

# **Protecting Children from Trafficking: A Curriculum for Parents & Guardians**

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## **Introduction**

As parents and guardians, you play a crucial role in shaping how children understand and navigate the world. Human trafficking is a growing concern, evolving alongside technology and changing social dynamics.

This curriculum provides a structured, actionable approach to trafficking prevention without fear-based narratives. It equips you with tools to raise awareness, build confidence, and set boundaries so that your child can recognize risks and make informed decisions.

## **Curriculum Overview**

This program is structured into three key learning areas, each containing objectives, discussion points, and action steps:

1. Understanding the Facts – Dispelling myths and recognizing truths
2. Building Confidence – Strengthening communication and family bonds
3. Setting Boundaries – Navigating social and online spaces safely

Each section includes age-specific guidance, interactive exercises, and discussion prompts to help parents and guardians effectively guide their children.

## **Step 1: Understanding the Facts**

### **Learning Objectives**

- Define human trafficking and its various forms.
- Identify common myths and misconceptions.
- Develop skills to discuss trafficking in an age-appropriate way.

### **Key Discussion Points**

Many myths about human trafficking can lead to ineffective safety strategies. Parents should focus on accurate information and open discussions with their children.

## Common Myths vs. Reality

- "Human Trafficking and Sex Trafficking are the same thing."
  - Reality: Sex trafficking is one form of human trafficking, but forced labor, domestic servitude, and organ trafficking also exist.
  - Source: [Public Safety Canada](#)
- "Traffickers only target strangers."
  - Reality: Many survivors are trafficked by romantic partners or even family members.
  - Source: [DEA](#)
- "Trafficking is always violent."
  - Reality: Most traffickers manipulate, deceive, or coerce rather than use physical force.
  - Source: [Covenant House](#)
- "Only women and girls are victims."
  - Reality: Men, boys, and LGBTQ+ youth are also targeted.
  - Source: [Polaris Project](#)
- "Only men are traffickers."
  - Reality: Women also engage in trafficking, either as leaders or accomplices.
  - Source: [Statistics Canada](#)
- "Traffickers are usually old men in white vans."
  - Reality: 39% of accused traffickers are aged 18 to 24, and 36% are between 25 and 34.
  - Source: [Vancouver Police Department](#)
- "Only undocumented foreign nationals are trafficked."
  - Reality: Thousands of legal working citizens are trafficked, though minorities are disproportionately targeted.
  - Source: [Polaris Project](#)
- "Trafficking doesn't happen near me."
  - Reality: Nearly half (48%) of all police-reported trafficking cases between 2010-2020 occurred in just five cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, and Hamilton.
  - Source: [Statistics Canada](#)
- "If a person consents initially, it's not trafficking."
  - Reality: Consent is not relevant if force, fraud, or coercion is involved – or if the victim is a minor.
  - Source: [Government of Canada](#)

### Action Steps for Parents & Guardians

1. Teach children to identify red flags – not just "stranger danger," but also manipulative behaviour from familiar people (see [Exhibit 1](#)).
2. Encourage open conversations about relationships and trust (see [Exhibit 2](#)).
3. Use reflection questions such as:
  - "What did you believe about trafficking before reading this?"
  - "How can we discuss these facts in a way that makes our child feel safe but informed?"
4. Take a short quiz to assess understanding (see [Exhibit 3](#)).

## Step 2: Building Confidence

### Learning Objectives

- Foster an environment where children feel safe discussing concerns.
- Build a child's sense of self-worth and emotional resilience.
- Teach children to trust their instincts and set boundaries.

### Key Discussion Points

Traffickers often prey on emotional vulnerability rather than physical weakness. A child who feels secure, loved, and heard is more likely to resist manipulation. Building confidence starts at home, where parents play a crucial role in modeling self-respect, resilience, and emotional intelligence. Creating a family culture that emphasizes open dialogue, self-worth, and boundary-setting helps equip children with the tools they need to recognize and respond to manipulation.

### Guidelines for Parents & Guardians

1. Model confidence and self-respect.
  - Children absorb how you talk about yourself, handle stress, and resolve conflicts.
  - Avoid self-deprecating remarks, as children may internalize similar self-doubt.
  - Speak kindly about yourself and others to reinforce positive self-perception.

