

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

What Parents & Guardians Need to Know



TOOLS FOR PARENTS:

- > How to identify warning signs that a child may have been trafficked
- > What to do if you think that your child has been trafficked
- > Ways to protect your child from being trafficked
- > How to talk to your child about human trafficking
- > How to keep your teen safe on social media
- > How to report human trafficking

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According to a study of U.S. Department of Justice human trafficking task force cases, the average age that a trafficked victim is first used for commercial sex is 12 to 14 years old – middle school age.



What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons, is a crime under federal and international law. It is a crime that involves the exploitation of one person by another for financial gain. Human trafficking occurs when traffickers use force, fraud or coercion to control other people for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex or compelling them to provide labor or services against their will.

In October 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) was enacted. Prior to that, no comprehensive federal law existed to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers.

The TVPA of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations define human trafficking as:

- a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.
- b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. (22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)).

Sources: United States Department of Justice; Polaris Project

According to the International Labour Organization:

- An estimated 40 million people are trafficked globally each year
- 25 million are in forced labor (this number includes those sold for sex) and 15 million are in forced marriages
- Women and girls account for 71% (28.7 million) of all trafficked persons
- 1 in 4 victims of human trafficking are minors

Florida Spotlight

Florida consistently ranks third in the nation in the number of calls made to the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Why is human trafficking happening in Florida?

- Transient population
- Huge tourism and adult entertainment industries
- Conventions and large special events
- Desirable weather
- High demand

Common venues for labor trafficking in Florida include domestic work, agriculture, hospitality, restaurant and food service, construction and begging/peddling rings.

Common venues for sex trafficking in Florida include illicit spa/massage, pornography, escort services, hotels/motels, online ads and residence-based commercial sex.

Source: National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics

Facts about human trafficking:

- Under U.S. federal law, any minor under the age of 18 who is induced to perform commercial sex acts is a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether her or she is forced or coerced.
- Children are victimized for labor trafficking as well as sex trafficking.
- Human trafficking victims can be any age, race, gender, nationality and from any socioeconomic group.
- Men and boys are victimized by sex traffickers. LGBTQ boys and young men are seen as particularly vulnerable to trafficking.
- Children are far more likely to be trafficked by people they know rather than strangers.
- Traffickers do not usually kidnap their victims or take them by force. Instead, most traffickers use psychological means such as tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor.
- Human trafficking victims often do not self-identify as being victims, and they are often afraid to come forward and seek help. Fear, isolation, guilt, shame, misplaced loyalty and expert manipulation are among the many factors that may keep a victim in a trafficking situation.
- Trafficking victims remain in their trafficking situations for reasons that often have nothing to do with being physically unable to leave. Some lack the necessities to get out, such as transportation or a safe place to live. Others are simply too afraid or too ashamed. Most have been so effectively manipulated that they do not identify as being a victim or as being under the control of another person.

Source: Polaris Project

Exploitation for profit

Human trafficking can occur in any community and victims and traffickers can be any age, race, gender or nationality.

Traffickers recruit victims by seeking out people with vulnerabilities, or weaknesses, that can be exploited for profit. Traffickers employ a variety of control tactics, including physical and emotional abuse, sexual assault, induced substance abuse, confiscation of identification and money, isolation from friends and family, confinement, and even renaming victims.

Often, traffickers identify and leverage their victims' vulnerabilities to create dependency. They make false promises aimed at addressing the needs of their target to impose control. As a result, victims become trapped and fear leaving for myriad reasons, including psychological trauma, shame, emotional attachment, or physical threats to themselves or their loved ones.

A victim's relationship to his or her trafficker is often a key factor in recruitment and control. Many survivors have intense emotional attachments to their trafficker. For instance, some victims identify their trafficker as an intimate partner or a family member. Often traffickers and their victims share the same national, ethnic or cultural background, allowing the trafficker to better understand and exploit the vulnerabilities of their victims. Traffickers can be lone individuals or extensive criminal networks. It is important to note that traffickers can be male or female and that children can even traffic other children. A common thread is their willingness to exploit other human beings for profit.

According to the Polaris Project, most sex trafficking victims are recruited via intimate partner or marriage proposition and most labor trafficking victims are recruited via a job offer.

Sources: National Human Trafficking Hotline; The Polaris Project; "The Polaris Project 2019 Data Report"

Traffickers often exhibit these behaviors or characteristics:

- Befriend a child online through social media, gaming or apps that provide private communications
- Are vague about their profession
- Are significantly older than female and male companions
- Take time to learn a child's hopes and dreams and exploit that child's weaknesses
- Promise things that seem too good to be true
- Encourage victims to engage in illegal activities to achieve their goals and dreams
- Express financial difficulties to make victim feel obligated
- Encourage inappropriate sexual behavior
- May not become sexual or forceful until trust is built
- Will become pushy or demanding about sex
- Will be jealous, controlling or violent
- Accompany and speak or translate for, the victim at school, medical appointments, etc.

Source: Shared Hope International

SAFE ADULT VS. PREDATOR

It may be difficult to tell if someone is really a safe adult. Here are some subtle but important differences.

