

## Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

- Dr. Kineka Hull: [00:03](#) Welcome to Elevate Youth Programming, a podcast for adolescent pregnancy prevention programs and other youth-serving agencies. In each episode, we will discuss best practices, tips, and strategies to strengthen your programming. Each episode will cover a specific topic discussed with experts from the field. Listen along as our guests join me to discuss these relevant topics. I'm your host, Dr. Kineka Hull. [00:00:30] Personal Responsibility Education Program providers are in a unique position to build relationships that foster trust and create a safe space for youth to share their experiences. This may include self-disclosures or signs of human trafficking. PREP programming presents an opportunity to prevent risky situations proactively by providing information and resources to build youth's life skills, [00:01:00] discussing tactics used by traffickers, emphasizing the importance of seeking help when needed, and reporting suspected instances of human trafficking. In this episode, we speak with Dr. Stacey Cutbush and Leanne Desselle to learn tips and strategies to recognize signs of youth who have experienced or are at risk [00:01:30] of experiencing human trafficking, and ways to support youth.
- [01:34](#) Dr. Cutbush has 20 years of experience conducting research evaluation and providing training and technical assistance in the fields of violence and victimization, including human trafficking, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, teen dating violence, school-based violence and mental health. She currently serves as the project director for the National Institute [00:02:00] of Justice-funded evaluation of the California Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Grant program, and the Office of Victims of Crime-funded Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance project.
- [02:17](#) Leanne Desselle is a training and technical assistant provider whose work is informed by her experience as a former practitioner where she managed and implemented multidisciplinary victim [00:02:30] service programs. She has been a featured expert speaker, trainer and technical assistance consultant for national organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the US Bureau of Justice Assistance, The US Office of Victims of Crimes, Freedom Network USA, the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center, and the HEAL Network.
- [02:57](#) So welcome to the Elevate Youth Podcast, [00:03:00] Leanne and Stacey. I'm excited to speak with you today. How are you?
- Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [02:57](#) It's a good day, thank you.

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- Leanne Desselle: [03:06](#) Yeah, glad to get to talk to you today.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [03:07](#) Perfect. So let's jump right in. If you would please each tell our listeners and me a little bit about yourself and some of the work that you do.
- Leanne Desselle: [03:17](#) Hey y'all, my name is Leanne McCallum Desselle. I use she/her pronouns and I am a research analyst and training and technical assistance provider at RTI International. I have a background [00:03:30] doing anti-trafficking collaborative response work on the ground through Office for Victims of Crime grants. So I've been a task force coordinator, I've managed human trafficking multidisciplinary teams, and now at RTI I take that practice experience on the ground and help other providers do that work themselves, offering my experience along with some of the research I do on human trafficking.
- Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [03:54](#) My name is Stacey Cutbush Starseed, and I'm a senior research scientist at RTI [00:04:00] International. Most of my work involves research evaluation and training and technical assistance around human trafficking, and more narrowly, child trafficking victimization.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [04:08](#) Perfect. I was so excited to find you on our internal network at RTI. I think that the expertise and the information that you have to share will be of great value to our listeners. So let's start with a couple of definitions just to make sure that we are using the correct terminology throughout our conversation and for our listeners [00:04:30] throughout their work. So can you give us a couple of definitions about minor or child trafficking? If there are any differences between the words trafficking, survival sex, and prostitution of children?
- Leanne Desselle: [04:44](#) I would be happy to share some definitions. We really follow the Trafficking Victim's Protection Act of 2000. So that's our federal human trafficking definition for sex trafficking. That's the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, [00:05:00] patronizing, soliciting or advertising of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act in which that sex act is induced by forced broader coercion. So basically what that means is a person is forced, which is physical force, tricked or coerced, so that mental, emotional control, through one of those means to provide a commercial sex act. And that can be trading a sex act for anything of value, whether that's money, a place to stay, drugs, [00:05:30] it can look like anything depending on the person. And for sex trafficking, if a person's under the age of 18, any commercial sex act, regardless of that forced fraud or coercion is considered sex trafficking.

