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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 #8



LESSON PLAN #8

The Rural Risks

Objective: To provide ideas for creating a deeper conversation that explores the unique factors of living in a rural community that increase a young person's vulnerability to sexual predators and traffickers.

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:** Get started by reviewing the vocabulary words with your child, then watch the animated video. After discussing the lesson, consider having your child complete the student survey in this lesson plan.

Vocabulary

1. **Rural:** Areas located outside of cities with low populations, open spaces, and an emphasis on agriculture and natural resources.
2. **Tight Knit (Tightly Woven):** A group of closely connected people who have strong and supportive relationships.
3. **Deep-rooted:** Something that is strong and developed over a long time, making it hard to change.
4. **Rumor:** A story or information that spreads from person to person, often as gossip, that may not be true.
5. **Poverty:** Not having enough money or resources to meet basic needs and having fewer possessions than is socially acceptable.
6. **Underestimate:** To think something is less serious or important than it really is.
7. **Vulnerable:** At risk of being hurt or taken advantage of because of a lack of support, protection, or resources.
8. **Acquaintance:** To know someone or be familiar with them.
9. **Lucrative:** Something that makes a lot of money.
10. **Isolate:** To separate or cut someone off from friends, family, or trustworthy adults.
11. **Rest Area:** A place along the highway where travelers can rest, where restrooms and snacks can be available.
12. **Desolate:** A place with few people around that can be empty or isolated.
13. **Exploit:** To benefit by taking advantage of someone in an unfair or harmful way.
14. **Coercion:** To pressure or threaten to do something they do not want to do.
15. **Family (Familial) Trafficking:** When a family member pressures, tricks, or controls a child in their family into sexual exploitation or forced labor, often for money, drugs, or personal gain.

III. Post Video Discussion

1. **In what types of communities can young people be more vulnerable to human trafficking?**
 - Young people can be vulnerable to human trafficking in all types of communities.
 - **Rural Areas:** Small towns and farmlands with fewer people, longer distances between places, and limited transportation, where unsafe situations may be harder to notice.
 - **Urban Centers:** Large, busy cities with many people, where unsafe people or traffickers can blend in more easily.
 - **Suburban Areas:** Neighborhoods outside cities with schools, jobs, and families, where risks can still exist, especially from people who are known or trusted.

2. **How can the tactics used by unsafe people be similar even though communities are very different?**

- **Risk Factors:** Unsafe people or traffickers use the same tactics everywhere. They look for young people or those in similar situations that make them vulnerable, such as not having enough money to meet basic needs, unstable housing, or a lack of adult support or supervision.
- **Types of Unsafe People:** Traffickers can be found in all types of communities. However, depending on the community, certain patterns may be more common.
 - **Rural:** Traffickers can be anyone, but they are more often someone the victim already knows, like a family member. ([Demand Abolition, 2018](#))
 - **Urban:** Victims are more often introduced to trafficking by a boyfriend, friend, or someone connected to their peers. ([Perkins, E.B. et al. 2016](#))

3. **What percentage of U.S. land and population is classified as rural?**

- About 97% of all the land in the United States is considered rural ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2017](#)).
- Only about 1 in 5 people (20%) or 60 million Americans live in rural areas ([U.S. Census.gov, 2020](#)).

Why this matters: Because rural areas cover so much land but have fewer people, about 19% of the U.S. population, homes and communities are often spread far apart. This distance can make it harder for young people to get help quickly and easier for unsafe situations to go unnoticed.

4. **What social factors can make it harder for a person in rural areas to speak up about abuse or trafficking?**

- **Mistrust:** When people are closely connected, young people may worry about whom they can trust. This can make it difficult to share secrets or report experiences of abuse or unsafe situations.
- **Fear of Gossip:** In small communities, information can spread quickly. Young people are often worried that others will find out, leading them to keep the abuse committed against them a secret.
- **Misuse of Trust or Power:** Some people may use their position or relationships to protect someone who is doing harm instead of helping the victims. This can make it hard for a young person to know which adults they can trust to protect them.

5. **What financial factors in rural areas can increase the risk of the trafficking of young people?**

When families are under financial stress, traffickers may take advantage of their challenges by offering money, help, or basic needs as a method to gain control.

- **Limited Job Opportunities:** There are fewer jobs available in rural areas, which can make it harder for families to earn enough money to meet their needs.
- **Poverty:** When families struggle to afford basic needs like food and housing, it can create unsafe situations. In some cases, this pressure can lead to the exploitation of children for money or other things.
- **Lack of Transportation:** Without reliable transportation, it can be difficult for adults to travel to work, which can increase a family's financial stress, causing them to make harmful financial decisions.

6. **What types of authority figures in small communities can affect the risk of being harmed or trafficked?**

When someone is in charge or trusted by others, it can be difficult for a young person to recognize unsafe behavior or feel comfortable asking for help.

- **Family Member:** A young person could be harmed by someone in their own family.
- **Community Leaders:** People in important roles, such as city officials or law enforcement, could misuse their position of authority to harm others or ignore unsafe situations.
- **Youth Mentors:** Adults who work closely with young people are expected to be safe, but sometimes unsafe adults may pretend to be trustworthy, like a teacher, coach, counselor, pastor, or youth leader.

7. **What geographic conditions can attract traffickers to rural communities?**

- **Isolation:** Homes and towns are often far apart, which can cause young people to be alone. When a child is alone, it is easier for an unsafe adult or trafficker to target them without being noticed.
- **Long Distances:** The long distance between homes and towns can make it harder for victims to leave an unsafe situation or get help quickly.

- **Highway System:** Highways connect small towns to people traveling from other areas, which can create more opportunities for traffickers to involve travelers in harmful activities.

