

COVENANT HOUSE
TRAFFICK STOP

Sharing Knowledge to End Sex Trafficking

Relationships and Sex Trafficking

Module Overview



We know that victims of sex trafficking are often recruited by someone they know. A study showed that one third of victims were recruited by someone they considered to be their boyfriend and another twenty-five percent were recruited through friends, often victims themselves.¹

Traffickers are master manipulators. Typically, they target an individual, gain their trust and identify what vulnerability they can exploit. They often shift between acting caring and threatening as a way to maintain control.

By discussing the qualities of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, students will be more empowered to keep themselves and their friends safe.

Students sometimes ask about the difference between dating and trafficking. It can be confusing. They want to know if buying their partner presents makes them a trafficker. The lines between sex and money for sex are often blurred.



Module Overview

Part I **Creating a Safe Space**

Part II **Ice Breaker (optional)**

Part III **Amy's Story**

A video based on the real-life experience of a teen who was trafficked by a man she believed was her boyfriend, followed by discussion and slides

Part IV **Group Activity:** What do I value in a relationship?

Part V **Wrap-up & Resource Support**

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Grade 7 – 12 students

TIME DURATION

40 – 70 minutes

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Smart board or computer
- Projector and screen
- Speakers
- Whiteboard
- Chart paper

Adjust for virtual presentations as needed

TAKE NOTE

You can complete this module all in one session or do Parts I – III followed by Parts IV – V another day.

Ice breaker, video and discussion questions are included on the accompanying slides. Timing will depend on if you do the optional ice breaker and group activity.

Students Will

- 1 Learn about some of the luring tactics traffickers use in the common 'boyfriend scenario'.
- 2 Have the opportunity to distinguish between the characteristics of unhealthy and healthy relationships.
- 3 Have the opportunity to reflect on their own personal values and demonstrate how everyone deserves to feel valued, respected and safe in any kind of relationship.
- 4 Be encouraged to reach out to a trusted adult for help if they find themselves in an unsafe situation. They will receive important contact information for community agencies available to support young people.

Recommended Advance Preparation

Learn More About the Issue

Before facilitating this module, we recommend that you learn more about sex trafficking by reviewing our [Educator Guide](#) and [FAQs](#).

TAKE NOTE

Before implementing this module, we recommend that you first facilitate the [Sex Trafficking 101](#) module, which will lay the foundation and establish an introduction to the issue of sex trafficking.

Review Content

To have an enriching discussion with your students, we recommend that you take some time to familiarize yourself with the content and activities. Review the flow of the module, discussion questions, slides and facilitator notes.



Be prepared to answer questions students have and share our resources to provide further information and support. Follow your school's protocol for disclosures.

Part I—Creating a Safe Space

🕒 5 MINUTES

When introducing a topic like sex trafficking, it is important to create a space that allows students to feel comfortable engaging in discussion and reaching out for support, if needed.

Let students know their options of what they can do if the session stirs up difficult feelings for them.

This can include:

- Stepping out to take a deep breath, a quick drink of water or make a trip to the bathroom during the session
- Reaching out to trusted adults in the school including the school social worker, guidance counsellor or child youth worker

You may also establish some ‘ground rules’ for class participation to ensure everyone feels heard, respected and valued in the group.

Part II—Ice Breaker: Thumbs Up or Down (Optional)

🕒 10 MINUTES

Overview

Sometimes it can be tough to spot the red flags and discern between situations that seem harmless from those that could be risky. Students will review different scenarios and decide whether they seem safe or potentially unsafe.

TAKE NOTE

Check the notes section of the slides to help guide the discussion.





Ice Breaker Activity

You can start this activity by saying, **“I am going to describe a few scenarios and I want you to respond with whether they seem safe or unsafe. If you think, ‘it’s all good’, give me a thumbs up. If you think, ‘red flag!’ give me a thumbs down. And if you’re not sure or you’re confused, give me a so-so hand gesture”.**

The following are the scenarios. You may choose whichever scenarios you would like to use with your students. You can come up with your own situations as well.

