



Addressing Human Trafficking: An Expanded Look at Online Safety

A national webinar hosted by the U.S. Department of Education

Thursday, August 27, 2020
3:00 – 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time

QUESTION & ANSWER SUMMARY

Webinar Description

On Thursday, August 27, 2020 the U.S. Department of Education conducted a webinar to address the significant interest of educators in learning more about human trafficking and address important questions raised during previous webinars.

During this event, a panel comprised of **Savannah Sanders**, founder, *Sex Trafficking Prevention and Lived Experience Expert*; **Erin Williamson**, U.S. Programs Director at Love146; and **Tanya Gould**, founder, *Identifiable Me and Lived Experience Expert* was moderated by **Dr. Shauna Knox**, the Department's lead on human trafficking. Additional comments were provided by **Ruth Ryder**, Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education, to close the event.

Participant Questions

Questions were submitted via the Q&A and Chat functions of Zoom and the balance through the webinar feedback form. Below is a list of the questions, edited for clarity. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments prepared the following responses to participant questions. event webpage.

1. When a child/teenager disappears, have investigators been able to look at on-line conversations of victim & ascertain a link to online grooming? Stalking?

RESPONSE: There are many cases of child exploitation that investigators have traced to online grooming. One such story is that of Alicia Kozakiewicz, who was groomed online and kidnapped from her Pittsburgh home in 2002. She later founded the [Alicia Project](#), which seeks to improve internet safety for children. The [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) has information and tips on how to prevent online grooming, which is also known as online enticement.

2. Who can teach the parent/custodian re: trafficking realities? Many parents do not have the capacity to teach their child, causing frustration for child & parent.

RESPONSE: Parents who have experienced trauma and are enduring the ongoing stresses of poverty and/or domestic instability may need additional help understanding risk factors and indicators of trafficking. Schools can work to engage parents in multiple ways, including group learning opportunities and one-on-one meetings with counselors if there are specific concerns. Some school districts have created community guides on preventing trafficking that include sections for parents, and many standalone, easily distributable resources for parents also exist. One is [What You Need to Know: Sex Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, A Training Tool for Parents of Teens](#), developed by the Office of Sex Trafficking Research at Arizona State University.

3. It seems that there is a lot of emphasis on developing curriculum for children and families to identify the signs of exploitation, however we know that there are many cases involving family members. Are there standardized curriculum or mandated trainings or mandated reporters to identify the diverse symptoms of HT and trauma?

RESPONSE: Several trafficking prevention curricula with both student and educator components have been developed and are in use by school districts around the country. The Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) is engaged in a comprehensive review of trafficking prevention curricula and will release a report in the near future. Curricula or trainings created solely for educators include online

training from [OTIP](#), and written resources from [Polaris](#), [Project Starfish](#), and the [National Center for Homeless Education](#). In addition, the US Dept. of Education will release an updated trafficking prevention resource for schools this fall.

4. What are the red flags / questions to ask students for whom you are concerned about potential trafficking involvement?

RESPONSE: Sex and labor trafficking share several risk factors, including poverty, family dysfunction or instability, a high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), history of running away, gang involvement, involvement with the child welfare system, and mental health issues. Risk factors specific to sex trafficking include childhood physical or sexual abuse, learning disabilities or developmental delays, history of arrest for status offenses, living in a group home or shelter, and family rejection related to LGBTQ status. Risk factors specific to labor trafficking include recent migration or relocation, being a member of marginalized or disadvantaged community, unstable immigration status, and being an unaccompanied minor.

Fortunately, not all students who are at risk of trafficking actually experience it. Shared indicators of sex and labor trafficking – behaviors or circumstances that represent clear red flags – include lack of control over money, personal identification, travel documents, or personal schedule; self-destructive behavior, exhaustion, depressions or symptoms of PTSD; untreated medical issues; and coached responses to questions. Indicators specific to sex trafficking include sudden changes in attire, possessions, or behavior; uncharacteristic promiscuity or sexual references; a romantic partner who is older or controlling; tattoos suggesting “ownership;” and possession of large amounts of cash or prepaid credit cards. Indicators specific to labor trafficking include working for no or very little pay; accruing debt to an employer while at work; more chores or responsibilities than are age-appropriate; and paying living expenses to or for a family or caretaker.

5. Are there websites or materials that are highly recommended to educate oneself and how to assist in the movement?

RESPONSE: Many organizations are dedicated to combatting human trafficking. Curricula or trainings created solely for educators include online training from [OTIP](#), and written resources from [Polaris](#), [Project STARFISH](#), and the [National Center for Homeless Education](#). Videos and materials by grade level are available from [NetSmartz](#), a project of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. In addition, the US Dept. of Education will release an updated trafficking prevention resource for schools this fall.

6. Does the Department of Education have any curriculum that specifically addresses online safety?

RESPONSE: See response to Question 3.

7. Any suggestions for engaging school systems? Many seem resistant to addressing this topic.

RESPONSE: Schools may be unaware that trafficking of children under age 18 occurs in their communities until they begin engaging with law enforcement and child welfare professionals about the issue. When they understand the problem is real in their community, they often become more willing to take affirmative steps to combat it. Those steps can include training educators to recognized risk factors and indicators of trafficking; developing prevention curricula or resources for

children and their parents; and establishing clear protocols for how schools should handle suspicions of trafficking. In terms of online safety, online education taking place in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic creates an opportunity for schools to underscore safe online practices.

