



My Voice Matters: Creating a Safe and Supportive Community

Middle School Parent Toolkit





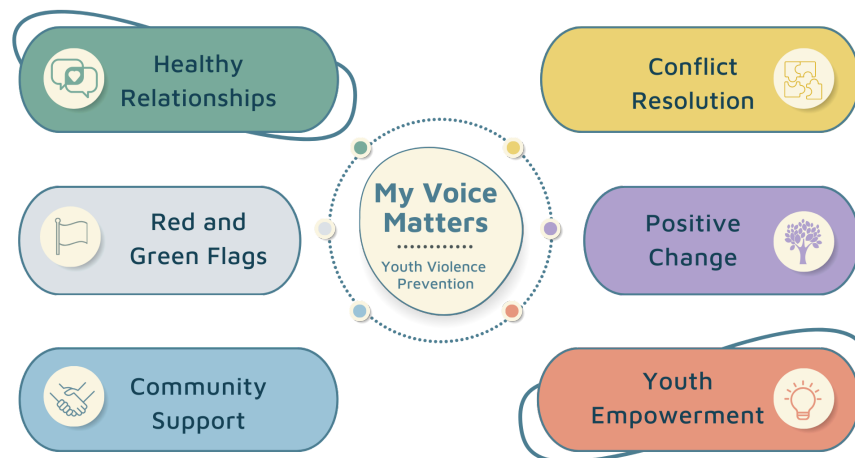
SAFE | HAVEN
PREVENTION PRAXIS

education connecting with action
to end violence

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The **'My Voice Matters'** program for adolescent youth is an initiative of Safe Haven Ministries, a domestic violence and human trafficking agency located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. At Safe Haven, we believe violence and human trafficking are completely preventable, and that we can come together with our surrounding communities in a joint effort to end violence. In order to nurture safe and supportive communities for everyone, the *My Voice Matters* initiative engages youth and the trusted adults in their lives, including resources and tools to help parents and caregivers have important conversations with their child(ren).

The program lessons are based on current research, adapted from other evidence-based programs, and focuses on 5 key topics:

- Healthy relationships and boundaries
- Recognizing and responding to red flags; avoiding dangerous situations, including human trafficking
- Getting help for oneself or for a friend
- Being an "upstander"
- Challenging harmful social norms and stereotypes

When we promote healthy relationship skills, build awareness, connect youth to trusted adults, step in to help others, and talk about things that influence our behaviors, we are working towards a world free from violence. Trusted adults, including parents and caregivers, play an important role in preventing violence.

The Center For Disease Control and Prevention calls the ideas above "protective factors." View the "[Moving Forward](#)"¹ video on YouTube or visit the Veto Violence website² to learn more about protective factors. You can also check out the CDC's website to learn more about the research^{3,4,5} behind strategies for preventing violence.



¹ <https://youtu.be/FJDwe2RkOqo>

² <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/connecting-the-dots/node/5>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/prevention.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/prevention.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/prevention.html>

Important Note for Caregivers

Violence and human trafficking are sad realities in our world, and many people in our community experience violence regularly. The *My Voice Matters* curriculum discusses various types of relationships and scenarios that some teens might encounter involving abuse or risky situations. Safe Haven does not promote any type of unhealthy relationship. Scenarios involving risky behaviors are included to help students think critically about potentially dangerous situations and build skills to avoid them in real life.

This Parent/Caregiver toolkit will help trusted adults process and work through important conversations about domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and other forms of violence, with the youth in their lives. We know that these issues deeply impact our community.

Self Care

When you're having conversations or preparing to have conversations with your child(ren) or the youth you work with, remember your own self-care. If the conversation starts to feel overwhelming, be honest and tell them you need to take a break, and you can talk again later. Reach out to someone you trust to talk about how you are feeling.

Having conversations about any type of violence can feel heavy or uncomfortable. If you have experienced violence or abuse, it can be especially difficult to talk to your child(ren) about topics that remind you of your abuse.

