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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 Youth Curriculum

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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 law enforcement. 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 # 1

The Myths & Reality



LESSON PLAN #1

The Myths & Reality

Objective: Provide parents and educators with ideas for creating a deeper conversation that explores how myths can contribute to overlooking the indicators that appear when a young person is being trafficked or groomed.

I. Emotional Readiness Acknowledgement

- A. To ensure school readiness for trafficking prevention education, refer to the *Walking Wise Implementation Guide* and the U.S. Department of Education's guide, *Human Trafficking in America's Schools (PDF)* ([ed.gov](#)).
- B. Please review the classroom teaching tips to prepare for educating students about exploitation.

II. Animated Video & Classroom PowerPoint Presentation

- A. **Parents:** Review the video's vocabulary words (below) with your child, then watch the animated video. After the lesson discussion, consider giving the 4-question survey (download the PDF).
- B. **Educators:** Prepare to teach this course by taking the education module for adults to develop your understanding of this topic. Download and edit the classroom presentation to fit your students' age and school policies. Additionally, consider adding Slido to the PowerPoint to enhance student interaction.

Vocabulary

1. **Myth:** A false belief commonly held by a group.
2. **Reality:** What happens in real life.
3. **Child Exploitation:** Taking advantage of a young person for someone else's benefit in a harmful way.
4. **Sex Trafficking:** When a person under 18 is pressured, manipulated, or forced to take part in sexual activity for money or something of value.
5. **Felony:** A serious crime that involves violence or harm to others and can be punished by long prison sentences or large fines.
6. **Kidnap:** to take someone away illegally by force.
7. **Manipulation:** influencing or controlling someone's behavior or decisions unfairly, often for personal gain.
8. **Mental Control:** Manipulating someone's thoughts and emotions until they accept new ideas without question.
9. **Target:** a person (or object) chosen for attack or selected for exploitation for someone else's gain.
10. **Rural:** areas outside of cities with low populations, open spaces, and an emphasis on agriculture and natural resources.
11. **Urban:** a city, and can sometimes refer to economically depressed inner-city neighborhoods.
12. **Suburban:** communities directly outside a city, and often refer to smaller residential neighborhoods on the outskirts of a city.
13. **False Sense of Security:** Feeling safe in a situation that may actually involve risk.
14. **Authority Figure:** A person who has influence or leadership over others.
15. **Social Circle:** A group of people who regularly spend time together or share interests.
16. **Abuse:** the repeated use of cruelty or violence against others.
17. **Coercion:** Pressuring or threatening someone so they feel they have no choice but to act against their will.
18. **Intimidation:** Using fear or threats to control someone's behavior.
19. **Threat:** making known an intention to cause pain, harm, and punishment, as well as misuse of the legal system, such as deportation.
20. **False Promise:** A commitment made with no intention of keeping it.
21. **Emotional Captivity:** Feeling trapped emotionally, even when not physically locked in or imprisoned.

III. Post Video Discussion

- 1. In what types of businesses or industries are people commonly trafficked?**

Industries in which sex trafficking is more likely to occur include hospitality businesses, such as hotels, casinos, restaurants, social media platforms, domestic work, topless bars, strip clubs, illicit massage parlors, and transportation companies. Businesses where human trafficking would more likely occur include restaurants, hotels, transportation companies, agriculture (crops and livestock), fishing and aquaculture, logging, mining, construction, factories, carnivals, and tourism.
- 2. Referencing the video’s opening scene, what does it mean to experience a “false sense of security”?**

A false sense of security refers to the feeling of being safer than one actually is. For example, parents may mistakenly believe they have protected their children from unsafe adults because the family moved to a safe neighborhood. Still, the threat unknowingly exists if they forget to set up or enforce the necessary safety settings on their child's or teen’s online social media apps.
- 3. What does it mean to “operate in plain sight”?**

Operating in plain sight can refer to illegal or harmful activity that may occur in everyday places without attracting attention. People may behave in ways that are not suspicious even when they have threatening intentions. Often, people believe criminal activity happens in dark alleys or places not visited by the average person. However, illegal activity can occur in areas where people commonly spend time.
- 4. What does the phrase “not in my community” mean?**

The phrase “not in my community” means believing that serious problems only happen somewhere else and not where we live. When people think this way, they may stop paying attention to warning signs or safety risks. The truth is that harmful situations can happen in any community. Staying aware and talking openly about safety helps protect young people.
- 5. What does the term “people of authority” mean?**

