

# COUNTER-TRAFFICKING COMMUNITY RESOURCE



# ***About A21's Counter-Trafficking Community Resource***

A21's Counter-Trafficking Community Resource equips those seeking to increase their understanding of human trafficking in the United States. Through this Community Resource, you will learn about the different types, indicators, and recruitment methods of human trafficking in the United States. You will also have access to A21's *Can You See Me?* awareness materials to display in public areas.

## ***What is Human Trafficking?***

Across the world, men, women, and children are being used as commodities, with their fundamental human rights stripped away for the financial gain of exploiters. Human trafficking is a violation of basic human rights that centers on the exploitation of another human being through force, fraud, or coercion, for labor, sexual or other commercial gain, or through the commercial sexual exploitation of a child.

## ***Where does Human Trafficking Happen?***

Human trafficking takes place both domestically, within national borders, and internationally. Few countries, if any, escape its effects either as points of departure, destination, transit, or a combination of all three. Human trafficking can occur in every system and structure globally; this can be seen in practical terms as labor exploitation in a company's supply chain or in the exploitation of people in the commercial sex sector.

## ***What Should I Do if I Suspect Human Trafficking?***

This Community Resource is for educational purposes only. It is not training material for intervening in potential trafficking situations. If you suspect that a situation might involve human trafficking, do not investigate the situation or approach the individuals involved. Human trafficking victims are often closely monitored and under someone else's control. Attempts to investigate, approach, or intervene could unintentionally put both the victim and yourself in danger. Instead, report what you suspect using one of the contact numbers below.

## REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

- For **emergency services**, call **911**.
- Report incidences of human trafficking to local law enforcement.
- To report suspected human trafficking, call the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** at **1 (888) 373-7888** or text "**BeFree**" to **233-733**.
- Suspected child sex trafficking or exploitation can be reported to the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)** at **1-800-THE-LOST** or [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org).

## SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

- Victims and survivors of human trafficking can call the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** at **1 (888) 373-7888** or text "**BeFree**" to **233-733**. Trained call specialists are available 24/7 to provide local resources for victims or survivors of human trafficking.
- **Take It Down** can help take down online images and videos of minors that contain nude/partially nude or sexually explicit content. For help removing online images and videos taken of you before you turned 18, visit [takeitdown.ncmec.org](https://takeitdown.ncmec.org).
- Access other **local community services**, such as food or housing, by dialing **211**.

# Human Trafficking in the U.S.: Key Facts

- ▶ Human trafficking is reported across all fifty states, and victims may be U.S. citizens or foreign nationals.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In the U.S., trafficking occurs in the hospitality industry, restaurants, nail salons, illicit massage parlors, agricultural, factory or textile industries, landscaping and construction, forced begging and panhandling, domestic servitude and cleaning crews, and via forced criminality.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Traffickers exploit vulnerabilities such as poverty, homelessness, broken families, and addiction to recruit victims through promises of a better life.
- ▶ The extent and methods of control can differ significantly from one trafficking situation to another, as does the duration of abuse. Traffickers will frequently use control mechanisms such as psychological and emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse, the confiscation of personal identification documents or money, threats, forced consumption of drugs, isolation, and renaming victims.

---

## Types of Trafficking

### ▶ SEX TRAFFICKING

Forcing, deceiving, or coercing a person to perform a commercial sex act; where a minor is being trafficked, force, deception, or coercion need not be present.

### ▶ FORCED LABOR

Forcing a person to work for little or no pay.

### ▶ DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

Forcing a person to work and live in a private residence as a cook, cleaner, nanny, or domestic worker for little or no pay.



1. U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 24th Ed.*, June 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>  
2. *Ibid*

# Understanding How Human Trafficking Can Happen

## VULNERABILITY

Anyone can be exploited, but traffickers often prey on those most vulnerable in society to recruit and exploit as victims. Vulnerability factors include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Homelessness
- ▶ Abusive home environments
- ▶ Lack of education
- ▶ Substance addictions
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Legal status
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Unstable political and/ or social conditions
- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Migrant / refugee status

Lack of employment options, economic turmoil, or dysfunctional and abusive home environments may lead people to seek alternative employment elsewhere. This can increase their vulnerability to exploitation through desperation and acceptance of unregulated or informal work in attempts to improve their personal financial situations. Conflict or unstable political conditions also increase a person's vulnerability, as seen in migrant and refugee populations. Wider cultural, political, and socio-economic barriers may also play a role. For example, many people may not have access to further education, lack social support networks, or not have access to social protection measures to safeguard against potential exploitation.

## RECRUITMENT AND GROOMING

Traffickers utilize a variety of recruitment methods to deceive and coerce victims into exploitative situations, such as:

- ▶ False job opportunities
- ▶ Promises of a better life
- ▶ Recruited by family / "friends"
- ▶ False immigration opportunities
- ▶ False relationships

One common recruitment method involves posting a false job opportunity online about a job in another country with little to no detail. The job posting may promise a competitive salary, accommodation, and a guaranteed work visa. Another recruitment method, called the "Romeo pimp" method, involves targeting an emotionally vulnerable female to engage in a "romantic relationship." The trafficker's ultimate goal is emotionally manipulating the victim into sexual exploitation. It may involve the trafficker showering the targeted victim with gifts and building a fast emotional connection. The trafficker often isolates the targeted victim from friends and family, so the trafficker soon becomes their sole emotional support.

The "romantic relationship" doesn't happen immediately as the trafficker will set aside time to "groom" the victim – that is, build a relationship and establish rapport for the sole purpose of manipulating and exploiting the victim at a later time. While the grooming process can happen quickly, it can also occur over long periods. The trafficker builds trust during this critical grooming period so that at a later date, the trafficker can create a future situation, trapping the targeted victim with minimal to no opportunity to seek assistance. They use deception and manipulation to make their victims feel ashamed or responsible for their own exploitation and, in the process, create the perception of a willing victim. After grooming a victim, traffickers can control their every movement.

# Human Trafficking: The Law

In the United States, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 and its subsequent amendments set forth the federal law governing human trafficking into two main categories, namely sex trafficking and forced labor.

## DEFINITION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: TVPA OF 2000 (AS AMENDED)<sup>3</sup>

Sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting a minor under 18 years of age for the purpose of a commercial sex act, or any persons regardless of age, by force, fraud, or coercion.”<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ A **commercial sex act** occurs when the sex act is exchanged for anything of value, such as food, shelter, drugs, etc., and is not limited to the exchange of money.
- ▶ Under the law, a minor is not able to consent to being bought or sold.

Forced labor is defined as “[t]he 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.”<sup>4</sup> Human trafficking through forced labor can also occur by creating a “climate of fear” by any of these means. Federal law also explicitly criminalizes the act of confiscating or destroying anyone’s passport or other immigration documents in furtherance of labor exploitation.<sup>5</sup>

A way to simplify the definition is to look at its three component parts: the **act**, the **means**, and the **purpose**.<sup>6</sup>

### ACT

to induce, recruit, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain persons.