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[05:43](#) So there's no such thing as a child prostitute, for example. We really erase the P word from our vocabulary because a child legally can't consent to engage in a commercial sex act. So they're a victim of a crime regardless. And for labor trafficking, it's the same [00:06:00] federal definition with that recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion. And that means there's no special exception for children when it comes to the labor. If there's physical force, mental or emotional coercion or fraud through trickery, that is considered trafficking.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [06:23](#) So with those definitions in mind, thank you, that was very helpful. Let's talk about marginalized populations [00:06:30] and how they might be uniquely impacted.

Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [06:34](#) There's a lot to consider when it comes to marginalized populations. It is widely documented in the anti-trafficking field that human trafficking disproportionately impacts communities that have been historically, politically, socially, and economically marginalized. Including Black, indigenous and persons of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA and two-feather persons, [00:07:00] foreign nationals, and those who are experiencing economic insecurities such as food scarcity or unstable housing. Our research consistently demonstrates that there's an over-representation of Black, indigenous and people of color, children as trafficking victims, and in addition, children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or queer-questioning, and two-spirit. Those are also over-represented among child trafficking [00:07:30] victims.

[07:31](#) We also know that children whose first language is not English or those who are foreign nationals are placed at increased risk for trafficking victimizations and that those persons experience multifaceted vulnerabilities to trafficking and attendant challenges. And finally, we know that system-involved youth such as children who touch base with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems are also at increased risk. In addition to increased vulnerabilities that marginalized populations [00:08:00] experience that place them at higher risk for trafficking victimization, systemic and personal biases and discrimination also impact the experiences and outcomes of trafficking survivors who are seeking services.

[08:13](#) So I think it's perhaps more common for folks to consider logistical barriers that marginalized populations may face such as transportation challenges or lack of affordable or reliable childcare. But it's also important for us to talk about the

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structural barriers [00:08:30] that may interfere with access to services and equity of services. The general barriers for survivors of trafficking accessing services have been well-documented, yet less is known about the experiences of human trafficking survivors actually seeking and receiving those services and how their intersecting identities impact their subsequent service access and uptake, which really signals to us the importance of listening to survivors experiences and decisions involving [00:09:00] services and referral barriers.

[09:03](#)

That's a place where we really need to continue to advance the field in terms of ensuring that survivors are able to receive services in ways that meaningfully consider, and are responsive to their lived realities, including some of those markers or experiences like disabilities, race, ethnicity, primary language spoken, gender and sex identity, trauma histories and more. So there's a lot to consider beyond just the increased [00:09:30] vulnerabilities that place certain youth at greater risk for trafficking victimization, but also the experiences that they face when trying to seek help for healing and trauma recovery.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[09:42](#)

Thank you for that. And so I know we recently did a podcast on housing insecurity. We also recently did a podcast on youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities or IDD, and so we touched on some of this. And one thing that we really dove into [00:10:00] was how even though these are documented, they are severely under-reported, as you state, in several instances, and so why might it be difficult to identify child trafficking victimization. Thank you for that. And so I know we recently did a podcast on housing insecurity and youth in out-of-home settings and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and both of those we [00:10:30] had guests on the podcast who have lived. And so we talked about not necessarily saying lived experience because everybody has some type of lived experience you have lived. And one thing that they really talked about was making sure that when you do show up, like you said, to provide this service or to provide this support, that it is not a tokenized best practice, that you have actually thought about that wraparound need or [00:11:00] what that individual person needs to meet them where they are.

And so like you said, "If I'm showing up for services, do you have someone who speaks my language? Do you have someone who has things that are culturally and inclusively responsive to my needs?" And so I like how you said that if you're showing up and you're not able to meet that need, chances are I'm not going to come back and that's going to be a missed opportunity to impact the [00:11:30] life of a young person. But even with

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these things being documented, sometimes there are some things that we miss, and so we have a lot of cases or instances that are under-reported. Can you talk a little bit about why it may be difficult to identify a young person who may be being victimized and trafficked? What are some things that we may not recognize that we should recognize?

Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [11:57](#)

It's difficult to identify trafficking [00:12:00] victimization for a variety of reasons which Leanne can discuss, but what I would first just say is that there's a real need for quick and efficient and accurate human trafficking screening and identification tools. Those have proliferated over the last decade. However, only a subset of those tools are targeted to identifying the trafficking victimization of minors or youth, and only a subset of those tools have been scientifically validated. So if and when [00:12:30] you get to the point where you are ready to conduct a formal screening or identification process, which is what we would ultimately recommend as best practice, it is important to find a validated tool to ensure that that tool has been tested to make sure that it's accurately capturing what it is supposed to capture, what it's intended to capture. And it's also important to recognize that appropriate screening tools will vary [00:13:00] by age, right?

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That the types of questions that we might ask a 15 or 16-year-old are going to be very different than what we might ask a five-year-old. And so it is really important to make sure that you have appropriate training or that you are referring the child to a person who has appropriate training that can ask the right questions without traumatizing the child. One example could be of a young child who's being trafficked that is five years old, for example, [00:13:30] they're told they're going on a vacation and their vacation is going to a different family member's home. And what's really happening there is trafficking victimization.

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So if they say to you, "Well, yeah, I went on vacation last week. That's why I was gone from school all week." It really takes a trained professional to be able to get to the right questions for a specific child at a specific age and a specific circumstance. So we just really want to make a plug to ensure that appropriately trained professionals are asking the questions, [00:14:00] the right questions, the right way at the right time for children who you are concerned may be experiencing trafficking victimization or are at risk of trafficking victimization.

Leanne Desselle: [14:11](#)

I would love to sort of build on what Stacey just said, which is that so much of the onus when we think about human trafficking is on survivors to come forward and tell us, "Oh, I'm a

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survivor. I need help, I need services." And for those of us who have worked in the field, that's simply not the way that most victims present [00:14:30] to us or survivors present to us. Many don't recognize that they're victims of human trafficking either because of internalized victim blaming, they blame themselves for what happened or the way that society or their traffickers have interacted with them, have reinforced these ideas. "Oh, well, I used substances so I should have known better." Or, "I'm not a US citizen, so this is what happens when you cross a border." And those are some barriers.

[14:57](#)

And then also trauma, the way that trauma [00:15:00] manifests. The human trafficking in their life may not be the most traumatic thing happening to them, and so for some people it may be easier to engage in that trafficking experience than it is to go home to an abusive family or to something else that's happening. And so the onus really should be on us as providers, as researchers, to find those indicators of trafficking and to do the work of supporting those folks regardless of whether they self-identify or not for us.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[15:30](#)

[00:15:30] Thank you. That's powerful. Both of you have mentioned indicators of trafficking. Can you tell us a little bit more about those indicators please?

Dr. Stacey Cutbush:

[15:38](#)

Sure, I'd be happy to. As a science-based organization, we encourage the use of science-based risk factors to support the identification of youth who are at a higher risk for experiencing trafficking victimization. Some of those evidence-based indicators include youth who have experienced homelessness, and particularly [00:16:00] those who have multiple runaway episodes. Research consistently demonstrates that the longer a child is on the run that their risk for trafficking victimization increases exponentially. Another indicator is youth who are or have been in out-of-home care, for example, like a congregate care or group home setting, or foster care. Youth who are undocumented are also at high risk.

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We've discussed previously [00:16:30] that Black, indigenous and youth of color are at high risk. In addition, that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer-questioning, two-feather youth are at higher risk. Youth who have disabilities, survivors of other crimes, particularly child abuse, child maltreatment, including all types of maltreatment. So neglect, physical abuse, psychological abuse, child sexual abuse, and children who have experienced sexual assault as teenagers, [00:17:00] youth who are juvenile justice involved, those who are in poverty or experiencing economic need, and youth who have family

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members engaged in sex work. To date, our research suggests these are the highest indicators that place youth at the highest risk for trafficking victimization.

Leanne Desselle:

[17:16](#)

One thing that I often hear from folks in the field is, "Why shouldn't we use red flags? Why don't we look for behaviors or what I can look at to identify trafficking?" And [00:17:30] unfortunately, it's really hard to look at somebody and say, "Oh, that person's being trafficked." And unfortunately, a lot of that idea that we can identify folks in public spaces just by looking at them, has been perpetuated through stereotypes and myths and misconceptions around anti-trafficking because some of these misconceptions are rooted in historical racism, xenophobia, and sexism. And so now we're in 2024, and we're still seeing the reverberations [00:18:00] of the way that those approaches started all the way back then before we even used the words of anti-human trafficking or human trafficking to respond. And so in the early days when we were first understanding human trafficking, it was in the early 1900s around the Mann Act, also known as the White Slavery Act.

