



Human Trafficking in **AMERICA'S SCHOOLS**



Session 2: How Schools Can Respond to Suspicions of Human Trafficking

Transcript

Suzanne Goldberg:

Hello, and welcome to session two of this three-part online series devoted to addressing human trafficking in America's schools. My name is Suzanne Goldberg and I'm the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Operations and Outreach in the Office for Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education. I will be moderating this session. On behalf of all of us at the Department of Education, I want to personally thank you for taking the time to participate in this series, to learn more about how you can be a meaningful part of efforts to end labor and sex trafficking of our students. As educators, you are uniquely qualified to notice warning signs of potential trafficking as you regularly nurture the caring, committed relationships with students that provide them the safety to seek support. You serve an essential function in ensuring that our students enjoy a safe, supportive school environment free from the fear of trafficking. Thank you so much for all that you do.

Our team here at the Department of Education has been engaged on a variety of fronts to provide timely, research-based and survivor-informed resources to those of you doing the important work of safeguarding students every day. Our webpage dedicated to supporting these efforts is shown on the screen now. On this site, you'll find links to recent webinars we have held, a brief addressing how positive behavioral interventions and supports can be used as a vehicle to intervene in sex trafficking, and our landmark guide: Human Trafficking in America's Schools, What Schools Can Do To Prevent, Respond, And Help Students To Recover From Human Trafficking. The department released this guide in January of 2021. The information contained in the guide informs the contents of this presentation, where we will discuss how schools can respond to suspicions of child sex and labor trafficking. This guide continues to be a primary source of timely information on this topic for America's educators.

Thousands of students are trafficked each year into the United States and in the United States. We can never know the precise number, but in 2019, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified more than 5,300 children under the age of 18 who had been trafficked for sex or labor. We also know that trafficking of children is not confined to one type of location. It happens everywhere. In urban, suburban, and rural areas, in places where you might

suspect it, and in places where you wouldn't. Trafficking children for sex or labor is a particularly heinous crime that can have devastating consequences for children, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma.

Schools can play an important role in interrupting trafficking when it occurs and in helping students heal from these painful experiences. In this session, we are going to talk about how schools can respond when an educator or other school employee suspects that a student may be being trafficked. Joining me for this session of our series are Charisma De Los Reyes and Harold D'Souza. Ms. De Los Reyes is a project specialist for the San Diego County Office of Education, Student Support Services Division. In this capacity, she assists schools in the office's catchment area in developing and implementing protocols addressing human trafficking. Mr. D'Souza is a survivor of labor trafficking and debt bondage. He is a co-founder of Eyes Open International, a nonprofit focused on developing trafficking prevention efforts through survivor-informed research on human trafficking. He is also a past member of the US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. You can find full bios for our speakers on the webpage where you accessed this video link.

So let's start by reviewing the definitions of child sex and labor trafficking, so that we clearly understand the range of activities involved. Sex trafficking. "Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which that act is induced by fraud, force, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform the act has not attained 18 years of age." And here, I want to emphasize that children under 18 can never be complicit in their own sex trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud or coercion is used. Labor trafficking. "Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery." So, Charisma, let me begin with you. Can you remind us of some of the more common indicators of child sex or labor trafficking?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Certainly. There are many potential indicators. They can be behavioral or physical, and they can also manifest in many different ways. Child sex and labor trafficking also have their own unique indicators. In sex trafficking, indicators can include being involved with people engaged in trafficking, frequent travel to motels or hotels and to other cities, a sudden decline in academic performance, expensive new clothing or other personal belongings, and uncharacteristic references to sex or sexual situations.

In labor trafficking, it might look like working for free or very little money, long working hours that are inappropriate or illegal for children under the age of 18, accruing a debt to an employer while working, being recruited for a job with the promise of easy money, or being responsible for paying rent, food, or other family expenses. But some of the most important indicators of trafficking actually overlap, meaning we may see both in labor and sex trafficked students. For example, exhaustion, depression or symptoms of PTSD, poor physical health

or malnutrition, physical trauma such as scars and bruises, or the lack of control over money, ID, travel documents or their personal schedule.

Suzanne Goldberg: Thank you for that. It's a very helpful foundation for our conversation. So, in San Diego County, you have developed a protocol that schools that you serve can adapt to their own needs. Can you describe the protocol development process you use and how it came to be in place?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Absolutely. Our county office of education developed the protocol as a tool to guide schools in responding to instances of potential trafficking. It was truly a collaborative effort where we partnered with several key players, such as child welfare, survivors, community-based providers, public health, behavioral health, juvenile court, and the district attorney's office. The protocol was actually first developed in 2010, and then later formalized by our county office. We knew with educators making up the largest body of mandated reporters, it was important for educators to know what they needed to do. And it was equally important to define what was the role of the educator once a student was identified. Since then, the protocol has been revised to incorporate many lessons learned and best known practices to better respond to student and system needs. For instance, looking at the sample protocol from the Human Trafficking in America's School's guide, the spectrum illustrates in more detail what things can be considered when educators recognize indicators of sex or labor trafficking.

