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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING 101**

# **Best Practices Guide to Raising Awareness in Your Community**

Developed by the Public Awareness Subcommittee  
of the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission

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This Best Practices Guide was developed by the Public Awareness Subcommittee of the Ohio Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Commission. It outlines best practices for raising public awareness of human trafficking and is intended as a “how to” resource for anti-trafficking coalitions and community leaders throughout Ohio. The following individuals contributed to this guide:

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# 10 high-level essentials

Educational presentations about human trafficking should:

- Be developed from credible resources (see below).
- Be survivor-informed, ensuring that survivors are supported regarding self-care and compensated fairly for their time.
- Include a “sensitive content” disclosure.
- Provide inclusive language, encompassing all cultures and genders.
- Include information about the LGBTQ+ population and other vulnerable populations that are susceptible to trafficking.
- Define sex, labor trafficking and the intersection of both, and include information about both types of trafficking throughout.
- Provide community and/or statewide information that’s credible and current (see below).
- Discuss barriers to victim identification and access to services.
- Include information regarding local coalitions and resources.
- Include information on how to become involved in raising awareness.

## Myth vs. fact

A simple online search of the term “human trafficking” instantly produces well over a million results. With so much information so readily available, it is important to know myth from fact when developing public-awareness materials. Many of the common perceptions of human trafficking have been debunked by leading anti-trafficking organizations and those with lived experiences. For example:

<p><b>MYTH:</b> Human trafficking always involves physically forcing someone into a situation.</p>	<p><b>FACT:</b> Although human trafficking can involve some physical force, it doesn’t always. Most traffickers trick, trap, manipulate, or threaten their victims into providing sexual services or labor.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>MYTH:</b> Women and girls are the only victims of human trafficking.</p>	<p><b>FACT:</b> Human trafficking does not discriminate. Both grown men and young boys can be victims, too. All gender identities are at risk, with members of the LGBTQ+ community considered a particularly vulnerable population. <sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>MYTH:</b> Human trafficking does not occur in the United States.</p>	<p><b>FACT:</b> Human trafficking is a global problem that affects countries worldwide, including the United States. It happens in both urban and rural areas of the U.S. and can happen in any community.<sup>1</sup></p>

<b>MYTH:</b> Human trafficking involves moving someone from place to place.	<b>FACT:</b> Human trafficking is often confused with human smuggling, which is a crime related to unauthorized border crossings. Human trafficking is a crime against an individual that does not necessarily involve movement. Victims can be recruited and trafficked in their own communities, schools or homes. <sup>1</sup>
<b>MYTH:</b> Trafficked individuals could leave their situations if they really wanted to.	<b>FACT:</b> Multiple barriers deter trafficked individuals from leaving their situations, including a lack of finances, a lack of housing, extreme fear, the threat or presence of violence, emotional blackmail centered on physical or sexual abuse of the victim’s children or partner, trauma bonding and more. <sup>4</sup>
<b>MYTH:</b> Awareness information about human trafficking is always factual and helpful.	<b>FACT:</b> The misinformation that exists can make it more difficult for communities to identify victims and for victims to identify themselves. <sup>3</sup>
<b>MYTH:</b> Traffickers usually prey on victims they don’t know.	<b>FACT:</b> Trafficking situations most often involve relationships in which a level of trust exists, including familial relationships and intimate partner relationships. <sup>2</sup>

### Credible resources

If you’re wondering where to turn to develop content, these state and national websites are reliable sources of information. It’s also important to learn about credible resource agencies within your community.

- [Ohio Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Initiative \(HTI\)](#)
- [Ohio Attorney General’s Standards of Service for Trafficked Persons](#)
- [Governor’s Human Trafficking Task Force](#)
- [Polaris Project](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)
- [Blue Campaign](#)

### A checklist for trainings

Trainings should be tailored to your audience, with these foundational components serving as a starting point.

#### Imagery and language

- Choose imagery that reflects reality and avoids depictions of bondage and captivity.
- Include a “sensitive content” disclosure at the beginning of the training.
- Use factual language provided by credible resources (see above).

