Parent Guide





PREVENTION TOOLS AND CONVERSATIONS TO HELP PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND ONLINE EXPLOITATION

HI PARENTS!

We all want to keep our children and teenagers safe from harm, both online and offline. Whether you're a parent, guardian, foster carer, or anyone involved in caring for a child, this guide is designed specifically for you. This resource will help you initiate important conversations about human trafficking and online exploitation with your children. Most importantly, it will equip them with the necessary safety tools to navigate potentially dangerous situations in their young lives, including how to understand and identify these issues, and put effective safeguards in place. Language matters. Every child develops at their own unique pace. The conversation strategies that work effectively for a 5-year-old will be vastly different from those appropriate for a 16-year-old. This guide offers a range of age-appropriate information and approaches for different developmental stages, helping you to tailor conversation strategies to meet your child where they are right now.

Let's start with the basics...

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking is the recruitment, control, and use of people for their bodies and for their labor. It is modern-day slavery and affects millions of men, women, and children around the world and in our communities. According to U.S. law, any minor under the age of 18 who is induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether there is force, fraud, or coercion.

WHAT IS ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Online child sexual exploitation is a form of online child abuse where a minor is coerced, manipulated, or deceived into engaging in sexual conduct. This exploitation often includes the production of explicit child sexual abuse materials (referred to as CSAM), creating lasting harm that extends far beyond the initial incident. It is typically ongoing, frequently starting with a person falsely befriending a vulnerable child to take advantage of them.

INDICATORS/WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Look for patterns of change rather than one-off incidents. Trust your instincts if your child's behavior seems off.

Behavioral, Physical, & Social Changes:

- Withdrawal or isolation from friends, family, or activities they previously enjoyed
- Sudden changes in academic performance, behavior, or classroom conduct
- Uncharacteristic, risky, or secretive behaviors
- Displaying advanced sexual knowledge or language beyond their age
- Appearing constantly tired
- Exhibiting aggressive behavior or unexplained physical injuries

Digital Behavior:

- Spends excessive time texting, chatting online, or gaming, often displaying secretive or addictive behaviors
- Sudden secrecy about online activities or reluctance to share what they're doing on devices
- Hides their screen, quickly closes applications, or turns devices away when others approach
- Extreme defensive reactions or aggression when digital boundaries are established or screen time is limited

Relationship Changes:

- New patterns of friendships, often noticeably older, both in-person and online
- Has an older "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" (if dating age)
- Frequent or prolonged absences from home without clear explanations
- Secretiveness about new relationships or reluctance to introduce friends to family
- Sudden changes in their social circle or abandonment of long-term friendships

Material Changes:

- Receiving unexplained gifts or new items they couldn't typically afford (e.g., expensive phones, beauty products, gaming equipment, avatar skins, toys)
- Wearing new clothing, shoes, or accessories and not being able to explain where they came from
- Having access to cash or gift cards without a legitimate source of income
- Showing reluctance to explain how they obtained new possessions or providing vague, changing explanations

Important: *No single warning sign confirms that trafficking or online exploitation is occurring. These indicators serve as potential red flags that deserve your attention and further investigation. If you notice them, ask open-ended questions, seek help, or contact your local trafficking or child abuse hotlines.*

1. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), Pub. L. No. 106-386, 103(8)(A), 114 Stat. 1470 (2000), 22 U.S.C.A. 7102(8)(A)

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Talking with your child

Children and young people encounter potential risks from trafficking and exploitation across many environments—from trusted relationships to online spaces (social media, online gaming), schools, sporting clubs, and public spaces. Knowing what signs to look for can help better protect your child from trafficking and online exploitation. Open communication and creating a safe and trusted environment where your child feels comfortable sharing is key to their safety and protection. Building this foundation of trust with your child empowers them to come to you with their concerns, vulnerabilities, and experiences.

Essential Tips for Effective Communication:

- Consistently reinforce that you love them and that you want to make sure they are safe and feel protected.
- Maintain a non-judgmental, supportive attitude throughout all conversations.
- Avoid shaming or criticism, which can shut down open communication and prevent your child from sharing concerns in the future.
- Be honest about the dangers of the internet while avoiding language that creates unnecessary fear or anxiety.
- Tailor your approach to what is developmentally appropriate for your child's age and maturity level.
- Acknowledge your child's desire to be online and connect with friends.
- Work together to establish safe online interaction guidelines that feel reasonable to both of you.
- Your child may not initially speak up about potential grooming or abuse, as most predators deliberately build trust and emotional connections before introducing threats or manipulation. This often makes children feel they must protect the person harming them or fear consequences like exposure to family and friends. Even with excellent communication, children may withhold information due to shame, fear, or misplaced loyalty. That's why recognizing behavioral warning signs is essential. Your observational skills are a crucial safeguard alongside open dialogue to protect your child.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Child Rights and Personal Value

Reinforce to your child that they have rights, that they are valued, and that their voice matters. Help them understand that everyone is worthy of respect and protection. Remind your child that we show respect to one another by valuing and appreciating other people's differences, interests, worth, and individual qualities. Even though they may be young, remind your child that they always have the right to say "no" to anyone who makes them feel unsafe, pressured, or uncomfortable, regardless of that person's age, authority, or relationship to your family.