### MEANS

the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

### PURPOSE

for commercial sex or labor or services.

**At a minimum, one element from each category must be present to establish a situation of human trafficking. However, in the case of sex trafficking of a minor, force, fraud, or coercion (the means) does not need to be established.**

*Individual states often have their own human trafficking statutes, which may be broader or narrower than the federal definition.*

3. See generally, 18 U.S.C. § 1591

4. U.S. Department of Justice National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, January 2022 at page 3 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1467431/download#:~:text=The%20Justice%20Department's%20new%20National,and%20survivors%3B%20and%20partnership%20at.>

5. Federal statutes prohibit involuntary servitude, slavery, and forced labor. These violations are codified in 18 U.S.C. § 1581, et. seq.

6. Polaris, The Action Means Purpose “A-M-P” Model, 2012, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/AMP%20Model.pdf>.

# Types of Trafficking

## SEX TRAFFICKING

Sexual exploitation or sex trafficking is a form of modern slavery where individuals are forced, coerced, or deceived into sexual exploitation for profit. While most victims of sexual exploitation are female, men and boys can also be victims. In A21's experience, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are vulnerable to human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking. Coercive control is common in sexual exploitation cases, where traffickers use power and control to dominate their victims through physical or emotional violence, manipulation, isolation, or threats.

Traffickers commonly recruit sex trafficking victims in two primary ways, with often a distinction between the recruitment methods for domestic and foreign nationals. Firstly, traffickers may recruit victims via the "Romeo pimp" scheme, where a romantic relationship is formed with victims to exploit them sexually. Domestic adult and minor victims may knowingly engage in sex work before being approached by a "Romeo pimp" who convinces them to work for him and offers his protection. Eventually, this trafficker takes all the victim's money and uses coercive methods, both overt and covert, to keep exploiting the victim. Covert methods of control are more subtle, but are often more manipulative and just as powerful. For example, the trafficker may make light of the situation so the victim doesn't comprehend the reality of the situation. They also may engage in "love bombing," where the perpetrator gives the victim a large amount of attention and affection in an attempt to control and build co-dependency. This usually occurs in a short period of time. Through falsified relationships, victims feel an emotional attachment to the exploiter. They can appear to be a "willing victim" by "agreeing" to do anything that is asked in an attempt to please the "romantic partner."

Alternatively, foreign national victims do not typically enter sex work situations knowingly, and fraud is a more prevalent recruitment tactic. For example, a recruiter may deceive a victim with immigration promises or a job opportunity that turns out to be false. The illicit massage industry is separate from the commercial sex trade, where victims are often exploited through debt bondage.



## FORCED LABOR

Labor trafficking, also called forced labor, refers to situations where a person is forced, coerced, or tricked and manipulated to work against their will for little or no pay. Forced labor can occur in many different industries and sectors in the U.S., including agriculture, hospitality, construction, beauty services/spas, and forced begging.<sup>7</sup>

Victims are typically recruited through seemingly legitimate job opportunities. Despite being aware of their exploitative situations, victims of forced labor are often restricted from leaving due to threats, violence, or simply because their income and livelihoods are at stake. Other methods of control might also be present, such as isolation or the withholding of payment or confiscation of identification documents. Exploiters retain a power imbalance through imposing accumulating debts, known as “debt bondage,” as a means of control to force the victim to stay in the situation.

In the U.S., foreign national victims of labor trafficking may have the correct H2-A/H2-B visa, but the work, pay, or conditions do not equate to the visa stipulations. When working conditions or pay differ from what was initially agreed to, workers cannot leave their situation for alternative employment as their H2-A/H2-B visa cannot be transferred to a different employer.

## DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

Domestic servitude is a form of forced labor that occurs when a domestic worker is exploited while working in a private residential home. Workers might be coerced or forced to work as nannies, cooks, cleaners, caregivers, or other roles. This situation is notoriously difficult to detect as residential homes are private, which isolates victims and reduces their opportunities to seek help. Moreover, as victims of domestic servitude are often foreign nationals, language barriers may also significantly impede their ability to access assistance.

At first, a job offer might seem legitimate, but after traveling to the destination, it turns out to be exploitative. Victims may be controlled and forced to stay in the situation through physical or emotional violence, manipulation, isolation, or other threats. Exploiters often confiscate the victims’ passports or other identification documents to prevent escape. This sector is susceptible to exploitation because it is poorly regulated. Those working in private residences often lack access to the same labor protections as other workers.

Victims of domestic servitude may also be subjected to sexual abuse by their trafficker. While not a form of sex trafficking, unless the abuse is commercialized, it is a separate, serious offense.



7. U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 24th Ed.*, June 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation.<sup>8</sup> Forms of child sexual exploitation include, but are not limited to, engaging in sexual activities, child sex trafficking, the sale of a child, and online child sexual exploitation. While some forms may involve a commercial element to the exploitation, there is almost always some form of abuse of power or vulnerability. Perpetrators may use physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as a form of control.

**Child Sex Trafficking** differs from adult trafficking in that due to the power dynamics involved with children, trafficking can occur without the presence of force, fraud, or coercion.

**Online Child Sexual Exploitation** The United States has distinctly separated the crimes of online child sexual exploitation from human trafficking, as opposed to other countries which may have an expansive definition of human trafficking to include some forms of online child sexual exploitation. However, understanding the use of the internet to exploit children can assist in understanding the vulnerabilities of children to potential trafficking. Online child exploitation covers a range of illicit activities, including the creation, distribution, and possession of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), sextortion, and enticing a child to engage in sexually prohibited activity, among others.

**Online Sextortion of a Minor** Within the last decade, perpetrators have been using the internet to coerce, persuade, and threaten children. They use tactics to get minors to engage in sexual activity through the use of preexisting, incriminating sexual content, or with new materials created during their manipulative scheme. For example, a perpetrator may have accessed an embarrassing sexual image of a child and is now threatening to distribute it to others if they refuse to create more explicit content.

### To learn more, access the following resources

#### ▶ ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

These two guides provide information about online child sexual exploitation, tailored to the reader's age. Click "Access Now" to view these guides included below on page

→ ADULT GUIDE [Access Now](#)

→ YOUTH GUIDE [Access Now](#)



8. For more information on child exploitation in the United States, including online child sexual exploitation, please refer to the U.S. Department of Justice National Strategy on Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction, available at <https://www.justice.gov/psc/national-strategy-child-exploitation-prevention-and-interdiction>

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING BARRIERS

While human trafficking is often depicted as straightforward in nature, the reality is more complex. In some cases, individuals may recognize that they are experiencing abuse or exploitation, but they may not perceive that the harm is human trafficking. Certain vulnerability factors may make some feel they cannot leave an exploitative environment, such as an inability to return home, potentially due to homelessness, or a lack of employment options, or they may have experienced threats or punishments when previously attempting to leave. Foreign nationals face additional hurdles such as immigration status, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with a foreign country. Some foreign nationals may be unable to leave due to confiscation of their passports or the inability of their work visa to be transferred to a different employer. Manipulated individuals may even blame themselves for the exploitation or they may still be trauma-bonded to the trafficker, not realizing that the trafficker had planned every step. Furthermore, without support, certain vulnerability factors may mean individuals “identified” as trafficking victims may remain vulnerable to further exploitation.

