “type” of person who participates in buying sex. However, research shows some common patterns:

- **Gender:** Studies reveal that most sex buyers in the United States are male.
- **Age:** Buyers vary widely in age range, from young adults to older individuals (18 to 80 years old).
- **Relationships:** Buyers may be single, dating, straight or gay, married, or have children.
- **Education:** Buyers represent people who have achieved all levels of education, including high school, community college, bachelor's, and professional degrees.
- **Employment:** They may work in different fields, including business, trade, healthcare, law, education, government, and community roles.
- **Income:** Frequent buyers often have higher incomes or extra money to spend ([Demand Abolition, 2018](#)).

4. What are some factors that can influence people to purchase sex?

- **Influential Adults:** Some young people can be influenced by adults, such as parents or mentors, who normalize or approve of buying sex, including exposure to pornography in the home.
- **Environment & Peer Pressure:** Attitudes and behaviors can be shaped by peers, community norms, and the environments in which young people are raised.
- **Media Influence:** Highly sexualized media, such as song lyrics, video games, social media, movies, and online content, can make buying sex seem normal and acceptable.
- **Exposure to Pornography:** Easy access to pornography can shape beliefs about relationships and sexuality, sometimes encouraging harmful attitudes that can make women, girls, and boys seem like objects.
- **Upon Early Adulthood:** As young people reach legal adulthood, access to adult clubs often introduces or reinforces the idea of paying for sexual experiences. ([Wilkinson, Kevin L. Jr, 2023](#)).

5. What common false beliefs do sex buyers hold to justify their illegal behavior?

- **“It’s normal behavior”:** Some believe buying sex is common or acceptable, using phrases like “boys will be boys” or “we’re both adults” to avoid responsibility, even though many victims are being exploited, do not have a real choice, or may be minors (under 18).
- **“It’s just a personal need”:** Some justify their actions by claiming they are simply meeting their own personal needs.
- **“No one is being hurt”:** Some believe buying sex is a “victimless crime” and assume the person involved is choosing to participate.
- **“They want to be there”:** Some convince themselves that the person they are buying is willing or even enjoying the experience, ignoring the reality that traffickers control many victims through force (violence), fraud (tricks/lies), or coercion (pressure).

6. What types of fake jobs can be offered to trick victims into sex trafficking?

Traffickers often use fake or misleading job opportunities to target young and vulnerable people:

- **Massage:** Traffickers may advertise fake massage therapy jobs, then pressure or force individuals to perform sexual acts instead of legitimate massage services.
- **Acting & Modeling:** Traffickers may pose as agents or talent recruiters, promising fame, photo shoots, or auditions. These offers lure victims into exploitation, often under the appearance of “getting discovered.”
- **Food & Entertainment:** Positions such as servers, hostesses, or dancers in certain clubs, casinos, and bars can be used to recruit people and gradually pressure them into sexual exploitation.
- **Hospitality:** Traffickers often use hotels or motels to meet sex buyers and carry out exploitation, while maintaining control over victims in these settings.

7. What might lead some people to buy sex?

Certain thoughts, feelings, or desires may motivate some buyers. However, these feelings do not justify the behavior, because buying sex contributes to the mental and physical harm of others.

- **Power and Control:** Some buyers are motivated by the desire to feel power and control over another person. ([Demand Abolition, 2018](#)), ([She Has a Name Presentation, 2025](#)).
- **Avoiding Relationships:** Some buyers are not interested in a real relationship and want to avoid the responsibility or commitment that comes with a genuine romantic partner.

- **Convenience:** Some believe it is easier to pay for sex than to invest time and effort into building a healthy relationship.
- **Loneliness or Isolation:** Some feel alone or struggle to connect with others and may seek a false sense of connection by buying sex.
- **Low Self-esteem:** Some buyers struggle with low self-worth or believe they cannot form a healthy relationship.
- **Depression:** Some buyers may try to cope with depression or sadness by seeking paid companionship.
- **Curiosity or Excitement:** Some are curious, want to experiment, or are looking for something new or exciting.

8. How are victims harmed or traumatized when they are trafficked (sold) to sex buyers?

People who are sold to sex buyers often experience serious and lasting harm:

- **Control and Entrapment:** Victims are often tricked, pressured, or forced into situations they would not choose. Traffickers use lies, threats, and manipulation to control them. Victims may be moved to unfamiliar places, isolated from support, and made to feel they cannot leave ([Edwards, E. et al., 2022](#)).
- **Emotional and Mental Harm:** Many victims suffer from depression, anxiety, and thoughts of self-harm. Some use drugs or alcohol to cope with the trauma they experience ([Demand Abolition, 2018](#)).
- **Physical and Sexual Violence:** Victims are often exposed to repeated physical and sexual violence, which can cause long-term health problems and deep emotional pain ([Wilkinson, Kevin L. Jr, 2023](#)).
- **Documented Impact:** Even after seeking help, victims typically experience long-term fear, shame, stigma, ongoing psychological manipulation from their traffickers, and distrust of law enforcement and social services ([Safe House Project, 2026](#)).

