

WASHINGTON, DC, July 12, 2012 - As a follow-up to my article last month listing [prevention tips for elementary schools](#), I'd like to provide the following list of tips for trafficking prevention programs in intermediate and middle schools.

1. Media Literacy. As I have stated before, preteens and teenagers must be educated about the media, especially advertising. Business enterprises are sending distorted messages to teens via the media in order to make a profit. These messages include: You aren't pretty unless you buy *this*, you aren't cool unless you own *this*, owning *this* product is more important than anything else, etc. Traffickers understand what popular culture is telling teens and they are using it to their advantage educate kids about the dynamics behind advertising. For more information, please see my article on the [importance of media literacy in prevention programs](#).

2. Coping Skills. Children in intermediate and middle schools are often struggling with a myriad of personal and social issues: bullying, teen pregnancy, peer pressure, poor self-image, etc. Educate students about different ways to cope with stress. A teen who is losing the battle against any one of these pressures can be lured into what a stranger might call "a better way of life." Coping strategies can include meditation, self-defense classes, exercise, writing, reading, music, sports, crafting, etc. Also, investigate your local child-focused volunteer organizations (e.g. [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#), [Girls for a Change](#), [Hardy Girls Healthy Women](#), among many others) and make this list available to students. Having a relationship with a mentor is an excellent coping strategy.

3. Extracurricular activities. It is crucial to keep intermediate and middle school kids engaged in activities. Boredom leads to a lack of direction. Traffickers are most interested in teens who lack the guidance and support to keep them working towards goals. Encourage students, especially troubled students, to maintain enrollment in extracurricular activities.

4. Exposure. At 14, I felt isolated from the rest of the world. When I met the man who trafficked me, he promised cross-country road trips with visits to exotic lands. I believed him because I *wanted* to believe him. I wanted to see something outside of my town. Expose students to other cultures and regions, even if it's only through media like music, documentaries, maps, and encyclopedias. I discovered Bollywood music and dance when I happened upon a program about Asha Bhosle in my late teens; it was as if a door to India had been opened. This could include exposure to different interests via field trips as well: the ballet, sports games, the theatre, orchestra concerts, etc.

5. Volunteering. Adolescents are hormone-driven creatures. They're angry, they're sad, and they're impulsive. Their lives can fall to pieces at a moment's notice, and it truly feels to them as though life will never get any better, until it does...

Volunteering can help a child keep things in focus, whether it's volunteering at a soup kitchen during the holidays or spending time with a senior citizen at a nursing home. Help your students see the world from someone else's perspective. Help them understand how fortunate they are by helping those less fortunate. A healthy perspective on one's own life will prevent attempted distortion by a stranger. Try to include a volunteer project in your curriculum.

6. Sexual empowerment. Our society is saturated with images of sex, and most images of women in the media are sexualized. This teaches young girls that sex appeal equals value. This turns into a domino effect. Over-sexualized girls are magnets for opportunistic boys or men who will push to have their expectations met. Teach preteen and teenage girls that, despite seeing and hearing about sex on a daily basis, it is ok to say no to anyone at any time, no matter what. Also, educate teen boys that it is ok to wait; boys often feel pressured to have sex because it would be “uncool” not to. Instill the idea in teenagers that they own their bodies, and nobody has the right to touch them - no matter what, no matter when, and no matter how far things have gone with a person in the past. Traffickers look for girls and boys who lack assertiveness and for those who have been exploited in the past.

7. Sex education. Knowledge is power. Sex education must go beyond the male and female anatomy.

There must be open discussions about the realities of sexuality and the consequences to sex.

8. Counseling! If a student’s symptoms of depression or anger are disrupting their school life, please recommend professional help. Ignoring a child’s signals for help will only drive them further away, possibly to seek solace from a stranger.

9. Trafficking basics. Teach children the basics about child sex traffickers and the tactics used by traffickers to gain their trust and to lure children away. Incorporate survivor -influenced curricula to teach children about these tactics and/or invite survivors into your schools to speak to the teens. For example, going to the mall was something I did almost every weekend. And this is exactly where I met the man who trafficked me to Atlantic City, NJ. This man was not the “creepy, old man” I had been warned about; he appeared to be in his 20s. He was *cool*, like a movie character, and he looked like he belonged in a music video. Today, predators have the ability to look for girls on the Internet. Also, these predators come in all shapes, sizes, and genders. Women, sometimes victims themselves, often help lure unsuspecting teens away with tales of a better life.

10. Start a club! Organizations like [Shoe Revolt](#) offer packages to help students start a club with the goal of educating peers about human trafficking.

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