## CONSENT

It is important to note that any perceived “consent” of the victim is irrelevant if obtained by improper means (force, fraud, or coercion). For example, a person may have willingly traveled to another country to accept a job offer, only to arrive and find out that the situation did not match the work or pay advertised. Furthermore, an adult may independently engage in consensual sex work, but after entering into a supposed romantic relationship with a trafficker, the trafficker takes all of the income and utilizes elements of force, fraud, or coercion. Ultimately, the existence of this force, fraud, or coercion negates any “consent” given.

## TRANSPORT AND MOVEMENT

In the U.S., human trafficking does not require movement. While “[h]uman trafficking is a crime of exploitation committed against an individual that requires no transportation or physical movement, either internationally or domestically,”<sup>9</sup> traffickers often move victims to isolate them from familiar surroundings and support systems. Traffickers seek to control foreign national victims by confiscating identity documents or through the use of unfamiliar surroundings in a different country. This includes language barriers and lack of support. Likewise, traffickers transport domestic sex trafficking victims to a different part of the country where the victim is neither familiar with the surroundings nor has a support system. Through such tactics, the trafficker increases control over the victim and decreases the likelihood of escape.

9. Department of Justice, *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, January 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1467431/download#:~:text=The%20Justice%20Department%20at%20page%203,>

# Recruitment Methods

## FALSE JOB ADVERTISING

Many victims are recruited through a job advertisement that turns out to be false or exploitative.

**EXAMPLE** *A person is contacted on social media and is offered a job opportunity abroad. This job offers high wages and the travel is stated to be “covered” in the agency fees. However, once accepted, the job is not what was advertised.*

## PROMISE OF A BETTER LIFE

Some victims are coerced or deceived into a situation of exploitation simply through the promise of a better standard of living or higher pay. The trafficker, who may be a stranger, acquaintance, or family member, usually promotes the fantasy of a lavish lifestyle, dream job, or opportunity that seems too good to be true. The victim, persuaded by this alluring picture, will agree to the opportunity on the basis of this false promise.

**EXAMPLE** *A friend shares about an opportunity to earn triple their income in another country. This promise of a better life often lures individuals to seek new opportunities where they are at risk of exploitation.*

## SOLD BY FAMILY

In some situations, “friends” or family members themselves recruit and sell victims. This might be due to chronic poverty or financial hardship. In the United States, substance misuse is often the reason individuals sell their children or friends to traffickers.

**EXAMPLE** *A mother agrees to sell her daughter for sex to a local drug dealer in exchange for “free” drugs.*

## FALSE RELATIONSHIPS

Victims may be recruited through perceived “friends” who befriend them with the sole purpose of exploiting them. It might be the case that someone the victim has known for some time offers an opportunity that the victim is willing to take without a thorough check due to the trust in the “friend.”

**EXAMPLE** *A trafficker uses his “girlfriend” to ask her friends if they would like to make money with her. The false friendship method of recruitment is used when these friends unknowingly enter a trafficking situation and are then forced to give their money to the trafficker.*

## FALSE RELATIONSHIPS/“ROMEO PIMP”

The “Romeo pimp” recruitment method involves traffickers who seduce or manipulate someone to exploit at a later date. Victims form emotional attachments to their traffickers through these falsified “relationships.” While the traffickers may shower the victims with love and affection at the start of the relationship, as trust is built, they often become volatile and violent to coerce their victims into exploitation. Often, victims are ultimately forced into sexual exploitation or other criminal activities.

**EXAMPLE** *A victim meets a man online and they soon enter a romantic relationship. Once they meet in real life her “boyfriend” starts to turn violent and puts pressure on her by saying if she loves him she will agree to have sex with men for money. Because she loves him and doesn’t want to disappoint him, she “agrees.”*

## ABDUCTION

It is an often misconceived stereotype that those who are trafficked are abducted or kidnapped. While abduction into exploitation by a complete stranger can happen, it is much more likely that victims will be recruited through deception or coercion.

# General Indicators of Human Trafficking

- ▶ The potential victim(s) have minimal-to-no details about the working or living situation.  
**EXAMPLE** *The individual does not appear to have a clear concept of what their job is, provides vague details, or seems unwilling to share information about the job.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are accompanied by someone they do not seem to know or who is not a close friend or family member.  
**EXAMPLE** *They are escorted to the hospital by someone who knows little about their medical history but claims to be a parent or friend.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are being controlled and/or are not in control of their identification documents.  
**EXAMPLE** *They arrive at the border and there is a dominant passenger who is holding the passports and speaking on behalf of the other persons. This dominant passenger may hand out identification documents to the potential victims when necessary before collecting these again and keeping them in their possession.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) have few personal belongings despite the fact they are permanently moving to a new location.  
**EXAMPLE** *They move to a new city for work, but they have only a small bag with few or even no personal belongings.*
- ▶ Potential victim(s) of labor trafficking show signs of physical neglect or abuse (scars, bruises, burns, etc.) and/or seem malnourished or disheveled. However, victims of sex trafficking are less likely to show signs of physical abuse in areas like the face, arms, or legs.  
**EXAMPLE** *They walk into a coffee shop with signs of physical harm (scars, bruises, burns...etc.) and are not dressed for the climate or are disheveled.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) seem unfamiliar with their surroundings or lost.  
**EXAMPLE** *They are seen waiting at a bus station for a prolonged period of time with limited personal belongings.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) seem distrustful, fearful, or hostile.  
**EXAMPLE** *They visit the hospital with visible injuries and refuse to give personal information, seem fearful or distrustful, and are anxious to leave as soon as possible. They create a false story for medical professionals that does not align with their injuries or reason for needing to be seen.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are being controlled, abused, or surveilled by their employer.  
**EXAMPLE** *They are a hotel worker and do not look at you when you walk by, appear to be hesitant to answer questions, and when you start to talk to them, the employer is always present or seems to interrupt the conversation.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are quick to answer their phone and have frequent phone calls or text messages, from the trafficker that seem to cause anxiety. Failure to respond quickly will result in repeated calls from the trafficker.  
**EXAMPLE** *They are anxiously checking their phone while waiting at arrivals in the airport and appear fearful or uncomfortable when communicating on the phone.*

\*While no single indicator confirms the existence of human trafficking, several indicators combined can increase the likelihood of a trafficking situation.

# Raising Awareness and Taking Action

Awareness is always the first step in understanding and combating human trafficking. While different methods, strategies, and tools are used to raise awareness, one of the most effective ways is through widely disseminated, targeted public awareness campaigns.

