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# ETHICAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING PRACTICES:

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



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## WHAT IS THIS?

**This document is a set of guidelines for Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) created by a diverse group of practitioners from various countries and faith backgrounds, facilitated by the [Global Learning Community](#).**

The guiding principles in this document have been outlined as indispensable for faith-based organisations as they engage in anti-human trafficking work. They recognise the unique strengths of faith-based approaches while addressing the distinct challenges that come with integrating faith into [trauma-informed](#) (TIC) and [survivor-centred care](#). Clear ethical guidelines ensure that faith serves as a source of comfort, empowerment, and restoration, rather than as a means of control or re-traumatisation. By integrating faith with a deep respect for religious freedom and diversity, FBOs can provide compassionate, respectful, and effective support, demonstrating the profound potential of faith to foster hope and renewal in the lives of survivors. This approach safeguards the dignity, autonomy and safety of every individual served by prioritising survivor agency and preventing the risk of unintentional harm through well-meaning but misguided actions, such as imposing beliefs, disparaging other faiths, or requiring religious participation for access to services.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When [faith-based organisations](#) engage in anti-human trafficking work, they bring unique strengths rooted in their faith, values, and community networks. However, it is essential for these organisations to ensure that their faith-based identity aligns with a "[Do No Harm](#)" approach. This involves drawing on their faith as a source of healing, empowerment, and justice, while being mindful to avoid practices that could unintentionally cause harm.

[Survivors](#) of trafficking need a space where they feel safe, respected, and empowered to heal on their own terms. Survivors come from diverse cultural, faith, and socio-economic backgrounds. For many, past experiences with religion may have involved coercion or judgment, which can be deeply traumatising. Faith-based organisations should approach survivors with humility—being mindful of cultural nuances, traditions, and [intersectional identities](#) and foster an environment of respect, inclusion, and understanding. This not only ensures a survivor-centred approach but also builds trust and facilitates healing.

**These guiding principles help FBOs avoid situations where survivors may feel coerced, marginalised, or judged.** FBO's can provide meaningful support to survivors by ensuring that their work is ethical and inclusive as well as deeply rooted in the values of compassion, dignity, and justice—the core principles of many faith traditions. They also help prevent potential conflicts when collaborating with secular organisations or those from different faith backgrounds, ensuring a unified approach to combating human trafficking that respects and honours the diversity of all involved.

## WHO ARE THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR?

These guiding principles are intended for faith-based organisations (FBOs) involved in anti-human trafficking efforts. This includes a wide range of religious institutions, faith-based non-profits, community groups, and ministries that provide direct services, advocacy, education, and support to survivors of human trafficking. The guiding principles are also relevant for faith leaders, volunteers, staff, and partners working with these organisations to ensure their programs and interventions are ethical, safe, and effective.

## HOW SHOULD THESE GUIDELINES BE USED?

These guiding principles are intended for faith-based organisations (FBOs) involved in anti-human trafficking efforts. This includes a wide range of religious institutions, faith-based non-profits, community groups, and ministries that provide direct services, advocacy, education, and support to survivors of human trafficking. The guiding principles are also relevant for faith leaders, volunteers, staff, and partners working with these organisations to ensure their programs and interventions are ethical, safe, and effective.

### 1. **As a Framework for Ethical Practice:**

The guiding principles provide a framework for FBOs to ensure that all actions, programs, and interventions align with ethical standards and the core principle of "Do No Harm." They should be used to guide decision-making, program development, and service delivery to avoid unintended harm to survivors.

### 2. **To Promote Inclusive and Safe Environments:**

The guiding principles emphasise creating environments where survivors feel safe, respected, and empowered to heal on their terms. FBOs should use these guiding principles to ensure their spaces, programs, and services are welcoming and supportive for individuals of all faiths, backgrounds, and experiences.

### **3. To Inform Training and Capacity Building:**

These guiding principles should be incorporated into training programs for staff, volunteers, and partners to build capacity in trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, ethical storytelling, and the prevention of spiritual abuse. Training based on these guiding principles will help ensure that everyone involved is aware of leading practices and the importance of a survivor-centred approach.

### **4. For Policy Development and Review:**

FBOs should use these guiding principles to develop, review, or update their internal policies and protocols related to working with and for survivors of trafficking. This includes policies on protection, confidentiality, spiritual care, partnerships, advocacy and child participation.

### **5. To Foster Collaboration and Partnerships:**

The guiding principles can help FBOs navigate collaborations with secular organisations, other faith groups, and government entities by establishing a common ground of ethical principles and a commitment to respecting diversity and inclusivity.

### **6. As a Tool for Self-Reflection and Accountability:**

FBOs should use these guiding principles to regularly reflect on their practices, including soliciting feedback from survivors to assess their adherence to the principles outlined. This ongoing process helps maintain accountability and ensures continuous improvement of anti-trafficking efforts.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles should be regularly reviewed with survivor input to ensure they remain effective, useful, and responsive.

