PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Should we talk to children about human trafficking?

Tina Frundt is the founder of Courtney’s House and a survivor of domestic sex trafficking.

Q: How important is it for parents to talk to their children about this issue?

Tina: It is very important. When you talk about it with your children you should really start at elementary and beyond that. Before elementary we start with good touch and bad touch.

The real issue is most kids actually know what trafficking is, but adults use the wrong vocabulary. Adults use the governmental term “sex trafficking,” when even survivors don’t call themselves “sex trafficking survivors.” The real word is “pimping.” When you are talking to youth ask them what a pimp is, ask them what their perception of what a prostitute is. They know what these words are and you can help them make the connection to what trafficking is.

Q: What other things do you think parents should be doing in order to prevent this from happening to their children?

T: I think parents and actually anyone who works with youth don’t understand youth. They don’t use the words that they use and they don’t actually understand what their words mean. So it is a big disconnect when they are talking with them. I feel like you need to understand and listen to the music that they listen to and pull up the lyrics. Because to have a real conversation about this you are going to have to touch on a lot of issues, about touching, sexual assault, and more. All of these issues are going to come up but they may not fully understand because of their surroundings and what they are embedded in on a daily basis.
Q: How have you incorporated this advice into your own life?

T: I have two daughters and they are twenty-three and seventeen. And so with that being said even though I am a survivor of child sex trafficking I raised my kids to know what forced prostitution was, what a pimp was, what a gang member was. With that being said my kids have referred people to me and Courtney’s House. Just from going to their schools and talking to their friends. Because they knew what to stay away from.

Talking is very important. My kids refer people to me and they already know what to stay away from. So you have to raise your children knowing.

Q: So you regularly spoke to them about what these things were?

T: I literally told them what pimps were, what they look like and what they would say. I would actually give them real-time information about what it would sound like.

Q: Is there anything parents should specifically be on the look out for? Warning signs?

T: People always want these blanket statements or warning signs, but I think the real warning sign is any time that you don't understand or even know what your child does on a daily basis. If you don't know their password to the internet, because the pimp could be in your house right now. How do you know who they're talking to?

We always say that we want our youth to have privacy and we want to trust them. But I’m going to be really honest and say- we are the parents and we pay the bills! So look at the bill! Look at your phone bill. Look at the GPS and put that on. You are protecting them and you are the parent. You need to know where they are so if something does happen to them then you know.

And that’s what I always tell my kids- “I’m putting the GPS on you, I’m just letting you know I’ll be able to see where you are, so if something happens to you I’ll be able to help you.”

Q: Is there anything else that you think parents should know about this issue?

T: I think that they need to understand that this happens to every racial background and every gender. It doesn't matter where you live. There can be people manipulating your children online too, telling them that they’re something that they’re not. So it is really important to talk to your kids about what is going on online and get their passwords. You need to be really embedded in their Facebook page so you can see it.

Most of our survivors’ predators or pimps actually contacted them on Facebook and social media, and talked to them right there. Right there in the same household as their parents.
Common Come-Ons

Angelyn Bayless is Director of Communications for Arizona State University’s Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research and serves as the local coordinator of CEASE Phoenix Metro, one of 11 pioneering cities working to reduce demand for prostitution.

Pimps are master manipulators. They are talented actors and salespeople and target girls who are emotionally vulnerable. From promising to help pay for basic needs or provide extravagances, pimps are skilled and accomplished at reading people and knowing just what to say and offer to get a girl’s attention.

A pimp can make a girl may feel loved, beautiful and spoiled with indulgences like trendy clothes and shoes, expensive hairstyling, manicures and pedicures, tattoos, designer purses, hotel stays and eating at restaurants, or travel to new and exciting places. Ultimately, the girl feels like she owes him something in return.

Pimps usually begin contact with a compliment. Pretending to be a talent scout, or modeling agent, initial contact may start with “Girl, you are so pretty, you should be a model.” Or, “I know a guy who is looking for a girl just like you to be in his music video.” Compliments turn to romantic attention, then graduate to physical affection, and ultimately earn “boyfriend status” with includes physical intimacy. Eventually the pimp will “flip the switch” and ask his girl to do the unimaginable.

Pimps often invest a lot of time and energy into finding the perfect victim. They have been known to frequent areas where teen girls like to hang out – the mall, concerts, park, bus stops outside of high schools, popular fast food establishments, bars and coffee shops. Pimps also shop for their victims online. They are mass consumers of popular social media and “friend” or “follow” or “like photos” of potential victims on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other popular sites.

