

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## SEX TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

### A TRAINING TOOL FOR PARENTS OF TEENS

ASU School of Social Work

**Office of Sex Trafficking  
Intervention Research**

THE MCCAIN INSTITUTE

*for* INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Many parents have a limited understanding of the issue of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation and how it might show up within your family. As the parent of a teen, you are constantly required to navigate your child's behavior, progress at school and keep a watchful eye for warning signs that could indicate your child is headed down a dangerous or destructive path or in trouble.

Most adolescents spend more time at school than anywhere else. Certain behaviors that take place before, during and after school, as well as on weekends and breaks are important for parents to monitor. Parents can begin to recognize warning signs and changes in behavior and appearance that may indicate underlying problems with teens in their care.

Daily interaction with teens gives parents the opportunity to prevent, identify and respond to sexual exploitation appropriately.

This training brochure explores the topics of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. With proper awareness, parents can begin to understand the warning signs and help their children avoid behavior and people and places that could lead to exploitation and abuse.

For those parents who suspect their teen has already been a victim of exploitation, this brochure guides you how to seek help for your child and offer the right kind of guidance and support to avoid further risk and abuse.

**According to the National Coalition to Prevent Child Abuse and Exploitation, the sex trafficking of minors is a severe form of child abuse with lasting effects on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and society.**

Sex trafficking, much like other forms of child abuse, can be difficult to detect because victims often hide their victimization and are reluctant to come forward and tell a parent or trusted person at school.

Also, common myths and stereotypes about sex trafficking can affect a parent's judgment and response. The reality is that anyone, regardless of race, age, gender, sexual preference or socio-economic status can be a victim of sex trafficking.

For sex trafficking to occur, there are two primary actors- the victim and the abuser. The abuser can be a traditional sex trafficker or a pimp. Or the abuser can be someone who has traded anything of value for sexual favors from an underage minor.

Police report instances where perpetrators have offered expensive clothing, cell

phones, electronics, accessories and even food in exchange for sex acts.

**Vulnerable youth can be lured into sex trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation using promises, psychological manipulation, provision of drugs and alcohol and violence.**

**Teens can be commercially sexually exploited through prostitution, pornography, stripping, erotic entertainment, erotic massage or other sex acts. The commercial aspect- exchanging money or something of value- is critical to separate the crime from sexual assault, dating violence, or statutory rape.**

Source: Shared Hope training materials

*Keep a watchful eye  
for warning signs*

**If you suspect Human Trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888**

# HOW DO TEENS BECOME VICTIMS?

WHILE THERE IS NO COMMONLY ACCEPTED PROFILE OF A SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIM, CERTAIN POPULATIONS ARE MORE VULNERABLE THAN OTHERS.

## RUNAWAY

- Pimps/traffickers target runaway or “throwaway” (A throwaway teen is one who has been forced out of the home by the parent or guardian) teens or those who are having trouble at home. These youth are at an increased risk for predators as they have few resources, may not be old enough to legally get a job, and are often running away from difficult situations.

## FOSTER CARE

- Youth in foster care may move around a lot, and are prone to victimization because they may not have someone looking out for them or making sure they are safe. They may crave the attention and consistency a pimp can provide.

## GANGS

- Increasingly, gangs are using prostitution as a means of income, much like selling drugs or guns. While drugs or guns can be sold just once, a human body can be sold over and over. Some girls are told they must sell their bodies as part of gang membership or initiation, for protection, or as their contribution to the gang.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Youth who have been arrested or are currently on probation may be at a higher risk for trafficking. Juveniles are most commonly arrested for related crimes such as loitering, curfew, runaway or minor in possession of drugs or alcohol.

LGBTQ youth account for a disproportionate rate of the runaway and homeless youth population, and experience disproportionately high rates of victimization. According to the 2016 Youth Experiences Survey, 54.5% of sex trafficked young adults identified as LGBTQ. These young adults are significantly more likely to report having been trafficked for drugs, money, and a place to stay.