A21's *Can You See Me? (CYSM?)* campaign depicts everyday situations of forced labor, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and online child sexual exploitation. Through films, billboards, and posters, the campaign, presents key signs of trafficking alongside the National Human Trafficking Hotline or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline. As a victim-centered public awareness campaign it appeals to vulnerable populations and actively trafficked individuals, allowing them to self-identify and seek assistance. By bringing broader visibility to human trafficking, *CYSM?* equips the general public to recognize and report possible trafficking situations.

The *CYSM?* awareness resources included in your Counter-Trafficking Community Resource depict different human trafficking and exploitation scenarios in the United States. Access these resources on page 14 to raise awareness in your community. To learn more about specific forms of human trafficking and exploitation and watch the films, visit [A21.org/CanYouSeeMe-USA](https://A21.org/CanYouSeeMe-USA).

## Take Action

Below are some ways to get involved and take action in your community. For more information, visit [A21.org/TakeAction](https://A21.org/TakeAction).

### ▶ LEARN MORE

A21's Human Trafficking 101 Training Course is self-paced and certified for continued education credits. To learn more, go to [A21.org/HT-101-Training](https://A21.org/HT-101-Training).

### ▶ EDUCATE OTHERS

Be equipped with information from A21's prevention and education resources, including parent guides, safety guides, and other prevention resources. Visit [A21.org/Education](https://A21.org/Education).

### ▶ VOLUNTEER

For a list of locations currently accepting volunteers and to apply, visit [A21.org/Volunteer](https://A21.org/Volunteer).

### ▶ GIVE

Support A21's work around the globe to reduce vulnerability, assist victims, and support survivors. Learn more about A21's proven solution and how your donation can help end human trafficking, by visiting [A21.org/Give](https://A21.org/Give).

**Frontline Professionals:** Professionals working in law enforcement, healthcare, immigration, transportation, education, and hospitality can access further training and indicators of trafficking for their industry [here](#).

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of A21 USA, Inc.



# ***CAN YOU SEE ME?*** **RESOURCES FOR YOUR COMMUNITY RESPONSE**



The following *CYSM?* resources included in your Counter-Trafficking Community Resource depict different human trafficking and exploitation scenarios in the United States. Use these resources to raise awareness in your community.

▶ **ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: ADULT GUIDE**

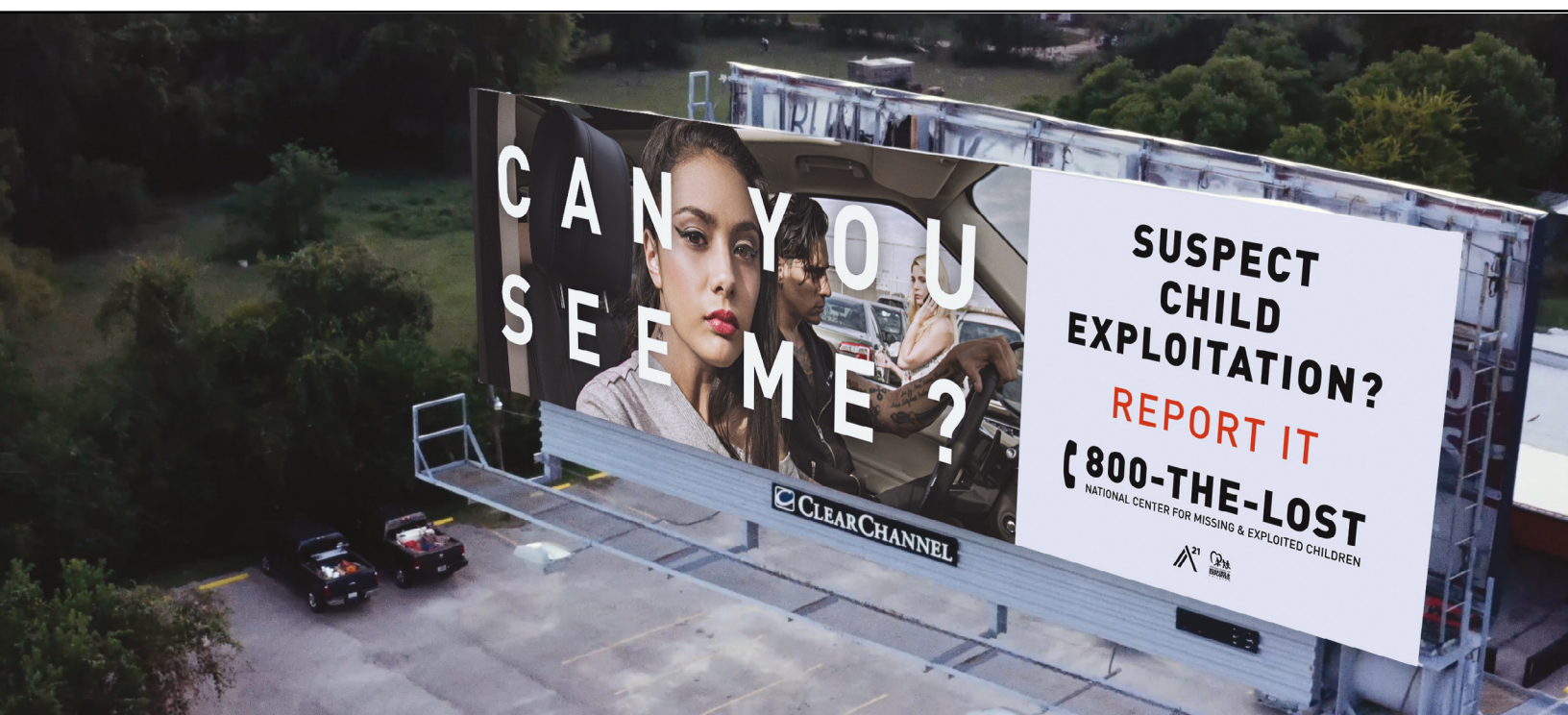
Distribute this resource to educate and equip adults to raise awareness about online child sexual exploitation.

▶ **ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: YOUTH GUIDE**

Share this age-appropriate resource with youth to educate them about online child sexual exploitation.

▶ ***CAN YOU SEE ME?* AWARENESS POSTERS**

Place these public awareness posters in public areas such as on the back of toilet stall doors, public transportation hubs, or around your community.



# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION HAPPENS **ONLINE** TOO.

## BUT THERE'S HELP IF YOU NEED IT.

### ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

According to the FBI, there are an estimated 750,000 child predators online at any given moment<sup>1</sup> - all with the goal to enter your home undetected, through the internet, and into the lives of your children. Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) is the use of the internet to facilitate the sexual abuse of a child. One of the most significant types of online child sexual exploitation is the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse images and videos. With more use of the internet in every aspect of our children's lives, we must learn how to protect them by recognizing the signs and symptoms of online exploitation. Offenders may want sexual images of your children, or may be manipulating them into a situation to engage in a sexual act with them.