SAFE ADULT

- Shows physical affection only when appropriate and/or initiated by the child.
- Treats all the children close to them equally. Although they might be closer to a certain child due to the child's personality or their relationship with the parent, they will not neglect other children present to pay attention to any one child.
- Spends time with the child around a parent, other adults or in public. They won't seek out alone time with the child but might agree to do so if requested by a parent.
- Respects a child's right to privacy — especially concerning nudity.
- Contact on social media will be minimal and public, if at all. Any private conversations will be conducted with the knowledge and consent of a parent or guardian.
- Avoids inappropriate conversation and keeps discussion centered on child-friendly content while children are present.
- Respects parents' rules and boundaries concerning their child's safety.

SEXUAL PREDATOR

- Demonstrates excessive or unusual touching, especially near the legs, chest, stomach or genital region.
- Singles out one "favorite" child with whom they spend significant time, giving them special attention or even gifts. This behavior can be especially evident while other children (including siblings) are present.
- Searches for reasons to be alone with the child. This could include enthusiastically offering to babysit, give the child a ride or host a sleepover.
- Lacks modesty around children, sometimes undressing in front of them or walking in while a child is using the restroom or changing.
- Privately contacts the child on social media. Conversation will be personal, frequent, and, in most cases, secret.
- Discusses or mentions sex, sexual acts or private body parts while a child is present.
- Questions parents' rules and decisions, accusing them of being overly protective.

Source: Shared Hope International

"Some of our most vulnerable children also face the threat of being victimized by commercial sexual exploitation. Runaways, throwaways, sexual assault victims, and neglected children can be recruited into a violent life of forced prostitution."

- Former Deputy Attorney General James Cole

If you observe someone in your child's life displaying predatory behavior, immediately:

- Remove your child from this person's presence or care.
- In a non-confrontational manner, gently ask your child about their relationship with this individual:
 - o Has this person ever contacted you over text or social media without my knowledge?
 - o Has this person ever asked you to keep a secret from me or other adults in your life?
 - o Has this person ever done something or asked you to do something that made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?
 - o Has this person ever touched or talked about your private parts? How about their private parts?
- If you feel that a person has directed predatory behavior toward your child, contact local law enforcement and make a report. You should also seek support for your child through a school counselor or other mental health professional.

Source: Shared Hope International

Who can be a victim of human trafficking?

"It can happen to anyone," and "it's happening in your backyard," are common phrases in the anti-human trafficking field. Technically, they are true: Anyone can be trafficked, in any community, just as anyone can be the victim of any kind of crime. There is no single, consistent profile for trafficking victims. The real story is that, while it can happen to anyone, available evidence suggests that people of color and LGBTQ+ persons are more likely to be trafficked than other demographic groups.

While human trafficking spans all demographics, there are some circumstances and vulnerabilities that lead to a higher susceptibility to victimization. Below are some examples of vulnerabilities that place youth at risk of being trafficked:

| Individual/ Psychological | Relational | Cultural/Societal |
|--|---|--|
| Low self-esteem | Pressure to receive good grades and perform well in school | Thinking that exploitation doesn't happen in the neighborhood or "it can't happen to me" mindset |
| A loner, has few friends, wants to fit in, has a desire for love/support | Victim of bullying or cyberbullying | High levels of gang activity |
| Has little or no positive adult support | Pressure from peers to do drugs, drink, have sex | Racism |
| Struggles with emotional or mental health issues | Early sexualization | Presence of massage parlors, strip clubs, prostitution, etc. in the community |
| History of trauma | Lack of positive role models | Pressure to own material items |
| Recently moved and/or changed schools | Familial abuse/neglect | Glamorization of pimps and "the life" |
| History or current drug or alcohol use | Unhealthy romantic relationship(s) | Pressure to be involved in sexual activity at a young age |
| Experienced physical, sexual, psychological abuse and/or neglect | High conflict friendships/relationships with family members or caregivers | Glamorization of drug use |
| Questioning their sexuality/identity | Experienced parental separation, divorce or death | Lack of community resources |
| Has food or financial insecurity | Family break-down (domestic violence, removal from the home) | Few, if any, social supports |
| Housing instability or homelessness | Immigration status | Lack of positive/healthy role models |
| Runs away | Disconnected from community | Stigmatization/isolation of vulnerable populations |
| Developmental or physical disability | Few external sources of support | Norms around acceptable sexual behavior (i.e. sexting) |
| Juvenile Justice involvement | Engages in sexually explicit behavior with others | Absence of healthy activities for youth to participate in |
| Struggling with porn addiction | Disconnected relationships with family & peers | |

Sources: Dr. Lisa Rapp McCall, Saint Leo University; "Not a Number" curricula developed by Love 146; Polaris Project; Human Trafficking Hotline

Teaching lesson: Going beyond the text

Identifying vulnerabilities

This activity is adapted from *A Guide for Caregivers* by Love 146. Traffickers often look for vulnerabilities in youth to exploit. A vulnerability is a weakness or defenselessness a person possesses. Those liabilities may be age, disconnected relationships with caregivers or peers, depression, bullying or addiction. In helping young people understand how they may be at risk for trafficking, we must first help them understand the ways in which they are vulnerable.

Using the case study below, try to identify the vulnerabilities that put Sarah at a greater risk for trafficking.