Parents and teens alike should trust their instincts. If something “feels” wrong, it probably is. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. “What if?” questions are a great opportunity to practice scenarios with your teen. Role playing is a powerful way to teach kids how to handle difficult situations. These “what would you do” conversations may help ease apprehension about the topic. “What would you do if a good looking guy came up to you at the mall and told you that he wanted you to take some pictures for his modeling business?” You will probably hear, “Oh mom, seriously?” In the end, it is better to upset your teen so that she thinks twice when potentially faced with a dangerous situation.
How does one begin to generally address trauma with children?

Traumatic stress is a term that can encompass so many different emotions and responses, specifically when it involves children and adolescents. In fact, many parents become stressed when their child is involved in a traumatic event. As a result, the entire family benefits from increased support as the effects of trauma are resolved. Keep in the mind that after a traumatic event, a child may need to speak with a professional.

Research has shown that some children respond to traumatic events based on their caregiver's response. Therefore, it is very important for the parents and other caregivers to utilize healthy coping skills such as effective communication. Communicating with children in an appropriate way is incredibly important and helps a child to understand that they are not alone during and/or after the event. Giving children permission to talk about a traumatic experience allows them to feel a sense of support, openness, and an understanding that they can talk to you without fear of judgment, disappointment or punishment.

If something a child says surprises you, don't appear alarmed or upset. Welcome them to continue sharing about that topic with open-ended questions, as opposed to close-ended questions, where the only possible answer is “yes” or “no”. Examples of open-ended questions include, “what happened when....” or “can you tell me what happened next?”

Throughout the conversation, listen to the child speak without interrupting, judging, or criticizing. Allow your child to express himself or herself completely. Beware of your facial expressions and body language, as those often communicate judgment or acceptance. Be empathetic and compassionate in your responses; never use language that could make the child feel like they were at fault.

Whether you are a parent, work for a youth-serving organization, or are a mentor for a child, it is essential that you are prepared to have these conversations. Keep a list of resources handy in the event a child discloses information that requires follow-up. If the child needs to speak with a professional, please find a trauma-informed clinician or clinical social worker. Often times, a child's pediatrician can act as a referral source.
How to Foster an Environment in Which Children Feel Comfortable Speaking Up

Talking to children about issues like child sex trafficking can be intimidating, for both parents and children alike. It is essential to create an environment where children feel comfortable speaking up about difficult topics, without fear of punishment or judgement, and without being worried that they are going to get in trouble or get someone else in trouble.

These discussions should not just happen one time; you want your child to know that they can come to you at any time to continue the conversation. Be proactive in bringing up these topics. Next week we will talk about some easy conversation starters to help begin an ongoing dialogue.

As we mentioned in our previous blog post on discussing trauma, effective communication with your children is very important. For most parents, they are unaware that their children know as much as they do about sex. So, have an ongoing conversation with them and help them to feel comfortable about talking openly. If something that your child says surprises you, don’t appear alarmed or upset. Welcome your child to share what he or she knows. This is the best time to share facts and dispel myths. Always let your child know that you are in this together!

Be sure to encourage them to be honest about their true feelings, fears and questions. We shared this last week in the post on trauma, but it is worth repeating—throughout the conversation, listen to your child speak without interrupting, judging or criticizing. Allow your child to express himself or herself completely. Be aware of how you react to what your child says—your facial expressions and body language can communicate judgment or acceptance.

After these conversations occur, we encourage you to check back in with your child in a few days or weeks as they might have additional questions after having more time to think about it. Again, keep a list of resources handy in the event a child discloses information that requires follow-up.

If you are not a parent, but you work with children in some other capacity (as a teacher, counselor, volunteer mentor, at a youth-serving organization, etc.), it is still important that you help create an environment where children feel comfortable talking about these issues. If a topic like child sex trafficking comes up, we recommend letting parents know so that they can be prepared to answer any questions the child might have later.
The Educator’s Role in Talking to/Teaching Children about Human Trafficking

Yvonne Williams

In today's tumultuous climate for America’s youth we have to wonder how educators are able to stay on track when it comes to actually doing what they went to college to learn to do, teach. Students are faced with unbelievable life challenges that not many educators are equipped to, or want to, deal with. But the hard facts are that students bring their personal lives and all that is happening outside of school into the classroom and teachers are forced to deal with it all, in addition to teaching their lesson plans. At NEST we hope to give educators tools to help them with some of the outside of school issues, so they don’t need to be educational experts and experts in everything else.

