

COVENANT HOUSE
TRAFFICK STOP

Sharing Knowledge to End Sex Trafficking

Sex Trafficking Prevention

A Guide for Educators



Covenant
House

Introduction

Sex trafficking is happening in communities all across Canada. At Covenant House, we've been working with survivors of sex trafficking for nearly 40 years. Increasingly we hear from educators wanting to know how to protect their students. Given that victims are recruited as young as 13,¹ awareness and education at a young age are essential.

About Sex Trafficking

Many people believe sex trafficking can never happen to someone they know. The reality is that young people are being lured online and from local malls and schools across Canada. Traffickers shower them with love and attention. They offer the 'dream' and promises of love, security and lifestyle.

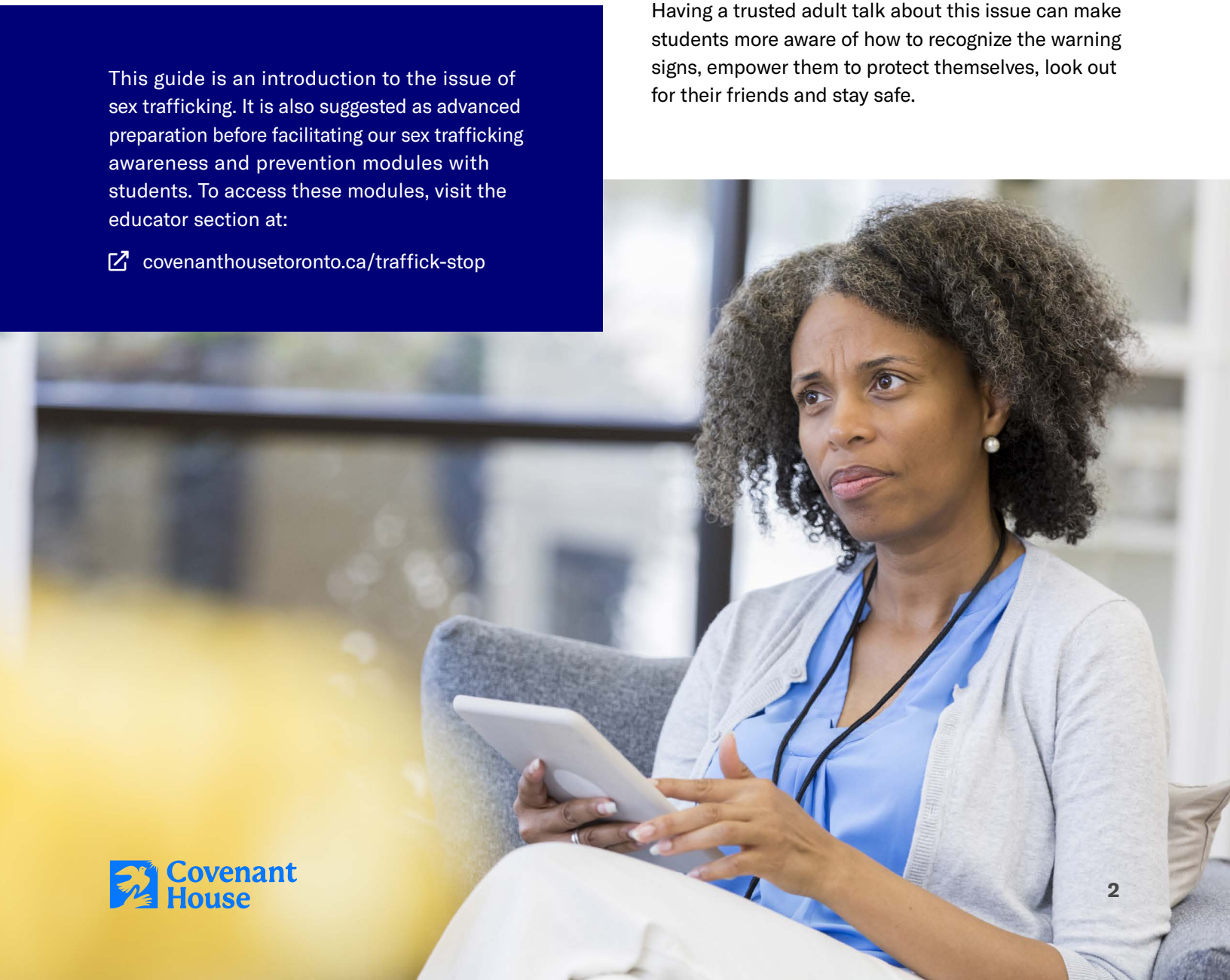
This guide is an introduction to the issue of sex trafficking. It is also suggested as advanced preparation before facilitating our sex trafficking awareness and prevention modules with students. To access these modules, visit the educator section at:

 covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop

Why it's Important to Talk About Sex Trafficking

We know from working with survivors that everyone has a role to play in prevention. Our national study with teen girls revealed that their risk factors increase with age, so there is a critical window of time to talk about sex trafficking and dialogue can have a big impact on the decisions they make.²

