

# The “Do’s” and “Don’ts” of Human Trafficking Awareness

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Compiled by the Public Education & Awareness Committee of the  
End Slavery Cincinnati Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition  
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## **Introduction**

Although the issue of human trafficking is not new in the United States, the American people have become more aware of it following the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

Since then, advocates have been creating educational content to raise awareness about human trafficking and to equip the public with the knowledge and tools to intervene and do their part to correct this injustice.

However, we must continually adapt our educational materials around this issue as new information emerges from reliable sources like the Polaris Project and their National Human Trafficking Hotline.

This guide is designed to provide a framework for awareness efforts to address various elements of human trafficking within the bounds of respectful language and objective, research-based truths. As you review the material, please note the “pivot points” which aim to name the specific ways we can purposefully shift the way we approach human trafficking awareness.

Together, we can create a more just and peaceful world for all.

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**Chair, Public Education and Awareness Committee**  
**End Slavery Cincinnati Coalition**  
**Coalition Partner, Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center**

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## The “Don’ts”

### Imagery



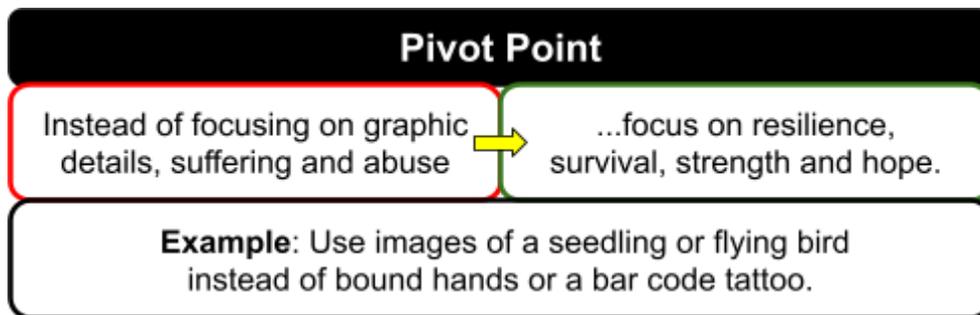
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The use of disturbing images to shock the viewers and grab their attention is discouraged. Referencing abuse, especially through imagery, can be distressing to those who have survived similar trauma.

- **DON’T use images of barbed wire, chains or duct tape.**
  - These images send the false message that all victims of human trafficking are physically restrained or literally silenced.
  - Human trafficking victims can appear to have freedom of movement and are restrained through invisible means like coercion, manipulation, promises of love, threats of violence and more.
- **DON’T use images of bruising or a threatening hand.**
  - These images send the false message that all victims of human trafficking are physically abused and assaulted.
  - Victims of human trafficking are controlled through force, fraud or coercion.



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- **DON’T use images of dirty beds or undergarments.**
  - These images send the false message that sex trafficking is the only kind of human trafficking.
  - Highlighting labor trafficking, as well as sex trafficking, is critically important in telling a comprehensive story of human trafficking.
- **DON’T use images of only women or girls.**
  - These images send the false message that only women and girls are victims of human trafficking.
  - Victims are also men and boys, and those who are transgender or fall elsewhere on the gender spectrum.