An authority figure is a person who leads or oversees others, such as a teacher, coach, boss, or community leader. Sometimes, young people may feel they must obey an authority figure, even if the person does not actually have the right to control them. In some cases, abusers or traffickers may try to use their position or influence to pressure young people into doing things that feel wrong or unsafe. It is important to remember that a trustworthy authority figure will never ask someone to do something illegal, harmful, or inappropriate.
- 6. What does the term “false promises” mean?**

A false promise is when someone says they will do something but never plans to keep the commitment. They may say things that sound exciting or caring to trick someone. For example, a trafficker might promise love, fame, money, or a special opportunity to gain a young person’s trust. These promises are used to manipulate someone into doing things that may be unsafe or harmful.
- 7. What are the ways traffickers can hold a victim captive?**
 - **Brainwashing:** Traffickers can use manipulative ways to change a young person’s thought process, giving the unsafe person control of the victim's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.
 - **Trauma Bonding or Emotional Bondage:** Traffickers use rewards and punishments in cycles to create a powerful emotional connection with their victims. This form of abuse causes the victim to experience positive and negative emotions for the trafficker, such as love or loyalty, while also living in fear.
 - **Economic Dependency:** Traffickers can gain control over young people who cannot earn enough money to buy necessities like food and shelter. Victims often feel stuck because they have no way to support themselves when wanting to break free from a trafficker who provides their basic needs.
 - **Drug and Alcohol Use:** Traffickers work to influence an individual's substance use or introduce the individual to drugs and alcohol to create dependency. Substance use can increase a victim's economic, physical, and emotional dependency on their trafficker, significantly reducing their ability to end their exploitation.

- **Imprisonment:** This means someone’s freedom is taken away so they cannot move around freely or make their own choices. This can happen physically, such as being locked in a place, or emotionally, when someone uses control and strict rules to limit a person’s independence. Even if a person is not “locked up,” traffickers may try to isolate or separate them from friends and family to keep control over them.

8. What does “mental control” mean?

Mental control occurs when someone tries to influence another person’s thoughts and feelings to switch their decisions. Traffickers may try to gain mental control by slowly changing how a young person thinks about themselves or their situation:

They might do this by:

- Trying to influence a young person’s beliefs and choices.
- Using manipulation or mind games to control behavior.
- Causing confusion or self-doubt so the person questions their own judgment.
- Making the young person feel like they must depend on the trafficker for support or approval.

Before someone can leave a harmful situation, they often need to realize that they are being manipulated or controlled. Once they understand what is happening, they can begin to look for ways to get help from a trusted adult.

9. What does entering someone’s “social circle” mean?

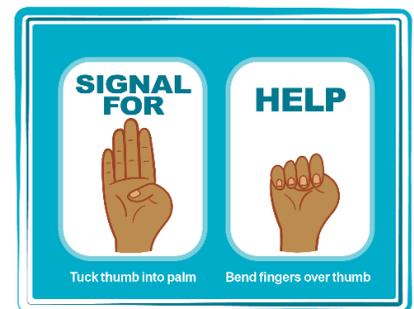
A social circle refers to people who connect through shared interests. They regularly spend time together to socialize and grow friendships. Traffickers use a form of trickery: They pretend to share common interests and work to blend into a friend group to look for vulnerabilities in the young person they are attempting to groom.

IV. How to Ask for Help

There are ways to ask for help if you become a victim of sex trafficking. You can also get help for someone you know who feels threatened or trapped by a sexual predator or sex trafficker.

Options:

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



24-Hour Hotlines for HELP

National Human Trafficking Hotline

[Rescue America](#)

National Sexual Assault Hotline

[National Runaway Safeline](#)

1-888-373-7888 or Text “BEFREE”: 233733

[833-599-FREE \(3733\)](#)

1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [Hotline.RAINN.org/online](https://www.rainn.org/)

[1-800-RUNAWAY \(786-2929\)](#)

VIDEO SCRIPT #1

The Myths & Reality of Child Sex Trafficking

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

Ever experienced the false sense of security of a locked front door when, unknowingly, your back door was standing wide open for strangers to enter?

Likewise, sex trafficking **myths** can be just as misleading, causing us to overlook common tactics used by traffickers who often operate in plain sight!

It's a crime to involve a child, under 18 years of age, in a commercial sex act or the production of sexually explicit photos and videos. Commercial sex is the exchange of anything of value for sexual activity, including drugs, money, food, shelter, or basic necessities.

People who attempt to entangle children in the sale of sex are labeled as child **sex traffickers**. And sex buyers who hire a minor are committing a **felony**!