8. Is there any funding for schools to integrate HT curriculum into counseling or health classes?

RESPONSE: Some trafficking prevention curricula for schools are free and, in some states, curricula has been funded by local coalitions that include foundations. Free training for educators may also be available from district- or state-level education agencies. Regular monitoring of many of the websites noted in this set of questions will keep you in the know of future funding opportunities.

9. Can you please give us some specific names of apps that fall into the category of unsafe - (e.g. can disappear) and what features specifically can be added?

RESPONSE: The landscape of apps and online platforms is constantly changing and therefore the list of concerning products will too. In addition, most any app can prove dangerous if not used safely. The most important thing a parent can do is to know the apps your child is using and learn about them yourself. If you're concerned about apps or programs being used by a young person, a quick web search for "online safety for parents" will provide you with the details you'll need to take informed action. Be sure to visit several sites to compare information and watch for potential biases of sites. Two such sources are the [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) and [Love146](#).

10. What apps can parents use to protect their child on their phone and laptop?

RESPONSE: There are many apps, some free or with free versions, that allow parents or caregivers to filter content, monitor social media use, and set time limits for children online. KidLogger, Qustodio, NetNanny, Bark, SafetoNet, FamilyTime, and Our Pact are a few. Research these and others to find what works best for your family.

11. What are the first noticeable signs when a child is being trafficked?

RESPONSE: Please see the response to Question 4.

12. What is the overall picture of school districts committing to HT curricula? In our state, we only have two school districts that have committed to include HT curricula, but info is mostly done through teachers or schools. There are tons of different curricula out there on HT - what is the Department of Education doing to vet these? What specific resources have been developed for teachers and administrators? How do schools go about "vetting" community resources - not all community resources are the same, of course, so how can teachers know what a good referral might be?

RESPONSE: Several trafficking prevention curricula with student and educator training components have been developed and are in use by school districts around the country. The Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) is engaged in a comprehensive review of trafficking prevention curricula and will release a report in the near future.

As for vetting community resources, remember that all children who experience trafficking require specialized services. Therefore, it's a good idea for schools to develop Memoranda Of Understanding (MOUs) with established social service providers that are trained and experienced in

these cases: anti-trafficking organizations, child advocacy or assessment centers, domestic violence agencies, and legal clinics and advocacy organizations specializing in migrant, immigrant, and refugee issues. MOUs should be based on a clear understanding of the services referral partners are able to provide and in which circumstances.

13. Where may I find downloadable and printable resources on "how to report" suspected child sex trafficking? Can you make any suggestions on free training materials to share with my coworkers or maybe even hold a parent education and awareness class?

RESPONSE: Reporting suspected child sex trafficking is one part of a comprehensive protocol on trafficking that schools are encouraged to develop. Policies on reporting suspicions to law enforcement and/or child welfare officials vary from state to state but consider using your school's existing child abuse reporting protocols as a starting point. One example of a [protocol for sex trafficking comes from the San Diego County Office of Education](#).

14. What are some of the red flags that parents and teachers should know about child being exploited?

RESPONSE: Please see response to Question 4.

15. Is there a clear profile of who trafficking perpetrators are? Do they exhibit unique characteristics/behaviors?

RESPONSE: One of the biggest takeaways from research on traffickers is that they don't all look like stereotypical villains. In fact, some look exactly the opposite. According to Love146, a nonprofit working to end child trafficking and exploitation, "traffickers and pimps can look like and be anyone: businessmen, grandmothers, celebrities, parents, firefighters, and religious leaders have been found guilty of trafficking. Even youth have been found guilty of trafficking their peers at school."

16. Are there non-profit organizations that can help schools to educate family members?

RESPONSE: Yes, many organizations provide resources that may be helpful to schools. They include [Polaris](#), [Project STARFISH](#), the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#), [Love146](#), and [My Life My Choice](#).

17. Are traffickers using online access more since students are doing school virtually?

RESPONSE: While there is no definitive answer to this question at this time, there are clear indications that children have become more vulnerable during the pandemic. Bark Technologies, a service for monitoring children's internet activity, says the number of predators it has reported to law enforcement increased 23% between early March and early May of 2020. [Reports of online exploitation of children](#) – much of it involving distribution of child pornography – have also risen sharply over last year. Research indicates that [cyberbullying of children](#) has increased markedly since the beginning of the pandemic as well.

18. What are tangible steps schools can take when a child is found to be a victim of child trafficking. For example, are the police notified? Does the child meet with the school psychologist?

RESPONSE: One of the most important steps schools can take to combat trafficking is to develop a clear protocol on how cases of suspected trafficking should be handled. A typical protocol might involve a teacher, bus driver, front office staff or other school personnel noticing that something seems wrong or “off” with a student and reporting their concerns to a counselor or social worker specially trained in trafficking issues. After talking with the student, perhaps several times to build trust, the counselor will determine whether the concerns are justified. If so, depending on state law, the counselor may contact law enforcement and/or child welfare. The counselor may also make referrals to a local provider of specialized services in trafficking, or, if no such services exist, to a child advocacy or assessment center. School protocols should also outline how possible impacts on other students will be investigated.