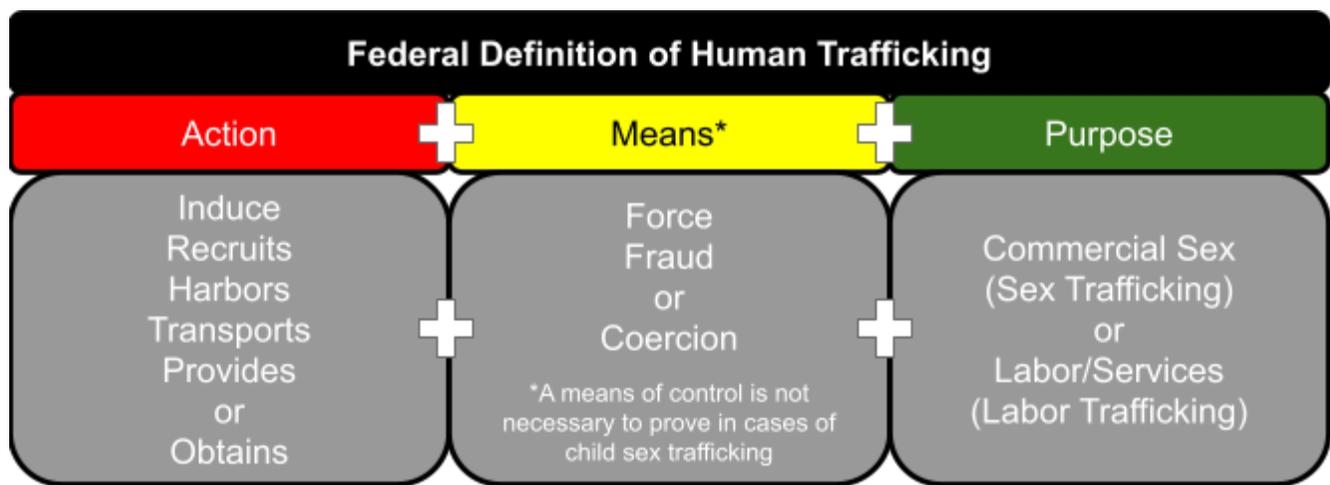
## Language



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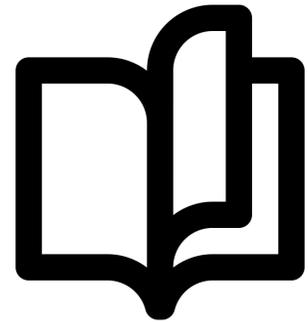
The use of graphic, grotesque, and detailed language to describe situations of human trafficking is not appropriate. Meticulously describing a situation of abuse can be distressing to those who have survived similar trauma.

- **DON'T refer to everyone as a "victim."**
  - This language sends the false message that all people experiencing trafficking understand they're being trafficked.
  - Say "person in a trafficking situation" instead of "victim."
  - If the person is no longer in a trafficking situation, focus on their strength and resiliency by saying "survivor" or "survivor-advocate" instead of "victim."
  - It's also important to note that "victim" is frequently used in a legal context.
- **DON'T use words like "save," "rescue," or "recover."**
  - This language sends the false message that victims of human trafficking need to be saved by a well-meaning outsider.
  - Human trafficking situations are complex and it might put a victim in more danger if someone interferes on their behalf without fully understanding the situation.
  - Victims are often psychologically manipulated and do not see themselves as a victim of human trafficking. The best practice is to empower someone to leave on their own.

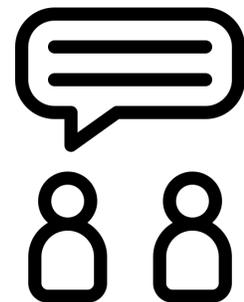


## Defining The Issue

- **DON'T equate Human Trafficking with Kidnapping or Missing Children.**
  - This language sends the false message that all human traffickers forcibly take their victims.
  - Traffickers manipulate people in vulnerable positions, often through building trust and intimacy through grooming or manifesting relationships.
  - Not all missing children are trafficked.
  - Not all kidnapped children are trafficked.
- **DON'T equate Human Trafficking with historical chattel slavery.**
  - This language sends the false message that all human trafficking victims are legally owned as property, like that of historical chattel slavery.
  - While some often refer to Human Trafficking as Modern Day Slavery, it is not the same. They are related concepts, but are profoundly different.
  - The remnants of chattel slavery are still present, and proper attention and respect needs to be given to this specific issue.
- **DON'T equate Human Trafficking with Prostitution or Sex Work.**
  - This language sends the false message that prostitution and sex work are equivalent to sex trafficking, which they are not.
  - Sex trafficking involves force, fraud and coercion.
  - This language sends the false message that sex trafficking is the only kind of human trafficking.



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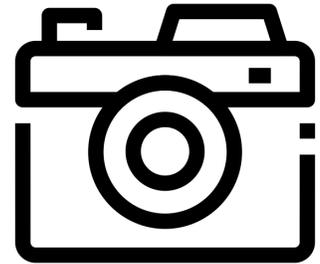
## Storytelling

- **DON'T share unsourced news or stories about human trafficking.**
  - Many stories on social media send false messages that all traffickers kidnap their victims.
  - Traffickers use manipulation and grooming to lure vulnerable people into trafficking situations.

## The “Do’s”

### Imagery

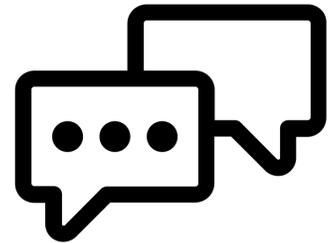
- **DO consider the context of the image.**
  - Examine the relationship between the image, headline and overall message. Do they compliment and enhance what you’re trying to convey?
- **DO use pictures of objects instead of faces.**
  - A general object, like a shoe, computer, or sewing machine can better tell a story of trafficking than a photo of a face.
  - Showcasing people often limits the viewer to imagine who could be victimized and how they can be victimized.
- **DO use images of hope.**
  - Focusing on resilience, hope and recovery is very powerful in human trafficking awareness.
  - Using imagery of trees, plants, birds, sunshine and light can easily convey this message.



