



Creating Child-Friendly Spaces for Child and Adolescent Trafficking Victims

A How To Guide

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This publication was developed through the Innovations in Addressing Child Trafficking (IACT) Program, which is combating child sex trafficking in the provinces of Guanacaste and Puntarenas. The IACT Program works to protect and assist child and adolescent trafficking victims, strengthen the prosecution of trafficking crimes, and prevent the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

IACT is being implemented by The Warnath Group from 2020–2025 in close collaboration with the Government of Costa Rica and civil society organizations, through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP). The Warnath Group is an organization specialized in evidence-based programs to address human trafficking, including child trafficking.

Authors: Laura Story Johnson, Rebecca Surtees

Design and Layout: Laura Story Johnson, Olivia McAdams

Project Director: Stephen Warnath



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A child-friendly space is an environment that is designed to help children and adolescents feel safe, calm, and comfortable while they are interacting with practitioners. A child-friendly space is about more than just the physical space. It is about how children and adolescents feel when they are in this space. For child and adolescent trafficking victims, child-friendly spaces are typically utilized in locations where practitioners interact with children and adolescents in the course of their professional work. Practitioners may work for the government, non-governmental organizations, or private organizations. The practitioners who are present in a child-friendly space will depend on the nature of the space and the work being done.

While child-friendly spaces can be used by all children and adolescents (anyone under age 18), they are commonly used in working with vulnerable children and adolescents. Child-friendly spaces originated in emergency and humanitarian settings as a means to provide children whose lives have been disrupted by conflict, disaster, or other emergencies with opportunities to engage in learning and developmental activities in a safe and stimulating environment (sometimes referred to as a “safe space”). They are increasingly used in working with child victims of abuse and violence, including child and adolescent trafficking victims.

This guide offers a five-step overview of how to set up a child-friendly space (or multiple child-friendly spaces) for child and adolescent trafficking victims in your institution or organization.

Step 1.

Determine if a child-friendly space for child and adolescent trafficking victims is something you need.

Step 2.

Identify the rooms or areas utilized by child and adolescent trafficking victims.

Step 3.

Select and plan for the rooms or areas to be developed into child-friendly spaces.

Step 4.

Design the child-friendly spaces.

Step 5.

Ensure practitioners utilizing the space have received training on the protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims.



1 Determine if a child-friendly space for child and adolescent trafficking victims is something you need.

A child-friendly space can be developed anywhere. It is important to think about where child and adolescent trafficking victims will interact with practitioners and to work to make those spaces child-friendly.

In Costa Rica, child-friendly spaces have been developed for child and adolescent trafficking victims within the framework of the Innovations in Addressing Child Trafficking (IACT) program to support child-friendly, victim-sensitive, and trauma-informed identification, protection, assistance, and access to justice for trafficking victims. Child-friendly spaces for child and adolescent trafficking victims have been developed in PANI offices, hospitals, prosecutor offices, and NGOs.

Child and adolescent trafficking victims have been subjected to physical and psychological violence and exploitation, usually over long periods of time, with devastating impacts on their development. Even after exit from trafficking, children and adolescents are still vulnerable to re-traumatization and re-victimization. Keeping children safe and protected, while promoting their psychosocial well-being and recovery, is therefore essential. Child-friendly spaces play an important role in the protection and assistance of child trafficking victims.

Child and adolescent trafficking victims may come to a child-friendly space under different circumstances and at different points in time, including before being identified as victims of trafficking or in the course of identification; when receiving different assistance services; when being involved as victims and/or witnesses in civil or criminal proceedings related to their trafficking experience; and in the course of their reintegration in their family or in a new setting.

If you interact with child and adolescent trafficking victims in the course of your day-to-day work, a child-friendly space would support your ability to provide child-friendly, victim-sensitive, and trauma-informed identification, protection, assistance and access to justice for trafficking victims.



2

Identify the rooms or areas utilized by child and adolescent trafficking victims.

