



- **Preparation.** Include a survivor-advocate if possible. Allow these individuals to sit directly next to the victim and introduce themselves to build rapport and assure the victim that the interviewing officers are trustworthy.
  - Consider allowing the advocates/interventionists to do a brief “[Ending the Game](#)” (ETG) curriculum, or refer them to *The Avery Center* for a 10-week program. If there are multiple victims, allow an advocate/interventionist to do ETG with victims who are waiting to be interviewed as well.
  - The interview should take place in a comfortable environment.
  - Avoid having a male intervene with a female victim; though well-intentioned, he might remind her of a buyer or trafficker.
  - Try to have a male health care professional intervene with a potential sex buyer.
  - Refrain from all physical contact with victims.
  - Revisit the presentation and resources we gave during the training; try to situate yourself in the mindset of the interviewee.
  - Respect boundaries and absolutely respect the survivor/victim’s “no.”
  
- **Introduction.** Non-perishable food, bottled drinks, blankets, warm and modest clothing (sweat pants and shirts, warm socks) should all be available<sup>1</sup>. The intervener should introduce the victim to the survivor-advocate and the pair should first make sure that the victim’s basic needs (bathroom, food, physical comfort) are the priority.
  - Victims are often sleep- and food-deprived and have little to no choice in any of their daily activities. Offering them choices right at the beginning of contact will help build rapport and trust.
  
- **The Conversation.** The actual interview should follow a standard outline:
  - General information and creation of a timeline (drawing this out on paper is recommended) with regards to the victim’s involvement in commercial sexual exploitation, relationship with the alleged trafficker, and any other involved parties should be discussed.
  
  - If a victim continues to talk in circles (non-linear stories are a sign of complex trauma), it might be good to offer a break and let the advocates/interventionists speak with the victim alone. Offer a bathroom break, a snack, or some water. Let them get up and walk around a bit or get a bit of fresh air. A change in perspective might allow the victim to break out of the mindset/brainwashed story they are repeating.
    - Always, always, always validate what they are feeling/telling you, even if you disagree vehemently.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Avery Center, UCOUNT* can assist with this.

- Mirror behaviors. If they curse, you can. If they talk about religion or hating the current weather or current president, affirm and validate to build rapport.
  - Make genuine eye contact with the victim and talk directly to them.
- **Phrasing suggestions:**
    - Questions that focus on identifying labor trafficking rather than sex trafficking might be more successful. Due to fear & mistrust of law enforcement, many victims are more comfortable speaking about the working conditions rather than any commercial sex acts that may be taking place.
    - Instead of “we don’t want this to happen to anyone else,” focus on the victim’s safety. She doesn’t care (and shouldn’t care) about other victims. She is likely terrified of the repercussions of even interacting with anyone who can help.
    - Lack of linear memory is often a sign of trauma, so it may be helpful during initial interviews to ask “What else happened?” instead of “What happened next?”
    - Suggested phrasing: “We are so sorry this happened to you. It’s our job to protect you, and we failed. We want to help you heal. We want you to stop hurting. In order to do that, we need a few details about what you’ve been through. Are you okay giving us a few details?”
    - Instead of telling the victim what their trafficker/buyers have done to them is wrong, focus on how you can help her. She knows very well what she’s been through is wrong. Keep reminding her that there are folks in the room (advocates/interventionists) who can help her find a place to stay, meals, access to legitimate employment where they won’t be harassed, etc.
    - Suggested phrasing: “We are here to help you. You can escape this right here, right now. We can help you find a safe place to stay, and we can make sure you have what you need to start to heal.”

#### **Other Considerations:**

- Most victims of trafficking experience intense fear – of their traffickers and of being deported. Therefore, when interacting with potential trafficking victims, it is important to reassure them that they are safe so you can begin the process of helping them get the protection and assistance they need to rebuild their lives. Gaining the trust of trafficking victims is an important first step in providing assistance.<sup>2</sup>
- Sample messages to convey to victims of human trafficking to help gain this trust include:
  - We are here to help you.
  - Our first priority is your safety.
  - Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, victims of trafficking can apply for special visas or could receive other forms of immigration relief.
  - We will give you the medical care that you need.
  - We can find you a safe place to stay.
  - You have a right to live without being abused.
  - You deserve the chance to become self-sufficient and independent.

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<sup>2</sup>2019. Resources: Messages for Communicating with Victims of Human Trafficking. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/communicating\\_with\\_victims\\_of\\_human\\_trafficking\\_0.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/communicating_with_victims_of_human_trafficking_0.pdf)

- We can help get you what you need.
  - We can help to protect your family.
- Be aware that changes in memory do not necessarily indicate falsehood or storytelling, but may be evidence of a trauma response.
- Avoid activities that can ostracize a victim, those that mirror the behavior of a trafficker, however unintentionally, by limiting or not offering a victim choices in the recovery process. It will require patience, empathy, and compassion from you, as well as from your partners involved in the effort.
  - **The Closing.** The interventionist and survivor-advocate/interventionist should make sure the victim has transportation, food and shelter when they leave, and provided with resources in the community for access in case they do not have these basic needs met already. The victim should be asked what their top three needs currently are, and a visual list of options of basic needs (housing, shower, food, clothing, medical, phone call, etc.) should be provided to spark conversation. The advocate should discuss these basic needs with the victim and ensure they are able to connect with the desired resources.