



# 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 # 1

## The Myths & Reality

The Myths & Reality lesson is part of a 12-part series on sexual exploitation.  
Subscribe at [WalkingWise.com](https://WalkingWise.com) to access the complete series.

This lesson is for students (11+), but the corresponding Myths & Reality  
classroom presentation is intended for adults, such as parents and school staff.



## 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 (pages 6-7) to prepare for educating students about exploitation.

#### II. Animated Video & Classroom PowerPoint Presentation (group plan only)

- 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.

#### Video Vocabulary

1. **Myth:** a false or exaggerated belief commonly held by a group.
2. **Commercial Sex:** to engage in sexual activity in exchange for something of value, such as money, goods, or services.
3. **Explicit:** revealing sexual acts or nudity, leaving no room for confusion or doubt.
4. **Sex Trafficker:** someone who tricks, pressures, or forces victims into performing sexual acts for the traffickers' financial gain.
5. **Felony:** a crime that may be punished by imprisonment for more than a year and often involves violence.
6. **Kidnap:** to take someone away illegally by force; to abduct a hostage for a ransom.
7. **Manipulation:** influencing or controlling someone's behavior or decisions deceptively or unfairly, often for personal gain.
8. **Brainwash:** to manipulate someone's thoughts and beliefs 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. **Pipeline:** delivering goods or information from one place to another.
14. **Love Interest:** one considering a potential partner for a romantic relationship.
15. **Violence:** using physical force to hurt, damage, or kill.
16. **Abuse:** the repeated use of cruelty or violence against others.
17. **Coerce:** to control someone through threats or physical force, causing fear or anxiety to make them act against their will.
18. **Intimidation:** influencing or controlling another person's actions or behavior by causing fear.
19. **Threat:** making known an intention to cause pain, harm, and punishment, as well as misuse of the legal system, such as deportation.
20. **Captive:** held in confinement or imprisoned.

#### III. Post Video Discussion

1. What is the legal definition of "Severe Forms of Trafficking in Persons" according to the 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 (Citizen’s 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].

2. **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.

3. **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 sex traffickers because they moved into 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 social media apps.

4. **What does it mean to “operate in plain sight”?**

“Operating in plain sight” refers to visibly engaging in activities without attempting to conceal them or behaving in a way that attracts no suspicion despite the potentially harmful intentions. Often, people believe criminal activity happens in dark alleys or places not visited by the average person. However, illegal activity occurs frequently and in areas where people commonly spend time.

5. **What does the phrase “not in my community” mean?**

The phrase “not in my community” often reflects a mindset that underestimates or denies the presence of harmful or challenging issues within one’s community despite the evidence. Adults can mistakenly believe their neighbors are law-abiding citizens. Therefore, they are not on the lookout for sex offenders or traffickers who could bring harm to young people in their community.

6. **What does the term “people of authority” mean?**

An authority figure can be anyone who commands or inspires obedience from someone else, regardless of holding legitimate power over that person. Often, traffickers can be authority figures, so young people believe they have no choice but to comply with harmful expectations, including demands that involve sexual abuse. However, a trustworthy person of authority will never use their power to ask or command someone to do something illegal or inappropriate.

7. **What does the term “false promises” mean?**

A “false promise” is a commitment made with no intention of carrying it out. It occurs when the intent is to deceive or defraud others. Often, traffickers trick young people into complying with harmful requests by telling lies such as their “dedicated love” for the youth or promises of fame and fortune.

## 8. What are the ways traffickers can hold a victim captive?

- **Brainwashing:** Traffickers use manipulative techniques to change an individual's thought process, giving them control of the victims' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.
- **Trauma Bonding or Emotional Bondage:** Traffickers use rewards and punishments in cycles to foster 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 obtain necessities like food and shelter. Victims often feel stuck because they have no means to support themselves when wanting to break free from a trafficker who fulfills their basic needs.
- **Drug and Alcohol Addiction:** Traffickers work to influence an individual's substance use or introduce the individual to drugs and alcohol to create dependency. Substance abuse can increase a victim's economic, physical, and emotional dependency on their trafficker, significantly reducing their ability to end their exploitation.
- **Imprisonment:** "Imprisonment" is the physical or emotional restriction of a person's freedom to move about or make independent decisions. Even if not physically confined, traffickers often maintain control over victims by setting strict rules or causing isolation from friends and family members.

## 9. What does "mental control" mean?

"Mental control" refers to manipulating a person's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions to limit their ability to make independent choices and decisions. Traffickers control victims by:

- Exerting influence over a young person's thoughts, beliefs, and decision-making processes.
- Employing psychological manipulation to sway or control a youth's actions.
- Using tactics such as gaslighting makes victims doubt their perceptions and reality.
- Creating a dependency on the trafficker for emotional support and validation.

Victims must first determine how to override the powerful influence their trafficker holds over them before they can begin to consider ways to escape or exit their trafficking situation.

## 10. What does entering someone's "social circle" mean?

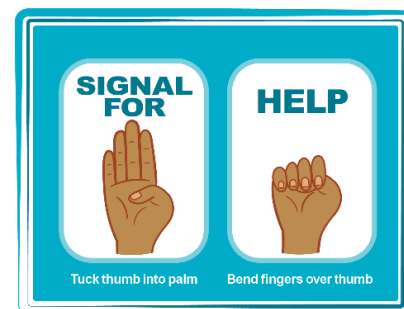
A "social circle" refers to people who connect because of their shared interests. They regularly spend time together to socialize and grow friendships. Traffickers use a form of trickery: They pretend to share common interests and work to blend into an established friend group to identify the vulnerabilities of 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-motioning 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.hotline.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

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

**1. In what situation is a child sex trafficking crime NOT being committed?**

- ☐ A. When a 15-year-old who runs away exchanges sexual activity for a place to sleep.
- ☐ B. When the young person is under age 18 and trades sexual acts for food.
- ☐ C. When a 13-year-old cleans a car in exchange for concert tickets.
- ☐ D. When a 17-year-old chooses to participate in sexual acts to make money.

**2. People who buy sex from someone under 18 are committing a serious crime called a felony.**

- ☐ A. True
- ☐ B. False

**3. Which statement does NOT describe a sex trafficker's actions?**

- ☐ A. Sex traffickers are most often strangers who kidnap their victims.
- ☐ B. Sex traffickers usually use manipulation and mind control.
- ☐ C. Sex traffickers usually emotionally control their victims.
- ☐ D. Sex traffickers often begin gaining the young person's trust.

**4. Trafficked victims usually escape or call for help at the first chance they can get.**

- ☐ A. True
- ☐ B. False



**SURVEY #1****The Myths & Reality**

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

**ANSWER KEY****KEY #1**

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

## RESOURCES #1

### The Myths & Reality

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

**Other Resource Links** – Websites accessed on 8/7/2025.

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

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

Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) – *Legal Definitions*

Child Sex Trafficking: [18 USC § 1591](#)

Sex Trafficking: [22 USC § 7102\(9\)\(A\)](#)

Labor Trafficking: [22 USC § 7102\(9\)\(B\)](#)

Commercial Sex Act: [22 USC § 7102](#)

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](https://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](mailto:support@WalkingWise.com). **Thank you!**