As an advocate of anti-human trafficking and knowing that the average age of a victim of this terrible crime is 12-14, obviously I want education about it in the public schools. Who else is able to reach those at risk? Who else will be able to spot the signs that a child is potentially being trafficked or exploited right under their nose? Stats tell us that 90% of sex abuse before the age of 18 will occur by someone the student knows and trusts. So it makes sense that those who need the support might not be getting it from home. Other than church or youth clubs, the only other avenue for education and potential intervention must take place in the schools if these vulnerable students are to receive any chance at getting support.

A new class does not have to be created in order for human trafficking prevention education to occur (although it would be advantageous to create a topic that covers multiple social issues under one umbrella inclusive of human trafficking and sexual exploitation). There are a multitude of viable curriculum and resources available on the NEST curriculum comparison charts that can be incorporated right into existing classes such as American History, Health, Social Studies, and the like. These curriculum are available for K-12 and take anywhere from 1-5 hours (on average), and can be done as one-time classroom units or in multiple module formats. In addition, the NEST website also has other resources available for assembly gatherings, school clubs, or PTA meetings. Whatever the need or interest, there is a credible resource or curriculum available for educators to begin to utilize now, to protect your students outside the classroom, therefore allowing them to learn better inside the classroom.

In today’s world students need support from all venues available if they are going to achieve success in life once they leave the classroom. Unfortunately, education and equipping students for life is not taking place in many homes across America. So as a community we are all responsible for using whatever gifts we have to play some role in helping children understand life’s obstacles and empowering them with tools to overcome them. It’s a new world and we must adapt with it, and educators are a great first line of defense.
How to Talk to Children About Human Trafficking

Most parents dread having the big “sex talk” when their child becomes a teenager. Today, if you wait until that age, it’s likely that someone—or television—has beaten you to the punch. According to the 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report, as many as 300,000 children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States, and with the average age of entry into prostitution being 12 to 14 years old, now is the most crucial time to understand the power of prevention when it comes to this horrific crime. Awareness and education play a major role in prevention and intervention, so equipping your child with accurate information is essential.

Introducing the topic of child sex trafficking to youth may be intimidating or difficult, so it helps to be prepared and equipped with as much information as possible. Reading through this brochure is an important first step, but we encourage you to not stop there.

YouthSpark has created two public service announcements (PSAs) to help start the conversation. Our PSAs are specifically geared towards educating children as young as 10 or 11 years old, as well as targeting the “demand” side of trafficking. More and more parents want to discuss this issue with their children, but don’t know how to as some of the videos out there may not be age-appropriate.

Our goal is that these videos will serve as a starting point for you to talk to your children about this important issue. In addition, we have created an Official Question & Answer Discussion Guide that provides suggested talking points and Care Clinician Tips.

We encourage all parents and youth-serving organizations to use these videos and the discussion guide as an appropriate resource to educate young people, which increases awareness and decreases vulnerability, helping to prevent them from becoming victimized and from becoming exploiters.

Please watch the entire video(s) before showing it to youth and read our Discussion Guide thoroughly for an easier discussion. Be sure to have resources available should any information be revealed that may require follow-up action. Resources may include contact information for a therapist or pediatrician, police hotline, child serving agency, etc.

Having a discussion about sex can be very intimidating for parents and children. However, preparing for the talk can erase some of that anxiety. Briefly ask your child what they know about this topic. Start with a discussion about facts and myths. Then watch the video(s) with your child. Be sure to leave plenty of time to talk about your child’s reaction. Lastly, identify safety measures that your family can put in place and role-play different scenarios. Although the topic is serious, don’t be afraid to add a bit of humor and assure your child that it is okay to have this conversation. Throughout the discussion, listen to your child speak without interrupting, judging or criticizing. Allow your child to express himself or herself completely.

You can find the PSAs and Discussion Guide here:

• www.youth-spark.org/start-the-conversation

Protecting Children from Human Trafficking
Below are some questions you can ask your child after viewing a video like our PSAs (or news article, movie, TV show, etc.), along with some suggested talking points.

After asking your child questions, always pause for a response. Allow them to answer freely without guiding them. This will let you know what knowledge they may already have and also help you gauge how to direct the conversation. Always allow the child to complete his or her statements in their entirety.