The next step in developing child-friendly spaces is to identify the rooms or areas that child and adolescent trafficking victims may utilize in the course of your day-to-day work. This includes waiting areas, practitioner offices, meeting rooms, counseling rooms, examination rooms, interview rooms, and activity rooms or larger spaces for groups.

Waiting Areas

Waiting areas are usually the first place where a child or adolescent trafficking victim interacts with practitioners. These spaces are critical to starting off on the right foot. If a waiting area is child-friendly, the child or adolescent will be more likely to feel safe, calm, and comfortable as they wait to meet with practitioners. You should think about the different ages of children and adolescents who will be waiting and how to accommodate their specific interests and needs.

Consider:

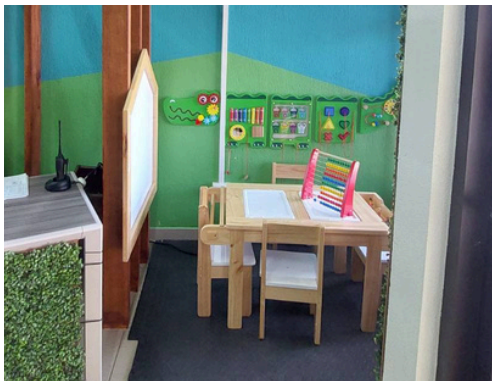
- Can you designate a full room or area for younger children?
- Can you designate a full room or area for adolescents?

If you have space limitations, remember that simple solutions go a long way.



Waiting Area for Younger Children

If you face space limitations, consider setting up a small table with chairs in the corner of a main waiting room and placing toys, art supplies, and/or books in this corner so that younger children know it is for them.



Waiting Area for Teenagers

If you face space limitations, consider setting up a couple of comfortable chairs in a hallway or an area close to but separate from the main waiting area so that teenagers can be within sight and at the same time feel that they have some privacy.



Practitioner Offices and Counseling Rooms

Practitioner offices or counseling rooms are used by professionals to meet with children and adolescents in the context of day-to-day work. With child and adolescent trafficking victims, this might include initial conversations, screening interviews, case management, providing psychological care and counseling, or providing other forms of assistance.



Meeting Rooms

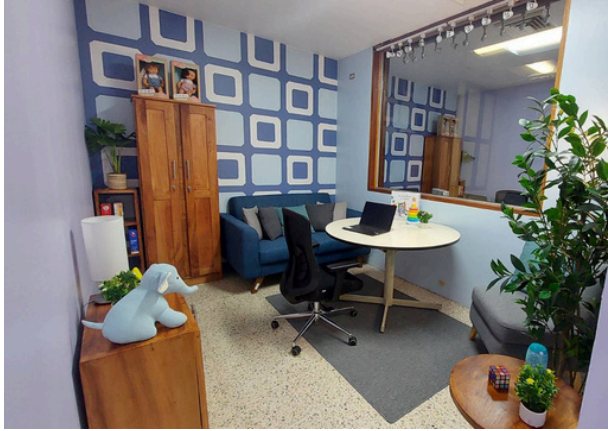
Meeting rooms are used when conducting activities with children and adolescents. This might be group counseling sessions or meetings with children alongside their family members. These spaces can also be used for educational or extracurricular group activities, such as prevention or risk reduction sessions on trafficking in persons with a group of adolescents, sessions with adolescent mothers and their children, or various skills-building workshops with children and adolescents.



Examination Rooms

Examination rooms in hospitals or healthcare facilities should be used for medical examinations of children and adolescents.





Gesell Camera Rooms or Interview Rooms

Gesell Camera rooms or interview rooms are used to conduct investigative or forensic interviews with child and adolescent trafficking victims who are involved in cases as victim-witnesses.



Activity Rooms or Larger Spaces for Groups

Some locations where child and adolescent trafficking victims interact with practitioners will have larger rooms or spaces for group activities. This might include a space where children and adolescents are able to spend time in a healthy environment, rooms for group counseling, play areas (both indoor and outdoor), or spaces for survivor groups to meet.