## 2. Foster emotional security.

- If a child feels unseen or unimportant, they may seek validation from untrustworthy sources.
- Make time for one-on-one interactions to encourage open communication.
- Allow children to express their emotions without fear of punishment or dismissal.

## 3. Encourage everyday boundary-setting.

- Teach kids that saying no is okay – whether with peers, adults, or online interactions.
- Reinforce that they have autonomy over their bodies, time, and personal space.
- Help them practice polite but firm refusals in everyday situations.

## 4. Normalize Difficult Conversations

- Discuss sensitive topics like personal safety, friendships, and online interactions without stigma.
- Use real-world examples to illustrate how manipulation happens.
- Make space for your child to ask questions and share their concerns.

### Practical Action Steps

#### 1. Create a Safe Home Environment

- Designate daily or weekly family discussion time to check in on emotions and concerns.
- Encourage children to share their thoughts without fear of punishment or dismissal.
- Lead by example – demonstrate respectful communication, active listening, and self-confidence.

## 2. Teach Assertiveness Through Roleplay

- Practice common scenarios where children may need to say "no," such as refusing an uncomfortable request.
- Encourage eye contact, clear speech, and confident body language.
- Reinforce the idea that saying no is not rude – it is a sign of self-respect.

## 3. Encourage Expression of Feelings

- Validate emotions instead of dismissing them. If a child expresses discomfort, take them seriously.
- Teach healthy ways to process emotions, such as journaling, talking, or engaging in physical activity.
- Help children identify emotions like fear, discomfort, or pressure as early warning signs of potential manipulation.

## 4. Recognize and Address Emotional Triggers

- Identify common triggers that make children more susceptible to manipulation (e.g., loneliness, self-doubt, lack of belonging).
- Provide alternative sources of validation through family bonding, mentorship, or structured activities.
- Teach children that their self-worth does not come from external validation but from their character, strengths, and intrinsic value.

## 5. Use the PTA Framework for Tough Conversations

- Past – Who is this person in your life?
- Task – What are they asking of you?
- Ask – Have you talked to others about this? Does it feel right?

By reinforcing confidence, autonomy, and emotional security, parents help children develop the skills they need to recognize manipulation and respond proactively.

## Step 3: Setting Boundaries

### Learning Objectives

- Help children navigate the digital world safely.
- Set realistic, healthy technology boundaries.
- Teach children how to balance privacy and transparency online.

### Key Discussion Points

Technology has changed how traffickers operate – 40% of trafficking cases start online. Instead of banning social media, parents should guide children in developing healthy digital habits.

Children today live in a hyper-connected world, where social media and digital interactions shape their sense of identity and belonging. Setting boundaries is not just about restricting access but about teaching children to engage with technology safely, critically, and mindfully. The goal is to help children develop the ability to self-regulate, identify risks, and make informed choices online.

### Guidelines for Parents & Guardians

#### 1. Teach Digital Self-Worth

- Help children understand that their value is not tied to likes, comments, or online validation.
- Encourage them to recognize that social media presents a curated version of reality, not real life.
- Have regular conversations about self-esteem, comparison culture, and mental well-being in digital spaces.

#### 2. Create Technology-Free Spaces & Times

- Establish screen-free moments (e.g., during meals, before bedtime, during family time) to encourage real-life interactions.
- Lead by example – model healthy digital habits by limiting screen time and prioritizing face-to-face communication.
- Encourage activities that don't involve screens, such as outdoor play, reading, hobbies, or family game nights.



### 3. Empower Through Privacy Settings & Digital Literacy

- Teach children how to adjust privacy settings to restrict access to personal information.
- Show them how to disable location tracking on apps and devices.
- Help them recognize manipulative tactics such as phishing, scams, and online grooming.

### 4. Help Children Recognize Online Manipulation

- Teach them to be cautious when someone they met online:
  - Tries to move conversations to private platforms (such as encrypted apps).
  - Shows excessive interest or offers gifts and special attention.
  - Pressures them to keep their conversations secret.
- Encourage children to always consult a trusted adult if something feels uncomfortable or "off".

### 5. Follow Their Social Media (With Mutual Agreement)

- Have a conversation about boundaries and trust regarding online interactions.
- Negotiate whether parents will follow their child's accounts and the level of monitoring needed.
- Respect their need for independence while keeping open communication about their digital world.

