



What to Say When Discussing Child Trafficking

Do say	Don't say	Why?
Trafficking survivor	Child / teen prostitute	Child and teen prostitutes don't exist –they are really survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Referring to survivors as young prostitutes implies that a delinquent youth chose a criminal lifestyle, as opposed to the reality which is that a minor is a victim of a sex crime.
Survivor	Victim	No one wants to be a victim. Calling people 'survivor' empowers them by recognizing their resiliency to overcome extreme hardship and trauma.
Survivors need supportive providers as they leave their situations on their own terms and in a way that is safe for them.	We rescue victims.	Survivors are empowered, not rescued. Much like survivors of domestic violence, survivors of human trafficking need to be informed of what services are available to support them, and what exactly each service provides. If we force a "rescue" the person is likely to run back to the trafficker as soon as they are able.
I believe you and it's not your fault.	That's so awful, I can't/don't believe it!	Well-meaning people might say they can't believe something happened not because they are expressing disbelief but because they are surprised or horrified. This conveys to survivors that 1) they are not believed and 2) their experience is so shameful they can't talk about it or shouldn't seek help.
What happened to you wasn't your fault.	You/they don't have to do that anymore.	Stating that someone doesn't need to do something anymore implies that the survivor consented to be trafficked.
<p>You had to do X - did you know that's a skill? You could do Y!</p> <p>"Even though your trafficker should never have forced you to cook drugs, you learned chemistry. Did you know you could be a chemist? Here is a program where you can learn more about chemistry and how you can use it in school and at work."</p>		Saying that a survivor is smart (or has other positive attributes) might seem like a compliment. It can be frustrating for a survivor to hear nice things said about them without receiving support to use that asset to better his or her life. Instead of giving a compliment, explain how the asset can be used to help the survivor in actionable terms.



Office of Children and Family Services

What to Say When Working With Trafficking Survivors¹

Do say	Don't say	Why?
We will do everything we can to help keep you safe.	You are safe now.	Your definition of safe may vary from his/hers. You cannot guarantee that he/she will be safe, and a broken promise can negatively affect your relationship.
We are not working with the people who hurt you. We are here because we want to help you.	No one here will hurt you.	Although your intention is not to hurt the survivor, he/she may perceive an interaction or something you say as hurtful. You don't want to promise this as you do not know if/when he or she will perceive hurt.
We are here because we want to help you. We will do our best to meet your needs.	We can fix your problems.	You may not be able to do meet the needs of the survivor, so don't make promises you can't keep. You may report the crime and nothing may come of it. You may not have the capacity to provide services for all of the needs he/she identifies. It is important to be transparent about your role, what you can do and what you can't do.
The people who hurt you violated your rights; you did not deserve what happened to you.	You are a victim, not a criminal.	It is not helpful to label the individual. He/she may not identify as a victim and someone in the past may have considered him/her a criminal so this can be confusing. It is important to explain what happened to him/her in a rights-based manner.
Trust my actions, not my words.	You can trust me.	Survivors of trafficking have been lied to many times. It might be hard for them to know who can be trusted. To demonstrate that you can be trusted be consistent, keep their information confidential, and be clear and honest about expectations and your capacity.
Is there anyone you know who might need help?	We want to make sure what happened to you does not happen to anyone else.	Rather than cause a survivor to feel responsible for the potential victimization of others, ask him or her if he knows other youth who may need services. Survivors should not be manipulated to provide information when he or she is unwilling to do so.

¹ Adapted from Cook County Task Force Train-the-Trainer manual.



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