While we generally recommend using these materials with children and youth who are eleven years or older, the decision should be made on a case by case analysis. This is why it is so important to start with very general, open-ended questions.

**What do you think about the video we just watched?** Unfortunately, what happened is something that really happens to young people in our community, as well as across the United States and in other countries. I’m sharing this with you because I don’t want it to happen to you or anyone you know. This is illegal and if someone tries to get you to do any of the things you saw, you should feel completely comfortable coming to me, the police, or anyone else you trust.

**What do you know about “trafficking”?** Many people don’t understand this issue and what we’ve seen on TV and what we hear in music may not let you really understand what’s happening to some young people. When someone does this to a young person, even if it looks like that young person wanted to do it, they are taking advantage of them. No adult should ever ask a young person to have sex with anyone for money, food, clothes, or a place to sleep.

**What do you think of the girls in this video?** The girls in this video are victims of a crime. Even though it may have looked like they were ok with it, most of the time they are scared and may not have someone they trust that they can talk to. Sometimes they believe they have to do what those adults say. Or these girls may have been hurt by the adults in their lives when they were younger, so they don’t know which adults they can trust now. Maybe there are no parents or other adults they know who are giving them love, so they look for love in other places. This doesn’t just happen in “bad” neighborhoods. It could happen to anyone. There were girls in this video, but it can also happen to boys. Victims never have to be ashamed because it is never their fault. Never.

**What do you think about the guys in this video?** No adult should ever try to have sex with a young person or pay to have sex with them. You heard the word “pimp” in the video and that’s just a name given to the person who is selling the young girl or boy. I know you may think “pimp” is a cool word but it isn’t. Buying or selling sex is a crime. Sometimes men think that because they are paying the boy or girl, they are helping them. They are wrong.

After having these conversations, check back in a few days or weeks as your child might have additional questions. Keep a list of resources handy in the event your child discloses information that requires follow-up.
Do You Know Who Your Kids Are Chatting With? Why Online Safety Matters

Social media plays a big role in most of our lives, particularly for our teenagers. Unfortunately, social media and the Internet also play a big role in child sex trafficking. Not only are girls and boys being sold online, but pimps often use social media to lure victims.

In 2010, twin brothers Tyrelle and Myrelle Locket were 17 years old when they became the first people charged with human trafficking in Illinois. In 2014, they were arrested again, accused of luring girls on social media. As this article describes, we have a new generation of pimps who can run their entire “business” with a smartphone.

Tyrelle created a Facebook account called “Rico Finally Paid,” and used it to target young girls. He listed his past job as “pimpin” and posted pictures of himself with cash and guns. One of the captions stated, “COME MAKE MONEY WITH ME.” He then messaged multiple girls through Facebook in an attempt to recruit them. For more information about this case, including specific conversations Tyrelle had with some of these girls, please click here. (Note: the article contains some explicit language).

This story is the perfect example of why it is so important to teach our children about online safety. Most parents (and adults who work at youth-serving organizations) did not grow up with the same technology that this current generation has access to. As a result, we have to educate ourselves about the most up to date social media sites. There are countless options out there—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Kik, Snapchat. The list goes on and on, and it’s growing every day. Social media and technology are changing at a lightning fast pace, and it can be hard to keep up. In addition to being aware about what’s out there, we also have to teach our children to be wise consumers of social media and the Internet and to make smart choices about how they use technology and who they interact with.

It is no secret that the media gives our kids an inaccurate depiction of sex. TV shows, music videos, movies, video games, social media, and popular songs glamorize prostitution and pimping, oversexualize our kids, and promote the objectification of girls and women. It is never too early to have a conversation with your child about media influence and to teach them to remember that what they see and hear is not an accurate or complete view of sex and sexuality.

In addition, it is important to have an ongoing conversation with your child about online safety. We need to have open and honest discussions, teaching them the dangers of talking to strangers online and reminding them that it's easy to pretend to be someone else on the Internet; they could think they are talking to someone their own age from their own school, but it could be a 40 year old in another state. We need to give our children the tools they need to make wise decisions about how they use technology—what information they choose to share, what pictures they post, who they talk to. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has created a free, online resource called NetSmartz. There are modules for kids, tweens, teens, parents, law enforcement and educators. NetSmartz covers a variety of topics, including cell phones, gaming, sexting, Internet safety, email, chat rooms, and identity theft. We highly recommend using this resource as you talk with your child about online safety.
What to Do if You Think Your Child Has Been Approached by a Pimp or Trafficker

Angelyn Bayless

The idea that someone you know or even your own teen could have been contacted by a pimp or trafficker is terrifying. Chances are, this will never happen to your family, but if it does, you should know exactly what to do. In addition, all teens and parents should be trained, “If you see something or hear something, say something.”