And from our experience, we recommend that schools or districts designate a staff member who is especially trained in handling human trafficking situations. This staff member can help sort through information, conduct screenings and safety and trafficking assessments, in addition to ensuring the most appropriate approach and response is used to meet the students needs. As an additional note, I'd like to share that our county office is leading a federal demonstration grant to provide staff and student training in human trafficking prevention education. And we are implementing this protocol in local participating school districts that will address both sex and labor trafficking. We are looking forward to learn more from the outcomes gained in this grant and then apply what we've learned towards continuous quality improvement of the protocol.

Suzanne Goldberg: Thank you so much for that, Charisma. And I think we all look forward to learning what you learn. So, let's take a look at your protocols in more depth. Can you walk us through them, starting with a discussion of the indicators of potential trafficking that would trigger use of the protocol?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Sure. So, San Diego CSEC recommended protocols for school, as you can see, is similar to the spectrum, right? That we've just discussed. But it also includes specific steps that staff members can take based on their school role, as well as know how to respond to different potential trafficking student situations. When we created this protocol, we aimed for something that could be easy to reach for and could immediately aid staff members to know exactly what they should do. Probably the most common situation is when a teacher becomes concerned about a student from what they've observed or the interactions they've had with the student. The teacher then recognizes, maybe, indicators like, again, a

sudden decline in academic performance, chronic absenteeism, exhaustion, or depression. Something overall just has really changed about this child, but the teacher isn't quite sure if this is a situation of trafficking. So, this is just one example of where the protocol would be triggered.

Really, for any potential situation, it starts with knowing the different signs and then consulting with specially trained staff members to take the best course of action. Another situation educators may encounter is suspecting a student who is exploiting or recruiting other students. Again, following the steps and in consultation with the designated staff, at that point law enforcement may need to be contacted directly. The last two potential trafficking situations in the protocol outlines recommended steps for staff to take for students who are suspected to be victims of commercial sexual exploitation, or are confirmed to be victims of CSEC. Each step describes who should do what and when. Essentially, in the moment, we want educators to feel confident in taking the steps they need while also supporting the needs of their students. With that, we also want to be trauma-informed and limit the number of times a student may have to tell their story. More importantly, reminding educators, our goal using the protocol is not to obtain a disclosure or to investigate, but to recognize risk factors and indicators, consult with specially trained staff, and report to the most appropriate authorities when necessary.

Suzanne Goldberg: This is all really helpful. Now, we know protocols for responding to suspected child trafficking could take different forms, but all should include certain key elements. Can you talk us through those basic elements?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Sure. Some of those basic elements are, protocols should include training for all staff on risk factors and indicators of child trafficking, along with specialized training for staff most likely to notice signs of trafficking. Those staff could include nurses, school counselors, bus drivers, school attendance officers, vice principals, and special education teachers. Protocols should define clear roles and responsibilities that emphasize a system response rather than an individual one. We don't recommend non-counseling staff to discuss their concerns directly with students or investigate potential instances of trafficking on their own. Protocol should be developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and partners, including parents, law enforcement, child welfare officials, and nonprofits who specialize in trafficking. If you are in a place that is without specialized trafficking services, a child assessment center, domestic violence or rape services agency could serve as a key stakeholder. Protocols should address both the wider school community and the victim of trafficking. Once trafficking has been confirmed, the designated school or district specialist should investigate potential impacts on other students and provide safety and educational planning to individual students affected by trafficking.

Suzanne Goldberg: So, a lot to think about, a lot to do. And it's wonderful to have specialized dedicated resources available within a school or a district for managing instances of suspected trafficking, but that's not every school or district. So, what about locations that don't have those same resources?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Right. Many trainings on recognizing and responding to child trafficking are free to educators and counselors. Some are available from federal agencies, national organizations, or state departments of education, or district offices. Some of these trainings are very easy to access. For instance, the Office of Trafficking in Persons offers SOAR for school-based professionals, which is actually online. And because of these resources, most schools should be able to develop a basic effective response to potential trafficking situations. Schools should also realize that we can't do it alone, and we aren't meant to do it alone. We need to proactively partner with many different organizations and entities in our community to provide a comprehensive response. We all have a shared responsibility to protect our students and their wellbeing. As a part of protocol planning, we recommend developing memorandums of understanding with partners so each entity understands the role it will play when responding to possible child trafficking, safeguarding the entire school community from traffickers and helping affected children to heal.

Suzanne Goldberg: So, can you talk to us just briefly about how the internet plays into this and what we need to know about online trafficking?

