

What Are Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaigns?

Anti-trafficking awareness campaigns teach people about human trafficking and how to spot it using ‘red flags.’

These messages appear on posters in airports, hotels, washrooms, and other public places. Many employees are now required to complete anti-trafficking awareness training. Anti-trafficking groups also run awareness campaigns to raise funds.

What’s The Problem?

Isn’t raising awareness a good thing?

Unfortunately, many of these campaigns rely on fear, stereotypes, and misinformation. Despite good intentions, they don’t help much. They often fail to deepen understanding and can even create more problems. So, what’s not working?



VICTIM NEEDS ARE NOT BEING MET

Many awareness campaigns are not meeting the needs of victims and survivors.

Campaigns raise superficial awareness, promote quick fixes instead of long-term support, and don’t address the root causes that make people vulnerable to exploitation in the first place.



OVERSIMPLIFICATION

Campaigns avoid complex details and rely on simple, shocking statements to grab your attention.

“Human trafficking can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time.”

This common anti-trafficking claim is oversimplified because it suggests everyone faces the same risk and that trafficking occurs randomly.

In reality, people facing poverty, homelessness, or very limited choices are much more vulnerable than others.

Oversimplifying human trafficking makes it hard to give people the full support they need. It also makes it hard to understand and address the root causes of the problem.



AWARENESS DOES NOT EQUAL ACTION

Awareness campaigns can often be more about providing a ‘feel-good’ activity than creating real change.

Asking people to wear costumes, take a cold plunge, or throw paper airplanes can make people feel like they have ‘done something’, without actually increasing their understanding of the issue.

The result is a false sense of security, shallow awareness, and very little meaningful action to support victims or those at risk.



LIMITS OF RED FLAGS

Some trafficking “red flags” can also be everyday activities.

A child attending sleepovers, losing interest in school, having a falling out with friends, or a newcomer to Canada needing someone to translate at an appointment may be trafficking indicators in certain contexts.

However, these behaviours should be looked at alongside other factors or risks, so we don’t jump to conclusions.

What Can We Do Better?

We all want to help victims and prevent human trafficking.

The good news is that we can.

Here’s how we can do better:



1. EMBRACE COMPLEXITY

Don’t settle for oversimplified ideas about trafficking. Explore more deeply. [Ask us how!](#)



2. SUPPORT PEOPLE

Make sure the anti-trafficking efforts you support genuinely help the people who need it, not just the organizations spreading awareness.



3. LEARN ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

Learn about alternatives to [red flags](#) and other ways to [identify exploitation and trafficking](#).

There’s a better way!

By learning what genuinely helps, we can move from *superficial awareness* to *meaningful action* that supports victims and reduces exploitation.