

Safety First. **Safety First.** Safety First. **Safety First.** Safety First.

Dear **Cardinal** Staff and Families,

Often, we hear the words, “**Safety, first.**” Almost everyone nods their heads in agreement. As parents and educators, we all want our students to be **safe**. With this in mind, it is important to take note of events and locations that can become unsafe, if students are not aware of any potential risks. Today’s message is not to instill fear. It is to promote awareness and proactive behavior. We have many students heading to **state events** in the next few days, and it is important to look forward to a fun and **safe** experience.

In our district, we truly believe **safety** must come first. Our administrative team uses the phrase, “**Safety** over convenience every time.” Our focus is to keep our students psychologically, physically, and emotionally **safe** to the best of our ability. With this in mind, we make intentional decisions to inform our students and families about **safety** concerns present in today’s society. This year, we offered learning around vaping for our students and families. Last year, our young adults watched the GRIDSHOCK Documentary with a trained social worker in the wings to answer questions and share stories to enhance students’ awareness and need for **safety** regarding human trafficking in Iowa. Many caregivers attended the night showing as well. All learned that human trafficking victimized all genders.

Below, you will find a short paragraph found on the GRIDSHOCK website, as well as a short documentary. Additionally, I have shared information about ways to stay **safe** and signs for caregivers to watch for regarding human trafficking.

There is quite a bit of information below. Please, consider taking time to read the information and visit with your child. I believe it will be time well-spent.

Take care,
Chris

GRIDSHOCK: A Documentary about Sex Trafficking in Iowa

Vanessa McNeal, a filmmaker and survivor of sexual violence sets out to explore the often-overlooked reality about why the sex trafficking industry thrives. The truth is that sex trafficking wouldn’t exist without the unquenchable thirst and demand for it. On the quest to learn more, Vanessa discovers who the johns/buyers are and why there is a culture of impunity that hides and protects them. In this riveting and truly disturbing documentary what you think you know about sex trafficking will be challenged. What is hidden will come to light, even in a midwestern state like Iowa. The film features survivors of sex trafficking, local and federal law enforcement, advocates, politicians, and a recovering sex addict.

<https://www.gridshockdocumentary.com/>

Polaris Project and its National Human Trafficking Resource Center February 11, 2021

<https://polarisproject.org/blog/2021/02/love-and-trafficking-how-traffickers-groom-control-their-victims/>

“I can’t believe she fell for that.”

“If I were him, I would have told someone!”

“I would have seen right through it.”

If you’ve never been targeted by a trafficker – or in an abusive or manipulative relationship of any kind – you may well think that nothing, ever, would convince you to have sex for money.

The reality is, many of us would be surprised by what we could be manipulated into doing, with the right combination of external factors in play. Traffickers are experts at finding those moments when people are vulnerable, of working the angles, of manipulating reality and leveraging fears. The process is called grooming. It is methodical, intentional and it works. Indeed, it is the most common way that people – adults and children wind up in sex trafficking situations. Sex trafficking very rarely begins with a violent abduction, or with a stranger involved at all. It begins with someone the victims knows and usually loves or trusts.

While every situation is different the overall grooming process usually involves the following steps:

Targeting the Victim

Traffickers are adept at identifying people with noticeable vulnerabilities or needs. They may scour specific locations such as bus stations, shelters, or local malls looking for someone without a safe place to stay or who they may be able to charm with their flattery and attention. Or they may look more closely at the people in their lives who are vulnerable – both children and adults – someone who has been through a bad break up, has low self-esteem, is simply lonely, or is too young to understand. Social media has also provided traffickers with a convenient way to find and groom their victims. They may identify vulnerable individuals across the country or geographically target them using location-based apps.

Gaining Trust

Once a trafficker has identified their victim, they need to also gain that person's trust. They may have several conversations where they form a bond over common interests or pretend to care about what they have experienced. They'll pose as good listeners, who care deeply, as they learn more about what they can do to insinuate themselves more deeply in the victim's life. Or, in situations where the trafficker may already be a part of their victim's life – like a family member – it may come more easily. Either way, traffickers will gain trust and collect information that can be later used to manipulate their victims.

Meeting Needs

Once they have gained the trust of their victims and better understand their needs, traffickers offer a solution to meet those needs. Depending on the individual victim, these needs could be physical – like a safe place to stay or a job to help them take care of themselves or their family – or something less tangible like love, affection and a sense of belonging or confidence. By fulfilling these needs, traffickers gain power – the power to provide and the threat – often unspoken – to take away what the person thinks they've gained.

Isolation

Traffickers need to put themselves at the center of victims' lives to create a near total dependency. To do so, they distance their victims from anyone who might weaken their influence or contradict the messaging they're providing. They might make off-handed comments about how they don't like their friends or make it so they become increasingly reliant on them – by driving them to school or work and being there to pick them up. By isolating their victims, traffickers make it more difficult for them to reach out to others for help later on down the line.

Exploitation

The way traffickers begin the process of exploiting their victims isn't always transparent. They may start slowly, by pushing their victim to do things they might be uncomfortable with, like asking them to have sex with a friend once or arranging a date for them as a way to make some quick money. Over time, the victim may be conditioned to believe that what they're being asked to do is "normal." They may even feel like they owe their trafficker for all they have done for them or believe their trafficker when they say that the situation is just temporary or a way for them to reach their common goals, such as getting out of the sex trade and starting a family – or keeping the current, abusive family together.