Having a trusted adult talk about this issue can make students more aware of how to recognize the warning signs, empower them to protect themselves, look out for their friends and stay safe.



Educating Yourself About Sex Trafficking

Protecting your students starts with educating yourself, so you can equip and empower them to recognize the warnings signs and reach out for help. Dispelling the myths around sex trafficking is a first step.

Sex Trafficking: The control, coercion and use of threats or violence to force a person to sell sex against their will for someone else's financial gain. According to law, it is always trafficking if someone is under 18, even if there is no coercion, control or threats.

Common Myths

✗ Sex Trafficking **doesn't** happen in **Canada**

✓ Many Canadians believe that sex trafficking is only an international issue. However, **most trafficking cases in Canada are domestic. 93% of Canadian sex trafficking victims are Canadian citizens.**³ It happens all over the country, in every community.

✗ Traffickers are typically **strangers**

✓ A recent study indicates victims are often recruited by someone they know: **1/3 of trafficked victims were recruited by males they considered to be their boyfriend** and **25% were recruited through friends**, often victims themselves.⁴

✗ Victims are **always** physically detained

✓ While victims may be physically detained, **traffickers typically use psychological, emotional and financial manipulation** to keep victims bound to them.

✗ The **women** involved make a lot of **money**

✓ Sex trafficking is founded on coercion and force. Rarely do victims keep any of their earnings. **Traffickers can make up to \$280,000 a year on each victim.**⁵

✗ Sex trafficking only happens to **lower income** youth

✓ Traffickers do not discriminate. Sex trafficking **can happen to anyone regardless of age, income, culture or neighbourhood.**



Who are the Victims?

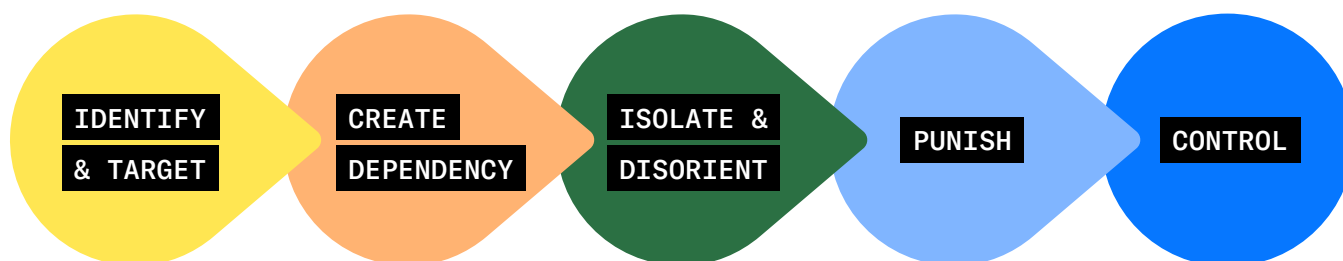
From our experience working with survivors, we know that there is no such thing as a 'typical' victim. Although 90% of victims are female, boys are trafficked too. There is evidence that previous child abuse, learning disabilities and poor self-esteem play a role. But sex trafficking can happen to anyone regardless of age, culture, income, orientation, gender or neighbourhood. The common denominator is some type of vulnerability that the trafficker identifies and exploits.

Types of Traffickers

Much like victims, there is no one type of trafficker. They can be peers, family or gang members. What we do know is that victims are often recruited by someone they know, often 'boyfriends' or friends, who may be victims themselves.⁶

Cycle of Exploitation

Traffickers are master manipulators. First they target an individual, gain their trust and identify what need they can fulfill. They shift between acting caring and threatening as a way to maintain control. This ensures victims will feel both loyal and intimidated. They become paralyzed by fear and believe that they cannot survive on their own without the trafficker's help.



What Makes Someone Vulnerable?