While there's a wide range of OCSE, we see a dangerous trend of cases rising significantly since 2013 called "sextortion." This is a type of sexual abuse involving the control of a child through force, threats or manipulation on a variety of online social media platforms. According to reports of sextortion to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), 56% of sextortion of children involved only one online platform, whereas 42% involved multiple. In cases involving multiple platforms, the offender would "meet" a child on more of a public social media platform, and then later once trust has been established, move to an encrypted or private platform such as a messaging app or live-stream video. It is then on these platforms where the child is then subjected to threats and blackmail. Often the offender may have access to previously posted content that was created when the child was for example in a previous romantic relationship, posted by the now ex. In those situations, the offender may be more immediately aggressive about seeking additional sexual images of the child. On other occasions, where no preexisting sexual image exists, often the first step is the offender befriending a young person to build an emotional connection to gain their trust and establish a relationship for the ultimate goal of sexual exploitation. This is called "grooming."

Children can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know. An offender can be any age, even the same age as the child. It will often involve an offender providing something to a child such as encouragement, praise, acknowledgement, affection, and sometimes gifts. Grooming offenders trick their victim into building a friendship or even a romantic relationship. This can lead to an actual meeting of the offender and child for the purposes of a sexual encounter.

In other cases, once they have the child's trust or control over them, an offender will then move on to manipulate the child to provide sexual images of him or herself to the offender. The grooming process can take days, weeks, months, or longer. Once one image is provided, using the threat of shame, embarrassment, guilt, or even physical harm to the child or loved ones, the offender will escalate the situation by using the illicit image to extort additional sexual images or at times real-time sexual acts which the offender is recording. When the offender starts blackmailing and threatening the child such as in this Can You See Me? video, sextortion occurs. In sextortion cases reported to NCMEC, the child victims are both male and female, and range in age from 8-17 years with an average age of 15. However, the child victims in the younger range tend to be female. In a smaller number of reported cases, the offender extorts the child to engage in sex. While these demographics are based on the data collected at NCMEC, it's important to remember children of any gender identity or age could be a victim of sextortion.

<sup>1</sup> Henry, S. (2011, 8 May). Shawn Henry on Cyber Safety. Retrieved from [https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-henry\\_051611/view](https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-henry_051611/view).

## THE LAW

Federal law prohibits sexual enticement or attempted enticement of a minor online.<sup>2</sup> It is also a violation of federal law for anybody to persuade a minor to create child sexual abuse images of themselves, including certain types of nude photos, as well as to use threats to extort an item of value.<sup>3</sup> This is in addition to each individual states' laws prohibiting and penalizing online child sexual exploitation offenses. Even if a child voluntarily engages in such conduct or is initially willing to send explicit images of him/herself, consent is not a defense to this crime. It is important to report any suspicious behavior to the police, or NCMEC's CyberTipline. It is highly likely that an offender is sexually exploiting or attempting to sexually exploit more than one child online.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUSPECTED OFFENDER<sup>4</sup>

- An offender is typically male but may often pose as a female
- Often pretends to be younger than their actual age
- Uses multiple online identities
- Targets multiple children on one, or multiple platforms
- Develops relationship by the use of praise, compliments, shared interests (often falsified), acting empathetically
- Seeks out children who may be struggling with real-life issues - social acceptance, friendships, attention, success at school, boredom – and aims to be the online “solution”
- Establishes a relationship of trust and dependence whether platonic or romantic
- Threatens to publish acquired inappropriate content online
- Threatens to share sexually explicit conversations with the victim online
- Threatens to reveal images, videos or conversations to family/friends if the child does not comply
- Secretly records sexually explicit videos of the child
- Threatens to hurt or sexually assault the child or family members
- Offers presents or rewards as an incentive for the child to send sexually explicit material
- Offender's objective is to gather content, to elicit sexual contact or for financial gain

<sup>2</sup> Title 18, United States Code, Section 2422(b) [Coercion and Enticement] prohibits the use of mail or any facility or means of interstate or foreign commerce to knowingly persuade, induce, entice, or coerce any minor, to engage in prostitution or any illegal sexual activity or any such attempt. 18 U.S.C. Sec. 2422(b) (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Title 18, United States Code, Section 2251(a) criminalizes the enticement or persuasion of a minor to create child sexual abuse images, or the attempt to do so, through the use of the internet, amongst other means. 18 U.S.C. Sec. 2251(a) [2008]. Title 18, United States Code, Section 875, prohibits in relevant part, extortion through use of the internet. 18 U.S.C. Sec. 875 (1986).

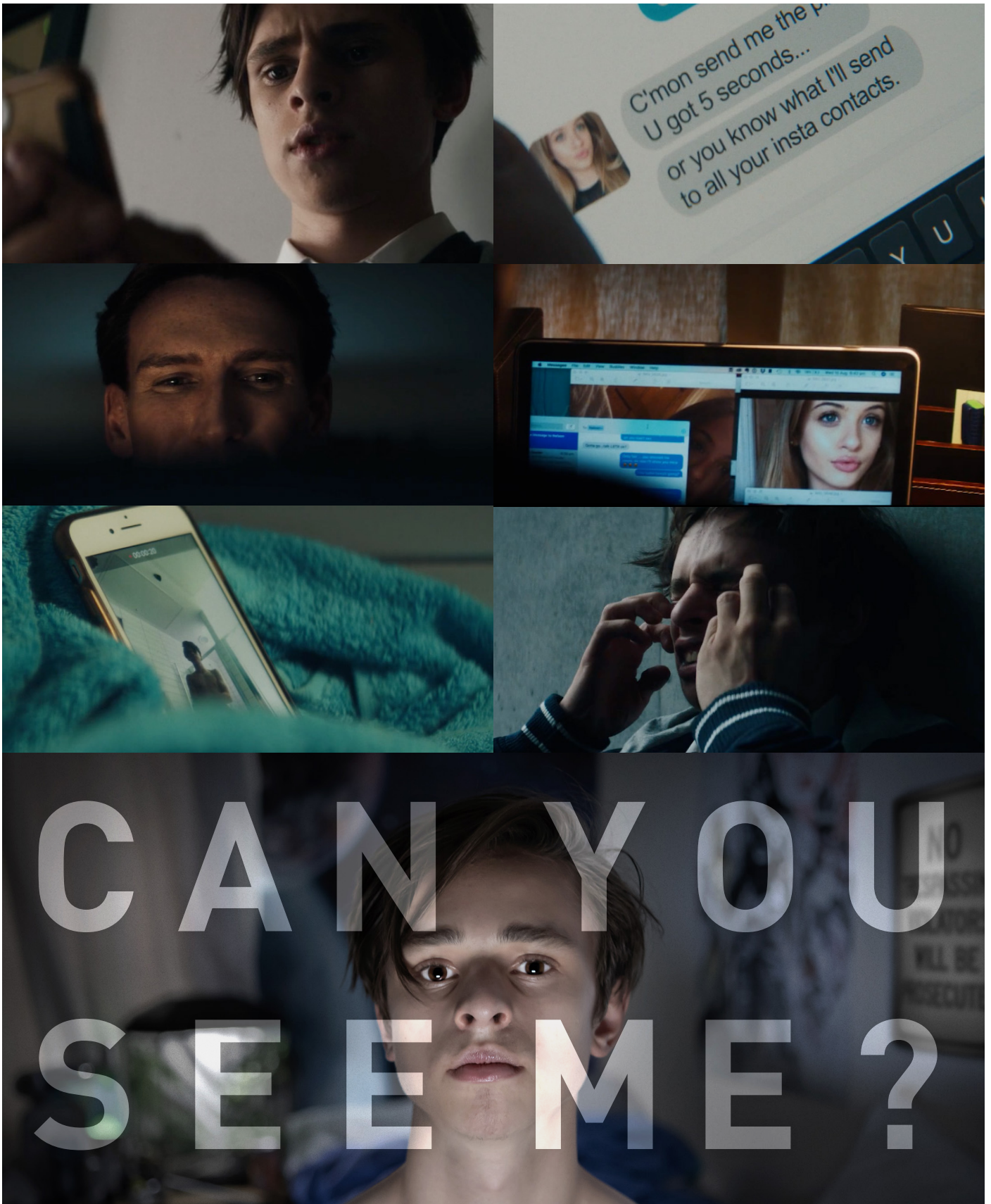
<sup>4</sup> This list is not exhaustive of all characteristics of offenders of online child sexual exploitation, but is a compilation of some of the most common attributes. Offenders may exhibit some but not all characteristics.