Source: Roe-Sepowitz et al, 2016

## HOW TEENS ARE LURED INTO PROSTITUTION

- Recruitment by a “Romeo/boyfriend” pimp who convinces the victim that he loves and cares for them
- Kidnapped by a “gorilla pimp” who forces them into the life
- Gang related prostitution either as a means of entry into the gang, gang initiation, as work to provide money for the gang, or for protection by the gang
- A parent or family member pimps out their child for drugs, money or needs such as food or rent
- Running away and living on the streets and are forced to exchange sex acts for basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.



*Adolescents who are unsupervised by their family or caregivers are most at risk for being exploited.*



# WHAT IS A PIMP?

## THE THREE T'S OF TRAFFICKING

### TARGETED

Pimps shop for their victims online, in shopping malls, bus stops, at schools, at after school programs or hang-out locations like a popular fast food restaurant or park, near foster homes and other places where teens gather.

### TRICKED

Pimps invest a lot of time and effort forming a bond with their victims. They often buy gifts, provide a place to stay, and give affection before revealing their real intent – to sell them for sex.

### TRAUMATIZED

The pimp's use of psychological manipulation, physical violence and rape can make the victim feel trapped and powerless.

The "trauma bond" between the trafficker and the victim is very difficult to break and may require intensive long term treatment and counseling.

Source: National Center for Missing and Exploited Youth, 2012



Under federal law, the crime of sex trafficking is defined as the harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not yet obtained 18 years of age.

Source: Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000

### PIMPS ARE PREDATORS AND REFERRED TO AS TRAFFICKERS, AS THEY COMMIT THE CRIME OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

A pimp is someone who forces another person into prostitution, and then keeps some or all of their earnings. The pimp makes arrangements for customers to have sex with their victim. Traffickers often brand their victims with a tattoo or mark to show they are property, much like a rancher might brand their cattle.

### PIMPS/TRAFFICKERS CAN LOOK LIKE AN ORDINARY GUY OR GIRL.

They can also be non-traditional, like a family member who pimps out their child for food, money or drugs. Pimps can also be female, and often pimps will work as couples trying to recruit young girls- where the female might act as a mentor, friend or big sister.

**TRAFFICKERS ARE MASTER MANIPULATORS.** They are talented actors and salespeople and target girls who are emotionally vulnerable. From promising to help pay for basic needs or provide extravagances, pimps are skilled and accomplished at reading people and knowing just what to say and offer to get a girl's attention. A pimp can make a girl may feel loved, beautiful and spoiled with indulgences like trendy clothes and shoes, expensive hairstyling, manicures and pedicures, tattoos, designer purses, hotel stays and eating at restaurants, or travel to new and exciting places. Ultimately, the girl feels like she owes him something in return.

### PIMPS USUALLY BEGIN CONTACT WITH A COMPLIMENT.

Pretending to be a talent scout, or modeling agent, initial contact may start with "Girl, you are so pretty, you should be a model." Or, "I know a guy who is looking for a girl just like you to be in his music video." Compliments turn to romantic attention, then graduate to physical affection, and ultimately earn "boyfriend status" with includes physical intimacy. Eventually, the pimp will "flip the switch" and ask his girl to sell sex.

### TRAFFICKERS OFTEN INVEST A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY INTO FINDING THE PERFECT VICTIM.

They have been known to frequent areas where teen girls like to hang out – the mall, concerts, park, bus stops outside of high schools, popular fast food establishments, bars and coffee shops. Pimps also shop for their victims online. They are mass consumers of popular social media and "friend" or "follow" or "like photos" of potential victims on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other popular sites.

**If you suspect Human Trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888**



# TOP 10 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM BECOMING A SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIM:

- 1. LISTEN AND BE PROACTIVE:** Talk to your teenager and ask questions about how they feel about their peers and the people around them. Teens sometimes struggle with peer pressure, bullying, and other social pressures like drinking or using drugs. All of these issues will increase their vulnerability.
- 2. ENCOURAGE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES:** Athletics, arts, and organized volunteer activities can all 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. Teens should be able to understand that many images they see have been edited, and do not represent a "real" or healthy body.
- 4. KNOW WHO IS REACHING OUT TO YOUR CHILD:** Knowing who your teen is 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. Traffickers have contacted their victims online through social media or in locations where teens gather.
- 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. Have a contact plan that includes a way for them to ask for your help to get out of a bad situation, without getting in trouble.