- Use language that is inclusive of all cultures, ethnicities and gender identities.
- Incorporate storytelling that is ethical; as such, it should respect the privacy of those with lived experiences.
- Make sure the discussion encompasses both labor and sex trafficking.
- Explain the importance of avoiding the word “rescue,” noting that it could invite harm to a victim. Emphasize that the goal is to support and provide available resources.

## Overview of human trafficking

- Define the issue and include information on both sex and labor trafficking.
- Discuss common types of sex and labor trafficking, including bonded labor, family-controlled, etc.
- Discuss where labor and sex trafficking may occur, such as geographical locations as well as in businesses, homes, etc.
- Share relevant information from credible resources.
- Limit the use of statistics. When used, tap only credible sources and explain that statistics within this population aren’t always accurate due to a lack of understanding and/or reporting.
- Discuss means of trafficking, including force, fraud and coercion.
- Discuss the six stages of the grooming process related to sex trafficking, providing facts while simultaneously dispelling misconceptions.
- Discuss the fraud and coercion process related to labor trafficking, providing facts while simultaneously dispelling misconceptions.
- Discuss vulnerable populations, but make it clear that anyone can become a trafficking victim.
- Discuss the intersection of human trafficking and other societal issues, including substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, etc.
- Discuss the barriers that victims of both sex and labor trafficking face.
- Discuss how human trafficking has changed in light of increased internet and cellphone use, the dark web, and social media apps – including the effects of the pandemic.
- When discussing only a single issue – sex trafficking of women, for example – provide a disclaimer that men and boys are trafficked, too, and that labor trafficking does occur. Discuss all populations vulnerable to trafficking, including the LGBTQ+ population, and explain that the one example given doesn’t encompass all forms of trafficking.

## Identification and response

- Discuss the importance of language when identifying victims.
  - Mention how individuals may not identify as “victims of human trafficking.”
  - Note sex-trafficking terminology: “the life,” “the track,” “the game,” etc.
  - Discuss identification and the language used online.
- When discussing identification, note the importance of prioritizing the victim’s safety by providing the victim with food, shelter, access to detox, etc.
- Provide resources for assistance and response locally and/or nationally.
- Ensure that resources are credible and provide services.

- Include survivors in all discussions, as their lived experiences offer unique knowledge and perspective.
- Offer meaningful suggestions for getting involved, such as serving on a task force, joining a coalition or helping to raise awareness.
- Leave participants with a sense of empowerment, purpose and hope.

## **A message of inspiration, hope and gratitude**

In the words of Maya Angelou:

*“People will forget what you said, but they will never forget the way you made them feel.”*

When awareness efforts involve sensitive content such as human trafficking, it is imperative that we, as invested community members and service providers, remember the experiences and feelings of survivors as we speak. It is equally important that we remember the feelings of our audience members, as they may be battling their own emotions related to previous lived experiences.

In doing this meaningful work, collaboratively, we can be a light in the dark by sharing a message of hope that leaves others feeling inspired.

The Public Awareness Subcommittee of the Ohio Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Commission appreciates your use of these guidelines, as it reinforces your commitment to awareness efforts that are grounded in best practices.

## References

- 1) Blue Campaign. (2022). Myths and Misconceptions. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Homeland Security : <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/myths-and-misconceptions>
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- 3) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2019 , February 20). Myths and Facts About Human Trafficking . Retrieved from Office on Trafficking in Persons an Office of the Administration for Children and Families : <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/about/myths-facts-human-trafficking>
- 4) United Nations. (2021, February 22). Share of Children Among Trafficking Victims Increases, Boys Five Times; COVID-19 Seen Worsening Overall Trend in Human Trafficking, Says UNODC Report. Retrieved from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes : <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2021/February/share-of-children-among-trafficking-victims-increases--boys-five-times-covid-19-seen-worsening-overall-trend-in-human-trafficking--says-unodc-report.html>



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