- Some guy you don’t recognize has started to pick your friend up from school every day and your friend won’t talk about it other than to say he’s a family friend.
- You have recently started a summer job and become friends with a girl who works with you. She invites you to a party where you’ve been ‘instructed’ to dress sexy.
- You’re sitting in a food court and a person walks up to you and starts asking you some personal questions.
- Your best friend recently met a guy on Instagram. A few weeks later, she tells you that she is driving to Montreal to spend the weekend with him.
- A person who has been liking your posts DMs you, mentioning a personal detail from a picture you posted three months ago.
- Somebody you just met at a party asks for your number.
- Someone you have been dating asks you to send them a pic of your body. They promise it won’t be shared with anyone else.



If the majority of students give thumbs up, you can ask them—**Why did you give a thumbs up? How could we modify this statement to make the situation not okay or so-so?**



If the majority of students give thumbs down, you can ask them—**What’s making you give a thumbs down? What red flags do you see?**



If the majority of students give a so-so gesture, you can ask them—**What was confusing or made you unsure?**

Part III—Amy’s Story

🕒 30 MINUTES

Overview

This 4-minute video is a dramatization of the real-life experience of ‘Amy’—a teen who was trafficked by a man she believed was her boyfriend.

Through this video, students will learn about some of the luring and manipulation tactics traffickers use which can help them better identify the red flags for themselves or their friends.



Video & Discussion

After students have watched the video, you can ask them to turn to the person next to them and discuss this question (or facilitate as a group):

“If you were Amy’s friend, at what moments would you have felt something wasn’t right in her relationship with Ryan?”





Video & Discussion Cont.

You can discuss the following red flags that suggested Amy was in an unhealthy relationship:

- 1 Initially it can appear as **instant love**. After only a short time together Ryan was quick to confess his love, make Amy feel special and talk about their future together.
- 2 Soon it shifts—**choice and boundaries** are ignored. There might be pressure to do things one does not want to do. In Amy’s case, Ryan forced her to be with other men. That is a big red flag.
- 3 A person is **made to feel like they ‘owe’ someone** because of their gifts, love or attention. Ryan first establishes romance and THEN asks Amy to help with his money problems.
- 4 There can be a **disregard for what a person might be feeling**. When Amy shared her discomfort, Ryan threatened to leave her.
- 5 There can be **emotional blackmail**, “if you really love me, you’ll do it”. Because Ryan alluded to a future together, his money problems became her money problems. Ryan blackmailed Amy when he said, “I am not going to be with a girl who isn’t giving me money”.

To summarize, you can remind students of what a healthy relationship looks like, with choice, consent, healthy boundaries and conflict resolution. When a relationship turns unhealthy, these things start to shift. Choice and boundaries may be ignored. There might be pressure to do things you don’t want to do, like Amy, and be made to feel like you ‘owe’ someone because of their attention or a gift. These shifts can happen quickly or over time. They are also the same tactics that traffickers use to lure young people.

You can explain to students how sometimes, even if there are threats or force, victims often develop a trauma bond with the trafficker and believe “It is my fault I made him mad”, “I love him and would do anything for him” or “No one understands me like he does”. This impedes their ability to understand what is happening, describe the situation they are in, and to reach out for help.

TAKE NOTE

This is a good opportunity to connect Amy’s story to the school curriculum and other discussions you’ve had around consent and healthy relationships.

Part IV—Group Activity: What Do I Value in a Relationship? (Optional)

🕒 20 MINUTES

Overview

Students will get the opportunity to reflect on what they consider important in a relationship.

By sharing with others in the group/class, they will learn about the characteristics that constitute a healthy relationship. They will also get the opportunity to develop their own relationship 'bill of rights'. The goal is to reinforce that everyone deserves to feel respected and safe.

TAKE NOTE

You may wish to stop here and leave students to consider what they value in a relationship for a follow-up discussion.

Check the notes section of the slides to help guide the discussion.



Discussion

You can ask students to think about what they consider important in a relationship. This relationship can be any type; it can be with a boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, family member, etc. They can either think independently or discuss with the person sitting next to them.