**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. Teens are naturally curious and are likely to search for information about sex online, and

be exposed to sexually explicit pornography either as a search result or by accident. 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. Time driving in the car is a good place to talk, or so is going for a walk without cell phones. Volunteering together is another way to spend quality time and teach about empathy and perspective about other people's circumstances and suffering.
- 8. KNOW WHERE AND HOW YOUR TEEN GETS NEW THINGS:** Sex traffickers will use the things that your teen wants to lure them. Take a regular inventory of your teen's belongings and ask questions if you see expensive electronics, clothing, purses, makeup, hairstyles, nails or items that you did not pay for or that you know your teen cannot afford.

**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. Many teens do not know their parents phone numbers, and rely on electronic contacts. Make sure your teen knows how to ask for help or contact you if taken to another location or separated from their cell phone.

- 10. GET COUNSELING IF ITS NEEDED.** If your child's symptoms of depression or anger are disrupting school or home life, get professional help. Ignoring your child's signals for help will only drive them further away and possibly lead to them seeking comfort from a stranger.

Source: Adapted from "Tips for Parents to Protect Children from Predators" from the book "Walking Prey" written by survivor Holly Austin Smith



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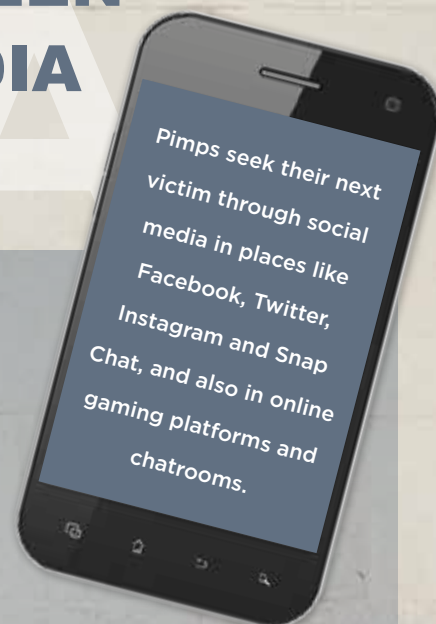


# HOW TO KEEP YOUR TEEN SAFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Make sure your child knows your phone number by heart. Phones can get lost or confiscated and your child needs to know how to contact you.
- Teach your child to never use his/her full name in creating an account. Make sure names are generic in name and key biographical data like a birthdate and 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 would have 1000+ "friends."
- Make sure your child knows that anything posted on the internet lasts FOREVER. There is no such thing as a way to permanently delete a posting, picture or video from social media.
- Make sure your child knows never to post a nude or racy photo on snapchat or 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.
- Monitor your child's accounts by creating your own account for each type of social media

your child has. If she has Facebook, you should also have Facebook and be her "friend" so you can see what she is posting and who her "friends" are. Same goes for Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat. Make sure your teen does not "block" you on these accounts or only allow you partial access.

- Know your child's passwords for all her devices. Make this mandatory or you will no longer continue to provide a cell phone, computer or internet privileges.
- Make sure your child is instructed to never allow location services functions inside games, apps or social media.
- 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." "I hate school" "I want to get out of here." These are the types or messages pimps are looking for so they can quickly become a person to "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 child's phone and make sure she is not utilizing a location "spoofer" program to trick you into thinking she is at one location, but actually is at another place. Most of these apps have a map or world icon. A google search will list the top options.



