

**School Teachers and School Counselors**  
**Child Sex Trafficking: Education and Prevention Curricula Guidelines**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Dear school teachers and school counselors,

First, thank you so much for all your work with children and youth. As a child, my teachers and counselors played very influential roles in my life. I remember almost every teacher I ever had, from Mrs. Heikel in kindergarten to Mr. Zalinsky in my senior year. School teachers and counselors are vital not only to the academic welfare of children but also to their physical, mental, and emotional states of well-being. You help set the foundation for children to become healthy and successful adults. This is the reason I dedicated my book, *Walking Prey*, to you. I believe in you because my teachers and counselors all believed in me.

Second, thank you for wanting to educate and warn your students about the issue of child sex trafficking. As a teenager, I had never heard of human trafficking; and I had no idea I was being courted by a sex trafficker in the summer between eighth grade middle school and ninth grade high school. Had I known, I might have recognized the tactics this man used to befriend me and then to lure me away from home. As a survivor advocate, I would like to offer advice on how to educate your students on human trafficking and how to prevent child sex trafficking because I believe those two goals require different approaches.

Before we get into the details of how to educate your students on human trafficking, it's important for you - the teacher or counselor - to be proficient on the topic. In the Introduction chapter of my book, *Walking Prey*, I discuss the basics of human trafficking as defined by U.S. legislation. I then discuss the basics of child sex trafficking. Please read at least this chapter before moving forward. It's important for you to be able to distinguish between the terms human trafficking, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, child sex trafficking, commercial sex acts, and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

As a teacher or counselor, it's also important for you to know potential signs of sex trafficking among your students. As we learned from the case of Minh Dang, former Executive Director of Don't Sell Bodies, and Theresa Flores, author of *The Slave Across the Street*, many victims attend school while actively being trafficked by family members, pimps, or gang members. Signs of family-controlled sex trafficking might look similar to signs of sexual abuse; and signs of pimp- or gang-controlled sex trafficking might look similar to signs of intimate partner violence/domestic violence. If anyone in your school speaks to students about sexual abuse, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, gang violence, and/or healthy relationships, be sure they are knowledgeable on the topic of human trafficking as well.

The Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign offers the following "red flags," or indicators, that "can help alert school administrators and staff to a human trafficking situation." Although recognizing the signs is the first step in identifying potential victims, the Blue Campaign warns that no single indicator is necessarily proof of human trafficking.

**Behavior or Physical State Indicators:**

- Does the student have unexplained absences from school, or has the student demonstrated an inability to attend school on a regular basis?
- Has the student suddenly changed his or her usual attire, behavior, or relationships?
- Does the student suddenly have more (and/or more expensive) material possessions?
- Does the student chronically run away from home?
- Does the student act fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous and paranoid?
- Does the student defer to another person to speak for him or her, especially during interactions with school authority figures (this may include an adult described by the student as a relative, but may also be a friend or boyfriend/girlfriend)?
- Does the student show signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or other serious pain or suffering?
- Has the student been deprived of food, water, sleep, medical care, or other life necessities?
- Is the student in possession of his or her own identification documents (e.g. student identification card, driver's license, or passport), or does someone else have them?

**Social Behavior Indicators:**

- Does the student have a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" who is noticeably older?
- Is the student engaging in uncharacteristically promiscuous behavior, or making references to sexual situations or terminology that are beyond age-specific norms?
- Can the student freely contact friends, family, or his or her legal guardian?

"These indicators are just a few that may alert you to a potential human trafficking situation," states the Blue Campaign, "While no single indicator is necessarily proof of human trafficking, you can use this information to help you recognize relevant suspicious behavior(s) and take appropriate action." For more information or to report potential trafficking, see the Blue Campaign's Human Trafficking 101 for School Administrators and Staff.<sup>1</sup>

**II. EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS**

Human trafficking is a global issue that affects men, women, and children. For this reason, human trafficking should be a topic of study in any global/social studies (or related) class in middle school, high school, or higher education. The United Nations defines human trafficking as "the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them". Such exploitation can be in the form of prostitution, forced labor, removal of organs, and other forms of exploitation. See the United Nations' website for more information on global human trafficking: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html?ref=menu>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/blue-campaign/Blue%20Campaign%20-%20Human%20Trafficking%20101%20for%20School%20Administrators%20and%20Staff.pdf> (accessed February 14, 2014)

In the United States, human trafficking is generally broken down into two categories: exploitation via forced labor or forced commercial sex. Because victims of sex trafficking can be adults or children, it is important for children to be educated on: (1) the existence of child sex trafficking within the United States, and (2) the common tactics of sex traffickers. **This preventative education should happen as early as 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade but no later than 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade.** In Appendix C of *Walking Prey*, I offer ten tips for teens to protect themselves against traffickers. Number nine is to understand how child sex trafficking works:

*Traffickers hang out in the same places you do: malls, skating rinks, bus stations, online, etc. Traffickers may not appear to be sketchy characters—they can be young and well-dressed. Traffickers may offer to buy you trendy clothes, shoes, cars, or other expensive items. Traffickers may ask for your phone number; they may ask to see or speak to you alone. Traffickers may tell you how pretty and mature you are, and they may mention knowing celebrities, exotic dancers, models, and/or porn stars. Traffickers may offer to help you make a lot of money or may offer to help you run away.*

*Know this—no stranger (man or woman) has good intentions if they offer to help you run away. No stranger (man or woman) has anything but personal gain in mind if they offer to help you make a lot of money. No matter how cool, how hip, or how fun and friendly they may seem, they may mean to harm you. Seek help from a trusted family member or teacher.*

As you read through *Walking Prey*, you will hear many survivor stories and many recent cases involving victims. As you create your education curriculum, you may want to include some snippets from the book as examples of real cases of child sex trafficking. For example, in Chapter 2, we learn about Stacy Lundgren, Founder of the Stacy Project. Stacy's parents had divorced and her father was often absent due to alcoholism. Like many kids, Stacy was bullied in school. As a result of her home and school life, Stacy struggled with depression and loneliness. She met an older guy online who feigned a romantic interest in her. He lured her into a relationship offline and then he eventually coerced Stacy into trading sex for money with other men.

This is a common tactic.

Sex traffickers will often romance young girls because young girls are often seeking love, attention, and acceptance from older boys. Traffickers will pretend to be the perfect boyfriends, and then they will ask the girls for “favors.” These favors may seem harmless to the girl at first and then gradually lead to greater exploitation. For example, the “boyfriend” might ask his victim to strip for money, then he might ask her to perform sexual acts on camera with him in order to sell the images to a website, and then he might finally request her to perform commercial sex acts with other men. Or, the “boyfriend” may suddenly become violent and demand the girl to perform commercial sex with other men. Or, he might blackmail her as in the case of Theresa Flores. Or, he might encourage her to run away and quickly move her to a different city or state, thereby isolating her from family and friends and making her more vulnerable.

**These are all tactics, and all of these examples are important. The more we educate our girls and boys about the tactics of traffickers, the better equipped they will be to detect red flags in potentially exploitative relationships.** It's important to remember that boys can also become victims of sex trafficking and that traffickers (as well their accomplices) can be any age, class, or gender. For example, gang members and pimps will often use an older girl to build trust with younger victims; and gay or transgender adults may reach out to gay, transgender, or questioning youth for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Be sure to build all of this into your preventative education curriculum.

As the teacher or counselor, you know best how much time you have to spend with your students on this topic. Whether you are creating an education curriculum on national or global human trafficking or creating a preventative education curriculum specific to the tactics of traffickers, the length of time is up to you. You can create a curriculum that will cover one class session or an entire class assembly or workshop or a series of classes and workshops. Depending on how much time you have, I recommend incorporating a discussion of community risk factors (see chapter 3 of *Walking Prey*), societal influences (see chapters 4-6 of *Walking Prey*), and ideas for prevention and advocacy (see chapter 13 of *Walking Prey*). I also recommend including books, videos, documentaries, and other materials created by survivors or featuring survivor stories. Please review these materials in their entirety before choosing to include them as some are more accurate and appropriate than others.

Last, when you introduce this topic to your class, especially the topic of traffickers' tactics, **please ensure that counselors are available to any and all students and that these counselors are well-prepared to care for victims of any type of abuse, including sex trafficking.** Remember a child who has been or is actively being trafficked may be attending your school, or a child who has been trafficked in the past may have transferred to your school. After my victimization in 1992, I attended four different schools. I carried with me a sense of shame and guilt that could have been addressed had I been educated about child sex trafficking and then given the proper resources to seek help. See appendices A and B of *Walking Prey* for resources.

### III. PREVENTION CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS

When it comes to creating a curriculum specific for prevention, I believe the goal must be to prevent all forms of sexual exploitation, not just commercial sexual exploitation and not just child sex trafficking. This is because sexual exploitation can lead to commercial sexual exploitation, which can also lead to sex trafficking. The preventative education I mentioned in Section II will warn students about sex traffickers and their tactics, and this may be enough to protect those students who are less vulnerable to exploitation. However, for those "at-risk" students who are experiencing one or more predisposing factors to potential exploitation (e.g. poverty, mental health issues, running away, etc.), a more intensive prevention program may be required. See chapter 1 of *Walking Prey* for a discussion of predisposing factors.

