



# Safeguarding Our Children from Human Trafficking: Using Culture as A Protective and Healing Influence Among Native Youth

## TALKING CIRCLE QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

Cultural traditions are a protective and healing influence. Culture can help address historical trauma as well as current risk factors that make Indigenous people vulnerable to many forms of crime victimization, including labor and sex trafficking. American Indian and Alaska Native children are living in poverty, involved in the juvenile justice system, and in the foster care system at higher percentages, increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking. During a virtual Talking Circle on January 27, 2022, titled, "[Safeguarding Our Children from Human Trafficking: Using Culture as A Protective and Healing Influence Among Native Youth](#)," panelists from [Covenant House Alaska](#), [Indian Child Trauma Center](#), and [Tate Topa Consulting](#) shared their knowledge and experiences.

This document reflects the perspectives of the panelists and is not intended to be comprehensive resource on the topic. It offers panelist responses to participant questions that were not answered live due to time limitations. Editor's notes are included in a few areas to provide additional information not stated by the panelists.

Watch the [recording of the live moderated discussion](#) for more panelist insights on this topic.

### **How does a Tribal program get started in addressing human trafficking?**

One way a Tribal program can get started is with building and providing education and outreach. This type of approach allows program staff to reach out and find stakeholder providers and learn from their experiences in the community. It allows the program staff to build understanding and awareness of the human trafficking language and law in our communities so community members can share their stories as they apply to their human trafficking experiences.

I [*E. Ingrid Cumberlidge*] truly and mistakenly believed human trafficking would not be on the lips of very many of the 229 Tribal communities in Alaska. Once they had an understanding of the language



and law, they shared many stories of Tribal people being trafficked and their need for support. These stories will naturally build the foundation for a Tribal human trafficking prevention and response efforts. They show the need for law enforcement intervention, social services and direct human trafficking support services, and direct services to get out of the human trafficking life and to provide continuing support. As these human trafficking needs present themselves the Tribal program, staff has the opportunity to reach out and find these agency and community programs. Bring them together as members of planning team or committee to work directly with tribes and Tribal services to build awareness and respond to human trafficking. Tribal programs are often best when they work together in a multidisciplinary way. In my experiences, every new resource in human trafficking leads you to more experts and resources that then can become strong resources to your Tribal human trafficking response program. In short, keep the conversation going, build support and intervention through multidisciplinary and law enforcement support teams/committees, and continue human trafficking response and survivor support.

**Are there resources and training that you would recommend, that would help support a Native survivor of sex trafficking?**

There are many resources and training available that can help guide you in supporting a Native survivor of sex trafficking. Here are a few suggestions to get you started in a long list of resources. The Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center offers [Talking Circle webinars](#) and [Tribal-specific content](#) on human trafficking. Tribes and Tribal organizations can also contact the Center directly at [contact@ovc-htcbc.org](mailto:contact@ovc-htcbc.org) or 1-844-682-0411 to request no-cost assistance. The Minnesota Indigenous Women's Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC) offers [comprehensive training and technical assistance](#) on sex trafficking in Indian Country and Alaska. MIWSAC published the survivor-informed report "[Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota](#)". The [National Indigenous Women's Resource Center](#) offers support addressing gender-based violence in Tribal communities, including Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and human trafficking. The Tribal Law and Policy Institute offers [sex trafficking and advocacy curriculum](#) for download.

**How do you share with young people what "grooming" means?**

In order to talk with a young person about "grooming", we need to educate and bring awareness to ourselves. The more we learn the better we become at explaining to young people what grooming looks like. We already know that perpetrators often look for young people or others who are vulnerable. We



know that poverty is a major risk factor. We also know that young people who come from dysfunctional homes are often looking to be loved. If you are approached by a person who suddenly wants to provide you with what you need or desire, that may be grooming for human trafficking. They will treat you nicely, say what you may want to hear, give you what you want and then they will get what they want from you. Often using threats or saying, “I gave you this, so you need to give me that.” We need to definitely begin to have conversations with young people about trafficking, what it looks like, and we need the support of all our communities. We need to continue to fund Tribal programs that want to do this work for our young people and all people who are at risk.