Encourage them to share their thoughts with the rest of the group. As students share, write down their responses on the board. Once you have a big list of qualities of a healthy relationship, you can ask them to create their 'relationship bill of rights' either independently, in pairs or in groups. If created in groups, you can have students write down their rights and put them up on the classroom board, as an every day reinforcement. When thinking of their rights, encourage them to think about what would help them to feel physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually safe in a relationship. If needed, you can share a few examples, such as:

- ✓ To be respected
- ✓ To express my opinions freely
- ✓ To hang out with my family and friends
- ✓ To end a relationship without feeling threatened
- ✓ To say no even if I said yes before
- ✓ To not feel pressured into doing things I don't want to do



Discussion Alternative

Or you can summarize student responses using this example included in the slides:

Healthy Relationship

Is my relationship based on:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Trust
- Equality
- Open communication
- Maintaining our individual identities
- Making decisions together

Does my partner:

- Accept me for who I am
- Value and support me through good and bad times
- Listen and respect my opinions
- Want to be a part of my life
- Not push boundaries or use violence
- Not try to exert control over me or my decisions
- Compromise when we disagree

Unhealthy Relationship

Am I:

- Not free to come and go as I choose
- Being isolated from family and friends
- Not able to share my opinions
- Not in control of decisions that affect me
- Feeling disrespected or powerless

Does my partner:

- Want me to give up my interests and friends
- Criticize and humiliate me
- Challenge my sexual boundaries
- Not accept when I say no
- Make me do things I am not comfortable with
- Constantly check in with me
- Threaten me or is verbally, physically or emotionally abusive

Part V—Wrap-up & Resource Support

🕒 5 MINUTES

Overview

By discussing the characteristics of unhealthy and healthy relationships, students can be better equipped to spot the red flags for themselves and their friends.

You can share how some survivors of sex trafficking did not always understand that they were being trafficked because they did not know what a healthy relationship looked like. Some did not know how to describe what was happening to them to the police, medical professionals, social workers or to their trusted person. So for many, it was a missed opportunity to immediately get help.



Encourage Students to Reach Out for Help

If they feel:

- Unsafe
- Disrespected or powerless
- Like they don't have any control or choice
- Like they are made to do things they are not comfortable with and don't consent to

If they hear things like:

- “Don't tell anyone”
- “It's our secret”
- “You owe me”
- “I need you to do something just once, for our future together”

If someone:

- Isolates them from family and friends
- Buys them a lot of expensive things
- Encourages them to skip school, miss curfew, try drinking or drugs
- Promises a better life
- Encourages them to be secretive about their relationship and whereabouts

Conclude this module by emphasizing that help is available. Encourage students to trust their instincts if something does not feel right or seems too good to be true. They should reach out to a trusted adult for support if they ever find themselves in a situation that feels unsafe. A trusted adult is somebody who cares about their well-being and who will take action to keep them safe. This person could be a parent, a neighbour, a teacher, a social worker, a mental health professional, a guidance counsellor, a chaplain or a youth worker.

You may share our digital resources which have key information on sex trafficking and contact information of community agencies available to support young people.

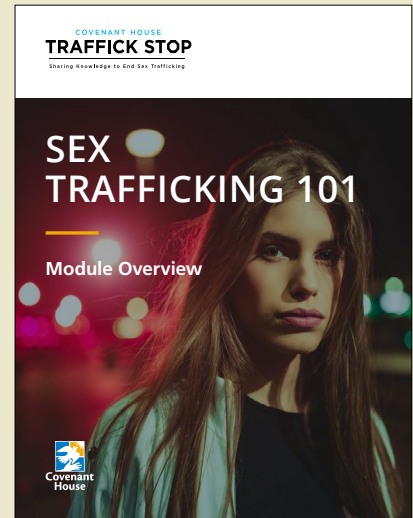


Potential Follow up Module

If you haven't done so yet, the following module is recommended:

Sex Trafficking 101

Students will learn what sex trafficking is, tactics that traffickers use to manipulate victims and the red flags to watch out for. Includes an animated video narrated by a sex trafficking survivor, slides and discussion questions.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SEX TRAFFICKING, VISIT OUR RESOURCE HUB AT [TRAFFICKSTOP.CA](https://traffickstop.ca).

1 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/>