Case Study: Sarah

Her best friend introduced them. Things got serious quickly, and David asked Sarah to live with him after only a month. It felt like a big step and Sarah was nervous about it, but it made sense after having felt lonely for so long. She loved him. He said he would do anything for her, and she would do the same.

As soon as she moved in, David changed. He started telling Sarah she was stupid, and she was lucky he was willing to take care of her. After a while, David started asking her to do favors for him, like having sex with his friends or people he knew. He told her they needed the money to pay the rent. Sarah didn't like it, but she loved him and believed it was her responsibility to help because of everything he did for her. One day, they had a fight about whether she would work that night. It was so loud that the neighbors called the police. The officer spoke briefly with David and Sarah and said he would file a report indicating a domestic dispute.

What factors put Sarah at risk for trafficking?

- o Sarah is lonely and finds emotional support in David
- o She may not have a strong understanding of healthy relationships
- o She is experiencing pressure to move in
- o She is emotionally abused by David
- o She is financially dependent on him and doesn't have an independent source of income
- o David is taking advantage of all these vulnerabilities
- o David's friends are taking advantage of all these vulnerabilities

Parents, discuss vulnerabilities with your children. Try engaging the youth in your life about what could make them vulnerable.

Consider asking these questions:

- o What kind of vulnerabilities do you think you have?
- o How could someone take advantage of your vulnerabilities?
- o What would you do if you realized someone was trying to take advantage of your vulnerabilities or a friend's?

Activity

Have your child look in the *Tampa Bay Times* for examples of situations where a person was taken advantage of due to vulnerabilities.

Child Sex Trafficking Warning Signs



Teaching lessons: Going beyond the text

Finding the red flags

[This activity is adapted from *A Guide for Caregivers* by Love 146]

Read the following online conversation, and spot the red flags, or indicators that something does not feel right.

Alex15: no no, nothing like that, I was just curious

JustJake17: hey, I'm actually gonna be in your town soon. we can finally meet in person

Alex15: that would be awesome! Why are you coming out here?

JustJake17: work

Alex15: what do you do?

JustJake17: boring stuff, you wouldn't care. Where do you want to meet?

Alex15: you pick, I just want to see you!

They meet up to watch a movie and have pizza. The chats continue:

JustJake17: I cant wait to see you again

Alex15: I know, I had so much fun!

JustJake17: can you come over tonight? I need to see you again before I go

Alex15: what about my parents?

JustJake17: they won't have to know, I can pick you up at the end of your street, just sneak out once they're asleep.

Alex15: what time?

Alex15: ugh, my parents are being ridiculous. I wanted to go to this party tonight but they're telling me I can't go. It's so unfair.

JustJake17: that sucks, why'd they say no?

Alex15: they think im too young or whatever.

JustJake17: how old are you?

Alex15: 15

JustJake17: you don't seem 15. you're so mature for your age. They really shouldn't treat you like a kid

Alex15: that's something I love about you, you never treat me like im a baby..I feel like I can tell you anything and i've only known you for a few weeks

JustJake17: we understand each other

Alex15: exactly. I bet your parents aren't super strict like mine

JustJake17: they were when I was your age

Alex15: wait how old are you?

JustJake17: 26. something wrong? You don't trust me?

Alex & Jake agreed to meet at the hotel where Jake was staying. When Alex walked in the door, he was surprised that there were two other men in the room. Alex asked what was going on, and Jake said they were friends from town that just wanted to hang out. They started talking and someone offered Alex a drink. About an hour later Jake said that his friends had paid to have sex with Alex. Alex said no, but Jake said Alex would do it if Alex really cared about him.

Red flags recap:

We might imagine an "online predator" to be a creepy old man sitting at his computer pretending to be a young teen online. But studies and interviews with victims of exploitation have shown that often, the abused minors were aware of the offender's age when they chatted online and thought of them as a romantic partner. They thought that they were in love, and in many cases, met with the abuser on multiple occasions (Crimes Against Children Research Center, 2000). Using the Comic section of the *Tampa Bay Times* as a model, have your child create a comic strip representing this scenario and marking all the red flags.

Source: Shared Hope International



Physical indicators

- Signs of physical abuse such as cuts, marks, bruises or burns
- Symptoms of neglect such as malnourishment
- Unaddressed or chronic medical or dental issues
- Frequent sexually transmitted diseases
- Repeated/unexplained pregnancies
- Overly tired in class or unable to keep up with studies
- Unusual new tattoo or presence of branding
- Signs of self-mutilation or cutting; suicide attempt
- Close association with an overly controlling adult

Behavioral indicators

- Sudden change in behavior such as new signs of depression or anger
- Appears withdrawn, isolated and distracted
- Becomes overly frightened, annoyed, resistant or belligerent to authority figures
- Sudden change in dress or appearance
- Appears coached when responding to questions
- Emergence of sexualized behavior
- Sudden academic decline
- Engages in risk-taking behaviors, demonstrates poor boundaries
- Stops participating in activities previously enjoyed
- Abruptly disconnects from family and friends
- Avoids answering questions or lets others speak for them
- Exhibits uncharacteristically promiscuous behavior or references to sexual situations either in person or on social media
- Lies about age and identity
- Starts abusing drugs/alcohol