### **What are panelists seeing in terms of traffickers coming from inside the Indigenous communities versus outside?**

Traffickers from Tribal communities and traffickers from outside Tribal communities are not as different as you may think. All traffickers prey on individuals. All traffickers devalue an individual’s worth. However, those traffickers who know a tribal community, also understand the values of a tribe, and may use this knowledge to their advantage. For example, Tribal communities have a strong kinship system and respect the responsibility members have to their family and land. Respect for kinship can be used as method of power for some traffickers to manipulate and get what they want.

### **What is labor trafficking? What can be done to prevent or inform others about this issue?**

[Labor trafficking](#) is the act of compelling, forcing, or coercing a person’s labor through the use of subtle or overt physical or psychological force. Some examples of these are threats of arrest, holding of money or documentation, or threats of loss of income (e.g., cuts in earning percentage if leaving employment), physical threats, and/or loss of basic necessities (e.g., housing, food, travel home). Providing broad community outreach and education for all ages and groups on safe travel, online activities (e.g., social media, online gaming), legal rights, and support agencies. Distributing resources widely is one approach to preventing and sharing information on labor trafficking. Reach out to [federally funded Human Trafficking Task Forces](#) which bring together a multidisciplinary approach to identifying and assistance victims of human trafficking and prosecuting human trafficking cases.

Report labor violations like improper payment of wages or other working condition violations to any of the Wage and Hour Division offices across the U.S. or the national phone number at 1- 866-4-USWAGE or visit [www.dol.gov/whd](http://www.dol.gov/whd). The Department of Labor will report labor trafficking



allegations to the proper investigatory agency such as made to agencies, such as U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or Homeland Security Investigations.

Editor's Note: The [Understanding Labor Trafficking Overview](#), [the Labor Trafficking Resource Guide](#), and the [Ask an Expert: Labor Trafficking 101 webinar](#), and [Q&A Summary](#) offer more on this topic.

**Community involvement includes Elders, youth, men, and woman groups. These traditional values have been taught for centuries in our culture. How can we engage all of these groups in our community to support victims of human trafficking?**

We need to remember that we as Native people want to see all of our communities to heal from the trauma we experienced. This includes all genders: women, girls, men, boys, elders, and our Two-Spirit/Native LGBTQ people. We need to stop specifically talking about one gender when it comes to human trafficking. Begin with having more conversations in our Tribal communities about human trafficking to remind them that human trafficking can happen to anyone which includes all genders.

We need to continue to encourage our leaders to have conversations and bring in experts who are doing the work. These experts also include survivors. We need to help survivors become the leaders. Help them in building skills that they are struggling with which includes public speaking, education, how to use a computer, etc. There is so much more work to do in our community.

**How can healthcare providers better show up for and support this community?**

In any situation, [training](#) is critical to a human trafficking response. Healthcare providers play an important role in identifying, responding, and reporting human trafficking. Healthcare providers often interact with trafficking survivors without understanding the realities of their situation. Training can assist healthcare workers with better understanding the needs of their patients and identifying appropriate resources for the victim or families involved. There should be an adequate response plan in place for the healthcare organization. Connect with [human trafficking victim service providers and taskforces](#) in your area to discuss how to support local anti-trafficking work.

**Does bullying play a part in the problem?**



Bullying, in whatever context, is harmful and traumatic. There is not a lot of data showing the direct connection between bullying and trafficking, however, bullying can inflict isolation, shame, and fear in the bully's victim, similar to what a trafficker inflicts on their victim. To create a safer environment, have discussions around healthy relationships and knowing where and how to report bullying. Create a trusting environment to report and respond to bullying.

### *Additional Information*

Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at [contact@ovc-htcbc.org](mailto:contact@ovc-htcbc.org) or 1-844-682-0411.

