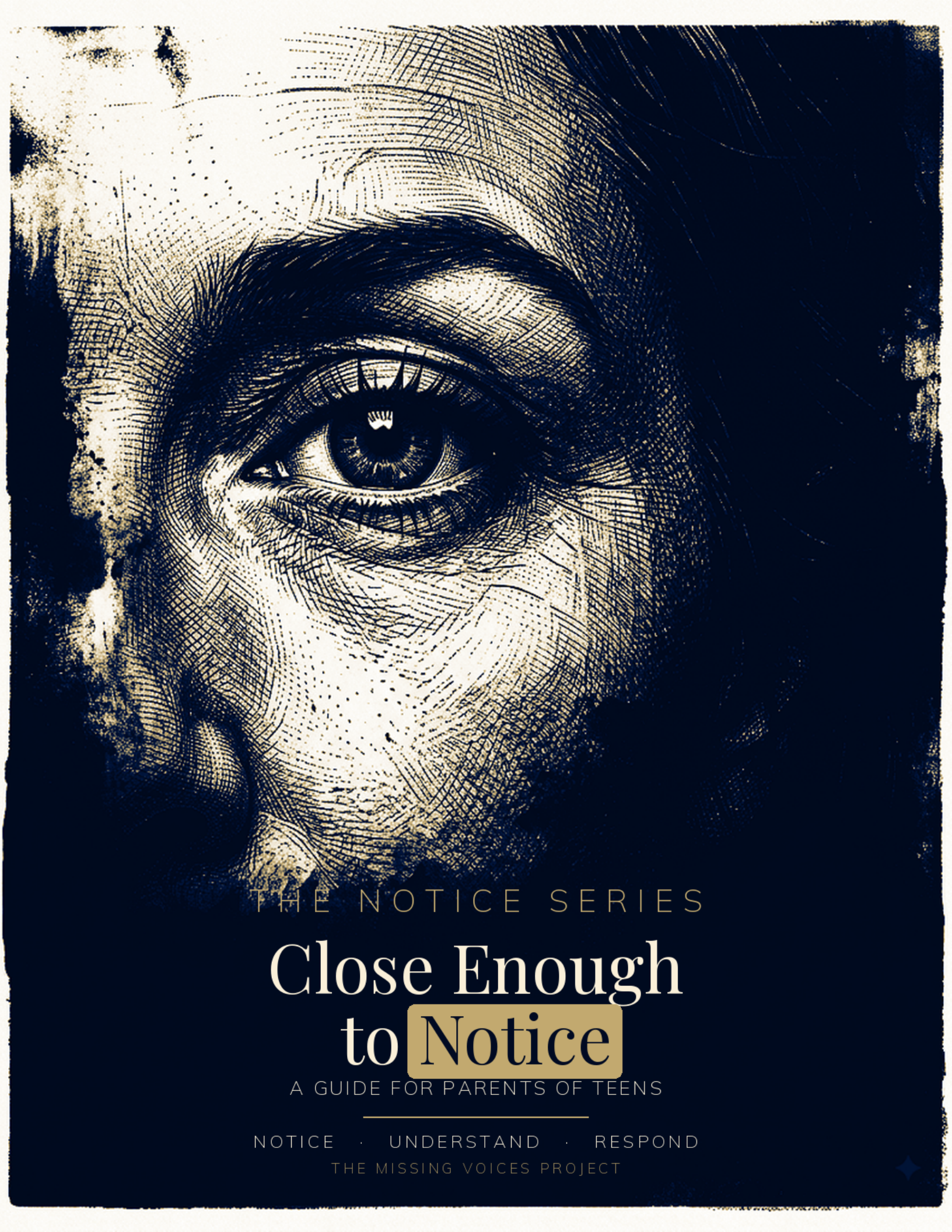




THE NOTICE SERIES

Close Enough to Notice

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF TEENS

NOTICE · UNDERSTAND · RESPOND

THE MISSING VOICES PROJECT

Start here: the calm truth

No fear. Just what is true, and what helps.

If most of what you have seen about trafficking involves vans, kidnappings, and zip ties, set that aside. Those stories go viral, but they are not how this usually works, and believing them can leave you watching for the wrong thing entirely.

The reality is quieter. Most young people who are trafficked are not taken by a stranger. They are drawn in slowly by someone who earns their trust first, often online, often posing as a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a friend, or someone offering an opportunity. Many keep going to school and living at home the whole time. That is what makes it hard to see, and it is exactly why a parent who knows what to look for matters so much.

This guide walks through three things: what to notice, how it actually works, and what to do.

