



Human Trafficking in **AMERICA'S SCHOOLS**



Session 3: How Schools Can Help Prevent Human Trafficking

Transcript

Ian Rosenblum:

Welcome to this conversation about the steps schools can take to prevent the trafficking of children. The US Department of Education is committed to providing support and resources for educators working to address human trafficking. This staff development series is a major component of that effort. This is one of three sessions that the department has created on practical steps schools can take to combat child trafficking and keep all students safe. You can find additional information on this topic in the second edition of Human Trafficking in America's Schools, What Schools Can Do To Prevent, Respond and Help Students To Recover From Human Trafficking, which the department released in January 2021.

Thousands of children under age 18 are trafficked each year in the United States for sex and labor. Children are exploited in urban, suburban, and rural areas. There is no place trafficking doesn't or can't occur. Schools can employ a number of prevention approaches that decrease the vulnerability of students to trafficking and interrupt trafficking when it does occur. In this session, we're going to focus on how schools can take concrete steps to protect students from victimization.

I'm joined today by two subject matter experts who will help us explore human trafficking prevention. The first person I'll interview is Katherine Chon, Director of the Office on Trafficking in Persons, or OTIP, and a senior advisor on human trafficking at the US Department of Health and Human Services. She serves on multiple committees and inter-agency work groups on trafficking, violence against women, child exploitation, and Native American affairs. Later in the session we'll turn to Jill Brogdon, Vice Chair of the Colorado Human Trafficking Council. With lived experience in trafficking, Jill has been actively involved in trafficking prevention and key legislative efforts to address trafficking in the state of Colorado. Full bios for our speakers can be found on the webpage where you accessed this video link.

Let's start by reviewing the definitions of child sex and labor trafficking so we clearly understand the range of activities involved. Sex trafficking, 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 force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced performs such act has not attained 18 years of age.

And labor trafficking, the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery. 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. Now let's start our conversation. I'm pleased to be joined by Katherine.

Katherine Chon: Hello Ian.

Ian Rosenblum: Let me begin with asking you to address some of the central tenants of trafficking prevention in the education sector. What are some key prevention approaches that schools can use?

Katherine Chon: Well, one of the first things to recognize is that prevention can happen at three different levels. So when we talk about primary prevention, that's preventing trafficking or other forms of violence before it occurs. When we're talking about secondary prevention, it's the role of schools in identifying whether a student has experienced trafficking and then preventing the harms from the trauma of that experience. And then tertiary prevention is preventing re-victimization because often if a student has experienced trafficking, they may be also highly vulnerable to re-victimization of trafficking or other forms of exploitation.

So when schools are thinking about how to address prevention, they want to look at all three levels. Do they have the education, the capacity, the resources, and staffing in place to help prevent trafficking amongst students at the earliest ages? So that can involve social emotional learning, identifying healthy and nurturing relationships with peers and adults. It may also involve age appropriate content around dating and having healthy relationships.

And then when schools are thinking about secondary prevention, do they have screening protocols in place? Do they know how to identify trafficking in a trauma informed way? Would they know how to respond to a potential disclosure that happens recognizing the different various ways trafficking may happen? And then finally, once they have identified someone who has experienced trafficking, are the safety nets and support in place so that it can prevent re-victimization?

Ian Rosenblum: Thanks Katherine. Can you talk a little more about trafficking prevention curricula or messages?

Katherine Chon: So human trafficking curricula or messages can involve universal education where every child is equipped to understand the signs of human trafficking, particularly around grooming and recruitment patterns. And then there's also targeted prevention education, particularly for subpopulations of students who may be at disproportionate or higher risk for human trafficking. So for example, children who have previously experienced abuse, or neglect, or some form of maltreatment, those who have experienced homelessness, or bullying, or other adverse childhood experiences that could increase their risk factors. Or if they are in family or community settings that have high what we call pull factors of attempting to heavily recruit in certain areas for human trafficking.

And so we encourage both universal education when schools are looking at curriculum and prevention messages, as well as targeted messages. And then the content of that is really focused on helping students to understand what human trafficking looks like and building their own skills so that they know how to identify the red flags around recruitment or grooming, either for themselves or for their peers. And the messages would need to be multi-pronged where I mentioned earlier, teaching social emotional skills, emphasizing the importance of healthy relationships, encouraging peer to peer support, and also building those skills of resiliency. And if they are in a situation of trafficking, encouraging help seeking behavior, especially if they have a peer or adult in their life that they can go to for some type of assistance.

Ian Rosenblum: How do you see the trafficking prevention curricula or messages just typically delivered in an effective way? Are they integrated into other aspects of a curriculum or often stand alone?

Katherine Chon: So human trafficking curricula prevention messages should be delivered directly to the students. And often this is done within school settings where the educators, administrators, sometimes even the parents are involved and aware of the institutional responses, but the messages themselves would be directed directly to students. It could be integrated in a number of subjects already taught into school. They don't necessarily even have to be standalone programs.

