

## Resource Article

# Human Trafficking

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Human trafficking takes place all over the world. It is defined as the practice of forcing another person to work or to perform prostitution against that person's will. Children and teens are often victims of human trafficking.

There are 2 types of human trafficking—labor and prostitution.

### **Labor Trafficking and Debt Bondage**

A person, often a child or teen, is forced to work for long periods of time with little or no pay. This person is not free to quit or take another job. These "slaves" live in fear of being physically harmed by their bosses.

Some people cannot leave because they are in "debt bondage." Debt bondage is when a worker owes money to his boss, usually for equipment needed to do the job. That person can never make enough money to pay back the loan. Sometimes people in debt give up their children to help work off their debts.

People often think that a person must be moved to another city or country in order to be considered a victim of human trafficking. Not true! A person can remain at home and still be a victim. A person is being trafficked if she is forced to work at a job. The person cannot quit or she will be hurt or even killed.

### **Prostitution**

Women, young girls, and young boys are forced into prostitution by threat or deception. A child or teen may be kidnapped from home or lured away with the false promise of a good job. Once the girl arrives, she may be beaten into submission. She is often raped and forced to work as a prostitute. The girl feels very ashamed after this happens. Even if she could get away, often her family will no longer accept her because they believe she was at fault for being used as a prostitute.

### **Helping the Trafficked Children and Teens**

If you are caring for some children or teens who have been trafficked, here are some things you need to know.

The adult traffickers tricked their victims. These exploited children and teens do not easily trust adults. Be patient, and keep reminding them that they are now in a safe place.

A formerly trafficked child or teen, especially one who was used as a prostitute, often feels ashamed. Tell her that she is accepted and cared for. You can tell her that she is loved. However, the person who forced her into prostitution may have said the same things to her. The men who used her may have told her that they loved her. This may cause her to have a very distorted understanding of what love means.

Tell the child or teen that nothing that happened to him was his fault. He was a victim of evil people. He is not guilty of anything. He has lost none of his value to God. In God's eyes, he is priceless.

## Runaway Children and Teens

It is not unusual for a child or teen to believe that running away is the answer to a problem or fear he has in his home. This is especially true for victims of trafficking. The young person may believe he can survive on his own. He may think that he does not need support or care from anyone. But running away is never a safe solution.

Human traffickers look for runaway children. Sometimes these traffickers kidnap children or teens. But often they are kind to runaways, providing them with food and places to stay. Once these young people trust the trafficker and have no other support systems to rely on, the kindness stops. The child or teen is forced to perform as a prostitute or work at forced labor.

## Share the Truth

Even if you think they should know or you think it is uncomfortable or unnecessary, share these truths with the children and teens in your care.

- “Running away from your family or caregiver is very dangerous. Bad people look for children and teens who are vulnerable or do not have a secure place to stay.”
- “Traffickers seem nice at first. But they are good at tricking their victims.”
- “If you make an unsafe choice and run away, no matter what happens, you are always welcome here. Jesus cares about you, and we do, too.”

Human trafficking is a serious problem worldwide. Though attitudes are changing, many people still blame the victims for what happened to them. When a precious child or teen shares her story with you, tell her that it was not her fault, that she is not to blame, and that she has no reason to feel guilty. The more you repeat this message of truth, the more likely you are to have an impact on the life of this victimized child or teen.