3

Select and plan for the rooms or areas to be developed into child-friendly spaces.

The next step is to select the rooms or areas utilized by child and adolescent trafficking victims that you will develop into child-friendly spaces and to create a plan for implementation. This will require administrative planning and resource development.

Administrative Planning

Depending on your role and the location where you are developing child-friendly spaces, you may need to seek certain permissions to alter the space or make purchases. If you need to justify why you are developing a child-friendly space for child and adolescent trafficking victims, you can consider presenting the following facts:

- A child-friendly space is part of enabling children and adolescents to participate in their protection and to exercise their rights in a safe, meaningful, and dignified manner.
- If the environment and processes in which child and adolescent trafficking victims receive assistance and protection are not child-friendly, this may have long-term and harmful consequences for their recovery.
- Child-friendly spaces can be used to mitigate and avoid re-traumatization and feelings of intimidation and stress by providing an environment that fosters victim-centered and trauma-informed care.
- Child-friendly spaces for child and adolescent trafficking victims can be utilized by all children and adolescents who are visiting a location, increasing the reach and impact of the spaces.

Resource Development

Ensure you have a clear plan and sufficient budget to develop the selected rooms and areas into child-friendly spaces. If your institution or organization does not have available resources, you can consider fundraising, such as applying for small grants, seeking in kind donations, or rallying community support for this initiative.



Consider:

- Perhaps there is a local artist who would be willing to donate their time to paint a mural.
- You might find local businesses willing to provide supplies or furniture in exchange for recognition of their commitment to anti-trafficking efforts.
- Community members or staff may be willing to donate their time to paint and decorate a room.

It is important to remember that child-friendly spaces do not need to be expensive. Sometimes just adding some plants and artwork to a space makes a huge difference. Child-friendly spaces also do not need to be complicated. In most cases, developing and improving existing spaces and rooms into child-friendly spaces should not require any construction.

If you do not have the resources to develop all of the rooms or areas utilized by child and adolescent trafficking victims, you can consider a phased approach. You might consider starting with one action item (for example, purchasing plants to put in the selected spaces or repainting) or starting with developing just one full room or space (for example, focusing on a corner of the waiting area or focusing on a teen space).



4 Design the child-friendly spaces.

The fourth step is to design the child-friendly spaces that you will develop. For design examples from different countries and contexts, please see:

<https://childfriendlyspaces.warnathgroup.com/cfs-examples/>

You can also utilize this interactive design ideas tool to look at child-friendly spaces that have been developed by the Warnath Group IACT Program in Costa Rica:

<https://warnathgroup.h5p.com/content/1292561873068839008>

In designing your child friendly space, you will want to pay attention to:

- Safety
- Decorations
- Colors
- Lighting
- Layout

Safety

Designing the space should take into account safety and child protection standards. Ensure:

- The building itself is up to code
- The building is secure (including making sure that traffickers and their associates do not have access to the space)
- There is adequate supervision of children and adolescents while they are in the space
- The room or space has adequate ventilation (air conditioning or fans as needed)

Decorations

Best practice in creating child-friendly spaces, both for children and adolescents, is to choose décor and decorations with a connection to nature. Research shows that spaces with depictions of natural elements such as landscapes, animals, plants and/or water reduce stress and promote a sense of calm and comfort.



Ideas for Child-Friendly Decorations

- Include hanging and potted plants (real or artificial)
- Consider artwork or a mural depicting landscapes or animals in their natural environment or abstract patterns
- Include soft furniture in cool colors and choose materials that are easy to keep clean and maintain
- Consider using ottomans in addition to soft chairs, these can function as both seating and tables
- Choose tables or desks or shelves made from natural wood
- Use rugs in neutral colors or from natural fibers
- Avoid the use of cartoon imagery (animals or people)
- Avoid commercial images (such as Disney characters or popular media)
- Consider having a basket of sensory-friendly toys like fidgets, as these are often very helpful for children and adolescents who are interacting with practitioners
- If appropriate to the context, consider including a tabletop waterfall or a sound machine that plays nature sounds