So messages on human trafficking prevention could be integrated into health and wellness classes or different advisory periods. And then there are also ways to integrate the topic of trafficking in other subjects. For example, economics, English, history, journalism, theater, current events and there are various teaching tools that already exist out there on how to integrate trafficking. And then there are also curricula that exist that are standalone trainings on human trafficking, whether it's looking at it from a universal perspective or a targeted population.

And then in terms of the mechanisms, schools have produce videos, they've had news cast style interviews, youth led efforts, and peer to peer models around raising awareness about human trafficking or raising awareness about what people can do around human trafficking. And many of these could be in online platforms as well as offline directly in the classroom or in the broader community.

Ian Rosenblum: And so, building on the strategies that you've described at the student level, how should we think about effective prevention strategies at the staff and policy or administrative levels?

Katherine Chon: Well, to have students talk about this issue comfortably, we also need to equip educators and staff in having a supportive environment and helping to create a supportive environment by normalizing conversations about topics that are sometimes really hard to discuss. And whether it's about trafficking or other forms of abuse, one of the areas in which to equip staff is training around not only how to identify, but if there is a disclosure or a request. I mentioned the importance of doing that in a trauma informed way and at the Department of Health and Human Services, we do provide free online training for any educator, particularly healthcare provider or social worker in a school based setting on what human trafficking looks like in general, but also what it looks like specifically within school based settings.

We have a module on how to provide trauma informed responses that schools can consider just assessing their own protocols around being a more trauma informed environment. And then beyond identification, screening and providing that type of trauma informed response, we also provide some guidance and there are sample resources we have for administrators in looking at their own institutional response protocols. And recognizing that their schools are not alone in this. They can work with specially trained local law enforcement, healthcare providers, the child welfare system, so that it's not just up to the school to respond, but there is a broader community based response. And then that's where some of those referral and training protocols could be helpful, in particular to the administrators. And so partnerships would be a key in the response and schools are not alone in this.

Ian Rosenblum: Thank you so much, Katherine, for joining us and sharing your expertise. I'd now like to welcome to the conversation Jill Brogdon and to take some time to speak.

As an individual with lived experience with trafficking, your perspective is critical to help us have a more complete understanding of the importance of prevention efforts. What's resonated with you about the information that we've just discussed regarding prevention of human trafficking?

Jill Brogdon: Thank you, Ian. I think what resonated the most with me is the importance of training staff and all teachers, all staff in the school, how to become askable adults. And what I mean by that is learning, if you will, the language of students and how they feel comfortable coming to them with an uncomfortable topic, and how to be able to draw more information from that student without them walking away, getting scared. So that the student feels comfortable.

I think it's critical that an adult understand that the shock value, students might want that, but it's better if the teacher remains calm so that they can invite in more conversation from the student. Another thing that resonated with me is the bystander training and how critical that is. In my situation, I have since

talked to several of classmates who said they thought something was happening between me and the teacher, but they didn't know how to go to someone about it. So if it's available in the school system for bystanders to have that education, whether it's a student, another parent, or someone else on the staff in the school, I think that's critical to help the victim find a way out of the situation.

Ian Rosenblum: Thank you Jill. What would you suggest that could help schools as they begin developing more system and community-wide prevention efforts to address child trafficking?

Jill Brogdon: Again, the trainings factor is critical. Also, I think it's very important that they understand that a trafficker can be anyone. It's not just what you see in the media. It can be a teacher, it can be any other staff member in the school, or a parent, or clergy, a neighbor, anyone. If you see an unusual behavior with a student, for instance, if they're sleeping during class, don't automatically assume that it's because they stayed up playing video games all night. It could be that they were doing something against their will. I think other important factors are to watch for indicators. Any other change in behavior that looks unusual, or if a staff member or teacher is paying special attention to one student and asking for after hours after school work for them to do, that's not typical of their school day, that's a red flag.

Ian Rosenblum: Thank you so much Jill. Thank you to both of you for your expertise and your participation and for your contributions to this field. And thank you all for viewing this session and for your interest in this vitally important topic. The US Department of Education is committed to supporting schools as they work to prevent and interrupt instances of human trafficking in schools.

Before we finish, we have a few final thoughts. Here are some of the resources we've identified as central to the information we covered today. We encourage you to take some time to explore them in more depth after viewing this content. And as a reminder, there are two other segments in this series. We encourage you to view these sessions as well, to help strengthen your understanding of human trafficking and the response educators can provide.

Finally, as we conclude this session in our staff development series, we leave you with these reflection questions. What pieces of information just shared stand out as content to remember in the future? What specific steps can you take within the parameters of your current role or position to be a part of the prevention efforts at your school? What supports would be helpful to you to do so? And what changes, if any, can you make to incorporate the information presented in this session more fully into your daily practice as an educator?

Please take a few minutes, whether you are viewing this content individually, or as a group to consider each question and engage with colleagues in discussion as needed to process the information shared today more fully. You may want to pause the content once all questions are visible to allow for ample time to reflect and discuss. Thank you once again for your support for all students,

particularly those who may be at risk of being groomed or trafficked. You can be part of the solution to ending child trafficking. Thank you again.