



WEDGWOOD'S MANASSEH PROJECT

Human Trafficking: Staying Safe at Large Summer Community Events

Andrea Keller, MA, LPC | Wedgwood's Manasseh Project Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator

While there is a lot of focus on human trafficking during events such as the Super Bowl or the Olympics, it is important to realize that human trafficking is happening every day. Human trafficking is largely misperceived in our media today, showing victims who are taken against their will. While these incidents may happen, sex trafficking is highly relational. It may take months and even years for a trafficker to groom their victim. False misrepresentation in the media may impact the way we view the crime and the way we perceive victims. Human trafficking can be hidden in plain sight due to the amount of grooming, manipulation, force, fraud, and coercion that takes place. While at large community events, signs of human trafficking may not be as obvious as one thinks.

MYTHS VS. REALITIES

- **MYTH: Traffickers are Strangers**

REALITY: SEX TRAFFICKING IS RELATIONAL

- According to a 2023 Survivor Study conducted by the Polaris Project, many survivors stated that their trafficker was a romantic partner, and nearly 40% of survivors were trafficked by a family member. Many survivors stated they knew and had a relationship with their trafficker. 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.

- **MYTH: Victims Will Always Seek Help**

REALITY: TRAFFICKING IS COMPLEX AND MULTIFACETED

- Many victims may not know they are being trafficked. Traffickers take time to develop trust with their victims, slowly isolating their victims from support systems, creating a dependency on the trafficker. While victims may want to leave their situation, victims may feel an extreme amount of fear leaving their trafficker. Threats, violence, manipulation, and lack of resources can make it extremely difficult for individuals to leave their situation.

While human trafficking can be “hidden in plain sight”, it is important to still be mindful and aware.

HERE ARE SOME SIGNS TO BE AWARE OF:

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Fearful, anxious, on edge with the person they are with.
- Avoids eye contact or doesn't speak for themselves.
- Isn't allowed to speak for themselves (even though their age/developmentally appropriate to do so).
- Rehearsed stories or inconsistencies in stories.

PHYSICAL OR SITUATIONAL SIGNS

- Signs of physical abuse, malnourishment, or exhaustion.
- Underage person dating an older or controlling person.
- Dressing inappropriately for weather or location.

www.manassehproject.org | manasseh2@wedgwood.org | 616.942.2110



WEDGWOOD'S MANASSEH PROJECT

WHAT CAN YOU DO (SAFELY):

- Trying to "rescue" someone by intervening can put you or that person in more harm.
- If something seems wrong, it probably is.
 - Contact security
 - Or contact law enforcement
- Report any suspected trafficking at the National Human Trafficking Tip Line:
 - Text "INFO" to 233733
 - Call 888-373-7888

REMEMBER: Trafficked victims can be any age, race or gender. Your awareness matters.