



Do's and Don'ts When Discussing Child Trafficking

Don't Say	Instead Say	Why?
Child / teen prostitute	Trafficking survivor	Child and teen prostitutes don't exist – what exist are victims and survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Referring to survivors as young prostitutes implies that a delinquent youth chose a criminal lifestyle, as opposed to the reality which is that a minor is a victim of a sex crime.
Victim	Survivor	No one wants to be a victim. Calling people survivor empowers them by recognizing their resiliency to overcome extreme hardship and trauma.
We rescue victims.	Survivors need supportive providers as they leave their situations on their own terms and in a way that is safe for them.	People cannot be rescued – they can be empowered. Much like survivors of domestic violence, survivors of human trafficking need to be informed of what services are available to support them, and what exactly each service provides. If we force a "rescue" the person will run back to the trafficker as soon as they are able.
That's so awful, I can't/don't believe it!	I believe you and it's not your fault.	Well-meaning people might say they can't believe something happened not because they are expressing disbelief but because they are surprised or horrified. This conveys to survivors that 1) they are not believed and 2) their experience is so shameful they can't talk about it or shouldn't seek help.
You/they don't have to do that anymore.	What happened to you wasn't your fault.	Stating that someone doesn't need to do something anymore implies that the survivor consented to be trafficked.
But s/he/ you is/are so smart!	You had to do X - did you know that's a skill? You could do Y! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Even though your trafficker should never have forced you to cook drugs you learned chemistry. Did you know you could be a chemist and work on [XYZ]? Here is a program where you can learn more about chemistry and how you can use it in school and at work." 	Saying that a survivor is smart (or has another positive attribute) might seem like a compliment. It can be very frustrating for a survivor to hear nice things about them without support to use that asset to better their life. Instead of saying a compliment explain how the asset can be used to help the survivor in actionable terms.



Do's and Don'ts When Working With Trafficking Survivors¹

Do's	Don'ts	Why?
We will do everything we can to keep you safe.	You are safe now	Your definition of safe may vary from his/hers. You cannot guarantee that he/she will be safe and a broken promise can negatively affect your relationship.
We are not working with the people who hurt you. We are here because we want to help you.	No one here will hurt you.	Although your intention is not to hurt the victim, he/she may perceive an interaction or something you say as hurtful. You don't want to promise this as you do not know if/when he or she will perceive hurt.
We are here because we want to help you. We will do our best to meet your needs.	We can fix your problems.	You may not be able to do meet the needs of the survivor, so don't make promises you can't keep. You may report the crime and nothing may come of it. You may not have the capacity to provide services for all of the needs he/she identifies. It is important to be transparent about your role, what you can do and what you can't do.
The people who hurt you violated your rights; you did not deserve what happened to you.	You are a victim, not a criminal.	It is not helpful to label the individual. He/she may not identify as a victim and someone in the past may have considered him/her a criminal so this can be confusing. It is important to explain what happened to him/her in a rights-based manner.
Trust my actions, not my words.	You can trust me.	Victims of trafficking have been lied to many times. It might be hard for them to know who can be trusted. To demonstrate that you can be trusted be consistent, keep their information confidential, and be clear and honest about expectations and your capacity.
Is there anyone you know who might need help?	We want to make sure what happened to you does not happen to anyone else.	Rather than cause a victim to feel responsible for the potential victimization of others, ask him or her if he knows other youth who may need services. Survivors should not be manipulated to provide information when he or she is unwilling to do so.

¹ Cook County Task Force Train-the-Trainer manual.



Office of Children
and Family Services