## SAFETY TIPS

- Talk with your child, and keep the lines of communication engaged and open.
  - Adopt a non-judgmental attitude.
  - Steer away from a “shaming” attitude which can hinder your child from speaking to you.
  - Be candid about the dangers of the internet.
  - Your child may not speak up about this - most predators will not immediately threaten your child, but will wait until after having some level of engagement, and then threaten with exposure to family and friends.
  - Recognizing many children want an online presence, be open to finding common ground with them, allowing the child an opportunity to engage with their friends but in a safe way.
- Create a plan of action so your child knows what to do next if someone asks them for images or videos, or if they sent an image/video and now are being threatened. Review or locate the “report abuse” sections of each platform with your child and show them how to use them.
- A child may feel pressure to “sex” images or videos with their current boyfriend or girlfriend. Once taken and sent to their significant other, it may be used against them later. Remember that once images or videos are given to anyone, the child no longer has control over what happens with that image or video.
- Monitor your child’s social media accounts to know the type and level of activity of engagement by your child.
- Ensure that only known individuals are accepted as “friends” on your child’s social media account.
- Ensure that your child’s privacy settings on websites, platforms are enabled and adequately set.
- Try to ensure that your child’s online status does not express an emotional vulnerability. People who exploit children may use these types of posts to identify children with vulnerabilities as potential victims.
- Images should not be sent to anyone that the child would not want widely shared.
- A child should not chat online to anyone that she or he does not personally know.
- Be aware that video calls can be surreptitiously recorded by the other party.
- If possible, restrict use of your child’s online activities to a public place in the house.

## USEFUL RESOURCES TO COMBAT OCSE IN THE U.S.

- If you think a child could be in immediate danger, call **911**
- Report suspicions of an online offender to your local police, your Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force at [www.icactaskforce.org/TaskForceContacts](http://www.icactaskforce.org/TaskForceContacts), or the NCMEC CyberTipline at **1-800-THE-LOST** or [CyberTipline.org](http://CyberTipline.org)
- If you are concerned about a child’s welfare, report to your local child protective services hotline or the Child Help National Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-4-A-CHILD** or through [www.childhelp.org/hotline](http://www.childhelp.org/hotline)
- Report any online exploitation including child sexual abuse images to the NCMEC CyberTipline at **1-800-THE-LOST** or [CyberTipline.org](http://CyberTipline.org)
- If a child wants to talk to someone, RAINN is here to listen 24/7. They can reach, free, anonymous, confidential help at **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)** or online at [online.rainn.org](http://online.rainn.org)



**SUSPECT ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION? REPORT IT.**



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://a21.org/canyouseeme)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN



**SUSPECT ONLINE ENTICEMENT? REPORT IT.**



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
**MISSING & EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN

[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](http://A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

# SEXUAL EXPLOITATION HAPPENS **ONLINE** TOO.

## BUT THERE'S HELP IF YOU NEED IT.

---

### THE STORY

His first year of high school wasn't what he thought it would be. He felt like an outsider. No matter how hard he tried, he just didn't fit in. But when he was online gaming, he felt confident, relaxed and accepted. He was only 15 years old when he met "Samantha" (Sam) on an online gaming platform. They had loads in common and he soon started chatting with her all the time. They exchanged numbers and soon were "dating" online. He couldn't believe he had such a gorgeous girlfriend who was so cool!

Sam sent him some sexy photos and kept asking him to do the same. When Sam asked him to send a naked video, he didn't feel comfortable, but he didn't want her to think he was lame – so he did. When Sam asked him for more naked pictures, he said no. That's when she started being really aggressive towards him. She said he'd hurt her feelings and if he wouldn't apologize and send more, she would send that video to all his friends and family. Sam sounded so different than before. He felt really scared so he just ignored her, but then she sent his private video around to all of his friends! Sam threatened that it would get worse unless he did exactly what she said. He wished he never met Sam, but it was too late. He's so ashamed and scared but doesn't know what to do or who can help him. He feels like it's all his own fault. He just wants to disappear. Maybe that's the only way that he can stop this from going on.

**STOP. This is not your fault.** Every day, children are being harassed and manipulated online in the United States and throughout the world. Even if your "online friend" seems really cool, gives you a lot of attention, and is fun - remember you don't know who they are, and you should be very cautious about trusting them. They may not be telling you the truth. If anyone asks you to do something you're uncomfortable with, or starts threatening you online, you don't have to do what they say. Instead you should immediately ask for help from your family or teachers, or someone you trust in real life or an organization designed to help you in this situation. Even if you already sent an image or a video, there are people who can help.