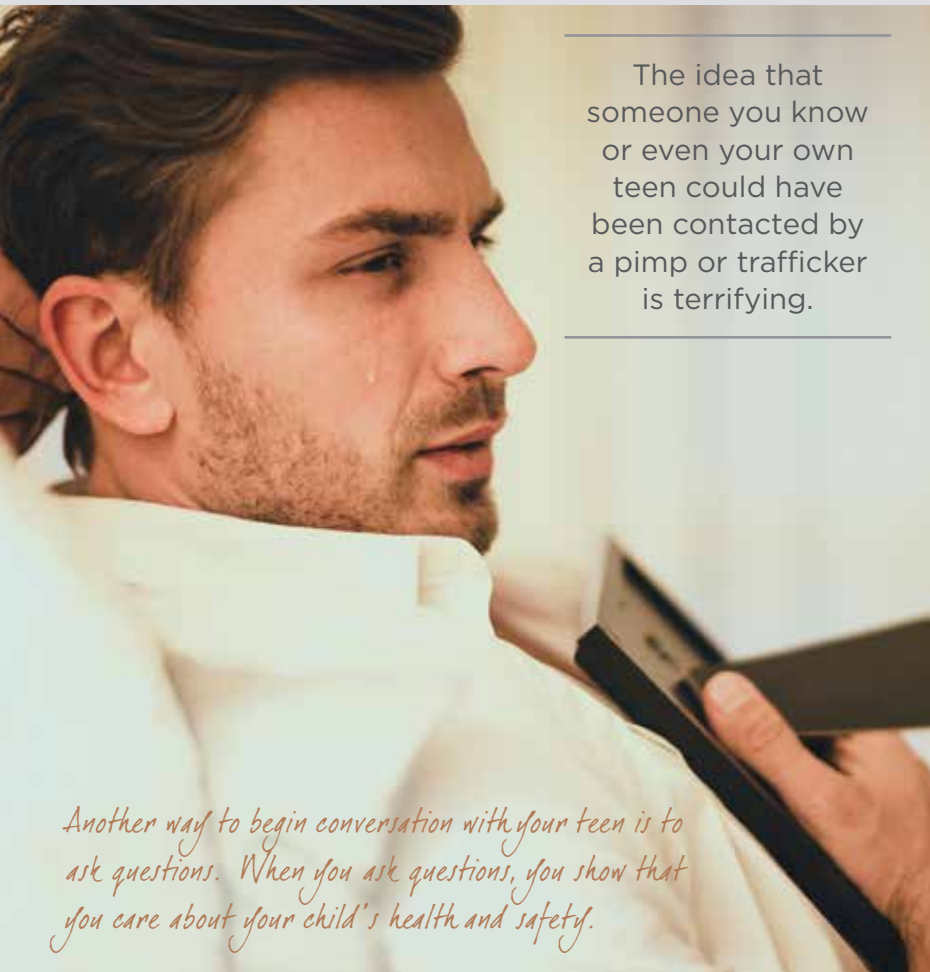
Pimps hide behind compliments and their listening skills. Teach your child about dating violence and coercive relationships, as there are many similarities and overlap with dating violence and the issues of control, coercion and manipulation.



# Parents should trust their instincts

Parents should trust their instincts. If something “feels” wrong with their child, it probably is. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. “What if?” questions are a great opportunity to practice scenarios with your teen. Role playing is a powerful way to teach kids how to handle difficult situations. These “what would you do” conversations may help ease apprehension about the topic.

“What would you do if a good looking guy came up to you at the mall and told you that he wanted you to take some pictures for his modeling business?” You will probably hear, “Oh mom, seriously?” In the end, it is better to upset your teen so that she thinks twice when potentially faced with a dangerous situation.



The idea that someone you know or even your own teen could have been contacted by a pimp or trafficker is terrifying.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

1. “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?”
2. “Would you give someone you just met your phone number?”
3. “Is it ok for a stranger to take pictures of you?”
4. “Have you ever known someone at school that had an much older boyfriend?”
5. “Have any of your friends ever talked about getting paid to go on dates?”
6. “Do you know what sexting is?”
7. “Has anyone ever sent you a picture that made you feel uncomfortable?”
8. “What would you do if someone sent you an inappropriate picture or asked you for one?”

*Another way to begin conversation with your teen is to ask questions. When you ask questions, you show that you care about your child's health and safety.*

## RED FLAGS FOR PARENTS

- missed a lot of school without your permission and/or running away and unexplained periods of time away from home
- presence of, or reference to, older boyfriend
- sudden possession of expensive clothing, purses, or electronics that you did not purchase and she cannot afford
- sudden change in dress/appearance
- unusual new tattoo
- unexplained cash
- “second” cell phone in her purse or wallet
- hotel room keys in her purse or wallet
- fake ID in purse or wallet
- reference to new “modeling job” or music video job
- sudden change in behavior such as new signs of depression, anger or appearance
- sudden academic decline
- surprising change in friendships/relationships with peers
- uncharacteristically promiscuous behavior or references to sexual situations either in person or on social media
- signs of physical abuse or restraint (cuts or bruises)
- signs of self mutilation (cutting)
- sexually transmitted infection/disease
- use of terminology like “the game” “the life” “daddy” “manager” “date/trick”
- suicide attempt
- starts using drugs
- starts drinking alcohol
- gang affiliation