Create a Safe Space

Help your child understand that they should always tell a trusted adult if another child or adult makes them feel uncomfortable or invades their personal space, whether that's entering private areas like their bathroom or bedroom, or crossing other personal boundaries. Consider asking your child to keep their bedroom door open while using gaming devices or move to a communal area, where natural supervision can occur.

Healthy Communication

Explain that healthy relationships create environments where open and honest conversations can flourish, with both people valuing each other's feelings and perspectives. Reassure your child that they will never be in trouble for sharing something serious with you. Let them know that you care for them and that your desire for their well-being will always take priority over any other concerns. Explain that anyone who threatens harm or retaliation to keep them silent is not a safe or trusted adult/person. Explain that unhealthy relationships, child trafficking, exploitation, and grooming all depend heavily on secrecy and isolation.

For Teens:

- Encourage assertive communication skills that empower them to make personal decisions and express themselves clearly and honestly. Help them understand that being assertive means standing up for themselves and their rights in a respectful manner.





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- **For Younger Children:**
  - Focus on helping them recognize the critical difference between safe and unsafe secrets.
  - **Safe Secret:** information that is meant to be private or kept unknown by others but will eventually be revealed (e.g., a surprise birthday party).
  - **Unsafe Secret:** information that could hurt someone or break the law, makes someone feel scared, uneasy, and is not meant to be private or unknown by others (told not to tell).

Personal Body Boundaries

Provide your child with age-appropriate language to express their boundaries around physical contact. Examples include: "I don't like the way I feel when you touch me," "I would prefer not to give you a hug," or simply "No, thank you". Support your child's autonomy by never forcing physical contact—such as hugs, being picked up, tickled, or sitting on laps—even with trusted family members or friends if your child is uncomfortable. Explain that some individuals may try to push or test these boundaries, but emphasize that their boundaries should always be respected. This approach empowers children to trust their instincts and confidently set the boundaries necessary to keep themselves safe. Ensure that your child understands their body is never meant to be used as currency. They should never be asked to show body parts or engage in physical acts in exchange for money, gifts, privileges, or anything else. Their body belongs to them alone.

- **For Teens:**
  - Help your teenager understand that setting personal boundaries is both their right and a crucial life skill. Explain that boundaries help them feel safe and comfortable while creating necessary physical and emotional space in relationships. These limits clearly communicate what is and isn't acceptable, particularly regarding how they want to be treated. It can also be helpful to talk about why someone might try to push or test those boundaries, and how to respond in ways that protect their rights and well-being.

- **For Younger Children:**
  - Help children understand the distinction between safe and unsafe touch. Avoid using the terms "good vs. bad" touch since unsafe touch can sometimes feel physically pleasant, making the terminology misleading for young minds. Remind them that even family members and close friends can be involved in unsafe/uninvited touch.
    - **Safe Touch:** Demonstrates normal affection like shaking hands for greeting, a pat on the back, or a friendly hug.
    - **Unsafe or Uninvited Touch:** Any unwanted or uncomfortable affection like touching private parts (areas covered by a bathing suit or underwear). It can also be someone asking you to touch them in places covered by their bathing suit or underwear, or in other places that make you feel uncomfortable.

Relationship Boundaries

A healthy relationship is a connection between two people built on mutual respect, honesty, trust, open communication, reasonable compromise, and healthy and clear boundaries that both people honor. Help your child understand that while peer pressure might make them feel they need to conform to what their friends are doing to gain acceptance, decisions influenced by others' expectations rather than their own values can be dangerous and lead to uncomfortable or harmful situations. Teach them that true friends and partners will respect their boundaries and won't pressure them.

- **For Teens:**
  - Explain that in a healthy, committed relationship, a partner should not ask you to do something you are not comfortable doing or isolate you from your family and friends. An unhealthy relationship can be characterized by forcing the other person (in any kind of relationship) to sacrifice friendships, family, school, personal goals, independence, or even their emotional well-being while in the relationship.

