

# *Human Trafficking*

## **WHAT IS IT?**

Human Trafficking broadly means the exploitation (think: "using") of individuals at the hands of others. There is an act, a means and a purpose. The act might be through recruitment and transportation of a person, by use of threats or coercion (that's the "means", or the "how") for the purpose of exploitation. The trafficker is always gaining something from exploiting the person – maybe it's forced sex work, forced labour or even organ removal. I know, right? Can you imagine... it is basically the selling of human beings and/or their work. Human Trafficking is sometimes called "Modern Day Slavery".

## **HOW CAN IT HAPPEN?**

We have all known people who are jerks. Sometimes it's obvious, sometimes it's not. Sometimes we may see a friend or someone in the community dating a really mean, nasty person and think "why on earth is she with him and why doesn't she just leave?!" Well, it's not always that easy and this is certainly the case with human trafficking. The trafficker doesn't want you, or that person, to leave or stop because then they won't get the benefits they were collecting at your expense. They know exactly what to do to keep you there and here's how they do it. Since we're talking about domestic trafficking, trafficking that happens in Canada, and it's usually forced prostitution of young women, I'll use that as an example to explain the process.

### 1. Recruitment

Wanna take a guess at the average age of recruitment here in Canada?

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12-14 years! It's bananas! Traffickers will be on the lookout for

young girls anywhere they can, but especially through social media and Facebook. Do you know anyone your age that doesn't have Facebook? Didn't think so! Sometimes what may start out as a new friend, or even love interest, may not be what it seems.

#### 1. Grooming

Ever been "love-bombed"? Well traffickers don't exactly walk around wearing a sign that says "Hey, I seem nice now but soon enough I'm going to force you to work for me and do things you really don't want to do". That would be crazy, right? Their tactic instead is to make their new recruits feel like the most special, loved girl in the world. This is the ultimate Prince Charming and you are the queen. Most victims will really start to feel like they are in a meaningful, committed relationship with their trafficker. During this phase, the trafficker will learn everything he can about the girl that he may be able to use to his advantage later on.

#### 1. Isolation/Conning/Breaking

While things may have seemed like they were on their way to a fairytale ending, this is when things take a turn for the worst. The trafficker will likely start putting down their victim to try to lower their self-esteem, they may get angry and unpredictable, they may start getting controlling and jealous, just to keep the victim on edge. And sooner or later, they ask the girl to engage in a sexual act for money – claiming that it is only one time and they really, really need her to do it.

Remember, it doesn't always happen this way. There are lots of kinds of trafficking and you can read real examples on today's power-point slide. Sometimes victims are forced into doing work because they are blackmailed, or someone threatens their family. Other times, sadly, it IS their family who is asking them to do the acts. Or maybe it's an underage boy who wants to gain drugs by selling sex down South. Other times you may not even realize it's happening – like if your photo or video is being bought online.

These folks have an invested interest in keeping the work going – whether it's just to put food on the table, or make hard cash. Through abuse, blackmail, threats, fear of police, intimidation and even sometimes forced drug addiction... leaving feels impossible.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT IT?**

Most people just don't know about human trafficking, that it's happening in Canada, or that these acts are illegal. We need to start the conversation (hey, seems like we're doing a good job so far!) and get people talking about this horrific violation of human rights. Tell your friends, tell your parents, talk to your teachers and get the ball rolling.

### **Speak Up!**

If you have a bad feeling about your relationship or situation, or a situation your friend is in, you should always listen to it. Now you know the signs and you say something to help a friend get out. They may not listen, but tell them you are there for them when they need it. If the person is a child, you legally have to say something. So shake off the jitters, put your chin up and march over to an adult you trust and let them help you.

### **Know your rights!**

Do you know what you can/cannot consent to as someone who is under 16? Make sure you know when the people you love are in situations where they cannot consent – no matter how willing they may seem. Remember, no one has the right to force you to do anything for their own gain. (Also, being sent to clean your room so your mom can watch her favourite tv show doesn't count).

### **Be Cyberwise!**

You spend a lot of time online, I know you do. Uh... look at us all right now. Make sure you stay safe online – don't send photos via

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text or email, never use a webcam with someone you don't know and if you're determined to meet up with someone you met online, make sure you do it in a public space with a friend, only after you've told an adult. Protect your privacy and your personal details! Though you may think everyone wants to know your every move throughout the day (tweet: "I am now eating lunch." "Time to cross the street"... you get the point!), those facts can be used against you later so be careful!

### **Know your allies**

Now that you're all up to speed on what human trafficking is, keep the numbers of trusted professionals and adults nearby. That way, if you are out and there is an emergency, you know the number to call in that very moment. Your friend might need your help, and there is only a small window to get help, so make sure you have the tools to be the best support you can!