## 1. RESPECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, DIVERSITY AND CHOICE

- **Uphold Human Dignity in All Aspects of Care:** Caregiving should be grounded in core faith principles such as love, respect, and compassion. All interventions should reflect a commitment to human dignity that champions the agency of each survivor or client.
- **Empower Survivors to Make Free and Informed Choices:** Ensure that survivors are given the information, support and freedom to make their own choices about their care, including their spiritual journey.



- **Honour Different Beliefs and Practices:** While each organisation may draw from its own religious traditions, it is crucial to respect and support survivors' right to choose their own spiritual path. This includes ensuring that your services are accessible and welcoming to people of all faiths or no faith.
- **Recognise and Prevent [Spiritual Abuse](#):** Often power dynamics between clients and caregivers, especially in the context of trauma, can create enormous risks of unintended coercion, including implied expectations and undue pressure to participate. Spiritual abuse is a misuse of power that can occur when religious beliefs or authority are used to manipulate, control, or harm others, even unintentionally. Ensure that survivors are never pressured or coerced into specific beliefs or practices. Create an environment where survivors feel safe to express their own spiritual needs and boundaries.
- **Avoid Unethical [Proselytisation](#):** Ensure that spiritual support is offered but not imposed or required. Services should never be contingent upon participation in religious activities or acceptance of a particular faith. There may be appropriate times and places for sharing faith, but it should never overshadow the mandate to protect and prioritise the rights and needs of each survivor or client. Rather, offer a supportive space for survivors to explore their spiritual journey, free from judgment or coercion.

## 2. INTEGRATE FAITH WITH TRAUMA-INFORMED AND SURVIVOR-CENTERED CARE

- **Healing Through Faith:** Recognise that trauma affects survivors differently, and provide spiritual care sensitively, without imposing beliefs. Utilise faith as a source of comfort and healing, while ensuring that support is trauma-informed. Recognise that faith can be a powerful source of healing when offered without coercion. Practices such as prayer or other faith rituals can provide comfort and strength when tailored to the survivor's preferences. Respect the non-linear nature of healing by allowing survivors to define their journey, ensuring support is flexible and responsive to their evolving needs.
- **Empathy and Compassion:** Reflect core faith values such as empathy, compassion, respect, and unconditional love in all interactions with survivors. Care should be driven by these principles, prioritising the dignity and autonomy of survivors.

## 3. PREVENT RE-TRAUMATISATION THROUGH SENSITIVE USE OF FAITH LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES

- **Sensitive Spiritual Messaging:** Be mindful of how religious language, imagery, and practices might be perceived or misunderstood by survivors, especially those who have had negative experiences with religion. Ensure survivors have safety and opportunity to communicate their needs and boundaries around religious language, messaging, activities, and practices that may be triggering for them or make them uncomfortable.
- **Voluntary Participation in Religious Activities:** Provide opportunities for spiritual growth and healing, but always make participation in religious practices voluntary. Survivors should feel free to engage at their comfort level.

## 4. ONGOING FAITH-BASED TRAINING, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND POLICIES

- **Faith and Professional Competency Training:** Provide training that integrates faith principles with professional standards in trauma-informed and survivor-centred care, human trafficking awareness, and ethical practices. Encourage staff and volunteers to understand how their faith can enhance compassionate, ethical care.
- **Policies and Protocols:** Require all staff and volunteers to understand and sign on safety and protection protocols and codes of conduct. Ensure that policies are reviewed and updated regularly.
- **Reflect on Faith-Driven Practices:** Regularly reflect on how your organisation's faith-based principles align with current anti-trafficking leading practices, and be open to adapting practices when necessary to better serve survivors.

## 5. FAITH-DRIVEN PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Establish Clear, Faith-Based Ethical Standards:** Develop policies and practices that reflect your organisation's faith values and commit to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct.
- **Open Channels for Feedback and Correction:** Intentionally encourage meaningful, regular, and anonymous feedback, including constructive criticism, from survivors, staff, volunteers, and partners about your organisation's practices in order to inform program improvements and policy updates. Be open to making suggested changes to better align with a "Do No Harm" approach and the commitment to survivor-centred and trauma informed programming.
- **Ensure Survivor and Participant Inclusion:** Integrate survivors and program participants in all aspects of programs and policies, from design and implementation to feedback and evaluation. Ensure their voices are heard and valued throughout the process.

## 6. FAITH-ALIGNED ETHICAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

- **Collaborate with Diverse Organisations:** In order to provide comprehensive, holistic support to survivors, be willing to partner with both faith-based and secular organisations. Ensure that all partners hold ethical standards and a commitment to "Do No Harm."
- **Mutual Respect in Interfaith Collaboration:** When working with organisations of other faiths or non-faith-based groups, maintain a spirit of mutual respect and understanding, focusing on the shared goal of ending human trafficking and supporting survivors in their journey to rehabilitation. Create a clear policy for interacting with and respecting other belief systems while maintaining the FBO's mission.