## SAFETY TIPS

- When creating a username, avoid using your real name, or even parts of your real name.
- Keep personal information private - don't give out any private information online such as school name, sports team name, activities, phone number or address.
- Be careful on your posts which tell people too much – avoid posting any information that could be used to find out where you live, where you go to school, who your family is, etc.
- Only accept online friends who you know in real life.
- Learn how to block any user who makes you feel uncomfortable or report them to the platform provider.
- Tell your parents (guardian, or trusted person) about anything uncomfortable or suspicious.
- If you're uncomfortable talking to your parents, talk to a teacher or make a report to the CyberTipline at [CyberTipline.org](http://CyberTipline.org).
- Remember pictures are forever, so be careful about the type of picture you give your boy/girlfriend, and whether you would want that shared with others later.
- Remember once you give someone a private picture or video of you, you lose all control of where that picture or video goes.
- Even your "hidden" and private photos and screenshots can easily be saved and shared, so make sure to understand all the features of the platforms you use.
- Tell someone if there is a photo received that includes unwanted or uninvited content.
- Be careful of someone who wants to chat with you online who you don't know in real life – especially when they start asking personal questions. They may not be who they say they are.
- Don't engage in video chats or webcam activity with anyone you don't know in real life.
- Remember that the picture of that online friend can be fake along with everything that they've told you.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUSPICIOUS PERSON

- Typically, male – but can pretend to be female
- Will try to be your friend, girlfriend, or boyfriend
- Will compliment you a lot, be supportive of you, and appear like they have loads in common with you
- Pretends to be around your age when they are really an adult
- Starts saying sexual things, including sexually suggestive questions
- May have an embarrassing picture or video of you that they share with you
- Threatens to share that picture or video of you to family or friends if you don't do exactly as they say
- Asks you to do something sexual on the webcam
- Is secretly recording you or taking screenshots
- Offers presents to you if you do what they say (this can include online gifts, like avatar skins or game credit)

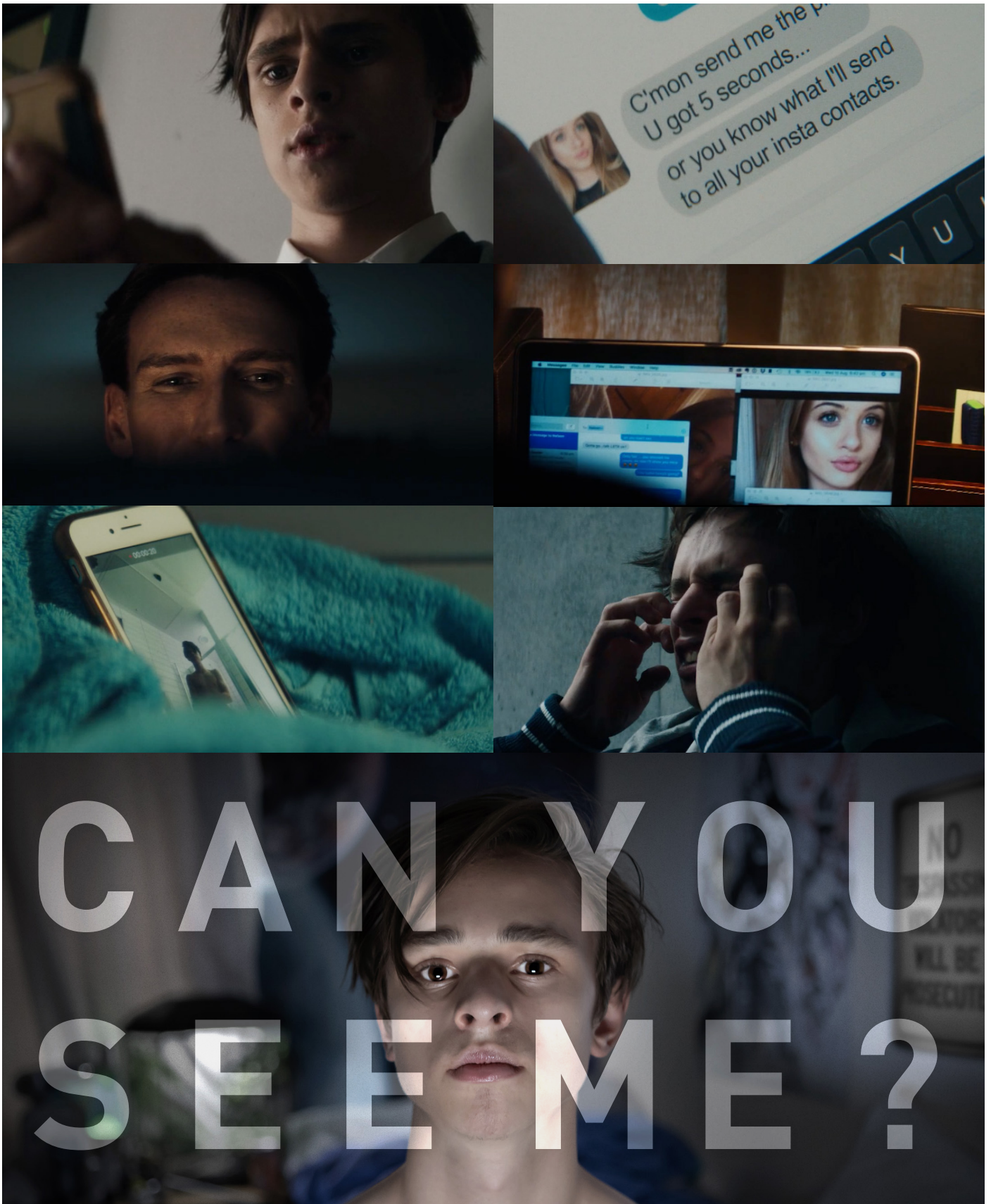
## REPORTING

If this or something like this has ever happened to you, do NOT be ashamed. This kind of exploitation is illegal, and it is NOT your fault.

This person has likely done this to other kids, is doing the same thing to someone now, so reporting this can help stop the cycle for you or others:

- Report the person and the incident to the police or The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at **1-800-THE-LOST** or [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cyberTipline.org)
- If you need to talk, RAINN is here to listen 24/7. You can reach, free, anonymous, confidential help at **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)** or online at [online.rainn.org](https://www.online.rainn.org)
- Do NOT delete any texts, emails, or pictures— give them to the police after reporting.

**You're not alone.** There are many professionals and other caring adults who can help you.



**SUSPECT ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION? REPORT IT.**



NATIONAL  
CENTER FOR  
**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN

[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://a21.org/canyouseeme)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN



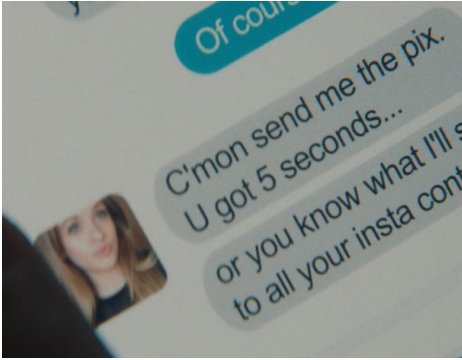
**SUSPECT ONLINE ENTICEMENT? REPORT IT.**



NATIONAL  
CENTER FOR  
**MISSING & EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN

[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](http://A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN



## ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

He met "Sam" online. "She" sent him some sexy photos and asked him to do the same. He didn't feel comfortable, but he sent some. When he didn't send more, "Sam" became aggressive, sent a private video of him to his friends, and said it would get worse unless he did what "she" said.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Withdrawn or secretive behavior
- ▶ Increasingly isolated from friends/family
- ▶ Excessive use of mobile phone, gaming console, or other electronic device
- ▶ Skips school or starts being disruptive in class
- ▶ Gifts that cannot be explained or accounted for
- ▶ Signs of unexplained physical harm and appears moody or aggressive
- ▶ Leaves home without explanation, goes "missing" for periods of time, or returns home late