Here are widespread myths about sex trafficking:

- Myth: Sex trafficking victims are usually **kidnapped**
It's common to be on guard for kidnapping, but most sex traffickers use emotional **manipulation** to control or **brainwash** their victims.
- Myth: Sex trafficking victims are strictly female
Society is often on the lookout to protect girls, but traffickers **target** all genders.
- Myth: Sex trafficking does not occur in my community
Sex traffickers operate throughout the United States. This includes **rural**, **urban**, and **suburban** communities. And traffickers have a direct **pipeline** to children through social media and online gaming.
- Myth: Sex traffickers only target kids they don't know
Kids are taught to be cautious of strangers, but often children are trafficked by the people they know. This can include family members, love interests, friends of the family, and people of authority.
- Myth: Sex trafficking usually involves **violence**
Trafficking can involve physical **abuse**, but sex traffickers typically **coerce** victims using **intimidation**, **threats**, or false promises of love and support.
- Myth: Sex traffickers hold a victim **captive**
Traffickers can hold children against their will, but they often use emotional bondage as their trap – through brainwashing, trauma bonding, economic dependency, and drug addiction.
- Myth: Trafficked victims always want help out
Some victims feel stuck because they don't recognize the crime committed against them or may believe they chose to participate. Others must first overcome mental control before physically breaking free.

What sex traffickers don't want you to know is that they often attempt to enter your **social circle**!

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 #1
The Myths & Reality

<i>Please mark an X in the box next to the best answer:</i>	
1. What does it mean when harmful activity happens “in plain sight”?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. It only happens in secret locations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B. It happens in everyday places without attracting attention.
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. It only happens late at night.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D. It always involves people wearing disguises.
2. A trustworthy authority figure will never ask someone to do something illegal or inappropriate.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. True
<input type="checkbox"/>	B. False
3. What does the phrase “not in my community” mean?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. Believing serious problems only happen somewhere else, and not where we live.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B. Thinking safety rules are not important.
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. Believing a neighborhood is unsafe because a police station is far away.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D. Discovering the neighborhood is too new to show up on a map.
4. What is an example of a false promise someone might use to trick a young person?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. Offering to help a friend who is struggling with homework
<input type="checkbox"/>	B. Volunteering to referee a sports game
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. Asking someone to meet for dinner after a school event
<input type="checkbox"/>	D. Promising fame, money, or love to gain trust
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

SURVEY #1

The Myths & Reality

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 #1

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

RESOURCES #1

The Myths & Reality

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

Other Resource Links – Websites accessed on 8/2025.

Severe Forms of Trafficking in Persons – Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)

- **Child Sex Trafficking:** It is a federal offense to knowingly recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, obtain, or maintain a minor knowing or in reckless regard of the fact that the victim is a minor and would be caused to engage in any sex act, on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person [[18 USC § 1591](#)]. Section 1590 does not require proof that the defendant used force, threats of force, fraud, coercion, or any combination of those means to cause the minor to engage in a commercial sex act ([Citizens' Guide to U.S. Federal Child Exploitation Laws, 2023](#)).
- **Sex trafficking** means the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age [[22 USC § 7102\(9\)\(A\)](#)].
- **Labor trafficking** means the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery [[22 USC § 7102\(9\)\(B\)](#)].
- **Commercial sex act** means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person [[22 USC § 7102](#)].

US Department of Education – *Human Trafficking in America's Schools*

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE-2021HumanTraffickingGuide-508.pdf>

US Department of Justice – *Citizens Guide to U.S. Federal Child Exploitation Laws, 2023*

<https://www.justice.gov/criminal/criminal-ceos/citizens-guide-us-federal-law-child-sex-trafficking>

OnWatch™ – [iamonwatch.org](https://www.iamonwatch.org): Video Module 1 – *Introduction to Sex Trafficking*

<https://www.iamonwatch.org/training/overview>

Polaris Project, Human Trafficking Hotline – [PolarisProject.org](https://polarisproject.org): *Myths, Facts, and Statistics*

<https://polarisproject.org/myths-facts-and-statistics/>

Homeland Security, Blue Campaign – [dhs.gov/blue-campaign](https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign): *Myths and Misconceptions*

<https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/myths-and-misconceptions>

Ohio Attorney General – [OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov](https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov): *Did You Know*

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Individuals-and-Families/Victims/Human-Trafficking/Did-you-know>

Penn State, Medical Practitioner Presentation – nosorh.org: *The Five Myths of Human Trafficking*

<https://nosorh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Human-Trafficking-Handout-Lisa-Davis.pdf>

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