First and foremost, if you have any students experiencing any of these predisposing factors, then step one for prevention of exploitation would be to address those predisposing factors. Offer that child resources to cope with that stressor. For example, if a child is missing one or both parents,

then connect that child with any local mentoring program similar to Big Brothers Big Sisters. Or, if a child is exhibiting depression or other mental health difficulties, then connect that child and his/her parent(s) or guardian(s) with mental health resources. Traffickers often target those children who are more vulnerable than others, and any child who lacks the guidance and resources to deal with his/her stressors is more vulnerable. If you are working on a long-term prevention program, then perhaps consider including several classes/workshops to cover potential predisposing factors. For example, one class can be spent educating students on mental health (e.g. signs of depression) and providing mental health resources.

Second, consider what community risk factors for CSEC are present in your location (e.g. a high transit area, a commercial sex industry, a homeless youth culture, etc.) and explain that potential exploiters (e.g. traffickers and buyers) can be more prevalent in those areas. See chapter 3 of *Walking Prey* for a discussion of community risk factors. While a general education on human trafficking or traffickers' tactics might include community risk factors, be sure that any intensive prevention program analyzes what areas might be risk factors within *your* specific community and surrounding areas.

Then, consider societal influences. In chapters 4-6 of *Walking Prey*, I discuss how advertising and negative messages in popular culture can influence girls and boys in negative ways. For example, vulnerable girls may be influenced to view themselves as commercial and sexual objects; and boys who are influenced by the same media messages may learn to view girls the same way. An intense prevention program must include media literacy, including a deconstruction of advertising messages and negative messages in the media. In *Walking Prey*, I recommend the following documentaries on these topics: Nicole Clark's *Cover Girl Culture*; Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp's documentary, *Consuming Kids: the Commercialization of Childhood*; Sut Jhally's *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex, and Power in Music Video*; Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*; Byron Hurt's *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes*; and Jennifer Siebel's *Miss Representation*.

If possible, your prevention program should address healthy relationships, including relationships with family members, friends, and boyfriends/girlfriends. If possible, you should also address healthy sexuality, including gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual appetite. As teenagers discover their own sexualities, it should be made clear that any identity, orientation, and appetite is *normal* and ok so long as it isn't self-destructive or harmful to others. It should also be made clear that dating relationships do not require sexual activity and that anyone can say no to sex at any time, no matter what, no matter when, and no matter how far things have gone with that person or anyone else in that moment or in the past. Make it clear that sex is supposed to feel good and safe.

Next, I recommend incorporating into your program an exposure to healthy and, when possible, *local* role models. As discussed in chapter 4 of *Walking Prey*, teenagers are often overexposed to negative role models in the media. Such role models promote the idea that society values fame, wealth, and self-absorption. Role models who are shown in a positive light are often limited to Hollywood elites, thereby narrowing the occupational goals for many youth to models, actors, singers, and other personalities in the media. All of these messages work to the advantage of traffickers, as explained in *Walking Prey*. Effective prevention programs will expose students to

an array of healthy role models (e.g. politicians, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, etc.) and, when possible, to *local* role models, thereby making such occupations feel more tangible, attainable, and removed from the media spotlight.

Additional recommendations for your prevention program can be found in chapter 12 of *Walking Prey*, as well as appendices E and F, 10 Tips for Elementary and Middle School Teachers and Counselors, respectively. These recommendations include instruction for coping skills, encouragement toward extracurricular activities, and resources to volunteer in the community. I prefer to think of these prevention curriculum guidelines as an empowerment program model for your “at-risk” students as opposed to a sex trafficking or CSEC prevention program. As you work on your program model, I encourage you to follow other survivors, advocates, and organizations who promote the empowerment of children and youth and to incorporate their recommendations as well. See appendices B and C of *Walking Prey* for additional resources, as well as [www.WalkingPrey.com](http://www.WalkingPrey.com).

If you prefer to use an established prevention program, especially for “at-risk” girls, then I recommend reaching out to My Life My Choice (MLMC) in Boston, MA. MLMC’s mission is to “prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls through survivor-led programs that educate and empowers girls to find their voice and create a positive life path while working to eliminate the violence and victimization of sexual exploitation.” In their prevention program model, MLMC pairs a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation with a therapist to lead the program for girls. For more information about MLMC, please visit their website at: [www.FightingExploitation.org](http://www.FightingExploitation.org).

#### **IV: CLOSING**

Again, thank you for all that you do and all that you are doing; and good luck!

Sincerely,

Holly Smith  
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