Charisma De Los Reyes: Sure. Prior, even, to the pandemic, that was the most common way and continues to be the common way that traffickers or exploiters will come into contact with children. And so parents really need to be aware of what their children are looking at, even becoming familiar with the games or different social platforms that their children might be on, and possibly even learn how to activate protections or privacy tabs to ensure, again, that children are only talking to people that they know or that their parents are familiar with. And so again, with the pandemic, our students are online more often than ever. And the internet truly is a great place to find lots of information, to connect us globally with other people or communities.

But again, there are always bad actors who will take advantage of the vulnerability of children and they may pose as a peer or someone safe or insist that they are safe, and then initiate a grooming process. And what's hard for children is that because they might lack maturity or simply their age, they just don't have a lot of experience, they don't know what they don't know. And so what we're hoping is that when we train students to understand how human trafficking can happen and the methods of recruitment, we're hoping that they can protect themselves as well as be advocates for their peers, really, in understanding how to be safe online.

Suzanne Goldberg: Thank you so much. It's really invaluable to hear your expertise. So, we thank you for your time and sharing it with us.

Charisma De Los Reyes: Thank you. So happy to be here.

Suzanne Goldberg: So, let's hear now from Harold D'Souza, who has lived experiences as a survivor of labor trafficking, to gain insights on this discussion from his perspective. Harold, thank you for being with us. As a person with lived experience, having been trafficked yourself, I'd like our viewers to have a chance to hear from you

at this point. What's resonated with you about the information that we have discussed based on your own experiences?

Harold D'Souza:

Thank you, Suzanne, and it's a great opportunity to be on the platform of the Department of Education. And the first and foremost thing I would like to share is that labor trafficking does happen in the United States of America. And this particular episode in my case could have been identified at a very early age, or it could be identified at a primary stage when I was a victim of labor trafficking. I just want to share a small example, Suzanne, is that I am from India. I am a victim of labor trafficking and debt bondage in the United States of America. We never saw snow in our life. And the first time we saw snow was in the year 2003, December.

So, we get a note from the school teacher that both my kids cannot come to school if they do not wear snow jackets. And I, being from India, I didn't know the meaning of snow jacket, because my kids did have a sweater from India, which was see-through. But my chef, he bought two snow jackets and my kids went to school. And next day, we get a note from the school teacher that both my kids cannot come to school if they do not wear snow gloves. Now, these are some red flags that could have been identified at a very early stage in the school. And hence I really appreciate and respect what Department of Education is doing to educate, enlighten and empower these school authorities to identify victims of human trafficking. Thank you.

Suzanne Goldberg:

Thank you so much. And I think it's a very, very important point that trafficking affects the individual or individuals who are trafficked and it affects those who love and care for and depend on those individuals, especially parents and caregivers. So, what recommendations do you have for schools to effectively engage the lived experience community as they develop their own protocols and other responses to trafficking?

Harold D'Souza:

My lived experience, Suzanne, is that the school authorities, like the bus driver, the administrative staff at the front desk, the teachers, the delegates who work at the cafeteria, are the prime frontline who can identify victims of human trafficking. It could be labor trafficking or sex trafficking. They play a very big role. So, getting them trauma-informed ensuring that they know that what happens in the case of victims, kids. I'm a brown skinned guy and it's very easy for school authorities to identify victims of labor trafficking, especially if the child is a foreign national. And that's a great point for all the school authorities to create an curriculum in the school education system. I thought to share that. There should be a subject on human trafficking for the students, for the school teachers, for the counselors. I would just want to share a small example.

My older son Bradley was pulled out, I think when he was returning from the school assembly line, by the counselor, thinking that his parents are going through a divorce because he was so stressed. His body language was so negative. And we were called in as a parent. But at that particular time, we being a victim of labor trafficking and debt bondage could not communicate to the counselor, nor did the counselor could see the red flag that this is not a case of divorce, but this is a case of labor trafficking or some other issue. But this is a

very huge point. There are so many examples. I always want to share that this is just the tip of the iceberg. I cannot share this in maybe five minutes or five hours.

The second example I would like to share is in the nursing staff. My son broke his glasses, I think when he was in the eighth grade, and for six months, he used to just put a cello tape on one of his glasses. We approached the nurse multiple times, but it should have been a red flag that there is something wrong with his family, that they do not have medical insurance, and this boy is struggling for glasses for the last six months. So there are certain message I would like to share to the parents of all the students, that the school authorities should conduct, whenever they have their annual program, or maybe for four or five minutes, something on human trafficking. And this could rescue some of the victims, students. And I just want to share that every student who is a victim of labor trafficking, and if their parents is a victim of labor trafficking or sex trafficking, that child could thrive in life.

