

# How to Talk to Your Kids About Human Trafficking

As parents, guardians, or educators of children, discussing an issue as vast, unsettling, and frightening as human trafficking may be intimidating. However, it is important to understand that you are part of the solution for preventing this abuse. Creating a safe environment for children to explore this issue with a trusted adult can help to allay anxiety and fear, combat misinformation, and create an opportunity for youth to understand how to keep themselves safe. While you ultimately know what is best for your child, this one-pager suggests some key messages that may be useful in shedding light on the issue of human trafficking, helping you educate and even empower the youth you care about.

## Human Trafficking Basics

Human trafficking refers to the buying and selling of human beings for the purpose of exploitation. It is a human rights violation that has been likened to “modern-day slavery”, and affects around 27 million people across the world, about one-third of which are children.

Traffickers recruit and harbor victims through force, fraud, and coercion, exploiting them for commercial sex or labor. Children are especially vulnerable to the lures of traffickers, and those who are or have been in the foster care system, runaway from home, or experienced previous emotional, physical, or sexual abuse are particularly at risk.

## What are the signs of a trafficked child?

*It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and represents only a selection of possible indicators. These signs may not be present in all cases and are not cumulative. Learn more:*

[www.traffickingresourcecenter.org](http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org).

- Is not free to leave or come and go as he/she wishes
- Is under 18 and is involved in commercial sex acts
- Is unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips
- Works excessively long and/or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work
- High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations
- Poor Mental and/or physical health, abnormal behavior such as fear, anxiousness, depression
- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or translating)
- Claims of just visiting and inability to clarify where he/she is staying/address
- Lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or do not know what city he/she is in
- Has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story

## Key Messages for Your Kids

- Educate yourself on the issue, and learn the signs of a trafficked victim: <http://www.polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/recognizing-the-signs>.
- Don't accept friend requests from people you don't know on social media.
- Be aware of how traffickers recruit people, and pay attention to your surroundings.
- Don't reveal too much about yourself (i.e. your full name, address, school, or living situation) to people you don't know or on your social media sites, no matter how friendly people might be.
- Never agree to meet someone you don't know without first consulting a trusted adult (i.e. parent, teacher, guidance counselor).
- If you feel uncomfortable or are hesitant about a situation, confide in a adult who you can help you make the best choices.
- Before accepting a job, take precautions to make sure it is legitimate. Some warning signs to look out for include: if the recruiter offers to train you in return for money, if the job seems "too good to be true", if the job description says "no experience needed", if the company doesn't have a website, if the job offer comes without you having to go through an interview.
- Never give away your personal information such as your social security card, passport, or residency papers.
- Making a decision to leave a situation or relationship where you feel unsafe or are being harmed or threatened can be hard and scary. If possible, talk to someone you trust, like a friend, family member, counselor, or youth worker.
- If you are in immediate danger or are being physically harmed, call **911** for help.
- If running away from home, try to find a safe place to go or call the runaway switchboard at **1-800-Runaway**.
- If you suspect you or a friend are at risk trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at **888-3737-888** or text "**BeFree**" (**233733**)

### Quick Facts

- Human trafficking has been reported in all 50 U.S. states. (Polaris)
- It is estimated that between 20-30 million people are victims of trafficking around the world, with about 1/3 of these being children. (ILO)
- California, New York, Florida, and Texas are the states with the highest volume of human trafficking. (Polaris)
- Pimps engage in what is commonly referred to as the "grooming" process where a child is showered with gifts, treats, and compliments in order to earn their trust. (Polaris)