### 6. Teach Online Safety Essentials

- Make sure children never share:
  - Full names, addresses, school details, or phone numbers.
  - Financial details, passwords, or social security numbers.
  - Private conversations or personal photos with strangers online.
- Encourage them to question messages or requests that feel suspicious and always check with an adult before engaging.

## 7. Recognizing & Managing Screen Time Addiction

- Watch for signs of unhealthy attachment to devices, such as:
  - Anxiety or irritability when separated from their phone.
  - Prioritizing online interactions over in-person relationships.
  - Staying up late or avoiding responsibilities due to excessive screen time.
- Encourage balance and self-awareness by setting screen time limits and encouraging alternative activities.

### Practical Action Steps

#### 1. Create a Digital Safety Plan

- Review privacy settings together and adjust them to limit exposure.
- Set family guidelines for social media use, online friendships, and gaming interactions.
- Encourage an open-door policy where children feel comfortable discussing online experiences.

#### 2. Pre-written Conversation Guides

- *How to talk about online safety with a 10-year-old:* “Sometimes people online pretend to be someone they’re not. If someone ever makes you feel uncomfortable, you can always tell me, and we’ll figure it out together.”
- *How to discuss digital boundaries with a teenager:* “I respect your independence, and I want to make sure you have the skills to handle online situations safely. What are some ways we can work together to make sure your privacy is protected?”

#### 3. Develop a Family Social Media Agreement

- Outline rules regarding screen time, app usage, privacy settings, and online friendships.
- Make it a collaborative discussion so children feel involved in shaping their own boundaries.
- Encourage a healthy balance between digital life and offline interactions.

## **Conclusion**

By implementing these three key steps – Understanding the Facts, Building Confidence, and Setting Boundaries – parents and guardians can help protect their children from trafficking without instilling fear.

Trafficking is a complex issue, but your influence as a parent is one of the most powerful tools in prevention.

## Exhibits

### Exhibit 1: Teaching Red Flags

Here are various ways parents or guardians can teach children to recognize red flags – not just with strangers, but also with familiar people who may exhibit manipulative behaviour:

#### 1. Teach Body Autonomy & Consent

- Emphasize that their body belongs to them and they have the right to say “no” to unwanted touch, even from family or authority figures.
- Teach them that secrets about touching are never okay.

#### 2. Define Safe vs. Unsafe Secrets

- Explain the difference between safe secrets (like surprise parties) and unsafe secrets (when someone tells them not to tell a trusted adult about something that makes them uncomfortable).

#### 3. Recognize Manipulation & Grooming

- Teach kids that "special attention" (gifts, favors, isolation from others) can sometimes be a way for someone to gain their trust for the wrong reasons.
- Role-play common manipulative phrases like *“This is our little secret”* or *“If you tell, you’ll get in trouble”* and practice how to respond.

#### 4. Teach Them to Trust Their Feelings

- Encourage them to notice when something feels wrong, even if they can’t explain why.
- Use phrases like "trust your tummy" or "listen to your inner alarm" when a situation feels uncomfortable.

#### 5. Expand the Concept of “Strangers”

- Not all strangers are bad, and not all familiar people are safe.
- Teach them about trusted strangers (like police officers, teachers, and store employees) they can go to for help.

#### 6. Teach Assertiveness

- Encourage them to speak up if someone makes them uncomfortable, even if that person is a family member or friend.
- Practice clear, confident “no” statements when something feels wrong.

## 7. Explain “Tricky People” Instead of Just “Bad People”

- Replace “stranger danger” with “tricky people” – anyone (even family or friends) who tries to break rules, ask for secrecy, or make them feel uneasy.
- Teach them that adults don’t ask kids for help (e.g., finding a lost pet or carrying something to a car).

## 8. Discuss Online Safety & Digital Red Flags

- Teach them to never share personal information (real name, school, address) online.
- Explain that anyone online can pretend to be someone else, even a friend their age.

## 9. Encourage Open Communication

- Make sure they know they can always come to you without fear of punishment.
- Use "What would you do if...?" scenarios to help them think through different situations.

## 10. Identify Safe Adults & Safe Places

- Help them identify trusted adults they can go to if they feel unsafe (teachers, coaches, family friends).
- Teach them where safe places are in public (like a store counter, police station, or school office).