- **For Younger Children:**
  - It can be confusing for younger children to recognize that someone they know—for example, a family member, a neighbor, a coach, or even another child—could act in ways that are unsafe or unkind. It is important to explain the difference between someone who is safe and trusted and someone who might be uninvited and tricky.
    - **Safe and Trusted:** a person who is truthful, honest, and reliable.
    - **Uninvited People or Tricky People:** a familiar person or a stranger who does something without permission (e.g., talking, touching) or uses deception (e.g., lying or keeping secrets), making one feel uncomfortable or cheated.

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Online Exploitation: What you need to know

- **ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (OCSEA):** A broad term that encompasses many forms of violence against children perpetrated online, which includes the terms "online grooming, child sexual abuse material/child sexual exploitation material, and live streaming of child sexual abuse."[1]
- **GROOMING:** Establishing a relationship and emotional bond with a minor to manipulate, exploit, or abuse them. This can occur online and offline. Online grooming is sometimes referred to as online enticement.
- **SEXTORTION:** Blackmailing or threatening a minor to share images or sexual content of themselves in order to get something, such as new sexual content, money, meeting in person, etc.
- **GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (GenAI):** A "type of artificial intelligence that can learn from and mimic large amounts of data to create content such as text, images, music, videos, code, and more, based on inputs or prompts."[2]
- **DEEPFAKE IMAGES AND VIDEOS:** A deepfake is an image or video that has been manipulated using Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) (sometimes referred to as "digital forgeries"). Deepfakes can be used innocently for fun or out of curiosity, but they are also being used to create sexually explicit deepfakes of adults and minors. Perpetrators can use these for sextortion without ever meeting their victim in real life. Children may also self-generate sexually explicit deepfakes with peers.
  - **Face Swapping Apps:** Uses A.I. to swap, replace, or superimpose one person's face onto another person's body.
  - **Nudify Apps:** Uses A.I. to take a photo of someone fully clothed to create a fake, realistic-looking, nude image.
- **A.I. COMPANIONS:** A.I.-generated chatbots designed to simulate human-like companionship and conversation. Some allow users to create realistic-looking avatars (e.g., a celebrity, a 'perfect' partner). They learn from available data, so they may give incomplete or inaccurate information, and many are not regulated and lack child safeguarding.

ONLINE DIGITAL SAFETY TIPS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

As children spend more time online, establishing open, honest and ongoing conversations about digital safety is essential for their protection and well-being.

On the next page are some practical tips and suggestions to empower your child with the knowledge and confidence they need to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Teaching Module Series: Cybercrime - Module 12: Interpersonal Cybercrime. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Accessed 27 November 2023 (website) https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html; See also, Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) What is online child sexual exploitation? Accessed 27 November 2023 (website)
2. https://www.accce.gov.au/help-and-support/what-is-online-child-exploitation



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Digital Footprint

A digital footprint is the information and images left behind while interacting online, which may stay online forever.

- Talk to your child about their digital footprint and how everything they share online leaves a digital trail that leads back to them. This makes it easy for people to know all about their lives without ever having to meet them.
- Encourage them to create a screen name that is different from their real name (i.e., not JohnS15, maybe JFox90).
- Avoid posting any identifiable information (e.g., pictures in front of their home, school, sporting clubs, photos with logos, or places that they frequent), including on gaming platforms, apps, or with A.I. companions.
- Keep their profile private and avoid adding people they do not know in person. Remind them to block anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable or who repeatedly attempts unwanted or uninvited communication.

Sending, Posting, and Reposting Digital Content

- Understand the permanence of digital sharing. Help your child grasp that the photos, videos, or digital content they post online are permanent, and once they share them, they can be easily saved and shared by others. This includes things sent through text, online chat, gaming platforms, apps, or with A.I. companions.
- Practice the three-question test. Before posting anything ask themselves, "Is this kind?" " Is this safe?" and "Would I be okay if everyone at school saw this?"
- Remind your child to tell a trusted adult if they receive unwanted, uninvited, or inappropriate content.
- Address the reality of sexting and sextortion. While it may be uncomfortable to discuss, it's crucial to talk with older children about the serious risks of sharing intimate images. Explain that once someone has compromising photos or videos, they may use them for blackmail or "sextortion" - threatening to share the images publicly unless the victim complies with their demands. Make it clear that anyone who engages in this behavior is committing a serious crime.

