

BE THE CHANGE

PARENT LETTER 6: HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In this **Safer, Smarter Teens: Be The Change** lesson, your child learned about the problem of Human Trafficking. Human trafficking is when a child or adult is recruited, hidden, or transported against their will for the purpose of forced labor, servitude, slavery, or for a commercial sex act. Your teenager learned that this is both a global problem and a problem in your own community. Students learned to identify situations that may make individuals vulnerable to the techniques used by human traffickers. The methods of reporting suspected or known human trafficking were identified and students reviewed how to advocate for themselves and others.

PARENT CONNECTION:

We often think of human trafficking as a problem that occurs in underdeveloped countries and that human trafficking is not a concern for our children here in the United States. The reality is, human trafficking occurs everywhere, even in our own communities.

School-aged children right here in the United States are being trafficked, and it is essential that all students and parents are informed of the risks. Any child could be the target of human traffickers, however there are factors that may place a teenager at greater risk for being targeted by human traffickers. These risks include:

- Runaways
- Living in poverty
- School dropout or truancy
- Lack of job opportunities – unemployment
- Low self-esteem
- Social isolation
- Foster care
- Substance abuse

Your teenager could be targeted during their everyday activities:

- **Online or cell phone:** It can be easy to find a vulnerable child or teenager online and establish a relationship. Relationships are established based on false promises. Deals are negotiated that can trap teens, and people aren't always who they claim to be online.
- **Shopping malls and common teenager "hang outs":** Your teenager may be approached in a public place like a shopping mall or park. False promises or offers that are too good to be true may be made, such as a photo shoot for a modeling contract, job offers to make deliveries for a large amount of money, invitations to come hang out at home with lots of video games, or offers to buy expensive clothing.
- **Bus and train stations:** Traffickers often look for teens who have run away or are homeless. When the teen has nowhere to go, traffickers offer work and a place to stay.
- **Peer Recruiters:** Traffickers may pay other teenagers to recruit teens. The peer recruiter gets to know the vulnerable teen and determines what he/she needs. The peer recruiter then talks about the great opportunities the trafficker can provide to fill that need.

TIPS TO FURTHER TODAY'S LESSON:

As they grow older, teens have more opportunities to participate in activities independently, so it's important that they understand potential risks and how to protect themselves. Discuss both online and in-person situations that could put your child at risk. Discuss how traffickers can trap teens and maintain control through manipulation and even force.

Everyone has a natural desire to be connected to others, to be cared for, and to be loved. In a healthy relationship, the bonds that form create positive, productive, and meaningful experiences. However, in unhealthy relationships the use of threats, fear, drugs, and various forms of abuse reinforce the connections. These trauma bonds can be so strong that they blur boundaries and make it difficult for the victim to identify right from wrong, healthy from unhealthy, and safe from unsafe. Abusers intentionally use the need to feel connected and loved to make false promises to fill this need which results in a strong trauma bond.

It is important for parents and their children to discuss the various ways that teens can be trapped and how traffickers maintain control. Teens may be afraid to tell parents or other trusted adults when they have been trapped into an unsafe situation out of fear of punishment or even legal consequences, as traffickers often force teens to participate in illegal activities like drinking or doing drugs. Help your teen understand that there are many ways to seek help, and remind them that it is ALWAYS okay to tell. Review the trusted adults in his or her life to turn to get help. If your child does fall victim to a human trafficker make sure they know how to go for help.

- Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) Hotline at 888-373-7888
- Text HELP to “BeFree” (233-733) to be connected with the NHTRC Hotline
- Call the Florida Abuse Hotline at 800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)
- Call 911 to reach local law enforcement
- Call the US Department of Justice at 888-428-7581