[18:21](#)

And essentially it was a response to fears around white women who were being sexually coerced or losing their [00:18:30] purity to men of color particularly and immigrant men. And so it criminalized crossing state lines for impure or immoral reasons, and it was disproportionately used to criminalize men of color. And so we see the reverberations of this all the way to the early 2000s When we look at really famous movies like Taken in which white women are kidnapped by men of color or foreign nationals. They're desperate to escape, they're being physically restrained, [00:19:00] and then law enforcement come in and save them. In reality, that just does not align with the experiences of the vast majority of folks we work with. Disproportionately, we're working with survivors who are of marginalized identities. Many are not being physically maintained in their trafficking experience. There was a study done with the National Human Trafficking Hotline several years ago in which they asked survivors what forms of force fraud and coercion they were experiencing.

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The most common experience [00:19:30] of control was coercion, that mental emotional control. And so this goes back to those red flags. If we think that we can look at trafficking and see trafficking, we're going to miss those folks who aren't white women or female-identifying folks. We're going to miss those folks who are not being controlled through physical force, but instead are being controlled through mental emotional control or fraud or trickery. And so this movement to really be focused



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on evidence-based indicators [00:20:00] and to do screening and assessment is to ensure that we're not employing these stereotyping and potentially harmful norms that we used in the past.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

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That is such great information. But you're right, when we think about someone who is being trafficked, we think about someone who has been taken. And I think that as I've been trying to expand my knowledge on human trafficking, I think one of the things that was most eye-opening to me is what you just said, a good proportion [00:20:30] is the coercion and that people can actually be trafficked in place. And so I think that that is something that we need to dispel some of the myths and get that information out there to make sure that people understand that all of it is extreme. Any type of trafficking, especially when we're dealing with young people is extreme, but it's not going to always be the "Taken" part like you emphasize.

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And so I think that gives us a good way [00:21:00] to realize that there are young people who we probably see every day and don't recognize some of these indicators who could actually benefit from our services, and us just being a little bit more vigilant. And so I know a lot of the screening tools that you mentioned are for practitioners and hospitals and things, but as teachers, we may not necessarily be able to go through a whole screener. But we might be able to recognize some changes in behaviors, [00:21:30] whether it be absenteeism, whether it be all of a sudden someone who we know typically does not have extravagant gifts or items, any changes from personality, picking up and knowing the young person that you are interacting with. Are there any other things that our listeners could be mindful of?

Dr. Stacey Cutbush:

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You're thinking about it the right way. For teachers to be just looking for any changes in a youth's presentation, how they're interacting, how [00:22:00] they're showing up, some potential examples of situations that might raise concerns if a teacher has a relationship with a student such that these conversations are possible. But if an employer is refusing to provide a signed contract or forces a contract in a language someone can't understand, or if a youth is charged a fee for the opportunity to have a job. Or as you mentioned that a youth is being showered with, [00:22:30] you're seeing more gifts or money, particularly if it's from someone much older than them through a romantic relationship, the youth is talking about a job that just seems too good to be true. Those are some situations that certainly warrant some attention.



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And of course, if a youth discloses or talks to a teacher or alludes about any abuse or exploitive situations at home, it's really important that educators do just that and they educate themselves [00:23:00] as well so that they understand what trauma bonding looks like and how to really listen to a potential survivor and believe them no matter what they're telling. And that's something in our work we see a lot that in some instances we may not be able to get to the heart of whether that child was actually trafficked or not. But we do become very clear through processes of investigation by appropriately trained professionals that this youth has experienced harm, [00:23:30] and that the youth needs services and support. And so really being sure that you are engaging persons with appropriate training to ask the right questions that won't create more trauma for that youth or that child, because certainly we don't ever want to require that they tell their story as that can exacerbate any trauma they're already experiencing. And a lot of times it's really just about connecting that young person to services to ensure that they can start [00:24:00] their road to recovery.