Source: Shared Hope International

RED FLAGS FOR PARENTS

- Missing a lot of school without your permission; is truant
- Suddenly in possession of expensive clothing/accessories or electronics that you, as a parent, did not purchase and child cannot afford
- Unexplained access to large amounts of cash, pre-paid cards, hotel room keys
- Has a secret cellphone or apps providing multiple cellphone numbers
- In possession of sexual paraphernalia (condoms, lubricant)
- Uses terminology like "the game," "the life," "daddy," "manager," "date/trick," etc.
- Presence of a sexually explicit online profile
- Unexplained periods of time away from home
- Runs away, reports staying with friends
- References traveling to other cities or states while whereabouts are unknown
- Surprising change in friendships/relationships with peers
- Has new friends with a different lifestyle or gang affiliations/involvement
- Presence of, or reference to, an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Has a fake ID or reports that identification is held by someone else
- References interacting and sharing personal information with sometimes significantly older people online
- References online escort ads or dating websites/apps

Sources: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Shared Hope International

TOP 10 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

1. LISTEN AND BE PROACTIVE:

Talk to your teenagers and ask questions about how they feel about their peers and the people around them.

2. ENCOURAGE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES:

Athletics, arts and organized volunteer activities can serve to help a child build their self-esteem, self-worth and to develop empathy.

3. TEACH MEDIA LITERACY:

Teach your teen how to identify, analyze and evaluate media messages in TV shows, movies, song lyrics, magazine articles and photos, apps, commercials, slogans or social media posts.

4. KNOW WHO IS REACHING OUT TO YOUR CHILD:

Knowing who your teens are talking to regularly or spending time with will help protect them and allow you to give them guidance about someone who may be a negative influence.

5. KNOW ITS OKAY TO SAY "NO":

Teach your teen that it is always ok to say "no" and there is no situation that is so terrible that you would not be there to help.

Source: Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research at Arizona State University: Adapted from "Tips for Parents to Protect Children from Predators" from the book "Walking Prey" written by survivor Holly Austin Smith

6. TEACH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEX:

By reinforcing and supplementing what your teen learns in school, you can help your teen develop important attitudes and information about healthy sexuality. Also teach your child that it is okay to say "no" to sex and that it is not okay to have sex out of feelings of obligation or fear.

7. SPEND TIME WITH YOUR TEEN:

Teens require quality time with their parents (without distractions) so they can talk about what is going on in their daily lives and so you can assure your child that you are there to help them resolve problems.

8. KNOW WHERE AND HOW YOUR TEEN GETS NEW THINGS:

Sex traffickers will use the things that your teen wants to lure them.

9. TEACH ABOUT THE WORLD:

Traffickers will use seeing the world or getting out of town as a lure with teens. Expose your child to other places, cultures and languages so they don't feel isolated or ignorant about the world around them.

10. GET COUNSELING IF IT'S NEEDED:

If your child's symptoms of depression or anger are disrupting school or home life, get professional help.

The art of manipulation

You may think that you are immune to being manipulated into doing something against your will for money, but you may be surprised at what others can manipulate or force you into doing. According to Polaris, traffickers are experts at spotting instances when people are vulnerable and then manipulating them and leveraging their fears.

The process of grooming is methodical and intentional. Polaris notes that grooming is the most common way that adults and children end up in trafficking situations. Sex and labor trafficking rarely start with violence or abduction. Most of the time, a stranger is not involved. While every situation is different, the overall grooming process usually involves the following steps:

- **Targeting the victim:** Traffickers identify people with noticeable vulnerabilities. They look for victims at bus stations, shelters, local malls, schools, anywhere that youth hang out. Social media also has provided traffickers with a convenient way to find and groom victims.
- **Gaining trust:** Gaining trust often takes place over a period of time. The goal of the trafficker is to form a bond over common interests. He or she will appear to be a good listener with a sympathetic ear.
- **Meeting needs:** Once they have gained the trust of their victims, traffickers offer a solution to meet those needs. By fulfilling these needs, traffickers gain power.
- **Isolation:** By putting themselves at the center of the victim's life, traffickers can isolate, control and create a "near total dependency," according to Polaris.
- **Exploitation:** Traffickers begin the process of exploiting their victims slowly and often invisibly. While the victim may be uncomfortable with what the trafficker is asking, over time the victim becomes conditioned to that behavior.
- **Maintaining control:** Once a trafficker establishes control, maintaining control takes diligence. Often this control is solidified through threats, further isolation or even addiction.

Source: Polaris Project

INDICATORS BY AGE GROUP

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Cruelty to others or animals
- Recurring nightmares
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Fear of the dark
- Regressive behavior like bed wetting
- Unusual interest in/knowledge of sex
- Expressing affection in ways that are inappropriate for a child of that age
- Sexual acting out/inappropriate sexual play with self or others
- Fear of a certain person or of being left alone
- Change in behavior around a specific person
- Fear of participating in physical activities at school

TEENS

- Extreme/unexplained anger
- Low self-esteem, self-worth
- Self-destructive behavior/self-harm
- Eating disorders
- Mood swings/anxiety
- Difficulty forming relationships
- Signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Promiscuous/seductive behavior
- Reports things happening to "a friend"

Source: How to Talk to Your Kids About Human Trafficking by TRUST

Technology and online safety

"Data shows that in the United States approximately 40 percent of sex trafficking victims are recruited online, making the Internet the most common place where victim recruitment takes place," Alexandra Gelber, the Deputy Chief for Policy and Legislation at the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the United States' Department of Justice, said.