As you are likely aware, a **trigger** is a connection to a traumatic event that may cause a deep and emotional reaction. Triggers can be smells, colors, songs, touches, and even certain words. Triggers can be anything, and there is no way to fully prevent a potential trigger.

Having these conversations with children and youth can bring up (or trigger) difficult feelings. These feelings are normal. To address these challenges, try building a system of support that helps you as you begin to explore more of these topics. These additional supports will aid in processing any hurtful reminders and understanding the responses you may have to them.

Supports may look like:

- Calling hotlines that specialize in domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking
- Reaching out to advocates at local domestic and sexual violence agencies
- Having a friend, a family member, or a partner that you can speak with
- Putting a pause on the discussion until you're emotionally ready to continue

You aren't alone, and you don't have to work through it alone. At the end of this guide, you will find information on resources in your community.



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Safe Haven is a safe place to visit, call, or text for help and support.

2627 Birchcrest Dr. SE (8a-5p) | Hotline: 616-452-6664 (24/7) | Webchat shmgr.org (24/7)

When Your Child Wants to Share

It is difficult to imagine that anyone would want to harm a child. But the truth is that there are many people who will. Sometimes, talking to children about topics addressed in this curriculum can lead to a child opening up about violence or abuse they have experienced. We call this “**making a disclosure.**”

It's usually difficult to receive this disclosure, but it's important to remember that this is a result of your support. The child felt safe enough to tell you. This is important because, all too often, children and teens don't initially disclose abuse out of fear.

Four important steps you can take following a disclosure:

1. Thank them for trusting you and let them know you believe them.
2. Let them know that what was done to them was not their fault and that you're sorry they were harmed.
3. Keep them away from the person who harmed them.
4. Seek professional help to support them.

Middle School Discussion Guide

My Voice Matters is a youth violence prevention program that teaches youth about healthy relationships, making wise choices, staying safe, and knowing how to get help if needed. The middle school curriculum uses engaging and interactive lessons to address the following topics: risk factors for violence, protective factors against violence, healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, red flag relationships, red flag situations, human trafficking, healthy boundaries, how to cope with difficult situations, safety planning, the importance of social norms, and how to get help for yourself or a friend.

Yes, that's a lot! That's why we put together this guide for the trusted adults in the lives of youth who participate in the program. We recommend using the information and discussion questions included in the guide to keep the conversations going, and build upon what was discussed in each lesson.

General Curriculum Outline:

It Takes a Whole Village

- Risk and Protective Factors
- Community Connectedness

Healthy, Unhealthy, and Dangerous Relationships (and situations)

- Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships
- Red Flag Feelings
- Human Trafficking

"My Voice Matters!"

- Healthy Boundaries
- Red Flag Feelings
- Trauma Responses
- Mindfulness and Coping Strategies

Making a Difference

- Social Norms
- Be an "Upstander"
- How to Get Help
- Support and Resources



It Takes a Whole Village

Key Terms and Ideas in this Lesson

Community Connectedness

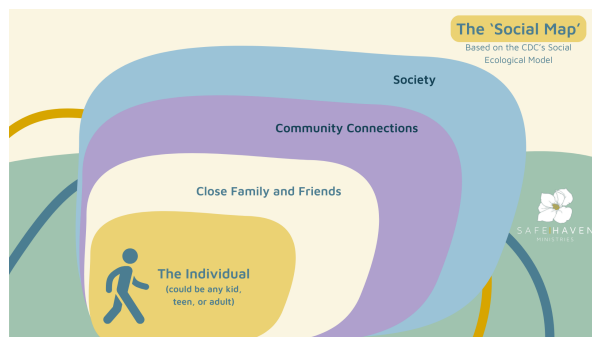
Protective Factors

Risk Factors

Social Map

Lesson Description

In this introductory lesson, your child(ren) will have learned about the importance of community connectedness, as one of many protective factors against violence. They will have also learned about risk factors, including some examples. In order to illustrate the way that our community impacts our overall health and safety, we discuss something called a 'social map' - adapted from [the CDC's Social Ecological Model](#).