## 11. Role-Play Scenarios

- Practice responses to uncomfortable situations, like what to say if a family friend asks for a hug they don’t want to give.
- Rehearse how to get help if they feel unsafe in a friend’s house, school, or public place.

## 12. Model Boundaries in Your Own Life

- Let them see you set and maintain healthy boundaries with others.
- Show them it’s okay to say "no" to things that make you uncomfortable.

## 13. Teach Them to Identify Unusual Adult Behaviour

- Help them understand that trusted adults don’t ask kids to keep secrets, lie, or break rules.
- If an adult asks them to be alone or to not tell their parents, that’s a red flag.

## 14. Make sure they remember past, task, ask (PTA) as well as they know stop, drop, and roll.

## Exhibit 2: Reflective Questions

### Framework for Parents: Encouraging Open Conversations About Relationships and Trust

#### **1. Create a Safe Space for Discussion**

Choose a relaxed environment where your child feels comfortable talking. Avoid making the conversation feel like an interrogation.

#### **2. Normalize Conversations About Safety**

Make discussions about safety and trust a regular part of conversations, not just a one-time talk. Use everyday situations to bring up topics naturally.

#### **3. Adjust the Conversation to Their Age**

For younger children, focus on recognizing uncomfortable situations and setting boundaries. For older children, discuss real-life cases and critical thinking about online interactions.

#### **4. Use Open-Ended Questions**

Ask questions that encourage reflection and dialogue. Examples:

##### Light (Building Awareness & Understanding Safety)

- What does it mean to trust someone?
- How do you know when someone is a safe person to talk to?
- What should you do if someone asks you to keep a secret that makes you uncomfortable?
- Who are the trusted adults in your life that you can go to if something feels wrong?
- How do you feel when someone respects your boundaries?

##### Moderate (Understanding Manipulation & Setting Boundaries)

- Have you ever heard the term “grooming”? What do you think it means?
- Why do you think it’s important to listen to your gut feelings?
- What would you do if an adult or older kid made you feel uncomfortable?
- How can someone try to trick you into thinking they are safe when they are not?
- What are some warning signs that someone might not have good intentions?
- How would you respond if a friend told you they felt unsafe around someone?

##### Mature (Critical Thinking About Trafficking & Manipulation)

- What did you believe about human trafficking before learning more about it?
- What are some common myths about trafficking, and why do you think people believe them?

- Why do some victims struggle to recognize they are being manipulated?
- What role do social media and online relationships play in trafficking risks?
- How can we discuss these facts in a way that makes you feel safe but informed?
- What can we do as a family to help others learn about staying safe?

### **5. Reassure Without Causing Fear**

Frame the conversation around empowerment rather than fear. Reinforce that they can always come to you for help.

### **6. Teach Them to Recognize Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships**

Help them identify what trust, respect, and safety look like in friendships, online interactions, and authority figures.

### **7. Encourage Critical Thinking About Media and Society**

Discuss how trafficking and manipulation are portrayed in news, movies, or social media. Ask questions like:

- How does the media shape our understanding of these issues?
- What stereotypes exist about trafficking, and how can we challenge them?

### **8. Provide Reassurance and Support**

Let your child know that they will never be in trouble for asking questions or coming to you with concerns. Encourage them to trust their instincts.

### **9. Check In Regularly**

Revisit the conversation over time to reinforce lessons and answer new questions. Ask follow-ups like:

- Have you ever felt uneasy about a situation but weren't sure why?
- Do you feel confident saying no if something makes you uncomfortable?

By making these discussions part of everyday life, you can help your children develop a strong sense of awareness, confidence, and trust in their own judgment.

### Exhibit 3: Quizzes

#### **Quiz for Young Children (Ages 5-9):**

1. Who should you tell if someone asks you to keep an unsafe secret?
  - a) No one
  - b) A trusted adult like a parent or teacher
  - c) A stranger
2. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, what should you do?
  - a) Keep it to yourself
  - b) Tell a trusted adult
  - c) Ignore it and hope it goes away
3. Which of these is a tricky person?
  - a) Someone who asks you to keep a secret from your parents
  - b) Someone who helps you when you are lost in a store
  - c) Someone who follows the rules
4. If a stranger asks for your help to find their lost pet, what should you do?
  - a) Help them because they seem nice
  - b) Say no and find an adult
  - c) Follow them to see if they really need help
5. Can someone you know, like a family friend, ever be unsafe?
  - a) No, only strangers can be unsafe
  - b) Yes, even familiar people can do things that aren't okay
  - c) Only people on the internet are unsafe