9. How can society put the commercial sex trade out of business?

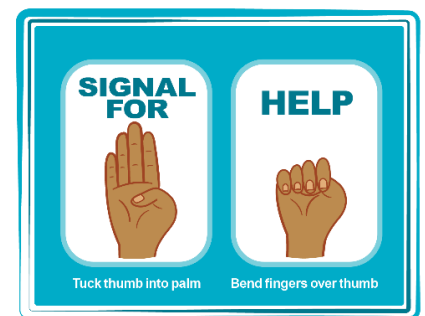
- **Change Attitudes:** Challenge beliefs that excuse or normalize buying sex.
- **Build Awareness:** Understand how traffickers manipulate and control people.
- **Resist Pressure:** Recognize and push back against unsafe or harmful influences.
- **Education:** Know how to reach out to a trustworthy adult for support.

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](#)
- 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 #12

The Hidden Buyers of Sex Trafficking

Note: The bolded words have been defined in the video vocabulary list under section II.

Ever had someone steal something precious from you?

An item that you value and can never replace.

This valuable could be a family keepsake, photos on your phone, or even your **identity**.

Now, imagine someone stealing *control over your own body*—and your freedom.

This is how victims of sexual abuse and sex trafficking often describe their experiences.

And while **human traffickers** are in the spotlight as villains, others are hiding in the background who are just as responsible for these crimes.

We're talking about the buyers—the adults who pay for sex with young or vulnerable people.

They're not always who you'd expect...

We often imagine creepy old men, or maybe rich, dangerous, and even awkward guys.

But—**sex buyers** can be people we interact with every day.

Buyers can be businesspeople, emergency workers, builders, and tradespeople.

They can be professionals such as doctors, politicians, and lawyers.

Buyers can also be people we trust, such as coaches, teachers, pastors, counselors, or even family members.

Why do some people buy sex?

What researchers discovered is eye-opening.

Pornography is often used to **groom** young males into believing that buying sex is normal and acceptable.^{1,2}

Some sex buyers claim they commit this crime because they're feeling bored, lonely, or depressed.³

Others claim to be curious, or pressured by friends who are looking for fun, excitement—or a way to fit in.³

But here's the disturbing truth:

For years, victims of exploitation were punished under the law, while sex buyers often slipped away unnoticed.

Yet buyers' actions cause deep and lasting **trauma** for victims who are violated. This may lead to severe **depression**, struggling with substance use, and sometimes thoughts of ending their life.

What sex buyers don't want us to know...is that their money robs victims—stealing childhoods, happiness, and dreams for the future.

If you or someone you know is a victim of **exploitation**, ask a trustworthy adult for help.

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.

1. Wilkinson Jr., Kevin L. (2024, July 4). The Breeding of Wolves: Understanding the Escalation Continuum & Escalation Dynamics of Contemporary Sex Trafficking, p. 21. DigitalCommons.liberty.edu. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/4600/>
2. Demand Abolition (2018, November). Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand, p. 34. Demandabolition.org. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from <https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf>.
3. She Has a Name (2025), Why People Solicit Sex. SheHasAName.org.



STUDENT SURVEY #12

The Hidden Buyers

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

1. Who are the most common sex buyers in the United States?

- A. Mostly women aged 18 to 25
- B. Mostly men from a wide range of ages and professions
- C. Mostly teenagers who are influenced by video games
- D. Only wealthy or high-status individuals

2. Which of the following is a false belief that some sex buyers use to justify their actions?

- A. Buying sex does not hurt anyone.
- B. Paying for sex encourages traffickers to exploit others.
- C. Victims are often controlled through force and pressure.
- D. Victims often suffer from emotional and physical harm.

3. What does "demand" mean in the commercial sex trade?

- A. The number of traffickers in a community
- B. People's willingness to pay for sex
- C. Laws that regulate businesses
- D. The number of victims identified in a community

4. What is one powerful way to help eliminate the commercial sex trade?

- A. Teach victims to avoid traffickers
- B. Ignore situations that seem suspicious
- C. Focus only on arresting traffickers, not buyers
- D. Educate people to stop the demand for buying sex

STUDENT SURVEY #12

The Hidden Buyers

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 #12

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

RESOURCES #12

The Hidden Buyers

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

Other Resource Links – Websites accessed 5/2025

National Center on Sexual Exploitation – *Combating Sex Buying – Failure to Combat Sex Buying Guarantees Not Only the Survival of Sex Trafficking but Also the Creation of Future Generations of Victims*. <https://endsexualexploitation.org/issues/sex-buying/>

Research Study: *The Breeding of Wolves: Understanding the Escalation Continuum & Escalation Dynamics of Contemporary Sex Trafficking*. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/4600/>

Demand-Forum.org: *Sex Buyer Arrests*
<https://demand-forum.org/sex-buyer-arrests/>

Demanding Justice – DemandingJustice.org: *Demanding Justice Report – 2014*
[http://www.demandingjustice.org/content/themes/dj/assets/resources/Demanding Justice Report 2014 Final.pdf](http://www.demandingjustice.org/content/themes/dj/assets/resources/Demanding%20Justice%20Report%202014%20Final.pdf)

Demand Abolition – DemandAbolition.org: *Facts About Men Who Buy Sex*
<https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf>
<https://www.demandabolition.org/research/facts-men-buy-sex/>
<https://www.demandabolition.org/research/>

Ohio Attorney General – OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov: *John School: Guidelines for Sex Buyer Education Programs*
<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Publications-Files/Publications-for-Victims/John-School-Guidelines-for-SBE-Programs>

Broken link? Please notify us at support@WalkingWise.com. **Thank you!**