Colors

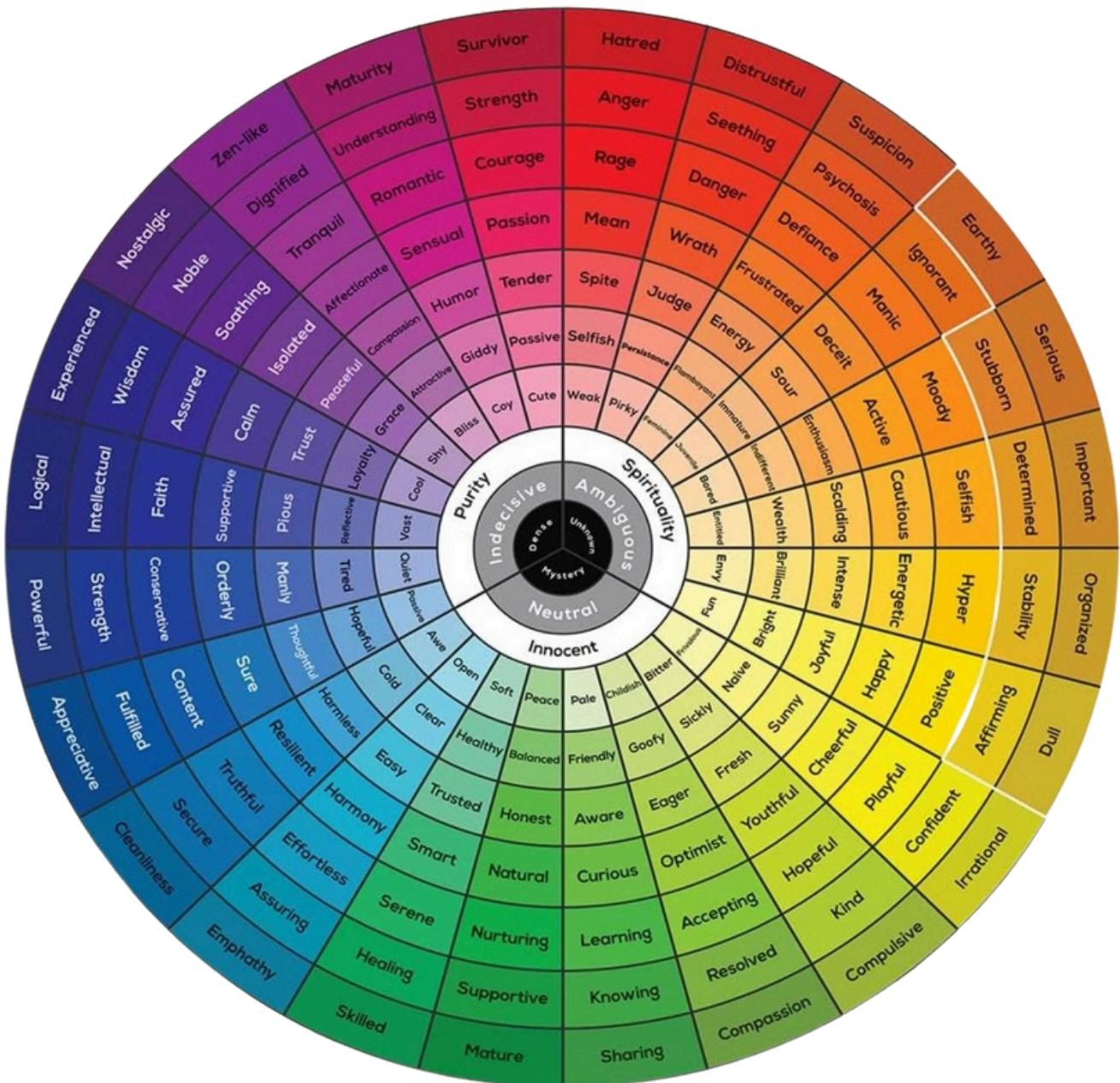
Best practice is to choose lighter colors that are perceived as calming. Research shows that color plays a pivotal role in creating healing environments tailored to the unique needs of children and adolescents. The main source of color in a child-friendly space will typically be through painting the walls. Color variety can come from murals, artwork, furniture, and other items in the space.