## 7. FAITH-INSPIRED ETHICAL FUNDRAISING AND ADVOCACY

- **Honest Representation Guided by Integrity:** Ensure that all advocacy and fundraising materials align with faith values of honesty, dignity, and respect. Avoid using survivors' stories in ways that could exploit or sensationalise their experiences or unwittingly expose their histories to their communities, potentially causing emotional and physical harm.
- **Ethical Storytelling:** Use storytelling that uplifts, empowers, and reflects the complexity, resilience, and humanity of survivors as the centre of their own stories, rather than portraying them as helpless or victims who are hopeless without the organisation's support. Ensure that survivors' engagement in storytelling is free and informed and that they are well-prepared to advocate for themselves in how/if they share their experiences.
- **Survivors must be informed about the future use of their stories/images** and provide clear consent, including the option to withdraw that consent at any time in the future.

## 8. LEGAL AND ETHICAL COMPLIANCE WITHIN FAITH FRAMEWORKS

- **Abide by Laws and Human Rights Principles:** Ensure that all actions comply with local laws and international human rights standards. Let faith guide the commitment to justice, fairness, and protection of human dignity.
- **Avoid Vigilantism:** Trust law enforcement and legal channels to handle trafficking cases. Advocate for justice that is rooted in due process and leading practices.



## 9. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

- **Child-Specific Trauma-Informed Care:** When working with children, ensure that care and support are age-appropriate, trauma-informed, and child-centred. Recognise the unique vulnerabilities of children and provide specialised support that considers their developmental needs.
- **Parental and Guardian Engagement:** Engage with parents or guardians in ways that support the child's healing and recovery, respecting family dynamics, cultural contexts and religious beliefs. Ensure that any spiritual guidance respects the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (see [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)).
- **Child Participation:** Encourage and support children's participation in decisions about their care and recovery, respecting their voice and autonomy as much as possible. Focus on the strengths and resilience of children, providing opportunities for them to build confidence and skills. Implement a trauma-informed consent policy to ensure children fully understand their rights and feel safe and supported in participating in decisions about their care, including any involvement in religious practices.
- **Voluntary Participation in Religious Activities Applies to Children:** Participation in religious practices must remain voluntary for children as well as adults. All participants should feel free to engage at their comfort level.

# GLOSSARY

**1. Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs):**

Organisations that operate based on religious beliefs, values, and teachings. FBOs often engage in social justice work, including anti-human trafficking efforts, drawing on their faith to support, advocate for, and provide services to vulnerable populations.

**2. "Do No Harm" Approach:**

A guiding principle that aims to avoid causing unintended harm to individuals or communities through well-meaning interventions. For FBOs in anti-human trafficking work, this approach involves ensuring that all actions and services are ethical, respectful, and sensitive to the needs and experiences of survivors by being rooted in their needs and expressed desires.

**3. Trauma-Informed Care (TIC):**

An approach to care that recognises and responds to the impact of trauma on an individual's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Trauma-informed care involves creating safe, supportive environments, avoiding re-traumatisation, and empowering survivors in their healing process.

**4. Survivors:**

Individuals who have experienced and escaped human trafficking. The term "survivor" is preferred over "victim" as it emphasises resilience and agency rather than passivity. Survivors may have complex needs that require comprehensive, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred support to heal and rebuild their lives.

**5. Intersectional Identities:**

Refers to the intersection of a person's social categories, including race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, and nationality. All of these categories impact a person's experience, and often the intersection of two or more of these categories creates unique challenges, including forms of both discrimination and privilege. In other words, the challenges faced by a straight white woman will be different from those of a straight white man, a lesbian white woman, or a straight black woman.

**6. Proselytisation:**

The act of attempting to convert someone to a different religion, belief, or faith. In the context of anti-human trafficking work, proselytisation can be harmful if survivors feel pressured or coerced to adopt the religious beliefs of an FBO in exchange for support or services.

**7. Survivor-Centred Care:**

An approach that places the rights, needs, and wishes of survivors in all decisions and actions. It recognises survivors as integral to the ecosystem of the organisation and team, avoiding decisions that treat them as separate. Survivor-centred care ensures that survivors are active participants in their recovery journey and that their voices guide the services and support they receive.

**8. Ethical Storytelling:**

The practice of sharing stories, particularly those of vulnerable individuals like trafficking survivors, in a way that respects their dignity, autonomy, and privacy. Ethical storytelling avoids sensationalism, exploitation, and misrepresentation, and it ensures that survivors' voices and experiences are presented truthfully and with their informed consent.

**9. Spiritual Abuse:**

A form of abuse that occurs when a person in a position of religious authority or influence uses that position to control, manipulate, or exploit others. In the context of anti-human trafficking, spiritual abuse can involve coercing survivors into religious beliefs or practices, which can cause further trauma and hinder their recovery.

**10. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

protects every child's right to choose their own religion, have their own thoughts and beliefs, and practice their religion, as long as it doesn't stop others from enjoying their rights.

**11. Child Participation:**

The involvement of children in activities, decision-making processes, or advocacy related to issues that affect them. In the context of anti-human trafficking work, child participation must be carefully managed to ensure it is ethical, safe, and appropriate. It is essential to avoid involving children in public advocacy, fundraising, or storytelling that could expose them to exploitation, re-traumatization, or stigma. When involving children in any activities, it should be in a controlled, safe environment with their informed consent and that of their guardians. The child's safety, privacy, and well-being must always be prioritised, and their involvement should be age-appropriate, voluntary, and in their best interest.



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