Leanne Desselle:

[24:01](#)

One thing that immediately comes to my mind is just how important teachers are in kids' lives and youth's lives. So many of the folks on the ground who I've worked with in the past said that the disclosures that came to them for children came through teachers because teachers spend so much time, they really get to know these kids, and in many times they're a safe adult that is a positive influence. And so teachers really are perfectly positioned for a disclosure because [00:24:30] of that relational component. So I just want to empower any teachers or mentors or folks working with young people in those sorts of relationships to know that the relationship is the tool to support a young person to potentially disclose. And then just like Stacey said, being a really positive person who takes that disclosure and believes them and encourages them and says, "Thank you for sharing. That's so hard. Can I offer you support?" Is the perfect way to respond.

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And also, teachers are so busy. [00:25:00] There's so much on your plates, there's so much training to do. And so just knowing you never have to go it alone. Almost every community across the United States right now has some type of service provider or collaborative response group, like a multidisciplinary team or a task force who's responding to cases of trafficking. So just know you don't have to do it alone. Get connected with those partners in your community now so when you come across one of those kids, I like to say your spidey senses are tingling. You just [00:25:30] know something's going on that that kiddo may

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not be disclosing to you, that you have those partners that you can call and say, "Hey, this is what I've seen. What do you think? What should I do next?"

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Because they can help you, first of all, follow mandated reporting guidelines. And then second of all, consider how you might connect that child to services to make sure that they're getting the care that they need in a way that's evidence-based, that's not tokenizing or based on racial biases, and that's really built in the [00:26:00] current practices for healing and support for young folks who've been exploited.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[26:04](#)

Thank you. I love that. No re-traumatization. And I like how you said, Stacey, not making someone retell their story, right? And believing them when they are disclosing. That can be re-traumatizing, and that is not something that we ever want to do to a young person. So I always fall back to the basic public health tenets of a three-tiered system of prevention. And [00:26:30] so we're going to talk about these three tiers in some ways that our listeners can infuse the knowledge that you're going to provide to them to be a better support to young people. So we all know that the first level is primary prevention, so that's education, increase of protective factors, building capacity of programs. We talked about indicators, not red flags, of how to recognize youth who may need support. What are some ways that our listeners might be able to increase their [00:27:00] knowledge of human trafficking, build the capacity of their programs? You also talked a little bit about policies and procedures. What are some tips that you would give them to get started?

Leanne Desselle:

[27:10](#)

I would say a great place to start is to get training from a reputable source about human trafficking. So whether that's a federally-funded service provider in your community, or using the Health and Human Services SOAR to Health and Wellness web-based learning tool. I think they have a module specifically [00:27:30] for teachers as well, and that's a training that's created by survivors and experts in the field, was just revamped really recently and is available in English and Spanish. That's an example of a really great place to start is to really understand what trafficking looks like and also what it doesn't look like. And then get partnering, go find those partners in your community so you can figure out where you fit into this puzzle of supporting survivors because many of the survivors we serve have many different needs.

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So they have multiple types [00:28:00] of trauma happening, they may be system-engaged, so we need everyone at the table.

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We need our educators, our social service providers, sometimes our law enforcement and prosecutors, juvenile justice. So absolutely our teachers and education sector have a seat at that table and that helps improve outcomes for those young folks when they've got that wraparound holistic care. And then I would say too, ensuring that you know the basics of being trauma-informed and trauma responsive in your day-to-day [00:28:30] because disclosure is not very likely for all different crimes, but particularly for trafficking because youth are very unlikely to know what's happening to them. So understanding that because disclosure is not the goal, being trauma-informed, knowing how to respond to disclosures, knowing how to do safety planning or engaging in trust-based relational interviewing or some of those modalities.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [28:54](#) It's a good way to listen to hear, not always respond, [00:29:00] and I think that is a good hallmark for a trusted adult. We know we need to respond, but sometimes we immediately jump into that reactive mode. You have to be able to stay calm, to listen, to provide support. But then sometimes as you're doing that investigation, as Stacey said, you have to know how to steer the conversation to make sure that you're getting the right information that you need to be of support or service.

Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [29:28](#) I just would also emphasize too [00:29:30] though, as a former teacher myself, a former public high school teacher I can relate to, we're required to know about so many things. Not only our content, but so many other aspects of child well-being that it can become overwhelming. And if at any point during this podcast you have felt overwhelmed, "This is just too much. What if I get it wrong? I don't even know how to start this conversation."

[29:55](#) We want to remind you that you don't need to be the one to have it, but to be that [00:30:00] trusted adult that can notice if something looks off. And one of the things I used to do is just put a sticky note on my student's desk and say, "Can you come touch base with me for a moment right outside?" You never want to sort of put that kid on the spot, say, "See me outside." And just say, "Hey, I noticed that you're looking X-Y-Z." Maybe, "I noticed that you're really tired a lot lately. I noticed that I haven't seen that smile come out in a long time. I'm worried about you," [00:30:30] or, "I care about you."

[30:31](#) And not even to maybe fish for that disclosure, but, "I want to remind you that you don't have to do this alone. Whatever it is you're going through, can I connect you to someone to talk?" Even as we talk and discuss the various ways to ask questions or

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support trafficking victims that teachers don't have to be the be-all and end-all and know how to do this, but to recognize and refer. Recognize and refer. Many schools have social workers or other types [00:31:00] of support services, even if they're only present half the day or a couple times a week, to be able to make sure that you connect that student that you're concerned about to an appropriately trained support staff.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[31:12](#)

Thank you for that. So let's talk about that reporting. So that's our secondary prevention, mandated reporting, good policies, first responses. And so a lot of our listeners may be teachers, others may be facilitators or community-based organizations or other youth servant [00:31:30] providers who don't always have the policies and procedures already established like sometimes schools do in those built-in support systems. What should they do if they are concerned that a young person they're working with may be a victim or survivor of trafficking, and how might they create their own policies when they don't have a school systems in place to support them?

Dr. Stacey Cutbush:

[31:52](#)

I think first and foremost, recognizing that youth choice is a critical component of healing, [00:32:00] that the youth themselves really need to be in a position where they feel empowered and in control. We're talking about youth whose power and control have essentially been stripped to them, their own sense of autonomy over their bodies and their lives. So making sure that that young person is in the driver's seat in terms of who they disclose to, what they disclose and when is fundamental to continue to maintain that trust.

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Because of trauma [00:32:30] bonding, it could be the case that that young person is not ready to disclose or has very real fears that should be attended to. It may not be an optimal situation for a full disclosure for any variety of reasons, including everything from potentially receiving more trauma and abuse to being deported. And so we really have to trust that young person and stand by them and let them know that we have their back, that we're there, if [00:33:00] and when they want to disclose any level of information that we'll be there to listen to support them. But really trying to draw it forth or push them is potentially going to backfire in harmful ways.

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And at the end of the day, our guiding mantra really needs to be, "Do no harm." And so when we're talking about situations involving mandated reporting, it is important to let that child know, "I do need to let you know that I am a mandated reporter. So if you tell me somebody is hurting you [00:33:30] or that you think you're hurting yourself, I will be required to tell

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this information," so that they understand what they can tell you and what they can't if they don't want that information further disclosed. And I know that's sometimes a hard thing for maybe some adults to recognize that we have the best of intentions, but that sort of turns into this savior complex where you want to go in and save this child or rescue this child, and that's not really appropriate in this situation. We really [00:34:00] need these children to feel empowered, that we're listening, that we're here, we can talk about situations and behaviors that are okay and that aren't okay to ensure they recognize what abuse looks like, but they ultimately need to be the arbiter of those decisions themselves.

Leanne Desselle:

[34:15](#)

There's always opportunity for youth voice and choice. It may not be the two best options, but giving that back to the young person or child is always going to make the situation a bit better. So a good example is if [00:34:30] the child does disclose something and you have to report through mandated reporting guidelines for your jurisdiction, you can even say, "I'm so thankful you told me this. Because I'm a teacher, I'm going to have to report this. Would you like to make the call with me or would you prefer I did it alone? Would you like to write down the things you'd like to share, or would you prefer to listen?"

[34:54](#)

So even just those micro moments of, "This or that? Do you want to sit in this chair [00:35:00] or that chair?" All of those are giving that power back to that young person. So even when we're doing something that's causing a bit of discomfort, we're still letting them be in the driver's seat. And so I want to encourage folks that it's so scary balancing engaging child welfare systems, listening to the child, it's okay to do both and to sort of sit in that discomfort in the middle and know that there's always opportunity to engage that young person.

