



School-Based Human Trafficking Prevention: Key Components and Implementation Considerations for Educators, Staff, and School Leaders

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Introduction

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have increasingly emphasized the importance of a proactive, multidisciplinary approach to human trafficking that involves all systems responsible for protecting youth, including K-12 schools. Several states have passed mandates requiring students and/or educators and school staff to receive human trafficking prevention education, while schools and districts in other states have decided to deliver this programming on their own. However, limited research exists on how to best equip students, educators, and other school staff to prevent human trafficking and how schools can respond to human trafficking concerns. This brief describes some key considerations for educators, school staff, and school and district leaders who are interested in delivering human trafficking prevention education activities in their schools.

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What Is a Comprehensive Approach to Human Trafficking Prevention?

Because schools vary greatly in their student needs, local community, and social context, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to human trafficking prevention education for all schools. It is important that schools implement prevention activities and deliver educational content that is aligned to their student population's unique needs as well as school, district, and community resources.

Regardless of schools' needs and resources, however, human trafficking prevention programs could consider including the following activities:

- **A Prevention Education Curriculum for Students** introduces the topic of human trafficking while simultaneously providing skills-based education, such as creating healthy boundaries, building healthy relationships, developing communication skills, practicing online safety, and strategies for seeking help. Student prevention curricula could be customized to specific age, grade, and maturity levels.
- **A Prevention Education Curriculum for Educators and Other Staff** provides an overview of human trafficking while also providing skills-based education on how participants can identify signs of and risk factors for human trafficking and other safety concerns and disseminate school- and district-level guidance for how educators and other staff can respond to situations where students require support.
- **A Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol (HTSSP)** standardizes procedures for educators and staff for how to respond to signs or disclosures of human trafficking from students. A useful HTSSP clearly outlines actions to take for specific types of concerns and identifies key points of contact both within and outside of the school.

This brief is informed by the process evaluation of the Human Trafficking Youth Prevention Education (HTYPE) Demonstration Program's first cohort (2020–2023). Established in 2020 by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), HTYPE funded eight local education agencies to

- create, implement, and build the capacity of schools to deliver prevention education and skills-based training to educators and other school staff and students; and
- establish a Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol (HTSSP) that addresses the safety, security, and well-being of staff and students.

This brief is based on interviews and focus groups with educators and school staff who participated in HTYPE program activities, including receiving prevention education for educators and school staff, delivering prevention education for students, and using the HTSSP. For more information on the process evaluation of the HTYPE program, please visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/process-evaluation-2020-2023-human-trafficking-youth-prevention-education-htype>.

Prevention Education for Students

Human trafficking prevention education for students aims to equip specific grade levels and age groups with knowledge of human trafficking and related harms, signs of human trafficking, and knowledge on how to respond if they or another student is experiencing human trafficking. A human trafficking curriculum may also teach students about protective behaviors, such as online safety and developing safe and healthy relationships with peers and adults.

Common Components and Skills



Definitions of sex and labor trafficking



Risk factors, or characteristics that make someone vulnerable to trafficking



Healthy versus unhealthy **relationships**



Online safety and social media tips



Protection strategies



Resources for getting **help**

Curriculum Delivery Considerations



Who will create the curriculum? There are national organizations that have created human trafficking prevention education curricula for educators and students, but there may also be local curricula providers that have content tailored to your school's community. You can also create your own or modify an existing curriculum in partnership with national or local experts.



Who will deliver the curriculum? If the instructors are school or district employees, it is important to consider which types of educators or staff will teach the student curriculum. Counselors and social workers may be more comfortable with the material, but classroom teachers may have existing relationships with a broader range of students. Subject teachers (such as English teachers) may reach more students, but specialized teachers (such as Health teachers) may find it more natural to incorporate human trafficking prevention into their classes.



How will curriculum instructors be trained to teach students? Regardless of who delivers the curriculum, they will need to be trained on its content and how to support students who may be at-risk of or experiencing human trafficking. Some educators and staff will be new to the topic of human trafficking. Check your district and/or teachers' union guidelines on having educators and staff participate in this kind of training.