In our national study with survivors, parents and anti-trafficking advocates, we learned that the factors below made survivors more vulnerable to being lured into sex trafficking. These factors, along with abuse, learning disabilities and self-esteem issues, also affected their ability to leave once they were trafficked:

1 Lives in Turmoil

Several struggled with school. Unstable family lives were also common: parents going through divorce, moving a lot, conflict with parental expectations, parental abuse and neglect.

2 Unmet Needs

Traffickers are masters at identifying vulnerabilities. They look for people who appear insecure, who lack a strong network of friends or attention from their families. They seek those looking for a sense of belonging, a glamorous lifestyle, fun and adventure or basic needs like food and shelter. Then they use this information to exploit them.

3 Past Traumatic Experiences

Some survivors reported having traumatic experiences, before being trafficked. Many described having a very poor self-image or low self-esteem. This created a vulnerability that traffickers exploited.

4 Changes in Norms and Attitudes Towards Sex

Our study highlighted how changes in norms and attitudes to sex may increase the risk of young people being trafficked. Social media, reality shows and celebrities have created new norms and pressures around partying and 'hooking up'.

5 Online Luring

The reality is that traffickers find their victims more and more through dating sites, gaming, chat rooms and social media like Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok.

When young people create profiles and post photos, traffickers gain immediate access to their personal details. They do not have to ask or fish for information that has already been shared. They can control the pace of each relationship and nurture multiple relationships at once. They are patient. They are calculating. They wait for that perfect moment to offer a young person something they want or need.

Covid Alert

Sex trafficking doesn't stop during a pandemic. It is the perfect time for traffickers to prey on young people as they spend more time online and may feel increasingly anxious and isolated. The economic impact of COVID also makes young people more vulnerable and at-risk for sex trafficking.

6 Lack of Knowledge About Healthy Relationships

Survivors told us that not knowing what a 'healthy' relationship looked like made them vulnerable to being trafficked. It also affected their ability to leave once trafficked. It is not always easy to tell when a relationship shifts from being healthy to unhealthy or abusive. The lines between sex and money for sex have become blurred. It can be confusing for young people.

7 Lack of Knowledge About Sex Trafficking

Survivors told us that they did not always understand what was happening to them or have the language to describe it. This affected their ability to recognize the warning signs and to leave once they were being trafficked.



Warning Signs



The signs of luring and trafficking can be hard to spot, but knowing them is a key step toward prevention. If you notice one or more of these signs or something just doesn't feel right, it is worth looking into.

Signs of Luring and Grooming

- > Receives lots of expensive gifts like purses, clothes, jewelry or manicures
- > Has a lot of 'unexplained' cash
- > Withdraws from family and friends
- > All consuming relationship with new friend or boyfriend
- > Skips school and misses curfew
- > Increased interest in appearance
- > Does things out of character like drinking or drugs
- > Secretive about activities and new friends or boyfriend
- > Has a new or unusual tattoo

Often indications of luring and grooming start with small shifts in appearance and behaviour which can be difficult to separate from typical adolescent traits. Traffickers work hard to lure victims so they can gain their trust and slowly try to distance them from their support networks. It's important to trust your gut if you feel a student is at risk or start to notice some of these signs.





Signs of Trafficking

- > Unusually fearful, anxious or irritable
- > Avoids eye contact
- > Not allowed or able to speak for themselves
- > Has few or no personal possessions
- > Without money or ID
- > Possesses a second cell phone
- > Poor physical health and hygiene
- > May seem malnourished
- > Shows signs of exhaustion and/or addiction
- > Seems disoriented and unaware of time and place
- > Shows signs of physical or sexual abuse
- > Inconsistencies in their stories
- > Is seen picked up by different cars
- > Has sexualized content on their social media profiles
- > Evasive about where they're going and who they're going with

If these signs are present, they may indicate that someone is entrenched in trafficking. They may be controlled by their trafficker and faced with many barriers that make it difficult for them to leave their situation.

It is important to note that victims do not need to show all these warning signs to suggest they are being lured or trafficked.

For more information on sex trafficking visit the Traffick Stop resource hub:

 covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop

How to Talk About Sex Trafficking

The more your students know about sex trafficking, the better equipped they are to protect themselves and their friends. It's about making them aware, not afraid. Here's how to get the conversation started.