Adults who work with teens are mandatory reporters in instances of child abuse or neglect, including sexual exploitation of any kind, meaning that they are legally required to report when abuse is observed or suspected. If your teen has overheard something upsetting at school, or witnessed something suspicious, they should tell a trusted adult at school. Each teen will have their own level of trust and comfort with some favorite adult in their life. Teachers, counselors, school nurses, coaches, school resource officers, doctors, nurses and even police officers who work on campus are trained to know exactly what to do if they hear of an instance of abuse.

It is important that teens understand that real friends look out for each other. They should be taught to never try to handle the situation on their own. It’s simply too dangerous. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911. Pimps and traffickers are often violent criminals, and any suspected contact with a teen or recruiting behavior should be treated as an emergency situation.

To report an incident or ask for help, you can always call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) 1-888-373-788 or text the Polaris BeFree Texting Helpline at “BeFree” (233733). This national human trafficking hotline is staffed round the clock and a real person will answer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. They can alert authorities in your local area for you, in a non-emergency situation where you do not want to call 911. You can also submit a tip online www.traffickingresourcecenter.org.

All communication with the hotline is strictly confidential to the extent permitted by law, and they will not release any identifying information about a caller, including to law enforcement or service providers, unless the caller provides his/her explicit consent.

If you contact the hotline, you will not need to provide your name or any identifying details about your situation unless you are comfortable doing so. The NHTRC will inform the appropriate authorities of situations that reference the suspected abuse of a minor, potential harm to you or others, or situations where the NHTRC is required by law to report.

You should have the phone number available or programmed into your cell phone, so you are always ready in case you actually do see something or hear something that you suspect could be human trafficking. Consider making a report together with your teen to show your support and teach how important it is to say something.
Contributors

Angelyn Bayless is the author of multiple training brochures on the topic of sex trafficking, including “How to Talk to Your Kids about Human Trafficking” and “Teen Sex Trafficking: Make a Difference by Understanding the Issue, Recognizing the Warning Signs and Knowing How to Seek Help.” She is Director of Communications for Arizona State University’s Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research and serves as the local coordinator of CEASE Phoenix Metro, one of 11 pioneering cities working to reduce demand for prostitution.

Tina Frundt is a leading figure in the crusade to help children sexually exploited for commercial purposes. Ms. Frundt herself a survivor of domestic sex trafficking; now dedicates her life to helping women and children heal from domestic sex trafficking and commercial sex exploitation. Since founding Courtney’s House in August 2008, Tina and her organization have helped more than 500 victims escape from being trafficked and find a new life. She also trains law enforcement and other non-profit groups to rescue and provide resources to victims. She is a member of the Washington, D.C. Anti-Trafficking Task Force.

Yvonne Williams is the coordinator for National Educators to Stop Trafficking (NEST), an online warehouse of over 50 human trafficking prevention curriculum and resources. Yvonne has been an advocate against human trafficking in the United States since 2004 and is the President and Co-founder of Network for Cultural Change (formerly Trafficking in America Task Force, Inc.) dedicated to addressing cultural issues that are fueling human trafficking and other cultural issues plaguing the United States.

youthSpark is a non-profit organization based in Atlanta, GA that works “to provide education and training, resources and counseling to protect youth who are at risk of sexual exploitation, transitioning them to healthy, productive lives.” We want to create a world where no child becomes a victim of child sex trafficking and no individual ever buys or sells another human. For more information about our work to end child sex trafficking through prevention and early intervention, please visit our website at www.youthspark.org.

Human Trafficking Search is the global resource and research database on human trafficking. The database consists of academic journals, reports, research studies, congressional testimony, news articles, and other primary and secondary sources, carefully researched and curated by experts in the field. First developed in 2006, HTS provides knowledge and information to service providers, advocates, law enforcement professionals, students, researchers, and anyone with an interest in this topic. In addition to the database, HTS offers background information, videos, a daily newsfeed, art, a weekly blog and more, all focused on human trafficking. HTS is a project of the OLP Foundation.

For More Information Visit:

- www.humantraffickingsearch.net
- www.youthspark.org
- www.courtenyshouse.org
- www.nesteducators.org