

How God Has Equipped You to Fight Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking in the U.S. has become a huge problem growing right under our noses. But Julie Haltom, director of Education at The Samaritan Women in Baltimore, Maryland, says Christians can make a difference in the lives of children and adults who are vulnerable to traffickers looking for victims.

“Every interaction matters,” Haltom says about relating to children, whether in churches or neighborhoods. “It makes a ripple effect that you might never see.”

Children are especially susceptible to traffickers, often online, when they experience insecurity or instability in their lives. This may be as a result of childhood abuse, broken families or poverty. If a child is growing up in an abusive family, “there’s such instability and inconsistency, which makes a child not feel safe, not feel secure, so they look for that outside of the home,” Haltom cautions.

The foster care system often plays into this insecurity. In foster care, children are moved around or may may run away, making them extremely vulnerable for recruitment into sex trafficking. Haltom says “50-60% of trafficked youth have intersected with the foster care system.”

Overall, sex trafficking is not an issue tied to women’s rights or women’s choice. Rather, it’s about vulnerability. “The current average age of entry into commercial sex exploitation is 11-13 years old,” Haltom says.

Children this young and younger are naive and can be deceived if adults do not protect them.

“As a child, your brain is still developing,” Haltom says. “You’re still trying to figure out right and wrong choices,

boundaries, all of that.”

It’s important for parents and other adults to recognize the vulnerabilities in children and to know with whom they interact. Haltom advises adults to look for “how children carry themselves, their willingness to take part in risky behavior, deeply looking for attention or acceptance.”

The media often doesn’t help the situation.

“A lot of what we’re seeing through media and social messaging is so sexualized,” she says. “If you look at TV shows, advertisements, you see children’s clothing that’s more adult form. We’re creating clothing for our children that’s adult in nature. We’re glamorizing pimping through our movies. We’re glamorizing sexualization and degradation of women through magazines, advertising and music.”

But, Haltom says, ultimately sex trafficking is not about sex. “Sex is what’s used for the exploitation, but at the core of the trade, it’s about power and control. “I think that the enemy loves to use misinformation and loves to stir confusion.”

There are “subtle ways that this is sneaking into our everyday life without us even knowing that it’s happening,” she says, advising Christians to educate themselves about how trafficking really happens and to be careful about where they shop so they do not unintentionally support companies that promote the exploitation of children.

Haltom reminds believers of the good news in the face of this darkness. “God has given us every single thing that we need. He has equipped us for this work.”

Listen to this podcast interview with Julie Haltom to learn more.