Maintaining Control

After traffickers establish control over their victims, they have to carefully craft strategies to maintain it. These strategies differ depending on the person or the situation. In many cases, physical force is not necessary. The trafficker may keep their victim in the trafficking situation by continuing to isolate them, threatening them or their loved ones if they attempt to leave, controlling them through their addiction, or even manipulating their sense of self. Sometimes losing the idea, the illusion of love, is enough to keep a person in a trafficking situation.

The purpose of the grooming process is for a trafficker to be able to gain full control over their victim and manipulate them into cooperating in their own exploitation. It's hard to spot the grooming process from outside the relationship – but it's not impossible.

Talk to the people you love – your teenager, your younger child, your friends and co-workers. Pay attention to things that seem off, or wrong, that new significant other who doesn't want to meet their friends, the child who is angry all the time but can't explain why, the "dream date" who showers her with gifts that seem inappropriate, that older man who seems a little too invested in a young man's life.

Take our pledge, and make a promise to educate yourself, and talk to your loved ones, if you are concerned someone is being groomed. These are hard conversations to have but they could be saving someone from being victimized. Understanding what grooming looks like is the first step.

There is no single profile for trafficking victims; trafficking occurs to adults and minors in rural, suburban, or urban communities across the country. Victims of human trafficking have diverse socio-economic backgrounds, varied levels of education, and may be documented or undocumented. Traffickers target victims using tailored methods of recruitment and control they find to be effective in compelling that individual into forced labor or commercial sex. Traffickers pretend to be a boyfriend or significant other, using feigned affection and manipulation to elicit commercial sex or services from the victim.

Vulnerable Populations

Homeless	Runaway	New to an Area	Away from Home
	Heavily Populated Areas	Transportation Hubs	Shelters
Public Spaces	Victims of Trauma	Unsupervised Youth	
Large Events	Unfamiliar Areas	Victims of Violence	

Tips to Stay Safe

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/faqs/safety-planning-information>

General

- Trust your judgment.
- If a situation/individual makes you uncomfortable, trust that feeling.
- Let a trusted friend or relative know if you feel like you are in danger or if a person or situation is suspicious.
- If possible, set up safety words with a trusted friend/relative.
- One word can mean that it is safe to talk and you are alone.
 - A separate word can mean you are not safe.
 - It is also important to communicate what you would like done (cease communication immediately, call 9-1-1, meet somewhere to pick you up, etc.).
- Keep all important documents and identification in your possession at all times. Your partner/employer does not have the right to take or hold your documents without your permission.
- Keep important numbers on your person at all times, including the number of someone you feel safe contacting if you are in trouble.
- Make sure that you have a means of communication (cell phone or phone card), access to your bank account, and any medication that you might need with you at all times.
- If you think you might be in immediate danger or you are experiencing an emergency, contact 9-1-1 first

Apps for Smart Phones

There are a variety of apps for smart phones to keep you or your loved ones safe. Learn about and download the apps that you think would work best for you. A list of common apps is below. The National Human Trafficking Hotline is not

affiliated with any of these apps. Remember that technology changes rapidly, so this list should not be considered exhaustive. Consider googling "safety apps" to find more suggestions or solutions.

- **Circle of Six** - This app lets you add up to 6 people from your contacts to join your Circle. Then with the touch of a button you can send the following commands - the pin icon sends a text and your GPS location to your Circle that says: "Come and get me. I need help getting home safely." The phone icon sends a text to your Circle that says: "Call and pretend you need me. I need an interruption." The chat icon sends a text to your Circle that says: "I need to talk."" Your friends can then immediately respond to your situation.
- **B Safe** - B Safe offers 6 features to help you stay safe. The Alarm feature sets off a siren (optional), and bSafe starts recording video and voice as well as sending your GPS location to your chosen friends. The Follow Me feature lets friends follow your movements on the mobile map. Once you have arrived home safely, your friends will be notified. The Fake Call feature will make your phone call you. You can also set it on a timer in advance to have an excuse to leave a situation. The Recording feature automatically starts recording video and audio and the recording is sent your primary person's mobile phone. The I Am Here feature shares your location with your friends. The Timer feature notifies your friends if you have not checked in within a certain time.
- **SafeTrek** - This is not a free app, and requires a monthly or yearly fee. To use it you open the SafeTrek app and hold your thumb on the safe button. If you determine you are safe, release the button and enter your 4-digit pin. If you are in danger, release the button and do not enter your pin. Local police will be notified of your location and that there's an emergency.

Warning Signs

Since human trafficking is often a crime that is hidden in plain sight, it is important to be aware of its warning signs. Some indications that a person may be a victim of human trafficking include (especially in the case of women and children):

- Appearing malnourished
- Showing signs of physical injuries and abuse
- Avoiding eye contact, social interaction, and authority figures/law enforcement
- Seeming to adhere to scripted or rehearsed responses in social interaction
- Lacking official identification documents
- Appearing destitute/lacking personal possessions
- Working excessively long hours
- Living at place of employment
- Checking into hotels/motels with older males, and referring to those males as boyfriend or "daddy," which is often street slang for pimp
- Poor physical or dental health
- Tattoos/ branding on the neck and/or lower back
- Untreated sexually transmitted diseases
- Small children serving in a family restaurant
- Security measures that appear to keep people inside an establishment - barbed wire inside of a fence, bars covering the insides of windows
- Not allowing people to go into public alone, or speak for themselves

These warning signs are adapted from information provided by the Polaris Project and its National Human Trafficking Resource Center and [Innocents at Risk](#).