Discussion Prompts (P) and Questions (Q)

1. P: Share one main idea you learned about risk and protective factors.
2. P: Name an example of a community connection. What community connections do you have?
3. Q: What are some other ways to get more involved in a/your community?
4. Q: Why is community so important?
5. Q: How can you use what you learned today to help you stay safe in relationships?

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Activities

Gratitude Note(s)

Think of at least one current community connection that is already a part of your child(ren)'s social map. Write a sincere note of gratitude to the staff or leaders that help make that opportunity possible. Ideas: teachers and other school staff, coaches, librarians/library staff, youth group leaders. These people don't hear "Thank you for what you do" as often as they could.

Get Connected

Brainstorm a list of 3 - 5 interesting community involvement opportunities. It's okay to add things that you are already participating in. Try to think of at least one new possibility.

An **online search for "youth groups in my area"** is a great place to start. You are likely to find a list of rec centers, youth groups and clubs, volunteer opportunities, youth events, and more. Many of these are intentionally low cost or free, to keep things as accessible as possible.

Invite one of your child(ren)'s friends or family members to come along to try something new or ask them to join an activity that your child(ren) is/are already involved in.

Healthy, Unhealthy, and Dangerous Relationships (and Situations)

Key Terms and Ideas in this Lesson

Healthy Relationships

Unhealthy Relationships

Green Flags / Red Flags

Human Trafficking

Lesson Description

A **healthy relationship** is one where everyone involved feels safe and is treated equally. An **unhealthy relationship** is one where at least one person involved feels unsafe and there is an imbalance or inequality between the members of the relationship. In the *My Voice Matters* (MVM) curriculum these two definitions are used as the starting point for understanding healthy relationships. Your child will have talked about different types of relationships (family, friends, and dating), and identified how they want to be treated in their relationships. This leads to an interactive discussion about green flags and red flags to look out for in relationships. The red flag conversation creates a smooth transition into discussing dangerous situations, including human trafficking.

Human trafficking is when someone uses **force**, **fraud**, or **coercion** to make another person participate in forced labor or commercial sex. Human trafficking is a serious danger to our community and can happen to anyone or any gender, race, or sexual orientation. It is important that we as a community educate our children about human trafficking, giving them skills to avoid dangerous situations, and seek help if needed. Youth participants will have learned about labor trafficking and sex trafficking, debunking several common myths. They have also identified and discussed their own *red flag feelings* using the *Think, Feel, Act* strategy to help avoid dangerous situations. As part of this lesson, youth identify safe people in their school/community and other resources they can turn to for help.

Discussion Prompts (P) and Questions (Q)

1. P: Explain the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
2. Q: What did you learn about...
 - ... red flags and green flags?
 - ... human trafficking?

Activities

What is Human Trafficking? - View and Discuss

Watch the [Human Trafficking](#) video together (Find a QR Code and site URL in Lesson Resources). Discuss your 'takeaways' (key points, new learning).

View and Discuss - Healthy Relationships

Watch the [Healthy Relationships](#) video together (Find a QR Code and site URL in Lesson Resources). Discuss any 'takeaways' (key points, new learning).

Make a List! Community Connections and Support

We talked about community connections and resources. Have a conversation about safe and trusted people, places, and resources. Make a list of these people, places, and resources, for your future reference, if ever needed. *Note: There is also a list of local, state, and national resources included at the end of this guide.*

Lesson Resources

[What is Human Trafficking? \(video\)](#) | <https://youtu.be/UeQfYOyvQlg>
by Childhelp (<https://www.childhelp.org/>)



Human Trafficking Overview

[Healthy Relationships video](#) | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldjZCvqhNWw>
By the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
(<https://www.missingkids.org/home>)