### **Quiz for Pre-Teens (Ages 10-12)**

1. What is a warning sign that someone might be trying to manipulate you?
  - a) They ask you to keep secrets from your family
  - b) They encourage you to talk to your parents more
  - c) They always check if you feel safe
2. If someone online wants to meet in person, what should you do?
  - a) Meet them in secret
  - b) Tell a trusted adult and never meet them alone
  - c) Ask them to send proof they are real
3. Why do traffickers often target people they know?
  - a) It makes it easier to gain trust
  - b) Strangers always raise suspicion
  - c) They don't target people they know
4. Which of these is NOT a myth about human trafficking?
  - a) Only women and girls are victims
  - b) Traffickers only kidnap people
  - c) Traffickers can manipulate victims without physical force
5. What is a safe way to respond if someone makes you uncomfortable?
  - a) Be polite and do what they say
  - b) Ignore it and hope it stops
  - c) Say no and tell a trusted adult

### **Quiz for Teens (Ages 13-17)**

1. What is the most common way traffickers manipulate people?
  - a) Physical violence
  - b) Gaining trust through deception and emotional manipulation
  - c) Kidnapping in public places
2. Which of the following is true about human trafficking?
  - a) Only undocumented people are trafficked
  - b) It only happens in poor countries
  - c) It happens in Canada, even in big cities
3. What should you do if a friend confides in you about a situation that seems unsafe?
  - a) Keep their secret
  - b) Encourage them to tell a trusted adult and offer to support them
  - c) Assume they are exaggerating
4. What is a red flag that someone online may be unsafe?
  - a) They respect your boundaries
  - b) They pressure you to keep your conversations private
  - c) They encourage you to talk to your family more
5. What is an important step in protecting yourself online?
  - a) Sharing personal details only with mutual friends
  - b) Using privacy settings and never meeting online people alone
  - c) Accepting all friend requests to expand your network

## Quiz for Parents & Guardians

1. What is the biggest misconception about trafficking?
  - a) It only happens to strangers
  - b) Trafficking only involves physical violence
  - c) Both a and b
2. What is a key way to help children stay safe?
  - a) Teach them about "tricky people" instead of just "stranger danger"
  - b) Make them scared so they are more cautious
  - c) Avoid talking about trafficking so they don't worry
3. Why do many human trafficking cases never go to trial?
  - a) There is often not enough evidence due to manipulation and coercion
  - b) Most cases involve false accusations
  - c) Courts prioritize other crimes
4. What is an effective way to help children recognize unsafe situations?
  - a) Role-playing different scenarios
  - b) Letting them figure it out on their own
  - c) Teaching them to trust all adults in authority
5. How can you create an open dialogue with your child about safety?
  - a) Encourage open conversations without fear-based tactics
  - b) Only talk to them about safety when a news event happens
  - c) Assume they already know how to protect themselves

## **Answer keys:**

### Quiz for Young Children (Ages 5-9)

1. b) A trusted adult like a parent or teacher
2. b) Tell a trusted adult
3. a) Someone who asks you to keep a secret from your parents
4. b) Say no and find an adult
5. b) Yes, even familiar people can do things that aren't okay

### Quiz for Pre-Teens (Ages 10-12)

1. a) They ask you to keep secrets from your family
2. b) Tell a trusted adult and never meet them alone
3. a) It makes it easier to gain trust
4. c) Traffickers can manipulate victims without physical force
5. c) Say no and tell a trusted adult

### Quiz for Teens (Ages 13-17)

1. b) Gaining trust through deception and emotional manipulation
2. c) It happens in Canada, even in big cities
3. b) Encourage them to tell a trusted adult and offer to support them
4. b) They pressure you to keep your conversations private
5. b) Using privacy settings and never meeting online people alone

### Quiz for Parents & Guardians

1. c) Both a and b
2. a) Teach them about "tricky people" instead of just "stranger danger"
3. a) There is often not enough evidence due to manipulation and coercion
4. a) Role-playing different scenarios
5. a) Encourage open conversations without fear-based tactics