



Human Trafficking: Myth vs. Reality

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Human Trafficking Awareness Month highlights the need to understand and address the realities of trafficking in our communities. Misperceptions persist, but by fostering healthy relationships and strong communities, we can unite in this fight. At Wedgwood, we are dedicated to raising awareness, educating others, and supporting survivors in West Michigan. Reflect on how your strengths and resources can help combat human trafficking.

It is important to be aware of the realities of trafficking such as: the grooming process, risk factors and indicators of trafficking.

Myths vs. Realities

- **MYTH: Human Trafficking only happens in foreign countries**
REALITY: Trafficking happens everywhere.
 - No community is "immune" from this issue.
- **MYTH: Only women and girls are trafficked**
REALITY: Trafficking can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or even socioeconomic status.
 - While it can happen to anyone, certain individuals and groups of people can be more vulnerable.
- **MYTH: Victims can easily escape their trafficker**
REALITY: Due to force, fraud and coercion, many victims may have a difficult time leaving their trafficker.
 - Traffickers also use manipulation and "false love" to keep victims trapped in their situation.
- **MYTH: Trafficking is the same as smuggling**
REALITY: While traffickers may transport or move their victims, human trafficking does not require movement.
- **MYTH: Victims will always seek help**
REALITY: Trafficking is complex and multifaceted - many victims may not know they are being trafficked.
 - Force, fraud and coercion can make it extremely difficult for individuals to leave their situation.
- **MYTH: Traffickers are strangers**
- **REALITY: According to a 2023 Survivor Study conducted by the Polaris Project, nearly 40% of survivors were trafficked by a family member. Many survivors stated that their trafficker was a romantic partner.**
 - Traffickers groom their victims into believing they are loved by showering them with gifts, affection, and emotional support - creating a false sense of security, love, and affection. **Trafficking is highly relational.**



What to look for:

While this is not an exclusive list, these are some indicators may be present in children or adults:

- Subtle mentions of a dysfunctional home life
- References to sexual situations, especially use of terms beyond age-specific norms
- Excuses for a family member, boyfriend, or girlfriend's potentially abusive behaviors
- Evidence of physical abuse (bruises, marks, burns)
- Homelessness or running away
- Reporting multiple sex partners
- Evidence of a partner appearing to control the conversation and/or speak for them
- Substance addiction
- Unmet needs/lack of social or family connection

What can you do:

- Continue to educate yourself on the realities of this issue including terminology, indicators of trafficking, and laws that are in place to help protect survivors.
- Educate yourself on the resources in your area working to combat Human Trafficking
- Report any suspected child abuse or neglect, if you see something, say something
 - For more information about the reporting process in Michigan, visit:
<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/abuse-neglect/childrens/report-process>
- Report any suspected trafficking at the National Human Trafficking Hotline:
 - 888-373-7888 or text BEFREE to 233733
- Connect with Wedgwood's Manasseh Project for further education and training opportunities, or for ways to get involved by volunteering or donating.