

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Human Trafficking occurs only in foreign countries.

FALSE. Canada is a source, transfer and destination country for victims of human trafficking.

In 2014 the RCMP's Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre revealed that 93% of victims in Canada at that time were of Canadian origin.

2. In order to escape, a victim of human trafficking simply needs to ask someone for help. If they do not seek help it is because they elect to remain in their current situation.

FALSE. There are numerous reasons a victim may remain silent and not seek help. Fear of their trafficker and a lack of trust in the legal system play a significant role in a victim's silence and one must not perceive this silence as consent. Traffickers utilize various fear tactics to maintain absolute power and control. Victims and their families may be threatened and victims are isolated from family and friends. A victim must face a number of other obstacles in attempting to escape their situation: language barriers, a lack of knowledge of their legal rights and available resources, and immigration issues all contribute to a victim's reticence.

3. Only troubled youth are at risk of being sexually exploited.

FALSE. Every person is at risk of being sexually exploited regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social class or family situation. Certain aspects can increase the risk factor such as poverty, drug abuse or a criminal entourage. Other factors can potentially decrease the risk such as positive peer influence, a solid education and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately no one is immune to the risk of sexual exploitation and it is crucial to be alert and attentive for possible risk.

4. Traffickers control their victims using all sorts of methods.

TRUE. A trafficker will use any technique that guarantees total control over their victim. Different methods include physical violence toward the victim, threats directed toward the victim or their loved ones,

or isolating the victim by cutting off all ties to friends, family and community. A victim may not appear as a victim at first glance, just as a trafficker is not necessarily identifiable.

5. If I know a victim or recognize a person as being a victim, I must remove the person from the situation at all costs.

FALSE. It is imperative to respect the person's decisions even if you are not in agreement. It is of utmost importance to preserve the relationship as it may serve as a lifeline if the time comes when your friend is prepared to leave. If you insist when the victim is not ready or receptive, you risk breaking the bond and this could result in the victim being further isolated. Inform your friend of your concern, but also speak of your support and respect your friend's decision. Don't forget you can ask for help to get through this difficult period.

TRUE. When dealing with a very young victim, it is important to take action immediately and inform Youth Protection Services to obtain appropriate assistance.

DO NOT WAIT.

6. If a girl tells me she chooses to prostitute herself and she is of legal age, it is okay.

FALSE. Very often, victims of sexual exploitation are forced to hand over their earnings to their pimp under threat of retaliation. In an effort to avoid this violence and should their earnings be insufficient, a victim will often claim to be of legal age and appear to consent. Also, it is important to note that it is illegal and considered a criminal offense to purchase sexual services in Canada, regardless of the age of the person.

7. Human Trafficking is such a huge problem that my efforts won't make a difference.

FALSE. Every little bit counts. Raise awareness among your family, colleagues and friends and inform them modern day slavery is an issue that we all must address. When you deem appropriate, arm your children with the proper knowledge to face this harsh truth. If you suspect there might be a problem, seek help.