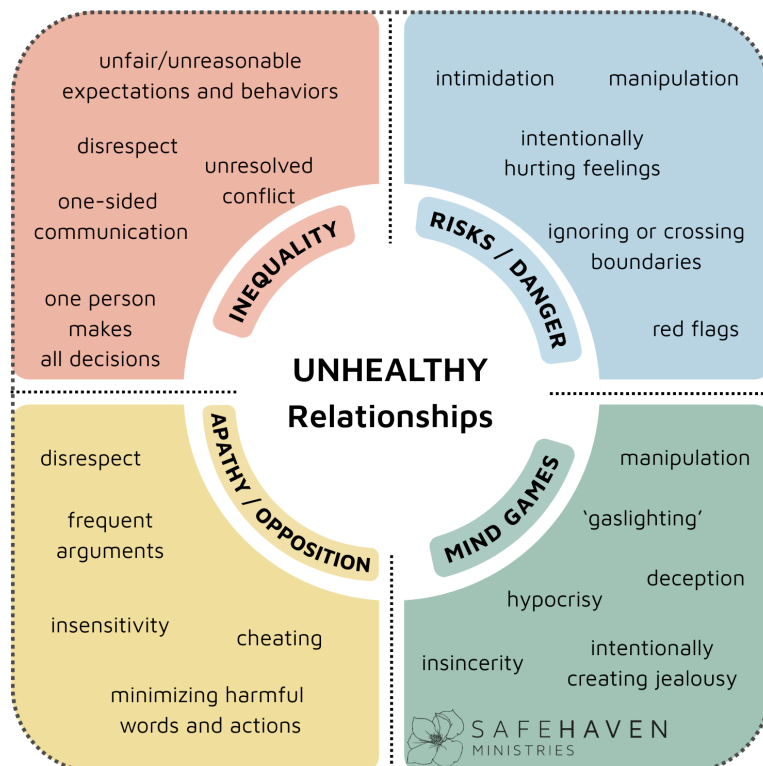


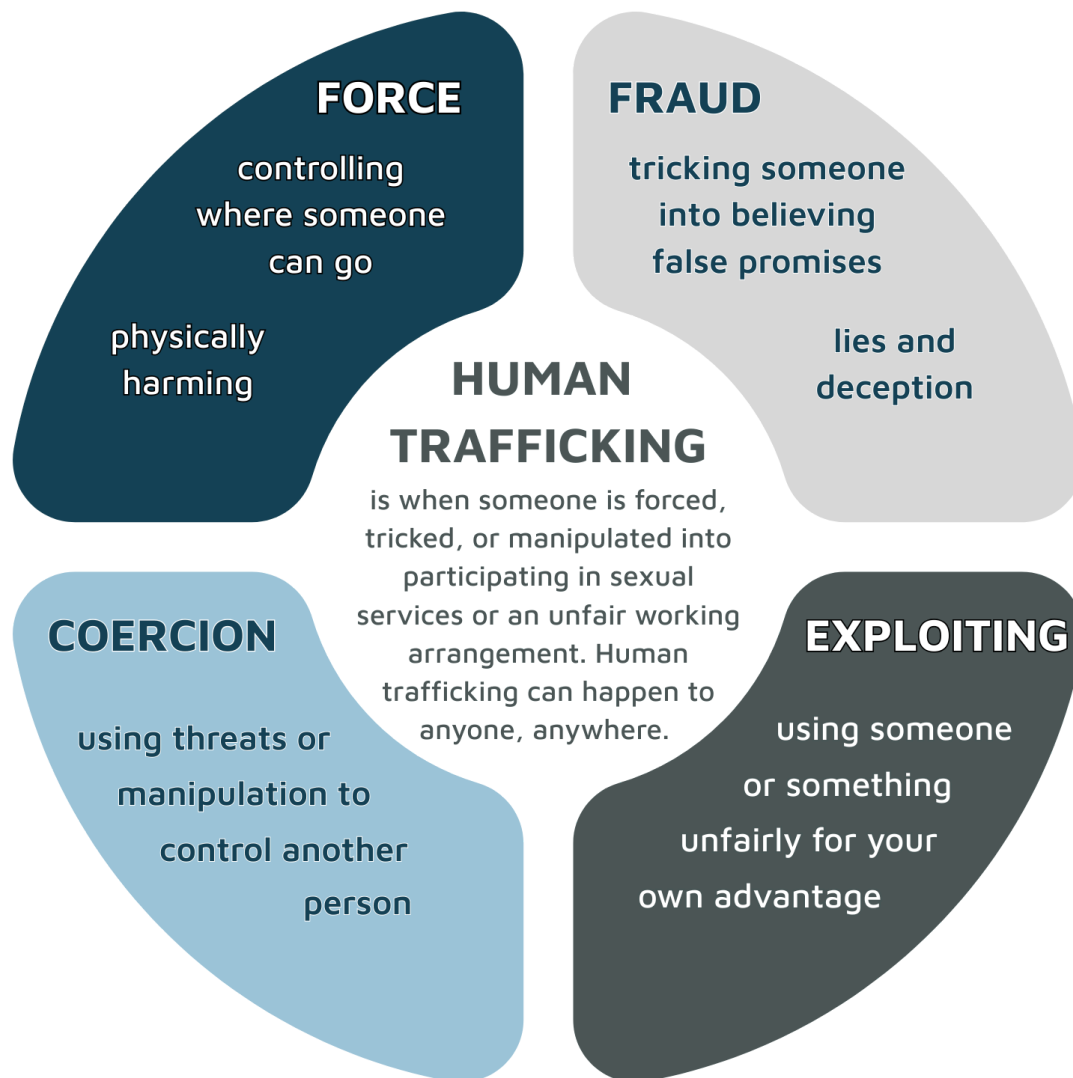
Healthy Relationships video
(NCMEC)