**"You do not have to become an investigator.
You have to stay close enough to notice."**

What to watch for

READ THIS FIRST

Almost every sign below overlaps with ordinary adolescence, a new relationship, or a mental health struggle. Any one of them on its own usually means something other than trafficking. What raises concern is a cluster of them together, a sudden shift from your teen's normal, and a sense that something does not add up. You are looking for a change in pattern, not a single checkbox.

- ◆ A new romantic partner or friend who is noticeably older, especially someone they met online and are secretive about.
- ◆ Unexplained money, a new phone you did not buy, or expensive gifts they cannot account for.
- ◆ A second phone, or new social media accounts they keep hidden.
- ◆ Pulling away from family and longtime friends, and losing interest in activities they used to love.
- ◆ New, intense secrecy, especially about who they are with and what they are doing online.
- ◆ Talk of a modeling job, a music video, or a work opportunity offered by someone they met recently.
- ◆ Frequent missed school, a sharp drop in grades, or unexplained absences.
- ◆ Answers that sound rehearsed or coached when you ask simple questions about where they were.
- ◆ A new tattoo or symbol they are cagey about.
- ◆ Signs of being controlled: unusual fearfulness, or asking permission for small everyday things.

The point is not to catch your teen out. It is to notice early enough to stay close.

How it actually works

A few realities that cut through the myths. These are what let you spot the real thing instead of the viral version.

It usually starts with trust, not force

Traffickers commonly build a relationship first, using romance, friendship, or the promise of money or a better life, then use manipulation, pressure, and sometimes threats to exploit the young person. The affection is the tactic.

It often happens online

Recruitment frequently begins on the platforms teens already use: direct messages, dating and chat apps, games, and social media. Someone posing as a peer or an admirer can start the process from anywhere.

Victims often lead double lives

Many trafficked teens continue going to school, living at home, and appearing to have normal social lives. The absence of dramatic warning signs does not mean everything is fine.

The viral warnings are mostly false

Rumors about zip ties on cars, coded markings, and package-delivery texts as trafficking lures have been investigated and found baseless. Sharing them spreads fear and pulls attention away from how this actually happens. Being the calm, accurate voice in your own circle is a real contribution.

It can affect any family, but risk is not evenly spread

Teens who are isolated, struggling at home, previously harmed, or otherwise vulnerable are targeted more often, because traffickers look for an unmet need they can offer to fill.

The conversations that prevent

- ◆ **Be the safe place to land.** The most protective thing is a teen who believes they can come to you and not be punished or shamed. Say it out loud, more than once.

- ◆ **Teach what a healthy relationship looks like,** and what is not okay, including online. Model it where you can.

- ◆ **Name the tactics, not just the danger.** People online are not always who they say they are, fast and intense romance is a red flag, and offers that sound too good usually carry a hidden cost.

- ◆ **Lower the pressure by talking about friends.** "Here is how to spot this happening to someone you know" is easier for a teen to hear, and gives them tools either way.

- ◆ **Stay involved in their online world** without turning it into pure surveillance. Curiosity keeps the door open.

RESPOND

If you are worried

Stay calm and stay connected. Do not confront the suspected person, and avoid ultimatums about a relationship you are worried about. Pushing hard can drive a teen closer to a trafficker, who will use the conflict with you to deepen their hold. Keep the line to your child open above all. Write down what you have noticed: dates, details, names or usernames.

Who to call

If your teen is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police.

Canada · 1-833-900-1010

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline. Free, confidential, 24/7, in more than 200 languages. It is not the police. Advocates can talk through the situation and connect you to local support, by phone, online chat, or tip form.

Report anonymously in Canada · 1-800-222-8477

Crime Stoppers.

United States · 1-888-373-7888

The National Human Trafficking Hotline, or text 233733.

For online exploitation of a child: report to [Cybertip.ca](https://cybertip.ca) in Canada, or the NCMEC CyberTipline at report.cybertip.org in the United States.

You do not need to be certain to reach out. The hotlines exist for exactly the "I am not sure, but something feels off" moment.

KEEP IN MIND

What not to do

- ◆ Do not share the viral van-and-zip-tie warnings. They are false, and they crowd out the real message.
- ◆ Do not confront a suspected trafficker yourself.
- ◆ Do not issue ultimatums that force your teen to choose between you and the person you are worried about.
- ◆ Do not assume it cannot happen in your family, and do not assume it is happening because of one ordinary teenage mood.

**Stay close enough to notice, and safe enough
that your teen will talk to you.
That is the whole job, and you can do it.**

SOURCES

Drawn from Polaris Project (recognizing trafficking, online recruitment, and trafficking myths); Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, operated by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking; the Government of Ontario and the RCMP; and anti-trafficking educators including BRYCS and Guardian Group.

The Missing Voices Project · Missing does not mean forgotten. Silenced does not mean unheard.