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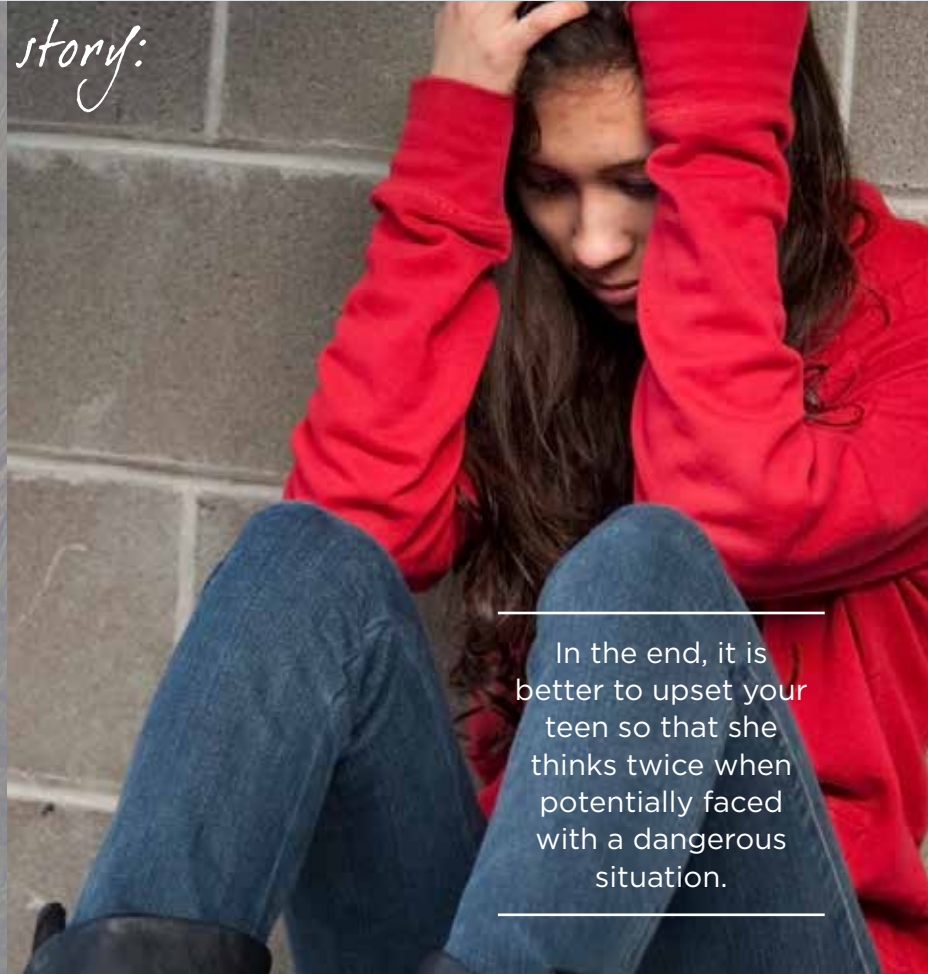
## A LOT OF VICTIMS DO NOT IDENTIFY AS VICTIMS.

- Victims may feel shame, self-blame and feelings of unworthiness of a better life
- Victims may be coached to lie and often give scripted stories
- Victims are often fearful and distrust law enforcement and government services out of fear of arrest
- Victims may have formed a trauma bond with their exploiter and may have deep loyalties and positive feelings for their abuser
- Victims often fear their own safety and the safety of their family and friends due to threats of violence
- Victims are often fearful and distrust law enforcement and government services out of fear of arrest
- Drugs often play a role in sex trafficking situations- sometimes as a way to cope or victims sometimes enter “the life” to support a drug habit

### Ashlynn's story:

*A 16- year old sophomore honors student in high school was having a fight with her parents. She left the house and walked to a nearby restaurant for some time to think. While she was crying at a table, a nice older and good looking guy in his 20's approached her, was really friendly, offered to buy her dinner and then suggested she stay at his place, just for one night. “Teach your parents what will happen if they treat you like that....you just won't come home.”*

*He drove her 50 miles from her home to a part of town that she had never been to before. He took her cell phone. She didn't know how to reach her parents or how to get home. She had no money on her. He was really sweet and gave her a drink laced with drugs. He had sex with her and then eventually told her she owed him and began selling her for sex. She was too ashamed to call the police until getting beaten so so badly she thought she might die. She was able to convince one of her customers to allow her to use his phone in the bathroom of the motel, and she called 911.*



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In the end, it is better to upset your teen so that she thinks twice when potentially faced with a dangerous situation.