8. How does the highway system contribute to human trafficking?

- **Transportation:** Highways allow traffickers to move victims quickly from place to place, making it harder to track them or get help. (Jarrell K. et al., 2023)
- **Travelers (Demand-side):** A steady flow of people traveling through rural areas can increase the risk of people looking to participate in trafficking situations.
- **Isolated Locations:** Rest areas, truck stops, and welcome centers are often quiet and spread out, which can make unsafe or trafficking situations harder to notice.

9. How have transportation industry awareness programs helped prevent human trafficking?

- **Driver Training:** Many companies have their employees trained to notice suspicious situations and report possible trafficking to law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking Hotline.
- **Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT):** This program trains people in the transportation industry, such as truck drivers, bus drivers, movers, and other workers, to recognize warning signs and take action to help.

10. How are victims negatively impacted by living in a low-populated community?

When help is harder to find or reach, unsafe situations may last longer, and victims may feel more isolated.

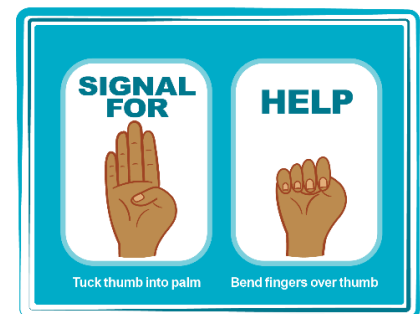
- **Law Enforcement:** Rural areas often have fewer police officers and limited training in handling human trafficking, which can make it harder to respond to these situations (Cole, J. et al., 2015).
- **Healthcare:** Some doctors and nurses may not be trained to recognize trafficking, so victims may not be identified when they seek medical help (Jarrell K. et al., 2023).
- **Support Services:** Smaller communities may have fewer local services, such as shelters or counselors. Victims may need to travel long distances to get help, making it difficult without transportation.
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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/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 #8

The Rural Risks of Child Sex Trafficking

Link: [The Rural Risks of Child Sex Trafficking](#)

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

Ever think the streets of a big city are far more threatening than small towns surrounded by farms and rolling hills?

City life is filled with lots of people, so getting away with a crime can be challenging due to the many witnesses. And help for victims can be just a few doorsteps away.

But country living can put miles between neighbors, causing isolation that sets the stage for crimes against children. And long distances make running away from abusers difficult and risky.

Lives are **tightly woven** together in **rural** America. Family bonds are **deep-rooted** and far-reaching, including aunts, uncles, cousins, stepparents, and even step-relatives. Outside these family ties are lifelong friendships that create countless connections among friends and neighbors.

While having a large community circle can be comforting, it can set the stage for **rumors** to travel quickly. All of this can make sharing dark secrets of sexual abuse seem impossible.

Some kids are at greater risk for child sex trafficking when **poverty** impacts their home lives.

Compared to big cities, there are fewer jobs in rural areas, and families can struggle to live on lower incomes. Money for food, shelter, and illegal drugs is why some parents turn to trafficking their own children.

Traffickers set up operations in small towns because they know community members can **underestimate** the threat of sex trafficking.

Here's how some rural communities are **vulnerable**:

- Traffickers are **acquainted** with town locals, so they know whom to sell to and who will keep their secrets.
- The crowded highways make trafficking local kids **lucrative**, with a different group of strangers passing through each night.
- Truck stops are often built at freeway exits that conveniently lead to small towns.
- Sex traffickers make thousands of dollars, forcing kids to go truck to truck, selling sex to drivers. But some truck drivers are trained to help those who are being trafficked.
- The long, dark highways are populated with **isolated rest areas** and welcome stations. These **desolate** locations make it easy for the controlling sex traffickers to **exploit** children.

What sex traffickers don't want kids to know is that what seems like a choice is actually **coercion**!

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.



STUDENT SURVEY #8

The Rural Risks

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

1. How can living in a rural area increase risks of trafficking compared to living in a big city?

- A. More people live in rural areas, making it easier for crime to go unnoticed.
- B. Rural youth are more easily isolated because they live in areas with low populations.
- C. Rural communities have more services available to prevent trafficking.

2. Why might trafficking in rural communities go unnoticed?

- A. Young people may be afraid others will find out and talk about them.
- B. Some people may not believe trafficking happens in their community.
- C. Traffickers may appear friendly and blend in with others.
- D. All the above.

3. What types of locations are at higher risk for trafficking crimes in rural areas?

- A. Local restaurants and small businesses
- B. Grocery stores and shopping areas
- C. Highway rest areas and truck stops

4. In what ways can a trafficker take advantage of rural areas?

- A. They use isolation and long distances to avoid being noticed.
- B. They avoid areas with highways.
- C. They only target large cities.

STUDENT SURVEY #8

The Rural Risks

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 #8

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

RESOURCES #8

The Rural Risks

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

Other Resource Links – Websites accessed 11/2022

National Library of Medicine – *A Case of Human Trafficking in Appalachia and What Emergency Physicians Can Learn From It.* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10284530/>

LOVE146 – Love146.org: *Top Cities for Sex Trafficking in Rural America*
<https://love146.org/trafficking-in-rural-america/>

SafeSupportiveLearning.ed.gov: *Human Trafficking in AMERICA'S SCHOOLS*
<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools/trafficking-in-urban-suburban-rural-areas>

Nosorh.org: *Human Trafficking in Rural America and the Rural Health System Response*
<https://nosorh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Human-Trafficking-Handout-Lisa-Davis.pdf>

Truckers Against Trafficking – TruckersAgainstTrafficking.org: *A Toolkit to Combat Human Trafficking*
<https://truckersagainstrafficking.org/get-our-materials/#> (Trucking Toolkit)

Polaris Project – *PolarisProject.org: On-ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking*
<https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

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