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### Language

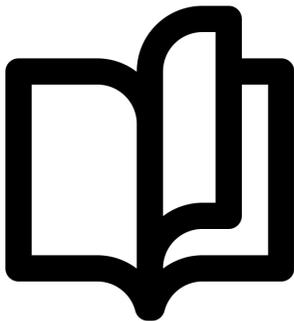
- **DO use phrases that specifically explain the harm being done.**
  - For example, say “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children” instead of “Child Prostitution.” There is no such thing as a child prostitute under federal law. All children under the age of 18 who engage in commercial sex are to be treated as victims of child sex trafficking.
  - Say “Child Sexual Abuse Material” instead of “Child Pornography”
  - Say “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism” instead of “Child Sex Tourism”



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## Defining The Issue

- **DO use up-to-date, cited, contextualized statistics.**
  - Quality statistics are hard to come by in the anti-human trafficking field. Be sure to cite the limitations and scope of each statistic you share.
  - Specify the source of the statistic, the population it represents, the type of trafficking captured in the data and how it relates to other statistics.
  - Reliable statistics can be found through the Polaris Project, the International Labour Organization and several government agencies.
- **DO provide an action item or take away lesson for participants.**
  - Empower the public to learn more, donate, volunteer, share what they've learned, shop more ethically, support a specific piece of legislation, etc.
  - Every person and community sector has a part to play. Human trafficking is a system of exploitation, so collaborative networks and systems must respond.
- **DO share the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 1-888-3737-888.**
  - While there are direct phone numbers for responding nonprofits, the most widespread and consistent resource is the National Human Trafficking Hotline.



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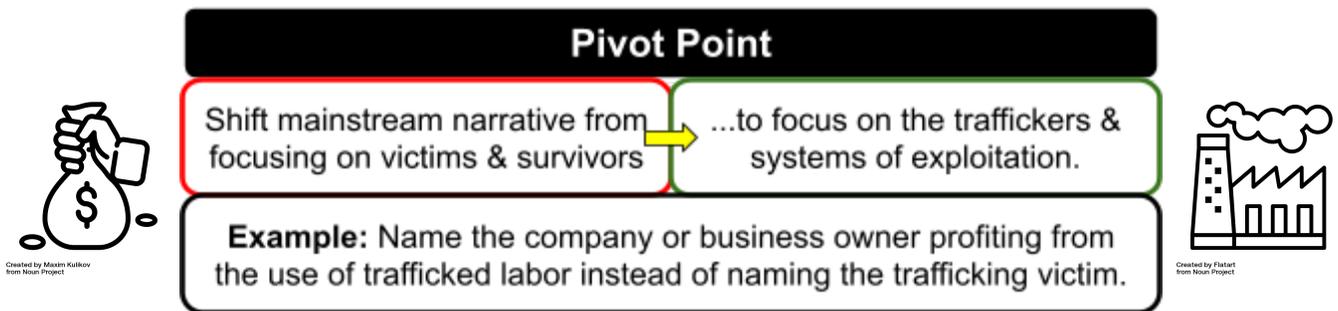
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## Storytelling

- **DO tell diverse stories of human trafficking.**
  - Consider labor trafficking stories, stories from Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other diverse communities. Focus on the LGBTQ community, the differently abled community, the immigrant community.



- **DO highlight and provide compensation for stories directly from survivors of trafficking.**
  - Survivors own their stories. They decide what is shared, where it's shared and why it's shared.
  - Survivors deserve compensation for the emotional labor of sharing their stories.
  - Survivor-advocates who are professionals in the field with opinions, knowledge, etc. own their stories as well.
- **DO consider your audience; a survivor of trafficking or other kind of trauma may be present.**
  - Provide content warnings before sharing graphic, descriptive or violent material.
  - Offer a quiet space or way for a participant to opt-out of a portion of the agenda.

## Conclusion

Thank you for your diligence and dedication to ending human trafficking. This document serves as a challenge for all of us to be more effective in telling a dignified and comprehensive story. While none of us have all the answers, we can continue to learn from one another. Please don't hesitate to reach out to the committee with any questions or concerns, [peacommittee.esc@gmail.com](mailto:peacommittee.esc@gmail.com).

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## Sources

- Freedom United, [My Story, My Dignity Content Guidelines](#)
- Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, [Working with Traumatic Imagery](#)
- International Labour Organization, [Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#), 1-888-3737-888
- Polaris, [Myths, Facts, And Statistics](#)
- The Irina Project, [Tips for Using Images When Reporting on Human Trafficking](#)