



STAC THIRD FRIDAY WEBINAR SERIES

Closer Than You Think

Unmasking familial trafficking & closing the gaps that keep it hidden

Hillary Evans

Director of Social Impact · 3Strands Global Foundation

Before we get started

1 Who's in the room?

Share your sector: law enforcement, CPS, education, healthcare, nonprofit/community, or other?

2 A quick gut-check

How familiar are you with familial trafficking: very, somewhat, or new to this?

A note before we begin

We will talk about the exploitation of children, sometimes by the people closest to them. That is heavy. It may be personal for some of us in this room.

1 **Care for yourself first**

Step away, or take a breath whenever you need to. That is always okay.

2 **Support is available**

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is open 24/7: 1-888-373-7888, or text 233733.

A portrait of Hillary Evans, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and wearing a dark blazer over a pink top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

Hillary Evans

over a decade of experience in prevention education
Director of Social Impact at 3Strands Global Foundation

- Advocate
- Educator
- Survivor Leader

Passionate about person-centered, trauma-informed work that helps people recognize all forms of abuse — beyond what we have seen in movies and on TV.

WHO WE ARE

Eleven mothers, one kitchen table, **1.31 million** lives.

We started in 2010 with neighbors who refused to look away from a local case. Our mission hasn't changed since: Prevent. Empower. Unite. Together, ending human trafficking.

2010

founded in El Dorado Hills,
CA

16 yrs

of survivor-led
prevention

50

states
reached

Where we're headed today...

- 01 What familial trafficking really is**
Definition, scope, and the dynamics behind it.
- 02 Myths that keep it hidden**
The misconceptions we all absorbed.
- 03 Why it goes unseen and the gaps**
Where identification breaks down, sector by sector.
- 04 Prevention- a wrap around model**
Evidence-based prevention that equips trusted adults and children.
- 05 A coordinated response & your role**
What each of us can do

PART ONE

Let's start with

What familial trafficking really is

THE DEFINITION

Naming it clearly

Familial trafficking is when a **family member or caregiver** exploits another family member, or enables someone else to do so, for sex or labor, in exchange for something of value.



It is a betrayal of trust

The person meant to protect the child is the one causing harm, which is exactly why it is so hard to see and to name



It is not only children

Family members can also exploit adults with disabilities and other relatives who may be vulnerable.

THE PICTURE IN OUR HEADS

**It is almost never a stranger in a van.
It is far closer than that.**

Most children are not taken. They are recruited, coerced, or sold by someone they know, and often someone they love.

THE SCOPE

Family involvement in child trafficking is common and badly under-reported

41%

of child trafficking situations are facilitated by family members or caregivers

IOM & Polaris — Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative, 2017

4×

higher family involvement in child cases than in adult trafficking cases

IOM & Polaris — CTDC, 2017

37%

of 457 surveyed survivors experienced familial sex trafficking

Polaris Project, cited in DOJ COPS Office, 2024

Family & caregiver recruitment rose from **21% to 31%** of all victims in a single year (2019→2020). Polaris — 2020 U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline data

THE DYNAMICS

How it actually works

1 **Coercion is relational**

Control comes through love, loyalty, guilt, and fear — not locks and chains.

2 **Harm is normalized**

When exploitation is woven into home life, a child may not recognize it as abuse — it is simply “how things are.”

3 **It is often driven by need & cycles**

Poverty, addiction, and a caregiver’s own history of abuse frequently sit underneath — trauma repeating across generations.

4 **The abuser controls the narrative**

Because they speak for the child to schools, doctors, and agencies, they can steer what everyone else sees.

PART TWO

The stories that

Keep it hidden

THE MYTH

“Traffickers are strangers who abduct kids off the street.”

THE REALITY

Most children are recruited by someone they know, and family involvement is common.

Abduction is the rare exception. Trust and access are the trafficker's real tools.

THE MYTH

“It's rare, and it doesn't happen in a community like ours.”

THE REALITY

It happens in every kind of family and neighborhood, and most cases are never reported.

Income, zip code, and appearances offer no immunity. What we count is only a fraction of what exists.

THE MYTH

“A child in that situation would tell someone, or run.”

