

Human Trafficking: It can happen to you.

Human trafficking is any commercial sex act or labor induced by force, fraud, or coercion. It is exploiting children by taking advantage of their vulnerabilities. Cases of child trafficking and exploitation are reported regularly by law enforcement and child protection agencies across the United States. Human Trafficking does not discriminate. It happens to children of EVERY age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. It can happen in rural, urban, and suburban locations (1).

Child Advocacy Services is working hard to protect children in our state from becoming human trafficking victims! Our agency offers the prevention curriculum, *Not A #Number*, created by Love146. *Not a #Number* teaches youth how to protect themselves from human trafficking by identifying their vulnerabilities. The curriculum offers safety skills youth can utilize when they find themselves in risky situations. It is important for children to learn early how to protect themselves. Begin conversations with your child now by discussing what they would do if they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Not sure how to do that?

One skill discussed in the curriculum is the importance of creating a safety plan. Present the prompt below to your child; ask your child how they would handle the situation; and then discuss appropriate responses.

You meet someone at a football game and exchange numbers because they seem nice. After texting over a couple days, the person offers to pick you up and bring you to a movie on Friday night. You aren't sure about going because you have only hung out in-person once before, on the night you met.

A safety plan for the scenario can include: making the date a group date; suggesting going to the movie during the day; or having a code word to send out in case of an emergency. Additional safety tips can include always making someone aware of your plans/location; having extra cash separate from your wallet; always holding your own ID and money; and memorizing the phone numbers of at least 3 trusted adults in case your phone is lost or dead.

By having open conversations with our children, we can have relationships based on trust. This is important for children. Children need a space where they can freely express themselves without judgement or fear of criticism. They need to feel trusted. Help children identify who they feel most comfortable talking to (teacher, friend's mom, neighbor, etc.). This will allow for open communication and prevent risk of becoming victims to trafficking.

Child Advocacy Services is happy to have certified trainers on staff who can offer the *Not A #Number* prevention curriculum to youth ages 12-18. There are also great resources available on www.love146.org to assist you in discussing this topic with your family. For more information regarding training opportunities, contact our Prevention Services Coordinators, Lauren Newman (lnewman@childadv.net) and Jordyn G'sell (jgsell@childadv.net).

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