Traffickers use live chat scams without parental protections, which provide them with immediate access and the opportunity to talk with targeted younger victims. Some tech-savvy traffickers also use location-trafficking applications that can access a victim's location, as well as snap pictures of an individual during video calls.

Traffickers can maintain control over victims by threatening to release intimate photos or videos of them to family members and friends if they do not comply with their demands. These images are often shared by traffickers via online marketplaces for the purpose of "virtual child sex trafficking."

Source: United States Department of Justice

Sign the Pledge for online safety

I, _____, pledge:

- **NEVER** to share inappropriate pictures of myself;
- **NEVER** to accept a "friend" request or other type of request from a stranger;
- **NEVER** to agree to meet with someone I've met online, or share my personal information, such as my home address, school name or phone number;
- To tell an adult immediately if a stranger uses a social media site, email or other form of communication to express love or admiration for me, promises me a ticket to another location or promises to make me a star; and
- To remember that I can talk to my parents, or a trusted adult, about anything.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Cut this pledge out and tape it to your computer or post it in your room as a reminder of your commitment to online safety.

Source: Florida Attorney General's Office

Going beyond the text Complicated relationships

An abusive relationship can develop over time. Traffickers gain trust by offering things that youth often crave, such as a listening ear, compliments, gifts and promises of love. Relationships can be complicated, and when the interactions are happening online, it can be especially hard for youth to recognize risky situations. Go through the Tampa Bay Times articles and classified ads with your teen. Discuss the possible risky situations that may be encountered.



Keeping your teen safe on social media:

- > Make sure your child knows your phone number by heart. Phones can get lost or be confiscated by a trafficker and your child needs to know how to contact you.
- > Teach your child to never use his/her full name when creating an account. Make sure that all account names are generic and do not contain key data like a birthdate or full address.
- > Many teens collect followers or even pay for them to increase their popularity among peers. Teach your child only to accept "friend requests" or "follow" people they know personally. It is doubtful that a 15-year-old girl or boy would have 1000+ "friends."
- > Make sure your child knows never to post a nude or racy photo on Snapchat, email or even live chat services such as FaceTime, as these photos can be recorded via a screen shot or other mechanisms and used for blackmail or to manipulate the teen into doing something to avoid the photo being circulated. There is no such thing as permanently deleting a post, picture or video from social media.
- > Monitor your children's accounts by creating your own account for each type of social media your children have. If they have Facebook, you should also have Facebook and be their "friend" so you can see what they are posting and who their other friends are.
- > Know your children's passwords for all devices. Make this mandatory and tell your child that, without them, you will no longer continue to provide cellphone, computer or internet privileges
- > Make sure to instruct your child to never activate or allow location service functions inside gaming devices, apps or on social media platforms.
- > Teach your child never to post something that indicates trouble at home or with a friend such as, "I just ran away" or "I hate my parents" or "I hate school" or "I want to get out of here." These are the types of messages that traffickers look for. Such posts provide the trafficker the opportunity to offer "help."
- > Turn on the "find my friends" location services and be sure to follow your child's location at all times.
- > Check the apps on your children's phones and make sure that they are not utilizing a location "spoofing" program to trick you into thinking that they are at one location when they are really at another. Most of these apps have a map or world icon. A Google search will list the top options.

Source: Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research, in partnership with the McCain Institute of International Leadership and Arizona State University School of Social Work

For parents who think their child may have been a victim of human trafficking:



Step 1: Call the police. Report your suspicions with as much supporting evidence as possible. Traffickers are violent and dangerous, and your child is not safe in their presence. Teens often will reconnect with their trafficker. Explain how this is a bad idea and consider restricting or monitoring all methods of communication.

Step 2: Learn about your child's rights as a victim. Offer nonjudgmental support and compassionate listening to assure your child that he or she is a victim of a crime and that you love your child no matter what. Sex trafficking victims have endured a high level of trauma and require specialized services and interventions.

Step 3: See a physician to have your child tested for sexually transmitted infections right away. If left untreated, normally curable diseases can cause long-term complications.

Step 4: Find long-term counseling with a trusted provider who has some experience working with victims of sex trafficking and victims of trauma.

Step 5: Think about your child's psychological safety. Parents can help their children feel safe by helping them identify things that instill the feelings of safety. Stay away from people, places and things that make the children feel unsafe. If your child is involved with people at school who are influencing his or her behavior, consider changing schools to avoid daily interactions and pressure from peers.

Step 6: Monitor children's social media accounts and interactions. Consider taking a break from all social media. In addition, monitor Internet usage and website history.

Step 7: Be prepared to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, low self-esteem and possible drug addiction during the recovery process. Your child is a victim. Avoid blaming your child for his or her role in the abuse. Do not use words that suggest the child's behavior caused the abuse or trauma.