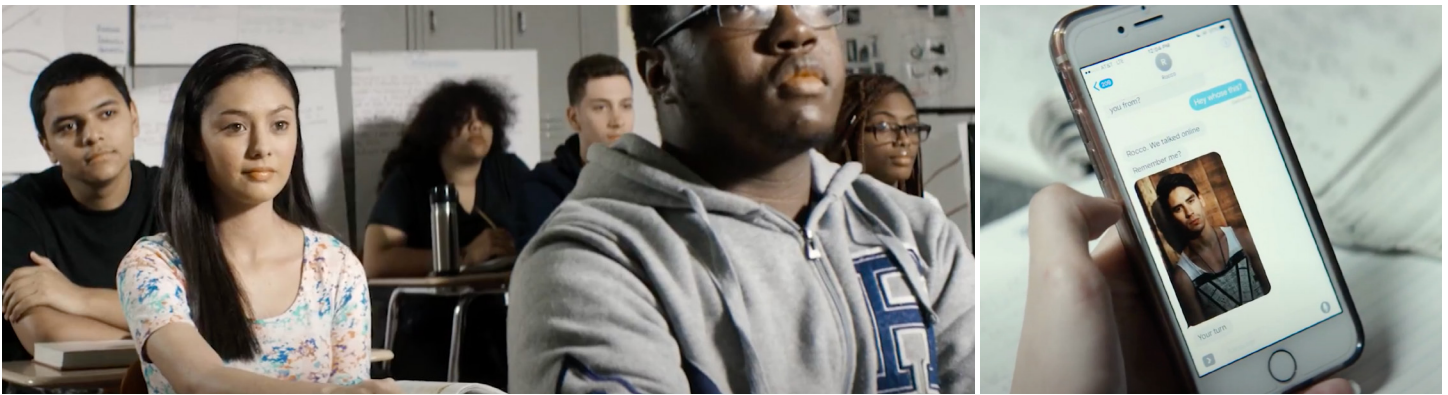
**SLAVERY STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.**



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://www.a21.org/canyouseeme)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.



## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF A MINOR

She was 15 when she met a cute, older guy on social media. He bought her gifts and said he loved her. But one day, he said she needed to have sex with a man for money. If she refused, he would hurt her. She wants to leave but doesn't know how.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Apparent minor involved in commercial sex
- ▶ Under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- ▶ Tattoos or brands indicating "ownership"
- ▶ Overly controlling "boyfriend" or older female
- ▶ Facial/body language display anxiety
- ▶ Child is preoccupied with "getting money"
- ▶ Child lies about age or identity
- ▶ Dresses inconsistent with true age

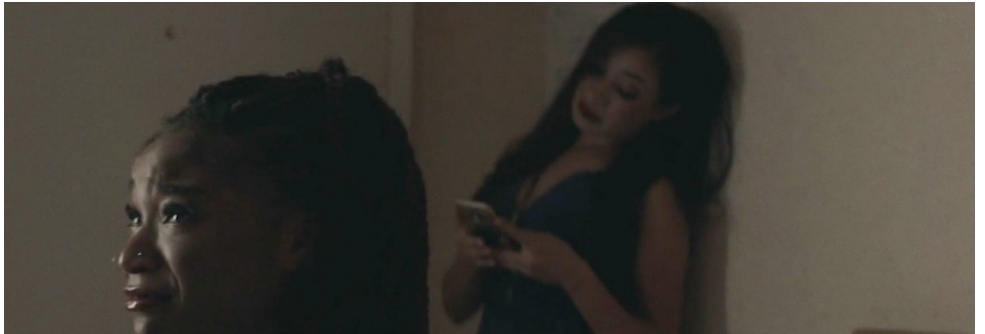
**SLAVERY** STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://www.a21.org/canyouseeme)

**800-THE-LOST**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.



## SEX TRAFFICKING

She had no money and nowhere to go. A nice older girl and her “boyfriend” helped – at first. The “boyfriend” said she needed to pay him back and made his “girlfriend” take her to customers. He said he would kill them if they didn’t make money. She doesn’t want to do this, but she’s scared.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Movement seems to be restricted by an overly controlling “boyfriend” or older female
- ▶ Does not appear to be in possession of their identification documents or passport
- ▶ Appears incoherent and in an altered state from drugs and/or alcohol
- ▶ Dresses to appear older or not dressed appropriately for the climate

**SLAVERY** STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://a21.org/canyouseeme)

**888-373-7888**  
U.S. HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.



## LABOR TRAFFICKING

Desperate for employment, he took a risk and paid someone to get him into the United States. But, he was forced to work long hours, had his wages withheld, and was not permitted to leave. He felt helpless in a foreign country where he didn't speak the language.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Appears anxious, uncomfortable, and unhappy
- ▶ Appears to be under constant surveillance of another person
- ▶ Avoids eye contact
- ▶ Lack of ability to communicate in the local language
- ▶ Not in possession of their identification documents or passport
- ▶ Underpaid or pay is withheld

**SLAVERY STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.**



▶ [A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME)

**888-373-7888**  
U.S. HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.



## AGRICULTURAL LABOR TRAFFICKING

For a fee, a man promised them good jobs and an education in the United States. They crossed the border and traveled to a farm, where they were forced to work for long hours. The living conditions are horrible, and the sister is sexually exploited. Isolated on a farm in a foreign country, their options seem limited.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Recruited through false promises
- ▶ Works excessive hours for little-to-no pay
- ▶ Evidence of abuse/visible scars or bruises
- ▶ Works and lives in the same place
- ▶ Is fearful, submissive, tense, or nervous
- ▶ Is unable to move freely
- ▶ Suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- ▶ Lives in substandard accommodations

**SLAVERY STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.**



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://a21.org/canyouseeme)

**888-373-7888**  
U.S. HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.



## DOMESTIC SERVITUDE LABOR TRAFFICKING

She met a “nice couple” in the Philippines through a job agency. They promised her an airline ticket, housing, and a good salary as a housekeeper. Once in the United States, they took her passport and cell phone. She was abused and not paid. She wants to leave but is in a foreign country with no money.

### INDICATORS

- ▶ Shabby clothing compared the family
- ▶ Appears fearful and submissive
- ▶ Does not speak the local language
- ▶ Works excessive hours for little to no pay
- ▶ Is not in control of their own ID
- ▶ Is not free to leave the house
- ▶ Under the surveillance of the adult family members

**SLAVERY** STILL EXISTS. IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.



[A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME](https://a21.org/canyouseeme)

**888-373-7888**  
U.S. HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

© A21 USA, Inc. 2023. All rights reserved.