

Q&A Summary

- 1. I work in child protection, and I struggle with how to empower survivors of sex trafficking, when they are under the age of 16 and the laws in my province state that I need to remove them. If I remove them and place them in a group home, they may run back to the trafficker. I'm at a loss with how to service children under the age of 16.**

Answer:

The approach depends on the province, but in Ontario — and specifically in Toronto — the Toronto Police Service has a dedicated program for minors who are being sexually exploited called CARE.

CARE focuses specifically on supporting minors experiencing sexual exploitation and can address questions and concerns related to these cases. This specialized team exists because the issue is significant, and victims are increasingly younger, requiring dedicated and informed intervention.

- 2. Monica, there is a saying that you have about the analogy of the fireman — from rescue, it's not enough just to rescue. And I know Ashley touched on it. This whole journey is more than just rescue. There's more to be done. I'm just wondering if you can share that analogy with us?"**

Answer:

There is a saying: you can't rescue someone from a fire and leave them in the ashes. That captures the core responsibility of aftercare.

Healing does not follow a fixed timeline — each survivor's process is unique. Effective aftercare requires patience, consistency, and long-term support.

Rescue is only the first step. Our duty is not just to remove someone from harm, but to ensure they have the sustained care and stability needed to rebuild.

- 3. You said that empowerment is the opposite of exploitation. What are examples of small but meaningful ways that communities can help survivors rebuild a sense of control and choice in everyday life?**

Answer:

Some of the most empowering things for me when I was younger were very small, practical acts — like being taught how to do my laundry. In trafficking, you're often told you're worthless, incapable, or unlovable, and you start to believe it. So simple things like someone saying "You look nice," or teaching me what a boundary is and how to set one, or even showing me how to brush my teeth, made a real difference.

I had no control over basic parts of my life — when to brush my teeth, what to wear, or even how to take care of myself. Being given choices, like picking my own clothes or having a say in my therapy sessions, helped me build confidence. These small opportunities to make decisions and have control are an important part of empowerment.

4. For young teens, how do you integrate them back into their families?

Answer:

When children enter our care as young as five, they remain with us long term. We focus on their education and overall development, and they stay in residential care until age 18 because, under Philippine law, they are minors until that point.

We cannot begin transition or reintegration planning until they reach adulthood. Once they turn 18, we can discuss next steps such as continuing their education or pursuing employment. In the Philippines, obtaining stable work is very difficult without a college degree, so we strongly encourage young women to pursue higher education to improve their opportunities.

For children who enter care at age five, the process is necessarily much longer, with most of their growth and preparation happening over many years.

5. How many kids that are rescued return to their exploiter?

Answer:

There is no authoritative global statistic on how many trafficked children return to their exploiter after rescue.

The best available research on what happens after rescue estimates that about 20% of trafficked children are re-victimized (which may include different exploiters). [Source](#)

6. Could you share examples of questions we could and shouldn't ask survivors? As much empathy and love you try to use to help, I don't feel equipped to have a conversation without hurting their feelings and reviving their trauma.

Answer:

Do:

- Let survivors lead — follow their cues about what (if anything) they want to share
- Listen without probing or asking follow-up questions
- Acknowledge and validate without asking for details
- Respect boundaries immediately if someone changes the subject or becomes quiet
- Focus on the present and what feels supportive now
- Use supportive, non-intrusive language

Helpful phrases:

- "Thank you for trusting me with that."
- "You don't owe me any details."
- "I'm really glad you're here."
- "If there's a way I can support you, please let me know."

Don't:

- Don't ask questions about their trauma or exploitation
- Don't ask "why" questions (e.g., why they didn't leave sooner)
- Don't ask for details out of curiosity or to better understand trafficking
- Don't ask them to share their story for awareness or education
- Don't assume they want to talk about their past
- Don't pressure or encourage disclosure

Avoid phrases like:

- “What happened to you?”
- “How did you get trafficked?”
- “Why didn’t you leave?”
- “Can I ask you some questions about it?”

Key reminder:

- Survivors are not responsible for educating others. The most supportive approach is presence, respect, and choice — not questions.