

## Child Sex Trafficking in America: A Guide for Parents and Guardians

### What is **Child Sex Trafficking**?

Child sex trafficking occurs when a child under 18 is involved in a commercial sex act where sex is traded for money, food, shelter, drugs or anything else of value. This crime is occurring in all types of communities throughout the United States and traffickers are making an alarming profit while victims endure countless days and nights of rape, abuse, torture and violence.

It's important to remember that even if the child believes it was his or her choice, they are a victim, and an adult or perpetrator is exploiting their vulnerabilities. A child cannot consent to sex with an adult. As such there is no such thing as child prostitution and that phrase should never be used when referring to child sex trafficking.

### Know the Warning Signs

Children frequently do not reveal their victimization because they're being manipulated by a trafficker who has physical and psychological control over them, or out of the shame and guilt that may exist as a result of their exploitation. Parents and guardians should familiarize themselves with some of the indicators of child sex trafficking, including:

- A history of running away or current status as a runaway;
- Large amounts of cash, multiple cell phones or hotel keys;
- Tattoos or branding related to money or ownership and/or the child is unwilling to explain;
- Signs of current physical abuse and/or multiple sexually transmitted diseases;
- Presence of, or communication with, a controlling older boyfriend or girlfriend;
- Gang involvement, especially among girls; or
- Travel to other states or staying at hotels when he or she runs away.

### How to Keep Your Child **Safer**

One of the most important things you can do to protect your child is to create an environment in which he or she feels comfortable talking with you. Open **communication** is key. Help make your children more aware by explaining the dangers of sex trafficking and by **challenging myths** and misconceptions that glamorize commercial sex. This includes having conversations with them about online safety and how traffickers/pimps use social networking sites and apps to mask not only their appearance but also their true intentions while recruiting new victims.

Do you trust the people with whom your child interacts? **Knowing** who your child is with is always crucial to protecting his or her safety. Also, it's very important to **monitor** what your child does and who your child is interacting with on the internet.

Lastly, if something doesn't seem right, **ask questions!**



**IF YOU SUSPECT  
CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING,**

**CALL  
1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678) OR  
VISIT [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org)**

## How Does a Child Become a Victim?

Child sex trafficking victims could be anyone – your daughter, neighbor, or nephew. Traffickers recruit victims in schools, online through social media, at shopping malls, bus stations or even foster care or group homes.

Perpetrators of sex trafficking often target children believing their age makes them easier to manipulate and control.

Factors that make children particularly vulnerable include:

- A history of sexual abuse. Traffickers will work to identify any vulnerability in a child's life and use that to create a closer bond to the child and to maintain future control;
- A history of running away or current status as a runaway; and
- An unstable home life and/or involvement in the child welfare or foster care system.

Pimps/traffickers may entice children using physical and psychological manipulation and sometimes violence. They will create a seemingly loving or caring relationship with his or her victim to establish trust and allegiance that remains even in the face of severe victimization.

## Who are the Perpetrators?

Traffickers can be anyone who profits from the selling of a child for sex to a buyer, including: family members, foster parents, friends, gangs, trusted adults, or "boyfriends".

Much of the trafficking of children has moved from street corners and truck stops to the internet, where children are sold for sex. Online classified sites allow traffickers and buyers anonymity and accessibility when exploiting children. Further, societal glamorization of "pimp culture" may make a child less likely to recognize or be wary of manipulative behavior.

In some cases, there is no identified trafficker, and it is the person buying sex from the child who is exploiting the child's vulnerabilities. For instance, if a child runs away, a buyer may exploit the child's need for food and shelter offering to provide that in exchange for sex.

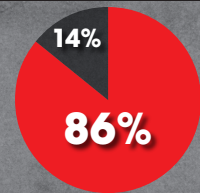
**A child cannot consent to being bought and sold for sex, and anyone purchasing sex from a child is committing a serious crime.**

## CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

1 in 6 of the 18,500 runaways reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® in 2016 were likely sex trafficking victims.



86% of these likely sex trafficking victims were in the care of social services or foster care when they went missing.



If a child is missing, the child's legal guardian should immediately call law enforcement and then the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678).

If you suspect a case of child sex trafficking, you can call 1-800-THE-LOST® or make a report at [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org).