Dr. Stacey Cutbush:

[35:25](#)

That's such a great point. We also need to recognize that a lot of [00:35:30] cases of trafficking victimization are in fact perpetrated by a family member or somebody that lives in the home. I think another popular misconception going back to a point made earlier is the stranger danger, right? That it's this third party that's going to come in and take this child away and that in fact, we have very, very few research studies that have been published. But among those that have been published, estimates suggest that roughly 20 to 30%, [00:36:00] and again, these are local studies, these are not national prevalence estimates. But roughly 20 to 30% of identified, verified child trafficking cases are in fact perpetrated by a family member.

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And so some of those mandated reporting cases, if there's a call made home to say, "Hey, your child told me today about some really terrible things that have happened to them." And in fact, if you think you're doing that child a favor by reporting it to their parent, it could in fact backfire terribly, right? That [00:36:30] child could be put in much greater harm. So once again, that's the reason why we really want to encourage and empower teachers to connect with appropriately trained professionals within your school who can help you navigate those situations rather than just picking up the phone call and calling home and disclosing some information that could put that child at greater risk.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[36:51](#)

So let's talk about the reporting and the supportive services. And so that's our tertiary prevention and [00:37:00] a lot of our grantees or facilitators or other youth serving agencies who are listening are looking for partners. And so you said you don't have to do it alone. There may be partners in your community or your local area who can assist you, especially when it comes to staying abreast on trauma-informed approaches or doing that referral. So what tips or strategies would you give to our listeners on building the right team to make sure that if they do recognize [00:37:30] some of these indicators and find a young person to support, they already have mechanisms in place to call on and include the right people?

Leanne Desselle:

[37:39](#)

This is such a good question, and the place I want to start is actually an anecdote. Two weeks ago, one of my best friends in the world who's a teacher in Washington state gave me a call in a panic that a child in her school might be experiencing trafficking, and she wanted some advice. "What do I do?" And so I asked her, "Well, what have [00:38:00] you done?" She said, "Well, we followed our protocol for engaging at-risk youth, so we did mandated reporting. We got connected with her court-appointed advocate," and the list went on and on. And the thing that struck me was, "Wow, you had all the tools in your tool belt already. You did everything right." And so that's the place I want to start is sometimes folks get worried, "Oh, I don't know how to serve trafficking survivors. That's really scary. The needs, I'm not sure what to do." In reality, so many teachers already have it [00:38:30] in them.

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They know how to report, they know how to connect to communities, and these young folks are likely going to need some of the exact same services that other young folks who are at risk or engaging in risky behavior or maybe engaging in truancy are already in your tool belt. So that's the first place is you've got some of those connections, so use those when

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possible. The second piece that I would say for trafficking survivors is oftentimes these are young folks with complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and their trauma may manifest [00:39:00] in a lot of different ways. And sometimes that can mean that the trauma is manifesting in particularly challenging ways that they may not succeed in programs that other youth do.

[39:11](#)

So that's when you want to get really specialized with your trafficking partners in the field. So making sure that you've got connections if you've got a local children's advocacy center or you have any partners who do outreach to runaway or homeless youth, if you've got [00:39:30] local organizations that do sexual violence response. Those are the folks that you want to start with if you don't have a trafficking-specific task force or service provider, and then ask them what are the services available for clients with complex needs. Oftentimes that's a great place to start.

Dr. Stacey Cutbush:

[39:49](#)

You asked earlier, Kineka, about, you mentioned some of the policies or the protocols that we've referred to. We support a lot of state agencies who are developing local protocols to support trafficking identification and response. And what we see that tends [00:40:00] to work well is having a crisis response protocol and then also a non-crisis response protocol, perhaps if there's support staff at your school capable of building something like that out. And I think that really speaks to the way Leanne just mapped a bunch of providers supports systems. That's essentially what that is. It's a mapping exercise to say, "If this child is in crisis right now and this [00:40:30] child's not going on to fifth period right now, we've got to do something about this right now," that here are the steps we need to take.