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The idea that someone you know or even your own teen could have been contacted by a pimp or trafficker is terrifying. Chances are, this will never happen to your family, but if it does, you should know exactly what to do. In addition, all teens and parents should be trained, “If you see something or hear something, say something.”

Adults who work with teens are mandatory reporters in instances of child abuse or neglect, including sexual exploitation of any kind, meaning that they are legally required to report when abuse is observed or suspected. If your teen has overheard something upsetting at school, or witnessed something suspicious, they should tell a trusted adult at school.

Each teen will have their own level of trust and comfort with some favorite adult in their life. Teachers, counselors, school nurses, coaches, school resource officers, doctors, nurses

and even police officers who work on campus are trained to know exactly what to do if they hear of an instance of abuse.

It is important that teens understand that real friends look out for each other. They should be taught never to try to handle the situation on their own. It's simply too dangerous.

If someone is in immediate danger, call 911. Pimps and traffickers are often violent criminals, and any suspected contact with a teen or recruiting behavior should be treated as an emergency situation.

To report an incident or ask for help, you can always call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) 1-888-3737-888 or text the Polaris BeFree Texting Helpline at “BeFree” (233733). This National Human Trafficking Hotline is staffed round the clock and a real person will answer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. They can alert authorities in your local area for you, in a non-emergency situation where you do not want to call 911. You can also submit a tip.



# FOR PARENTS WHO THINK THEIR CHILD MIGHT HAVE BEEN A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

**Step 1. CALL THE POLICE.** Report your suspicions with as much supporting evidence as possible. Pimps are violent and dangerous criminals and your child is not safe in his/her presence. Think about the physical safety of your child and your family. Teens often will reconnect with their trafficker. Explain how this is a bad idea and consider restricting or monitoring all communication channels.

**Step 2. LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS AS A VICTIM.** Continue to offer nonjudgmental support, compassionate listening and let your child know that they are a victim of a crime and that you love them no matter what. Sex trafficking victims have endured a high level of trauma and require specialized services and interventions. Victims of trauma can experience extreme stress that impacts the person's ability to cope and function.

**Step 3. HAVE YOUR CHILD TESTED** for sexually transmitted infections right away. If left untreated, normally curable diseases can cause long-term complications and infertility.

**Step 4. SEEK LONG-TERM COUNSELING** with a trusted provider who is trauma informed and has some experience working with victims of sex trafficking.

**Step 5. THINK ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY.** You can help your child feel safe by helping them identify things that instill the feelings of safety, and stay away from people, places and things that make them feel unsafe. If your child is involved with people at school who are influencing her behavior, consider changing schools to avoid daily interactions and pressure from peers.

**Step 6. MONITOR SOCIAL MEDIA OR CONSIDER A BREAK FROM ALL SOCIAL MEDIA.** Monitor internet usage and website/data history.

**Step 7. BE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH DRUG ADDICTION, PTSD, DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, LOW SELF ESTEEM AND FEELINGS OF WORTHLESSNESS DURING THE RECOVERY PROCESS.** Avoid blaming your child for his/her role in the abuse. Do not use words that suggest his/her or behavior caused the trauma.

**Step 8. FIND SUPPORT IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY WITH A PEER MENTORING PROGRAM.** Peer support and group therapy is helpful and sex trafficking victims can be coached to feel less like a victim and more like a resilient survivor. These interactions with other survivors can foster feelings of strength and help empower youth to rebuild self-esteem and make positive choices going forward.

## TIPS:

Be aware that during the abuse, your child lost control of his or her body. It is important that your child eventually begin 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 continue with the above steps upon recovery.

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