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

What is Child Sex Trafficking?

Child sex trafficking is one of the most common types of commercial sexual exploitation. Child sex trafficking is a high priority at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), because these children are often currently missing and actively being exploited. Child sex trafficking victims include girls, boys, and LGBTQ youth. Victims could be anyone – your daughter, neighbor, or nephew. Knowledge and awareness are key in keeping your loved ones safer.

According to the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act.” Children who are exploited through commercial sex are viewed as victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons, which is sex trafficking “in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age.” A commercial sex act is “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.”

How does a child become a victim?

Traffickers target vulnerable children and lure them into sex trafficking using physical and psychological manipulation, and sometimes they may resort to violence. Any child may be vulnerable to such a person who promises to meet his or her emotional and physical needs. Often traffickers/pimps will create a seemingly loving or caring relationship with their victim in order to establish trust and allegiance. This manipulative relationship tries to ensure the youth will remain loyal to the exploiter even in the face of severe victimization. These relationships may begin online before progressing to a real-life encounter.

Who are the pimps?

Pimps, also known as traffickers, can be anyone, including family members, foster parents, friends, gangs, trusted adults, or “boyfriends,” who profits from the selling of a minor to a buyer.

Victims are

Targeted – Pimps are predators who seek out vulnerable victims. While any youth can be targeted by a pimp, runaways or children experiencing trouble at home are especially vulnerable. Traffickers know these children have emotional and physical needs that are not often being met and use this to their advantage. Pimps find victims at a variety of venues such as in social networking websites, shopping malls, and schools; on local streets; or at bus stations.

Tricked – Pimps are willing to invest a great deal of time and effort in their victim to break down a victim’s natural resistance and suspicion – buying them gifts, providing a place to stay, promising a loving relationship – before revealing their true intent. Frequently victims do not realize the deceptive nature of their trafficker’s interest in them, viewing their pimp as a caretaker and/or boyfriend.

Traumatized – A pimp’s use of psychological manipulation causes the child to truly believe the pimp cares for his or her well-being. Coupled with physical control this can make a victim feel trapped and powerless to leave. This “trauma bond” is difficult to break and specialized intervention and services are often necessary.

Statistics

- In 2014, 1 in every 6 endangered runaways reported to NCMEC was likely a victim of child sex trafficking.
- Traffickers are increasingly using social networking apps and sites to target and recruit children.
When a child goes missing, the legal guardian should immediately call law enforcement and make a report. Next, call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678). Taking the extra step to report missing children to NCMEC ensures that all available resources are being employed to assist in the identification and recovery of that child.

If you suspect a case of child sex trafficking, contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® at 1-800-843-5678 or visit www.cybertipline.com