Healthy Relationship Characteristics



Unhealthy Relationship Characteristics





When the victim is a minor, the use of force, fraud, or coercion does not need to be proven for the act to be considered trafficking, particularly in cases of commercial sexual exploitation.



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My Voice Matters!

Key Terms and Ideas in this Lesson

Healthy Boundaries
Traumatic Events
Trauma Responses
Mindfulness
Coping Strategies
Safety Plan

Lesson Description

This lesson helps youth understand how **healthy boundaries** can help keep us safe in relationships. Your child(ren) will have identified what their personal boundaries are, and discussed how to recognize and respond if a boundary is crossed. As part of this conversation, we also discuss **coping strategies** and **safety plans**, which can be used as tools to keep us safe in any risky or dangerous situation we may find ourselves in. Your child(ren) will have also learned a general definition of trauma, and how even though our responses to traumatic events are not always what we would consider “normal,” these trauma responses are actually what our bodies and minds perceive to be safest in that moment.

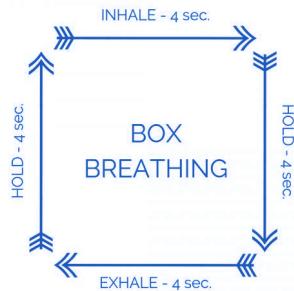
Discussion Prompts (P) and Questions (Q)

1. Q: Why are healthy boundaries important?
2. P: Tell me an example of a healthy boundary. It could be a personal boundary or just a general example.
3. Q: How might you respond - or what would you do - if someone crossed one of your boundaries?

Activity

Coping Strategy: Box Breathing

Coping strategies help us to regulate our emotions (and our responses to our emotions). We discussed several possible coping strategies, and practiced one. Have your child(ren) show you how box breathing works. Practice with them a few times. Ask them to tell you how this strategy can help keep someone safe.



