

Human Trafficking: Insight for Students

Introduction:

Thank you so much for wanting to learn more about human trafficking and for spreading awareness about this issue. Human trafficking is a global issue that affects men, women, and children. 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=menuaside>.

In the United States, human trafficking is generally broken down into two categories: exploitation via forced labor or forced commercial sex. In the Introduction chapter of my book, *Walking Prey**, I discuss the basics of human trafficking, as defined by U.S. legislation, with an emphasis on child sex trafficking and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). As a survivor, I encourage students to educate their peers on: (1) the existence of child sex trafficking within the United States, (2) the common tactics of sex traffickers, and (3) the societal influences that can promote CSEC.

Child Sex Trafficking Exists in America:

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.

Common Tactics of Traffickers:

As you read through *Walking Prey*, you will hear many survivor stories and many recent cases involving victims. As you work on your awareness and education efforts, you may want to include snippets from the book as 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. 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, author of *The Slave Across the Street*. 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 when discussing child sex trafficking with peers. The more you educate your peers 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, as discussed in *Walking Prey*, 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. If you have time, include a discussion of risk factors in the community that might raise the chances of crossing paths with a trafficker or other exploiter (see chapter 3 of *Walking Prey*).

When you introduce this topic to your class/school, especially the topic of traffickers’ tactics, please ask your teacher(s) to 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 student who has been or is actively being trafficked may be attending your school, or a student 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. Be sure your counselors have a copy of appendices A and B of *Walking Prey* for resources.

Societal Influences that Promote CSEC:

As you read through *Walking Prey*, you will learn that traffickers often target children who are more vulnerable than others (see chapter 1), including those who are overexposed to and influenced by negative messages in the media (see chapters 4-6). I highly encourage you to educate your peers about these negative societal influences in the media. For example, the constant sexual objectification of women in music videos and advertising can influence girls to

view themselves as commercial and sexual objects; these same messages can also influence boys to view girls in the same way. In *Walking Prey*, I recommend the following documentaries to educate students 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*.

Closing:

If you're interested in additional efforts toward education and/or prevention of CSEC, including child sex trafficking, please team up with a teacher and have that teacher read the *Walking Prey* addendum, *Child Sex Trafficking: Education and Prevention Curricula Guidelines*. This is available on www.WalkingPrey.com. Again, thank you for all of your hard work and research, and please share your efforts on my Facebook page and on Twitter. Good luck!

Sincerely,

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*Please ask a parent or teacher to approve of this before reading/viewing.