Color can elicit a distinct emotional response and neutral and natural colors such as blues and greens are recommended to help children and adolescents feel safe, calm, and comfortable. It is recommended to avoid stark white walls and to avoid deeply hued high-energy colors (such as red, orange, yellow) that may arouse negative emotions. However, color is very context-specific and the color palette will depend on the location and purpose of the child-friendly space.



Ideas for Child-Friendly Colors

You can use this trauma-informed color wheel to help choose your color palette.



If you are able, it is helpful to seek input from children and adolescents in your community on the selected color palette and to adjust based on their feedback. This will help with local specificity, as culture and context impact how individuals react to different colors.



You can also use this color palette, which was validated with children and adolescents in Guanacaste and Puntarenas through the IACT Program.

Lighting

Best practice is to use as much natural light as possible. Research shows that spaces with natural light and artificial lighting that mimics natural light can reduce stress and promote a sense of calm and comfort. Lamps, pendants, and up-lighting can also help to diffuse artificial light and mitigate perceived stress or discomfort.

Ideas for Child-Friendly Lighting

- Increase natural light if possible and use LED indoor lighting that mimics natural light
- Avoid fluorescent or yellow-tinged lighting
- Consider where decorative lights (lamps, hanging lanterns, floor lights) can be used to make the space feel more comfortable
- Ensure lights do not hum, buzz, or flicker
- If appropriate, allow for children and adolescents to be able to adjust the light according to their needs, to give them a sense of control over the environment



Layout

Best practice is to use an open layout for your child-friendly space. Eliminating clutter and overcrowding can reduce stress and help children and adolescents to feel safe, calm, and comfortable.

Ideas for Child-Friendly Layouts

- Ensure the layout is appropriate for the age of children or adolescents who will be using the space
- Use shelves and storage to eliminate clutter (for example, toys and books should be organized and not left lying around)
- Provide opportunities for privacy or personal space if possible
- Place some seating against a solid wall with a clear view of the rest of the room to provide a sense of safety
- Arrange furniture to promote positive and equitable interactions
- If appropriate, allow for children and adolescents to be able to rearrange some of the furniture (such as ottomans) to give them a sense of control over the environment



5

Ensure practitioners utilizing the space have received training on the protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims.

The final step in creating a child-friendly space is to ensure that all practitioners who may interact with child and adolescent trafficking victims have been trained to understand trafficking in persons and their role in the protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims. Practitioners should also be trained on child-friendly and trauma-informed interactions and communication. A physical space alone is not enough to ensure the best interests of the child when child victims are interacting with practitioners. Practitioners themselves need to have the skills and knowledge in how to be child friendly.

Checklist for Staff Training

- Are all staff familiar with relevant institutional protocols and procedures for the protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims?
- Do staff know what to do if they encounter a possible trafficking victim in the course of their day-to-day work?
- Are staff educated on the impacts of trafficking in persons on victims?
- Do staff have skills and knowledge about child-friendly interactions and communication?
- Are staff educated on the provision of trauma-informed care?
- Are staff informed on addressing vicarious trauma?

Access on demand educational content on trafficking in persons here:
<https://aprendizaje.warnathgroup.com/home-english/>



Finally, it is critical to consider sustainability in the creation of child-friendly spaces, including how a child-friendly space will be maintained over time and in response to any changes or challenges that arise. This can include ensuring the space is consistently in state to be used, as well as remaining open to adapting the space. Over time, you may discover or decide that some aspects of the space or its design are not a best fit for your location or community. Having monitoring and evaluation practices in place can assist in this process. You can keep up with new research and examples of child-friendly spaces by visiting:

<https://childfriendlyspaces.warnathgroup.com/>