Step 8: Look for a peer mentoring program in your community. Peer support and group therapy is helpful, and sex trafficking victims can be helped to feel less like a victim and more like a survivor. Interactions with other survivors can foster feelings of strength and help empower youth to rebuild self-esteem and make positive choices going forward.

Source: Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research, in partnership with the McCain Institute of International Leadership and Arizona State University School of Social Work



Think About It

“Be aware that during the abuse, your child lost control of his or her body,” notes Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research. “It is important that your child eventually begins to take back power and control and be an active part of the long-term plan and solution for healing. Know that many sex trafficking victims will return to their abuser. Be prepared to notify police if this happens and to continue with steps toward healing.”

Teaching lesson: Going beyond the text

Why does trafficking exist?

Human trafficking is happening around the world and even in the United States. Talk with your teen about this issue. Why do you think human trafficking exists? Who benefits? What are the pros and cons? Use current events from the *Tampa Bay Times* and on the Internet to help you with your discussion. Go to slaveryfootprint.org and take the quiz. Write down the number of slaves that work for you (as indicated by the quiz) and any questions you might have. After you have completed the exercise, share your results and talk about the results with your friends, family and classmates. Were you surprised or shocked by the content? Did it cause you to change your behavior?

Sexting 101

Sending someone sexually explicit photographs or messages, whether verbal or in pictures is known as sexting. According to Shared Hope International, teens and tweens often refer to this as “sending nudes.” Research reveals that 1 in 5 teens admit to sexting. Many parents are generally unaware of whether their teen is engaging in sexting.

“Due to the sexting epidemic that is an unfortunate reality today, it is essential that parents talk frequently to their kids about sexting if they don’t want their teen participating in it,” notes Shared Hope International. Experts suggest the “first discussion should commence before your child even gets a cellphone or any device that’s capable of sending a sext. Once a child receives such a device, they are susceptible to the influences of sexting. To prevent your teen

from sexting, you will want to take the initiative. After your child has a device, frequently have an open discussion on the topic.”

It is important to do this so that your child will feel comfortable approaching you and talking to you about it. According to Shared Hope International, “Sexting is a difficult topic to approach and requires a balancing act. You don’t want to appear too judgmental or forceful, but at the same time you want to be firm with where you stand and help them to see the dangers and consequences.”

Sexting leaves youth vulnerable to being trafficked. Pictures or provocative texts can be used as leverage by traffickers looking to exploit a child. The trafficker may threaten to share the sexted materials to gain the child’s compliance.

Source: Shared Hope International

Monitoring devices

“In a world where kids are growing up with technology all around them, it is important for you to have the right information to help them,” advises Shared Hope International. “Monitoring your kids’ online devices is a challenge.” It can be difficult to keep up with new technology, apps and websites.

To help you get started, here are some tips:

- Guard your kids at the location level. Keep internet devices out of the bedroom as much as possible and have a “bedtime ‘turn in’ time when Mom and Dad have the devices lined up on a power strip charging in their room.”
- Talk to parents of friends where your kids spend time. Ask at school and church about wireless access points.
- Guard your router/network signal. Is it filtered? Do you worry about kids or babysitters surfing your Wi-Fi for inappropriate content?
- Guard the device. Predators can communicate with your children through iPhones, Chromebooks, Macbooks, iPads and laptops. Although many parents don’t realize it, predators also can communicate with Xbox/PlayStation consoles.
- Understand and monitor social media. Social media is an integral part of a tween’s or teen’s world. It’s important for parents to understand the various platforms, how they work.

According to Shared Hope International, “Internet devices need parental controls just like when you prepare your child to get their driver’s license...but before you hand over the keys. You control access to the vehicle, practice with them, quiz them, and remain in control until you’re ready to hand over the keys. But even then, you want to know where they are going, with whom, and when they will be back. Internet access is no different and can be just as dangerous as an unmonitored teen behind the wheel.”

Source: Shared Hope International

Talk with Tweens and Teens

Helpful tips from Shared Hope International for talking with your child about sexting

Q What do you think is considered sexting?

A ➤ Sexting: sending someone sexually explicit photographs or messages

Q Is there any harm to sexting?

- A** ➤ Can be charged for child pornography (by sending or receiving sexts)
- Images/messages follow you, you can’t delete them once they are sent
 - Sexually objectifies you
 - Images are almost always shared with others besides the receiver
 - Reputation and future opportunities are often at risk
 - Many stories of children being forced into prostitution or sex trafficking begin with the “pimp” using sexts as a means of coercion to get them to comply with their demands

Q Do you have control over a picture/message once it’s sent?

A ➤ Absolutely not. Nearly every teen who receives a sext ends up sharing it or forwarding to others, and many sexts end up on third-party websites. All of this usually occurs without your knowledge or consent.

Q Is sexting worth the attention?

- A** ➤ The receiver and those they show it to are likely to lose some respect for you
- You become a sexual object instead of a real person
 - The individual asking will often try to make you feel special but all he or she really wants is a sexually explicit photo. Odds are, if he or she doesn’t get it from you, he or she will just try and get it from someone else.

Q Why do people sext?