What permissions do parents and guardians need to provide? Informing families about human trafficking prevention activities and securing active or passive consent is often required to teach students about a sensitive topic like human trafficking. Check what school, district, and state guidelines you may need to follow.



How will the curriculum be delivered? The curriculum's length, including the number of modules and activities, may determine its delivery. Will it be taught across multiple class periods? If so, consider whether it would be best taught in sequential classes or across several weeks.



What types of interactive skills-building activities will be incorporated into the lessons to help promote comprehension of material? Consider activities that can help students understand core concepts and practice what they learn.

Prevention Education for Educators and School Staff

Human trafficking prevention education for educators and school staff aims to equip participants with an understanding of human trafficking and its signs, as well as the tools and skills for how they can play a role in protecting students' safety and preventing trafficking-related harm.

Common Components and Skills



Definitions of sex and labor trafficking



Indicators that someone is being trafficked



Recruitment or grooming tactics



Protective factors against trafficking



Risk factors, or characteristics and experiences that increase the risk of trafficking



Strategies for responding to and supporting students who may be experiencing trafficking



Key points of contact **within and outside of the school**

Curriculum Delivery Considerations



Who will create the curriculum? Like prevention education materials for students, there are national and local organizations that have created human trafficking educational curricula for educators. Your school district and/or state may also have requirements for educator and staff trainings that may need to be incorporated.



Who will receive the curriculum? Will all classroom teachers, specialized curriculum teachers, and/or counselors and student support specialists receive this training? Check with your district or teachers' union to see if there are rules or best practices on who can participate in trainings.



How will the curriculum be delivered? In-person, synchronous instruction may result in more participant engagement, but virtual live or asynchronous instruction may be more accommodating and accessible for educators. Trainings that are delivered during regular professional development or incorporated into existing mandated reporting and school safety trainings may reach more staff. Check with your district or teachers' union to see if there are rules or best practices on the timing and length of trainings.



What strategies will increase engagement and active participation from participants and ensure that they understand and feel confident about the information they have learned? Try hands-on activities and opportunities to practice the skills they learn through the curricula and training content, such as scenario-based exercises and role-playing.

Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol

The HTSSP is an official set of procedures that school staff are to follow when they suspect, or a student has disclosed, human trafficking. The HTSSP is meant to serve as a reference document that school staff can easily access to guide them through the reporting process. For more information on how schools can create and implement an HTSSP, please see the [Human Trafficking School Safety Protocol Toolkit](#).

Common Components



A reminder of the **indicators or signs** of human trafficking common to schools' specific student populations



A list of **steps or a decision tree** that school staff can follow when they suspect trafficking



Contact information for key school staff involved in a response to human trafficking



A list of **external referrals** to community-based organizations, law enforcement, and child welfare that can be a resource to students, their families, and the school

HTSSP Implementation Considerations



How will the HTSSP be created and adopted? Will the HTSSP be a separate protocol or incorporated into existing school safety and mandated reporting protocols? How will your school or district create an HTSSP that will complement existing safety protocols? If the HTSSP needs to be approved by school or district leadership, consider what guidelines it needs to meet, including guidelines around how staff will be trained to use it.



Who will use the HTSSP and when? Which staff will be responsible for certain stages of the protocol? Who could staff turn to if they are unsure what to do?



How will staff be trained to use the HTSSP? Consider incorporating the HTSSP into the prevention education for educators and staff, as well as other refresher trainings and reminders throughout the school year. The HTSSP could also be a component of existing child abuse mandated reporting trainings.



Where will the HTSSP be located? Will this be a digital resource only or will a physical copy also be available in classrooms and staff offices? Consider periodic reminders to HTSSP users on where the HTSSP is located.



How often will the HTSSP be updated? School and district policies may change, and community-based resources and government agencies may experience turnover in key staff. Consider implementing routine reviews of the HTSSP and incorporate updates as circumstances or resources change.

Conclusion

At its core, a comprehensive human trafficking prevention program involves educating students, educators, and other school staff about human trafficking, how to recognize it, how to respond, and how to support students who may be experiencing human trafficking. There are many ways of delivering comprehensive human trafficking prevention programming in K-12 schools, and different strategies can be successful when they are responsive to the unique needs and developed in consideration of the available resources.