

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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Teen Sex Trafficking: What Parents Need to KNOW!



The following Know! Tip discusses the sex trafficking of children. There is no graphic content or description below, but it could still be difficult for some readers. If you suspect human trafficking might be occurring near you or need help, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, TTY 711, text 233-733, or [chat with the hotline at humantraffickinghotline.org/chat](http://humantraffickinghotline.org/chat).

In a newly released report by the U.S. State Department, the United States (along with Mexico and the Philippines), ranks among the top three worst countries in the world for human trafficking—including the sex trafficking of minors. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services warns that more than 300,000 of our nation's youth are considered at risk for sexual exploitation annually.

You may have already heard about teen sex trafficking becoming more common in our country, but chances are, it still feels far away from your life and the lives of those you love. In reality, it is happening all around us, in neighborhoods just like ours, to children just like ours.

What exactly is sex trafficking and is YOUR child really at risk?

Sex trafficking is defined as, "a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age." This refers to everything from street prostitution, stripping, and pornography to exchanging sexual acts for survival (sex in exchange for food and shelter).

At this point many of us will take a deep breath and say to ourselves, "this is not my child, and this is definitely not something my child would get mixed up in or be lured into."

Traffickers however are clever and highly manipulative. The trafficker doesn't show their true self in the beginning. They typically befriend the victim and gain their trust; they may even pretend to be romantically interested in their target. When the trafficker is ready to strike, they are likely to extort the victim to prevent running away or seeking help by



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threatening the victim’s loved ones, for instance.

It is also important to note that girls are not the only victims of child sex trafficking. In certain areas, some studies have estimated as much as 40 to 45 percent of the victim population to be boys.

Traffickers do not discriminate based on a victim’s gender, age, race, or socioeconomic status. Boys and girls from varying backgrounds are being “recruited” into sex trafficking. What traffickers do target however, is **vulnerability**. And what child doesn’t have vulnerabilities?

Every child and situation is unique. While there is no all-inclusive list to determine every child’s risk, researchers have identified a range of common factors among those involved in sexual exploitation and sex trafficking (according to a report by the Institute of Medicine (IOC) and National Research Council (NRC), *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*. Those factors are:

Individual:

- History of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment
- Homeless, runaway, or “throwaway youth”
- LGBTQ+ youth
- History of systems involvement (e.g., juvenile justice, child welfare)
- Stigma and discrimination

Relationship:

- Family conflict, disruption, dysfunction

Community:

- Peer pressure
- Social norms
- Social isolation
- Gang involvement
- Under-resourced schools, neighborhoods, communities

Societal:

- Lack of awareness of commercial exploitation and sex trafficking
- Sexualization of children
- Lack of resources

Involvement in the foster care system and childhood sexual abuse are said to be two of the highest risk factors that increase a child’s vulnerability. However, low self-esteem, rebellion, and the desire for love and attention are also powerful vulnerabilities that traffickers look to exploit, in addition to the risk factors listed above.

An estimated 150,000 children born in the U.S. are recruited into sex trafficking each year, and they’re recruited at a young age. Fourteen is the average age of a trafficked victim in the U.S. This is an important topic to not only be aware of, but a potentially life-saving conversation to have with our children.

In the tip to follow, we will share additional information on the topic, including getting this conversation started with your child, and what to do if you suspect someone you know or come across is in need of help.

In the meantime, reach out to the **National Human Trafficking Hotline**



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Sources: [Fox News Investigates: Human trafficking in America among worst in world: report. June 23, 2019.](#) [Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation \(ASPE\). Human Trafficking Into and Within the United States: A Review of the Literature, 2009.](#) [United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, Annual Report 2019.](#) [Youth.gov.](#) [Institute of Medicine \(IOM\) and National Research Council \(NRC\), Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States \(sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention\).](#)