

Guidance Document: Sex Trafficking Prevention Instruction

Introduction

Educators play an important role in raising awareness, changing attitudes, and promoting preventive behaviors related to sex trafficking. **The Washington Legislature (RCW 28A.320.168) mandated that school districts provide instruction on sex trafficking awareness and prevention beginning no later than the 2025-26 school year.** This document provides guidance on how to integrate this critical subject into instruction effectively, so that students are well-equipped to recognize and prevent sex trafficking.

Understanding the legislative requirements

RCW 28A.320.168 requires that all school districts in Washington offer instruction on sex trafficking awareness and prevention, **ensuring that each student receives this instruction at least once between grade seven and graduation.** This instruction may be integrated into existing courses or units or be part of a repurposed course or lesson. OSPI is tasked with reviewing and making available open education instructional resources that support comprehensive education on sex trafficking.

Best Practices for Teaching About Sex Trafficking

Safe learning environments

Educators should acknowledge the risk of re-traumatization for students with a personal history of sexual violence or trafficking. Lessons on sex trafficking prevention should be taught in a respectful, non-judgmental tone. Instruction should avoid messages that incite fear and shame or perpetuate victim-blaming. Students should be made aware of counselors or other staff that can offer support as needed. Allow for regular breaks and provide spaces where students can go if they need to step away from class to regroup or opt out of instruction.

Age-appropriate content

Tailor the content to be developmentally appropriate. For middle school students, focus on awareness, recognizing warning signs, online safety, and understanding basic concepts of consent, healthy relationships, and exploitation. High school students can engage with more in-depth discussions on the topics above as well as socio-economic factors contributing to trafficking, legal ramifications, and community resources for support.



Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity

Recognize and address the disproportionate impact of sex trafficking on communities historically impacted by exploitation, particularly LGBTQ+ people and girls of color. Use [inclusive language](#) and [stories of survivors](#) that reflect diverse experiences and identities to ensure all students feel represented and engaged. Avoid materials that reinforce [stereotypes](#) about who is involved in and impacted by trafficking.

Interactive and engaging methods

Utilize role-playing, scenario analysis, and group discussions to engage students actively. Interactive instruction not only facilitates better understanding but also allows students to practice recognizing and responding to potential trafficking situations.

Empowerment and advocacy

Educate students on recognizing signs of trafficking and how to safely intervene, seek help, or advocate for themselves and others. Programs that focus on boosting self-esteem, teaching decision-making skills, and empowering youth to assert their boundaries can reduce their vulnerability to traffickers.

Emphasize the importance of community engagement and being informed advocates against trafficking. Programs should develop students' knowledge and skills to protect themselves and others, fostering a sense of agency and self-efficacy. For example, teaching media literacy skills that help differentiate between myths and facts empowers them to protect themselves and others.

Implementing Curricula on Sex Trafficking Prevention

Because required comprehensive sexual health education (CSHE) content (e.g., healthy relationships, affirmative consent, avoiding exploitive relationships) provides relevant context and skill-building, **it is recommended to include sex trafficking prevention as part of or following CSHE**. Schools may also choose to dedicate specific sessions within the school year to focus solely on sex trafficking awareness. This can be done through a series of presentations, special classes, or as part of existing health, social studies, or ethics courses.

Vetting curricula and speakers

Schools may choose to partner with local organizations that specialize in sex trafficking prevention to bring in expert speakers, provide resources, or conduct workshops.

Evaluate for accuracy and sensitivity. Ensure that any chosen program and/or speaker provides medically and legally accurate information, is trauma-informed and free from stigmatizing language, and offers actionable guidance for students.

Background check on speakers. When inviting guest speakers or external educators, thoroughly vet their qualifications and experience in the field of trafficking prevention. Ensure

that they are equipped to handle sensitive topics with care and provide appropriate support for students.

Community and family engagement. Engage with local experts, families, and students to ensure the content is relevant and appropriate. Provide parents/guardians with resources to support and encourage ongoing conversations at home.

When in doubt, utilize instructional materials reviewed by OSPI to ensure content is accurate, up-to-date, and aligns with state standards and legislative requirements.

Conclusion

The mandate to provide instruction on sex trafficking prevention is a critical step to protect Washington's youth. By following these best practices and implementing thoughtful, comprehensive instruction, educators can help raise awareness and prevent trafficking among students.

Resources

Multiple open education resources (search for "trafficking.") [OER Commons](#).

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center. [Creating trauma-informed classrooms](#).

[National Human Trafficking Hotline](#).

Polaris [Internet]. [Survivor Stories](#) and [Myths, Facts, and Statistics](#).

References from This Document

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