And I'm very proud to share today that they're, both my sons, Bradley is working for Tesla for the last eight years. And my younger son, Rohan, if God willing everything goes well, you'll see him the pro of tennis. So, every child has a passion, has a talent, has a wisdom and a dream to do something in life. Maybe he or she is a victim of any crime, maybe a victim of labor trafficking, but that child should be given the authority or the privilege or the freedom and hope to live his or her life to the fullest. Thank you.

Suzanne Goldberg:

Thank you so much. And you've made several really important points for our educators in the audience. And one most basically is to be paying attention, right? To be looking at the kids in front of you and looking not only at what they might not have, whether it's a snow jacket or mittens or something, but also thinking about why. And in thinking about why, and I know educators think about this all the time, children come in with many different kinds of trauma in their experience, but to recognize that trafficking of a parent or guardian is a possibility. Because that might lead to different kinds of questions. And I think your example of a counselor who assumed that he was feeling a lot of stress because his parents were divorcing, it probably didn't enter the person's mind that actually it could have been a different situation that might involve trafficking.

And even just that reminder to keep this on the list of things that runs through an educator's mind and for educators who are working with teachers and staff throughout their communities, whether bus drivers or folks working in the cafeteria or teaching in classes or anything else, that it's important for everybody to have that awareness and ask that question about trafficking. So, let me ask you one more question which is, is there anything else you'd like educators to know as they develop their own protocols in their schools and districts for responding to child trafficking?

Harold D'Souza:

This is a multimillion dollar question. I would like to communicate this to all the authorities at the school, the Department of Education and even to the community members. That whenever you or anyone you suspect is a victim of

human trafficking, could be labor trafficking or sex trafficking, please note the number on your cell phone. That's 1-888-373-7888. That's the National Human Trafficking hotline number. And there are many local numbers within the state. For example, in Ohio, the human trafficking hotline number is 513-800-1863. And most important, the school authority should educate and empower the kids that in case of any crisis at any time, if it's an emergency, call 911.

Many times the victim in the case of labor trafficking are scared to call 911 just because the perpetrators or traffickers use four words. Number one, "I'll get you arrested." Number two, "I'll get you handcuffed." Number three, "I'll get you jailed." And number four, "I'll get you deported." So, this is what I would like to communicate to all the school administration. Love your kids, respect them, recognize them, reward them and ensure that, again, once again, that every child could be the future school teacher. He could be the principal. He could be the governor, or he could be, if he's a born US citizen, he could be the President of the United States of America. Thank you very much.

Suzanne Goldberg:

Thank you so much. And I think you make a couple of really important points again, and let me just sum them up to say that we all need to learn. We all need to keep the possibility of trafficking in mind as we're thinking about students we engage with, as we're thinking about the community environment, the families that engage with us. And we also don't need to know everything. There are experts. There are resources. There is support. There's support at the state level. There's support at the federal level. And thank you for reminding us of the federal trafficking number and the National Trafficking hotline number. And really, thank you very much for sharing your expertise. And I want to thank both you, Harold, and Charisma, for your expertise and participation. It is clear that you have made and are continuing to make contributions to this field that are vital.

I also want to thank everybody who has joined us for your interest in this important topic and in taking up and taking out with you what we've talked about today. The US Department of Education is committed to supporting schools as they work to prevent and interrupt instances of human trafficking in schools, both students and students' families, as we've just talked about. Before we finish, we have a few final notes to share. Here are some of the resources we have identified as central to the information we covered today. I encourage you to take your time with them, to explore them in more depth after viewing this content. Each bit of time you spend will both benefit you directly in your knowledge base, and it will be information that you can share with others in your community, and you may well save a life with it.

And as a reminder, there are two other segments in this series. We encourage you to view these segments as well, and to help strengthen your understanding of human trafficking, and very importantly, the responses that educators can provide. Finally, as we conclude this second session in our staff development series, I leave you with these reflection questions. Which pieces of information that we just shared stand out for you as content to remember in the future? As you reflect on this session, how familiar are you with the appropriate resources in your school, in your district and your community? Do you know who to

contact if you believe a student may in the process of being groomed or may be involved in trafficking? And that goes for family members of your students as well. What changes, if any, can you make to incorporate the information presented in this session into your daily practices as educators? How do you contact people?

How do you bring people in? How do you bring in these resources in your daily practices as educators? Please take a few minutes, whether you're viewing this content individually on your own, or as a group, to consider each of these questions and engage with colleagues in discussion as needed to process the information we shared today. You may want to pause the content once all of the questions are visible to allow ample time for reflection and discussion, and to come back again to these questions over time. Thank you so much, again, for your support of all students, particularly those who may be at risk of being groomed or trafficked. You can be part of the solution to end child trafficking. We all can be part of this. We depend on you and we are grateful for your work. Thank you so much for being with us and have a good rest of your day today.