- A** ➤ Seeking attention/approval
- Peer pressure
 - Bullying
 - Want to please another

Source: Shared Hope International

Going beyond the text

What if?

- “What if?” questions are an opportunity to practice scenarios with your kids. Role playing is a powerful way to teach kids how to handle difficult situations. Act out with your child various situations at different familiar locations. These “what would you do” conversations can take place at the dinner table or on the drive to school and may help ease apprehension about the topic.
- “What would you do if a good-looking older guy came up to you at the mall and said he thought you were pretty enough to be a model. Would you give him your phone number?”
 - “Is it ok for a stranger to take pictures of you?”
 - “Have you ever known someone at school that had a much older boyfriend or girlfriend?”
 - “Have any of your friends ever talked about getting paid to go on dates?”
 - “Do you know what sexting is?”
 - “Has anyone ever sent you a picture that made you feel uncomfortable?”
 - “What would you do if someone sent you an inappropriate picture or asked you for one?”

Source: TRUST



What is CSAM?

Sometimes legally referred to as child pornography, Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) is the documented sexual abuse and exploitation of children. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the National Council of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), “children and adults can be exposed to these images and videos over the internet without warning or consent.”

People can be exposed to this material without warning during a hacked video conference, webinar, or by being sent images over social media. “CSAM exposure can be traumatic for you and your child. You may have feelings like shock, anger, sadness and disgust at what you have seen. You may find it hard to get the image out of your head. You may experience nightmares, trouble concentrating

or forgetfulness about things that should be easy to remember. These are very common reactions that can disrupt your sense of safety. You are not alone.” Most important, you need to let your child know he or she is not alone.

It is important to familiarize yourself with online platforms before engaging. Be sure to check the safety settings and learn what the reporting mechanisms are. Before posting information, make sure you are aware what is shared with the public. According to NCTSN and NCMEC, “Ensure your settings are set to prevent unauthorized users from joining your video call or connecting with you on social media or online gaming. Talk with your school or other online community groups about what they are doing to ensure a safe online experience.”

Talking With Teens



- Pay attention to your teen's body language during and after their response. Their body language should match what they are sharing.
- Label behavior, not the person. For example, an “angry youth” is a “youth who is angry.”
- Remember: language matters. There is no such thing as a teen “prostitute.” That teen is a victim of human trafficking.
- Ask your teen if anyone has touched them in ways that don't feel okay. Know that sexual abuse can produce a physical response that feels good to the victim, so asking your teen if someone is hurting them may not get the information that you are looking for.

Here are some things NOT to do when talking to your teen. Don't:

- Question what they've shared or why they have decided to share this information with you. This could shut down communication.
- Expect the teen to believe their situation is unhealthy or abusive.
- React verbally or physically in a way that shows disgust or disdain. Try not to show that you're “shocked” or talking about how “awful” the youth's experience was. This may prevent them from sharing more or believing that you can “handle” the information.
- Expect the youth to disclose all the details of their abuse. Sometimes difficult information needs to be gathered in stages.

Source: *A Guide for Caregivers to Prevent Child Trafficking* by Love 146

Reporting CSAM

To make a report of CSAM exposure online, please provide the following information:

1. The username of the individual sharing the explicit content
2. The date and time the content was shared
3. The URL or meeting link where content was shared
4. The meeting number and password, if applicable.

Source: *National Child Traumatic Stress Network; National Council of Missing and Exploited Children*

Teaching lessons: Going beyond the text

Kevin's story

Kevin was recruited by a crew member who came to his door selling magazines. It seemed like a great opportunity at first. Have your teen read Kevin's story on the Polaris blog: polarisproject.org/blog/2015/08/survivorstory-abandoned-by-atraveling-sales-crew.

Have your teen look for a news article in the *Tampa Bay Times* about a teen or adult being trafficked for labor. Teens can search the archives in the digital edition for an article, using the search engine. Your teen should write down the main ideas and facts of the article and then share the information with you.

Would your teen feel comfortable coming to you about something that happened?

Here are some things to consider when talking to your teen:

- Be non-judgmental when listening and avoid language that could make them feel shame or rejection.
- Avoid beginning your conversation by saying your teen did something/said something wrong. “I” statements can be very helpful. For example, “I am concerned because...”
- Pay attention to your body language. Face your teen, make eye contact, show interest and empathy. Show understanding through words, nods and facial expressions. Speak calmly.

I Was Trafficked: Two Survivors Share Their Experience

"It was people saying that 'I see you and I care'—that was the thing, I think, that turned things around for me most."

— Jeri Williams, Co-Founder
Survivor 2 Survivor

ANGIE

Born in Kentucky, Angie did not have a "normal" childhood. She was indoctrinated into human trafficking at birth. Angie says, "nobody really understands the depth of human trafficking. I didn't understand how deep things go. It's so involved with so many parts. You could be supporting it and not realize it."

Angie grew up in a suburban neighborhood. Although she went to school, she didn't really have any friends. When she wasn't at school, she was confined to her home.

Raised by an alcoholic father, who was a prominent member of the Luciferian Church, and a drug addicted mother, Angie's parents fought all the time. At school Angie recalls often acting out in class and not becoming involved in school activities until she was a teenager.

