

Talking to kids about human trafficking

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As parents in the modern age we are inundated with educational tools for our children. I can influence my unborn child with prenatal systems that strap on my belly. I can purchase DVDs to ensure that my baby can read. I can help them excel with flashcards and beginner computers. I can fill a library with books on how to increase cognitive development. Yet, as much as I want my children to succeed intellectually I have a deeper longing for my boys to be spiritually wise. To know and love the Word, and to learn how to participate in the Kingdom.

When I look at scripture I see that this is a real possibility. It is often the young who "get it." David trumps Goliath, Samuel chats with God, and Mary delivers the Deliverer. Matthew 11:26 confirms that God reveals things to little children, and Jesus encouraged his followers to become like little children (18:3). Undoubtedly children are significant players in the spiritual realm. They can be powerful in prayer and action. So when I think about the upcoming *Weekend of Prayer for Victims of Sex Trafficking*, I believe it would be a disservice to leave our children out. The topic needs to be presented with caution, but our kids need to know about injustice, and learn how God wants them to change our world.

First, when introducing the idea of trafficking to kids, steer clear of talking about *children* who are trafficked. It can be difficult for young people to distance themselves from an intense subject, especially involving children. They may easily assume that if one child is kidnapped, they too are in danger. We do not want to traumatize our children or make them afraid of being trafficked themselves. So keep the discussion about adults.

Secondly, avoid the concept of sex. Parents and guardians have strong opinions about when they want to introduce discussions on sexuality, and it is not something that can be adequately covered in an object lesson or Sunday School class! Instead the topic of human trafficking should be discussed in terms of slavery: people buying, selling and owning other people. Most kids understand well the idea of collecting and trading and these concepts can easily be translated to explain human trafficking.

One of the current top toys for elementary age boys is Bakugan. This game involves collecting battle brawlers to win fights. You gain power by playing the right cards and having the right balls/creatures. Make the connection between Bakugan and human trafficking. Talk to kids about how there are certain "bad" people who play games like Bakugan using people rather than cards or Bakugan. They buy people, trade people and sell people. The difference is that in Bakugan you want to the most powerful fighters, but with human trafficking, people take the weakest or poorest or most vulnerable people and buy and sell them and force them to do really tiring work. Explain that people should never be bought and sold or traded and used. Also teach them that they can pray for people who are being trafficked or who are slaves.

Any elementary age girl knows about another top toy for 2010, Zhu Zhu pets. These toys are electronic hamsters that kids collect and take care of. Again, the connection can be made with human trafficking and how certain "bad" people collect people rather than hamsters. Explain that instead of trying to help

them and take care of them, human traffickers treat the people they collect very badly. Again, explain to kids that people should never be bought and sold or collected and used. Teach them to pray for people who are being trafficked or who are slaves.

Children care about others, and in an appropriate way, we should encourage them to care about people who are suffering injustice, such as victims of human trafficking. More importantly, we should pray with our children so that they know that God who is all-powerful and all-loving is on the side of all of the victims.

Q and A.

Kids may ask tough questions, and as parents or youth leaders, you need to be prepared with some thoughtful answers. If a kid asks:

“How much does a human cost?”

- Explain that the price varies around the world, but that every person is worth far more than gold to God.

“Why do people buy or sell or trade people?”

- Share that some people are so poor that they think they need to sell their family members to have money for food.
- Remind them that some people don’t know God and they don’t know how to love, so they buy people and try to trap them to work for them.

“Could this happen to me?”

- Assure them that they are safe and loved.
- Help them to name people who protect them.

“What do people buy slaves for?”

- Explain that slaves have to do very hard work that others are not willing to do
- Share that they don’t have choices because they are trapped.

Other teaching ideas

1. For a quick object lesson, for example during children’s time at Sunday service, you could use sports trading cards. You can have some baseball or hockey cards to show the kids, and talk about how you save up to buy cards, and trade them to have a whole set or team. Then you can talk about how some people trade real people rather than just cards. You could even put some photos of adults on cards with their basic “stats” on the back such as their name, age, country where they come from, occupation and daily earnings. You could give out these cards to the kids so that they could go home and pray for people who are traded and trafficked.
2. Help kids connect visually by using chains, or chainlink bracelets. You could recount the Scripture in Acts 16:25-34 with the image of chains being loosened, and innocent people being set free from captivity.

3. Remind kids of the story of Joseph (Gen 37:12-36). Joseph was purchased and removed from his family and all that he knew. This biblical account also shows God's faithfulness to victims.
4. Set up a mini grocery store where kids get to shop for food items and pay with money. Afterwards, you can explain that some "bad" people shop for people. They think that just because they have money they can buy people and that that is slavery.