THE REALITY

Children rarely disclose harm caused by the people they love and depend on.

Loyalty, trauma bonding, shame, and fear of losing their family keep them silent. Silence is not consent, and it is not proof that it isn't happening.

PART THREE

Warning signs and why it goes

Unseen: The Gaps



Familial Narrative

3StrandsGlobal



Watch on  YouTube

THE CORE PROBLEM

The signs are usually there.
The problem is that no one system sees the whole child.

A teacher sees one piece. A doctor sees another. A caseworker sees a third. The caregiver, the abuser, is the only one who connects them all.

A HARD TRUTH

Why children don't tell



They love their family

Protecting a parent can feel more urgent than protecting themselves.



They fear losing everything

Home, siblings, what's familiar, a disclosure can feel like it will cost them all of it.



They may not have the words

If it has always been this way, a child may not recognize it as wrong.



They've learned adults don't act

Past attempts that went nowhere teach children that telling isn't safe.



PREVENTION EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Warning signs. Patterns, not proof.

No single sign confirms trafficking. Watch for clusters that persist over time.

A controlling caregiver

Speaks for the child, won't leave them alone with others, monitors closely.

Unexplained money or items

Gifts, cash, or phones inconsistent with the family's circumstances.

Frequent absences

Chronic truancy, unexplained gaps, or a child who seems to disappear.

Sudden behavior shifts

Withdrawal, fear, hypervigilance, or knowledge beyond their age.

Scripted or coached answers

Rehearsed responses, or a story that changes when the caregiver isn't present.

Unmet basic needs

Neglect alongside signs of control — the two often travel together.

Memory Issues

Because of trauma, memories may be repressed therefore, the child may not remember which could appear like lying.



GAPS BY SECTOR

Law Enforcement

WHERE IT SLIPS THROUGH

Familial cases don't match the trafficking "profile" officers are trained on. They get logged as neglect, a runaway, or a custody dispute, and the trafficking is never named.

WHAT HELPS CLOSE IT

Trauma-informed, child-first interviewing; treating the child — not the caregiver — as the source of truth; and screening tools that flag familial exploitation.



GAPS BY SECTOR

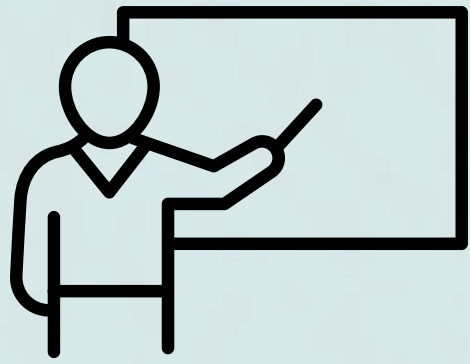
Child Protective Services

WHERE IT SLIPS THROUGH

Systems built around neglect and reunification aren't always equipped to name trafficking by a caregiver and reunification pressure can send a child back to the person exploiting them.

WHAT HELPS CLOSE IT

Trafficking-specific screening at intake, shared protocols with law enforcement, and safety planning that questions reunification when a caregiver may be the trafficker.



GAPS BY SECTOR

Schools & Educators

WHERE IT SLIPS THROUGH

Educators see students every day, but rarely receive trafficking-specific training. Warning signs get read as truancy, defiance, or a “behavior problem” and are addressed as discipline.

WHAT HELPS CLOSE IT

Age-appropriate prevention education for students, and trained, trusted adults in every building who know the signs and how to respond.



GAPS BY SECTOR

Healthcare

WHERE IT SLIPS THROUGH

Visits are brief, and the caregiver, often the abuser, speaks for the child and stays in the room. Injuries and symptoms get treated without anyone asking what's really going on.

WHAT HELPS CLOSE IT

Routine, private screening; a standard practice of speaking with the child alone; and every provider knowing the local referral and reporting pathway.



GAPS BY SECTOR

Nonprofits & community

WHERE IT SLIPS THROUGH

Community organizations earn trust and see families up close, but often without trafficking protocols, and without realizing they may be the first to notice something is wrong.