Angie's memories of her childhood are vague. This is due in part to the physical, sexual and mental abuse that she suffered. Isolation, religious

indoctrination, fear, as well as alcohol and drugs also played a part in distorting her childhood. From birth to her early teens, Angie was groomed by her parents to do what she was told when she was told to do it. "I remember being taken out of my house in the middle of the night by my father. I was told to shut up and get in the car. I was taken to the homes of my parents' friends, relatives and co-workers where I was sold." She also recalls

being trafficked to the Hell's Angels at one time.

Angie explains that part of the grooming process involves intentionally manipulating someone's mind. "Your mind is split for the purpose of being sex trafficked and used for rituals and things like that. When I was sex trafficked with my dad and all these men and women, I did drink ... and there were drugs. I didn't have a conscious understanding what was going on. It was not like I made a choice."

It took many years for Angie to learn to trust people. In her teen years, she turned to sports to focus her energy and gain confidence. She currently devotes her life to helping others cope with trauma.

While Angie's story seems like an exceptional situation, she notes that there are millions of young victims who are abused, victimized, and trafficked every day by caregivers and community leaders. Angie wants to bring attention to the situation and remind people that trafficking is not just limited to certain types of people and that children are especially vulnerable.

LAURA

Born and raised in North Carolina, Laura was 4 years old when she entered foster care. She was bounced around from home to home. At the age of 13, she was adopted. A few years later, her parents, an alcoholic father and controlling mother, divorced.

When she was 18, Laura moved away from her small town to live in a large college town, where she quickly became enamored with her new-found freedom. Going to college didn't last long. She moved in with a man, who introduced her to drugs.

Laura realized she needed to get sober when she became pregnant at 19. She managed to escape the abusive situation she was trapped in with the help of her father. Two years after rescuing her, Laura's father died.

"My father was my best friend. I felt like he was the only one that ever got me and ever cared for me. He was my hero regardless of his alcoholism, so when I lost him, I lost everything."

Skydiving, drinking, doing drugs and being in toxic relationships with men became Laura's new reality. "One day I met a man at a gas station. He promised me a new life. A better, more lavish one. To be pampered always and treated like the queen I was. At the time I was 24, drug addicted, lost. I was sold a bunch of hopes and dreams by this one guy."

He told Laura he and his brother owned a massage business where she could work. The men supplied her with so many drugs that she didn't care when her job went from giving massages to prostitution, and she had limited freedom to leave the apartment.

"You don't think about the consequences or who's doing what to you. You just want your next fix, and you keep doing the drugs to kind of numb the pain and numb the guilt and numb the shame. I was mainly

a cocaine user, but I also ended up a heroine user. So, I was clearly never in my right state of mind, just always completely oblivious."

The grooming process involved getting Laura dope sick, mentally manipulating her and controlling where she earned money. "I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I didn't think I could ever be worth anything else. I got to a point where I accepted that as my life, worth and value. I accepted I was going to be sold, and that was my work. That was my value, which was nothing really at all. I didn't think anybody would ever want me again."

After spending four and a half months in jail, then living with her grandparents for a short time, Laura was lured back into the trafficking scene, something that is very common for survivors. Eventually, the tactics used by her trafficker became more violent and controlling.

As the physical trauma worsened, the intimidation tactics and abuse became more dramatic. Being beaten nearly to death and suffering from withdrawal, Laura remembers thinking, "I'm going to die."

In 2018, Laura managed to escape her trafficker and move to Florida where she entered her fourth rehab center. She has been sober ever since. "Now I have a passion for helping people heal spiritually and mentally. That's been a journey for me. I found feeling within that first year, and then I've just continued to build my life off what others have done for me."

Part of that passion is making others aware of human trafficking. She says parents need to be aware of changes in children's behaviors and attitudes.

Laura warns that controlling relationships are a key indicator of human trafficking. She encourages parents to speak openly with their children about what healthy relationships should look like.

How to Report Trafficking

NATIONAL
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
HOTLINE



CALL
1-888-373-7888



TEXT
"BeFree" (233733)



LIVE CHAT
humantraffickinghotline.org

24/7 • Toll free
Confidential
200+ languages

GET HELP • REPORT TRAFFICKING

If you believe that you have encountered a victim, or you suspect that a form of human trafficking is occurring, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline or local law enforcement. Reference that you suspect human trafficking and provide as much information as you can without directly involving yourself in the situation. If there is risk of imminent harm or danger, immediately contact 911.

Pasco County Commission on Human Trafficking

VISION: To work toward a day when no person within Pasco County is compelled to work or engage in a commercial sex act.

MISSION: Ensure the health and safety of people in the community through awareness, education and advocacy efforts.



@knowmorepasco

CONTACT US AT:

htcommission@pascocountyfl.net

Ways That You Can Help End Trafficking



Learn red flags & indicators



Use your skills to give back



Observe and report



Advocate for victims & survivors



Spread the word



Tell your friends: "Demand drives exploitation"



Volunteer locally



Learn more: Go to polarisproject.org



Take a training



Host an anti-trafficking event



Stay informed about the issue

Shop Free Trade Certified Goods. For a list, please visit fairtradecertified.org/. Look for goods with these symbols.



Newspaper in Education

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