

## **Is Human Trafficking in Your Backyard?**

There is this common myth and misconception when many hear the term “Human Trafficking.” Many seem to believe it can only happen overseas, like in the movie *Taken*, or can only happen to girls of ethnic backgrounds. However, this is not true! It can happen in your own backyard, at your child’s school, the local hangout, online, or any other place children frequent. Human trafficking is modern day slavery. It is making a child have sex with someone to pay the bills. It is forcing a child to miss school so they can work at the family business. It is coercing a child to perform a service so they can have their basic needs met, such as food and shelter. It is using a false relationship to exploit a child’s vulnerability. It happens to **EVERY** age, socio-economic class, and ethnicity. Human trafficking does not discriminate! We do not share this to instill fear. We share this to empower youth and their caregivers to take the necessary steps and open the lines of communication so we can all make safe choices in our lives.

Child Advocacy Services is working hard to protect children in our state by offering the prevention curriculum *Not A #Number* created by Love146. This program teaches youth how to protect themselves from human trafficking by identifying their vulnerabilities and offering skills they can utilize when they find themselves in risky situations. One of the skills discussed is how to create a [safety plan](#). However, you can begin the discussion with your child now by having conversations about what they would do if they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. For example, you can present this prompt to your child:

*You meet someone at a football game, and numbers are exchanged because they seem nice. After chatting for a while, the person offers to pick you up and bring you to a movie on Friday night. You aren’t sure because you have only hung out in person once, which was the night you met.*

A safety plan for this scenario could include group dating, suggesting going to the movies during the day, and having a code word to text in case of emergency. Love146 also provides general tips, such as making someone aware of your plans/location, having extra cash for a cab ride home separate from your wallet, always hold your own ID and money in

case you get separated, and memorize the phone numbers of at least 3 or 4 trusted adults in case your phone is lost or dead.

By having open conversations, you can have a relationship with your child based on trust. This is important for children. They need a space where they are able to freely express themselves without judgement or fear of criticism. Help them identify who they feel most comfortable talking to (teacher, friend's mom, neighbor, etc.)

Child Advocacy Services is happy to have two certified trainers on staff who can offer the *Not A #Number* prevention curriculum to youth ages 12-18, and there are also great resources available on [www.love146.org](http://www.love146.org) to assist you in discussing this topic with your family. You can get more information regarding training opportunities by contacting our Prevention Services Coordinator Angela Golden at [agolden@childadv.net](mailto:agolden@childadv.net).

If you have concerns or witness human trafficking or any other form of child abuse always report it to the authorities. If you suspect trafficking within the United States, you can call the National Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. Also call your local law enforcement agency via their non-emergent line or 911. Child abuse should always be reported to the Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services Child Abuse Hotline at 1-855-4LA-KIDS (52-5437).

Have a suggestion? Please contact either Angela Golden [agolden@childadv.net](mailto:agolden@childadv.net), Ashleigh Fuller [afuller@childadv.net](mailto:afuller@childadv.net), or Marcy Willett [mwillett@childadv.net](mailto:mwillett@childadv.net) to let them know.