1 Define It

Sex trafficking is when a person is lured, tricked or manipulated into selling their body for sex to make money for someone else. A Covenant House study shows that teens protect themselves more when they are familiar with what sex trafficking is.⁷

2 Identify the Warning Signs

Many survivors didn't understand what was happening to them. Help your students recognize how and where sex trafficking happens so they can stay safe and look out for friends. It's often much easier to spot the signs with someone else.

3 Talk About Healthy Relationships

Some survivors didn't know what a healthy relationship looked like, which made them vulnerable to being lured. Help your students understand consent, setting boundaries, resolving conflict and the signs of a healthy relationship, such as respect, honesty, trust, equality and open communication.

4 Create a Safety Plan

Help students recognize the tactics that traffickers use and how to protect themselves, including identifying trusted adults and practicing online safety. Some families develop a 'code word' for use when children or teens are in an uncomfortable or unsafe situation. The family decides in advance the action plan if a child uses this word.

5 Encourage Them to Seek Help

Survivors didn't always know where to get help or were too afraid to ask. Let students know:

- Sex trafficking is never their fault
- It's okay to ask for help

Survivors told us that they didn't always know how to describe what was happening to them. This is language you can teach students to use if they are ever in doubt:

- "I am being made to do things I am not comfortable with, that I don't consent to"
- "I feel like I don't have a choice"
- "My gut doesn't feel right"
- "I feel disrespected or powerless"

To facilitate our sex trafficking prevention program with your students, including modules on Sex Trafficking 101 and Relationships and Sex Trafficking, visit the educator section at: covenanthousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop

Sessions for Students

Thank you for playing a leadership role in bringing this important issue to your classroom.

If you'd like to explore this topic further with students, you can book a presentation with one of our expert facilitators or use our materials to facilitate your own session.

Having supported more than 575,000 students since 1987, Covenant House's Awareness and Prevention school program is committed to helping keep youth safe.

What Students Will Learn

Sex trafficking often happens right in front of us. Covenant House's presentations help equip and empower students to trust their instincts, recognize the warning signs for themselves or their friends and reach out for help.

Invite Covenant House Into Your Classroom

OR

NEW!

Facilitate a Session Yourself

"This presentation is GOOD. I think that ALL SCHOOLS should have their students see this... We need to protect them with awareness."

— **Runnymede CI**

- ✓ **FREE**
- ✓ In-person or virtual
- ✓ Suitable for grades 7 – 12
- ✓ 60 – 75 minutes long
- ✓ Aligns with school curriculum
- ✓ Includes resources on how to get help

To book an in-person or virtual presentation in the GTA:

covenanhousetoronto.ca/presentations
416-735-1388

This program includes two modules that are:

- ✓ Suitable for grades 7 – 12
- ✓ Aligned with school curriculum
- ✓ Based on learnings from our work with students and survivors

Modules contain video, icebreaker, slides, discussion questions and resources for students:

- ✓ Module I—Sex Trafficking 101
- ✓ Module II—Relationships and Sex Trafficking
- ✓ Student resources

To access our sex trafficking modules, visit the educator section at:

covenanhousetoronto.ca/traffick-stop

Getting Help

Covenant House

We provide young women (between the ages of 16 – 24) with the health care and housing services needed to recover, heal from intensive trauma and move forward with their lives. We also provide referrals to other community related services.

Contact our anti-trafficking team at:

[✉](mailto:endht@covenanthouse.ca) endht@covenanthouse.ca

(Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.)

Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline

Canada's national hotline is available to report tips or access information about sex trafficking, local support services, law enforcement and emergency services across the country.

- Call the confidential 24-7 hotline at: 1-833-900-1010 or visit [✉](https://canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca) canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca
- To find services in your community, visit the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline's National Referral Directory

- 1 Gabriele, F., et al. (2014). The Incidence of Human Trafficking in Ontario, Ontario Coalition Research Initiative
- 2 Covenant House Toronto, & Ipsos Public Affairs. (2018). A National Sex Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Study
- 3 Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). Fact Sheet: Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/our-work/sector-resources/>
- 4 Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). "No More": Ending Sex Trafficking in Canada, Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/our-work/sector-resources/>
- 5 CISC. (2008). Strategic Intelligence Brief: Organized Crime and Domestic Trafficking in Persons in Canada (p. 5, ep.)
- 6 Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). "No More": Ending Sex Trafficking in Canada, Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/our-work/sector-resources/>
- 7 Covenant House Toronto, & Ipsos Public Affairs. (2018). A National Sex Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Study