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Making a Difference

Key Terms and Ideas in This Lesson

Social norms

Being an “Upstander”

Support and Resources

Lesson Description

Feeling supported by your friends and your community is important to nurturing a safe and supportive community. Sometimes when a friend needs help, it can be difficult to know what to say or do. During this lesson, we discussed what it means to be a good friend, including being kind, listening to understand, and offering to help. We also discussed basic **safety planning**. This includes identifying trusted adults, in addition to the community support and resources we talked about in a previous lesson.

Social norms are unwritten and unspoken rules that influence the way people behave. Your child will have learned what social norms are, and how harmful social norms and stereotypes can negatively impact our relationships and the community.

One of the best ways to make the community safer is to increase the number of people who are willing to step in if someone is being bullied or harassed. Stepping in to help someone is called **being an upstander**. Your child will have discussed how to be a friend to someone who has been bullied or harassed, how to interrupt bullying or harassment, and how to speak out against bullying and harassment.

Discussion Prompts (P) and Questions (Q)

1. Q: What would you do if you thought one of your friends was being hurt or was experiencing human trafficking?
2. P: Ask your child what would make them feel supported if they were being abused or if someone was trying to exploit them.
3. P: Talk about the local, state, and national resources listed at the end of this guide and how to get in touch with them. Also talk about trusted adults they could turn to for help.
4. P: Ask your child to teach you about social norms.
5. Q: Do you see any bullying or harassment at your school?
6. Q: What are some ways someone can be helpful, using what you learned about being an upstander?

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Activity

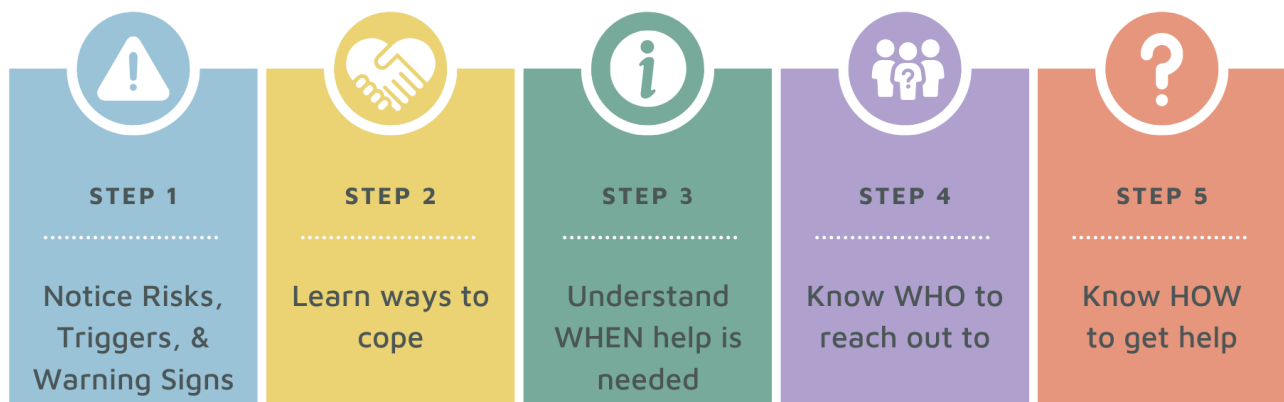
Safety Planning

Your child(ren) may have spent some time creating their own safety plan during this lesson (it is an optional activity). If they did create a safety plan, ask them to show you or tell you about what they wrote. If they didn't create one already, you can use the blank Safety Plan on the next page and create one together.

Note: Please make sure that your child is comfortable doing this activity with you. For many people, safety planning is a personal process that they would prefer to keep to themselves.

Lesson Resources

Youth Safety Plan



The image above outlines the 5 main steps to take when developing a safety plan.

My Safety Plan

A **Safety Plan** is used to help keep someone safe when they are in a risky or dangerous situation. We have to know when to use a safety plan. That's why we start with triggers and warning signs.

"I should use my safety plan when I am in a 'red flag' situation, or if I have 'red flag feelings' about something."