[40:37](#)

Map out, step one. Who's making that phone call and who does it go to? What happens next? And then similarly, a non-crisis response protocol that, "This needs to happen, but we're not going to solve the world's problems today and we can make this phone call tomorrow." So I think it's really important to sort of map out the flow chart, if you will, of who's going to take what actions and in what order so [00:41:00] that you are prepared if and when you see those indicators or if you have an actual disclosure.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[41:06](#)

I think one of my favorite anecdotal sayings is, "Smarter not harder." And so like you said, you don't have to build this on your own, especially if you're a small agency or community-based organization, especially if you're working in a school



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system. Put that in your memorandum of understanding. That said, do you mind sharing with me your policy so that we can tweak this for our [00:41:30] agency? Or as you're looking for individuals who might serve on your community advisory board or being in your referral network, ask them, "Do you currently have a protocol that you can infuse my agency into so we can piggyback off of some of the things that you're doing?" Or, "In exchange for us coming to your school to provide this health education class, do you mind if we somehow put into our MOU that when you train your teachers on some of these policies and procedures that you [00:42:00] train us too, and we'll exchange some type of training on something that we have?"

[42:04](#) Really leverage the built-in support systems that you currently have as an agency, that your community currently has, to make sure that you are having some type of smooth, soft handover and continuum of services that makes sure that everyone who comes in touch with this young person can have a fantastic impact.

[42:28](#) And so with that, thank you [00:42:30] so much for joining us today, Leanne and Stacey. This has been truly valuable information. I've learned a lot and have expanded my knowledge and my viewpoint on human trafficking, victimization and survivorship. Are there any key takeaways that you would like to leave with listeners?

Dr. Stacey Cutbush: [42:48](#) Thank you so much again for having us. I think the main takeaway is that just as we always try to ensure that children recognize and understand that they're not alone, that you as a teacher [00:43:00] are not alone either. I know society places such demands and expectations on teachers to solve all the world's problems. And we know that that's not fair or accurate or possible, but for you to keep doing what you're doing and that is caring about children and recognizing when children may be demonstrating signs of distress, and just connecting to your resources that can help you.

Leanne Desselle: [43:23](#) One of my biggest lessons learned from working on the ground with young folks who'd experienced trafficking [00:43:30] is that success can look a little different. And it's really important to remember that when you're engaging with them and walking alongside them through their healing journey. So success may not be they go back to school and they become the valedictorian and they become an entrepreneur and start touring the country. That may not be some of these folks' life paths.

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[43:52](#) And so rethinking success, maybe success is that that young person is only truant for a week this time instead of two weeks [00:44:00] because that relationship you're building or because you were engaging in centering their voice and choice, or because you created a warm and welcoming environment to return to. Being really mindful that this is incredibly traumatic and healing is not linear, healing is not the same for every child.

[44:20](#) And so letting that child come back when they come back or letting that child show up how they do as they're moving through it and just being there for them is the greatest [00:44:30] gift that you can offer to support their healing. And to not take it personal. Sometimes trauma manifests in ways that are really confusing. It might show up like anger, it might show up like disassociation, and just remember that's how that young person's dealing with some really tough stuff. So not taking it personal and really walking alongside them with that trauma-informed and supportive lens is the way that you are going to help them move to what success is going to look like [00:45:00] for them.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[45:01](#) Thank you so much. So today we have learned a lot. We have learned that it is our responsibility to make sure that we are staying on top of the indicators that we may see presented among the young people that we support, that we need to be sure that we are able to recognize these indicators and refer by making sure that we have great connections with partners so that we are ever ready. And in doing so, that we elevate youth's voice and [00:45:30] choice by creating micro moments for young people to reclaim their power in every effort to do no additional harm. Thank you for listening to this episode of Elevate Youth Programming Podcast.

[45:44](#) If you enjoy today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Elevate Youth Programming on your podcast platform of choice. For information on today's topic and resources in adolescent pregnancy prevention, visit The Exchange at [teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov](http://teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov). [00:46:00] The Elevate Youth Programming Podcast is funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau. The content in each episode is not the opinion of FYSB, nor is training and technical assistance contractors. I'm Kineka Hall, and this has been another episode of Elevate Youth Programming.