WHAT HELPS CLOSE IT

Staff training on the signs, a clear internal response protocol, and warm handoffs to the partners equipped to act. Trust, turned into action.

A WRAPAROUND SUPPORT MODEL

Surround the child so there's no gap left to fall through

Educators

See it early, respond
safely

Healthcare

Screen & ask
in private

The child

At the center

Child welfare

Safety over
reunification

Community

Trust & warm
handoffs

No single adult carries this alone. Prevention works when everyone is equipped and connected.

THE PATTERN ACROSS EVERY SECTOR

**The gap isn't one person missing it.
It's the **space between systems** that don't
talk to each other.**

Close that space with shared language, training, and a child at the center

Let's pause here

Questions before we move to solutions

PART FOUR

Prevention that works



A school-based prevention education program.

Implemented across the United States and internationally — comprehensive training for staff and families, and curriculum for students of all ages.

OTIP Approved

Survivor-informed

Evidence-based

Spanish & English



How it works



PROTOCOL

Creating coordinated, agreed-upon response protocols and procedures.



TRAINING

Providing comprehensive professional development for school-based professionals and community members.



EDUCATION

Offering adaptable curricula for kindergarten-12th grade, available 24/7 for educators to implement with their students in English and Spanish.



RESEARCH

Increasing understanding, awareness, and behavioral change.

THE EVIDENCE

**When people have knowledge and options,
traffickers have none**

888K

Students reached
through PROTECT

99%

of students recognize
the signs of trafficking
after PROTECT

96%

of school staff are confident in
the steps to report after
PROTECT

Prevention extends past the school gates.

CARE

FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Equips the adults closest to a child to recognize risk and respond with confidence.

100% know how to report afterward

AWARE

FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Free online prevention education, designed for local sponsorship and broad reach.

Open to everyone, everywhere

Students, families, communities, and a layered prevention model with PROTECT at its core.



Anthem 
HealthKeepers Plus
Offered by HealthKeepers, Inc.
Virginia's Foster Care Specialty Plan

- **Practical, real-world curriculum for youth, caregivers, and professionals**
- **Skill-building and action-oriented**
- **Support tools for caregivers**
- **Modular and online**
- **Self-paced and flexible**
- **Secure, moderated platform designed for safe engagement (HIPPA)**
- **Community-integrated spaces**
- **Pre/post tests to capture program efficacy**

ELEVATE/RISE

State Medicaid offices contract with managed care orgs to provide specialty plans for foster care. We work with Elevance Health-contracted states to get youth, caregivers, and professionals these services for FREE.

Youth



Develop self-awareness, confidence, and practical skills for independent adulthood.

Caregivers



Build trauma-informed skills to guide youth toward stability and independence

Professionals



Use structured tools to turn transition planning into clear, actionable steps.

PART FIVE

A coordinated

Response & your role

CROSS-SECTOR RESPONSE

Closing the space between

1 **Shared language**

When every sector defines and screens for familial trafficking the same way, fewer cases get mislabeled.

2 **Clear protocols & pathways**

Written agreements are a concern in one sector to reach the right partner fast and safely.

3 **A team around the child**

Not a child passed between silos, but professionals coordinating around one young person.

IF SOMETHING FEELS WRONG

You don't need to be certain

1 **Report a reasonable suspicion**

You don't have to prove it. Contact CPS or law enforcement, or call the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888.

2 **Don't confront the caregiver**

Confrontation can escalate risk to the child. Let the trained system respond.

3 **Document what you observed**

Facts, dates, and direct quotes — not interpretations. Details help the people who act next.

4 **Keep the child's safety first**

Respond in a way that doesn't put them at greater risk. When unsure, ask a trained partner.



YOUR PART How you can help

Need help now?

National Human Trafficking Hotline
1-888-373-7888 · text 233733

- **Learn the signs and share them**
Take what you heard today back to your team, and start the conversation.
- **Bring prevention to your community**
Explore PROTECT for your community and connect your sector to a coordinated response.
- **Stay connected & support the work**
Follow 3SGF and STAC, join future trainings, and give if you can.

Q&A's



Together, ending
human trafficking.

Let's stay
connected.



3sgf.org/protect-students