My **Red Flag Triggers** and **Warning Signs**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What can I do when I feel unsafe or triggered?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

These are some **coping strategies** I can try if I feel unsafe or triggered:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Here are some of my **safe places and trusted adults**:

Safe Places:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Trusted Adults:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Glossary of Terms

Being an Upstander	When someone who observes harassment chooses to step in to help the person who is being harassed
Boundaries	Limits and rules we set in our relationships to make sure they stay healthy and safe
Bullying	When someone who is stronger or has more power acts aggressively towards another person over and over again, or could repeat the action over and over again
Coercion	Using threats or manipulation to control someone else
Commercial Sex	Exchanging something valuable (such as shelter, money, or drugs) for sexual acts
Disclosure	Something (such as information) that is made known or revealed
Domestic Violence	A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner
Exploitation	When someone benefits from causing harm to others
Force	Physically harming someone or controlling where they can go
Forced labor	Making someone work against their will, making them work without pay, or making them work in order to "pay off a debt."
Fraud	Making false promises or claims about things like how much someone will get paid, working conditions, love, marriage, etc.
Grooming	Manipulative behavior an abuser or trafficker uses to gain the trust of a potential victim, convincing them to go along with whatever the abuser/trafficker wants
Healthy Relationship	A relationship where everyone involved feels safe and is treated equally

Human Trafficking	When someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to make another person participate in forced labor or commercial sex
Safety Plan	A step-by-step plan to help us stay safe when dealing with difficult, risky, or dangerous situations and emotions – These plans often deal with risky or dangerous situations like abuse, bullying, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts.
Sextortion	Sexual exploitation targeting children and teens using manipulation, threats, and blackmail to get money, sexual content, or sexual activity
Sexual Harassment	A type of sexual violence involving unwanted physical, verbal, or written sexual advances, OR any harassment related to a person's perceived gender or sexual orientation
Sexual Violence	Any sexual act committed or attempted by another person against an individual who has not freely given consent or is unable to consent or refuse – This includes both unwanted sexual contact and sexual harassment.
Social Norms	The unwritten or unspoken rules that influence how people in a society behave
Trusted Adult	An adult that a young person trusts to help them if they have questions, experience red flag feelings, and when they aren't sure what to do

Additional Resources

This guide was created with the intent to give people who care for children and youth the tools to talk about subjects that often are avoided. Having these kinds of conversations can seem challenging at times. Do your best to speak to kids from a place of concern and care.

If you or someone that you know has experienced or is experiencing violence, abuse, or human trafficking, the following local resources can provide free and confidential support:

Local

Safe Haven Ministries

Website: www.shmgr.org

24/7 Hotline: 616- 452- 6664

YWCA West Central Michigan

Website: www.ywcawcmi.org

24/7 Hotline: 616-454 -9922

Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County

Website: www.cac-kent.org

Telephone Number: 616-336-5160

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Website: www.hispanic-center.org

Telephone Number: 616-742-0200

Network 180,

Kent County Mental Health Authority

Website: www.network180.org

24/7 Hotline: 616-336-3909

the bridge of Arbor Circle

Website: www.arborcircle.org/the-bridge

Telephone Number: 616-451-3001

AYA Youth Collective

Website: www.ayayouth.org

Telephone Number: 616-406-3945

State and National

Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence

Website: www.mcedsv.org

24/7 Hotline: 855-864-2376

24/7 Textline: 866-238-1454

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Website: <https://www.rainn.org/>

24/7 Hotline: 800-656-4673

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Website:

www.humantraffickinghotline.org

24/7 Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

24/7 Textline: 233733

love is respect

Website: loveisrespect.org

24/7 Hotline: 866-331-9474

24/7 Textline: text "LOVEIS" to 22522

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Website: 988lifeline.org

24/7 Hotline/Textline: 988

The Trevor Project

Website: www.thetrevorproject.org

24/7 Hotline: 1-866-488-7386

24/7 Textline: 678-678