Communication

- Many online games, and social media platforms are designed for interacting with people online. Set up parental controls on devices, individual games and social media platforms. Remind your child to avoid accepting people they don't know in person or are not trusted friends and family. Encourage them to come to you first if they are unsure.
- Help your child understand that sharing emotional struggles, expressing desires for specific items, or posting about personal problems can make them targets for manipulation. Predators and scammers actively look for vulnerable posts to identify potential victims. Encourage your child to talk through difficult emotions with trusted adults rather than broadcasting them online.
- Talk to your child about the difference between safe and unsafe communication online:
  - **Safe Online Communication:** includes social media posts, texts, or emails to known and trusted people. This includes sending appropriate photos to family and friends and only having conversations that you are okay for others to see.
  - **Unsafe Online Communication:** are social media posts, texts, or emails to unknown and untrusted people. This includes sharing passwords or personal information with anyone online, receiving photos that include unwanted or uninvited content, and someone asking you to show them your private parts (e.g., via webcam, text) or sending you inappropriate photos.
- Remind your child that anything they share with an A.I. companion, chatbot, or generative A.I. program (i.e., face swapping or Nudify app) is not private and that every image, video, or creative work they upload has to live somewhere. Encourage them to treat these apps and programs as they would sharing personal information online.
- Remind your child that when we don't know someone, we may never really know who is on the other side of the screen. Someone may seem kind, understanding or genuinely interested in friendship or romance, but their true identity and intentions may be different from what they present. Age, gender, appearance, and personal details can all be fabricated. This is why maintaining boundaries with online-only relationships is so important for safety.

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What protection measures can I take to safeguard my child from human trafficking and online exploitation?

Creating a Safety Plan helps prepare your child to recognize unsafe situations, know what to do, and who to ask for help. Start a conversation with your child and establish clear expectations for regular communication. Let them know that you reserve the right to check their devices at any time as part of keeping them safe. Whether you formally create a written safety plan together or engage in regular safety discussions, these conversations equip your child with the awareness and tools they need to stay safe, both online and offline.

HERE ARE SOME PROTECTIVE MEASURES THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED:

- **Enable location sharing:** If your child has their own device(s), set up location sharing so you can monitor their whereabouts and know their location in emergency situations.
- **Map out safe routes and resources:** Review your child's regular destinations and travel routes and discuss ways they can avoid potential risks and establish safe alternatives. Ensure they know the addresses of safe places to go if they feel threatened (libraries, police stations, trusted neighbors) and have memorized contact information for reliable adults they can call in emergencies.
- **Maintain comprehensive awareness:** Stay actively informed about your child's social circles and activities, both online and offline. Know who they spend time with, what they watch, who they communicate with, and how much time they are spending online. This knowledge helps you identify concerning changes in behavior or relationships that might signal danger. If you notice your child is becoming uncharacteristically withdrawn from friends and family, have an open conversation about what they are experiencing. If you're concerned for their well-being, don't hesitate to seek professional help.
- **Establish collaborative digital boundaries:** Work with your child to create healthy technology habits and safeguarding measures that feel reasonable rather than punitive. Involving your child in creating these boundaries helps ensure better compliance and understanding. Collaborative digital boundaries may include:
  - Charging your child's devices outside of bedrooms overnight.
  - Designating specific areas in the home for technology use.
  - Managing time spent online and setting limits on screen time on school days.
  - Controlling website, social media, and online game access.
  - Installing age-appropriate parental control software on devices.
  - Monitoring your child's social media accounts and knowing their passwords.

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PROTECTIVE MEASURES CONTINUED:

- **Follow platform age restrictions and safety features:** Always follow the age requirements and safety guidance provided by apps and games your child uses. Take advantage of kid-friendly versions when available (such as YouTube Kids), and utilize built-in parental controls appropriate for your child's age, including setting profiles to private, disabling live chat features on games, and turning off location sharing on social platforms.
- **Develop a discreet help signal:** Create a unique way for your child to ask for your help if they get into an uncomfortable situation (e.g., a signal, item, or safe word) that they can use or give to you to talk to you without you getting frustrated or getting in trouble.
- **Stay informed about digital trends:** Keep current with evolving technology and popular apps by following reputable child safety organizations on social media or subscribing to their newsletters (e.g., NCMEC, Thorn, Bark, Carly Ryan Foundation).
- **Program emergency contacts:** Add important numbers to your child's phone contact list (e.g., trusted adult, police, trafficking hotline numbers). If they're able to, have your child memorize 1-2 trusted adults' phone numbers in case of an emergency.
- **Reinforce emergency protocols:** Clearly communicate that in any emergency or unsafe situation, your child should immediately call 911.

Getting Set Up

INTRODUCING A DEVICE

When introducing your child to a personal device, there's no single approach that works for every family. The key is choosing a strategy that aligns with your child's maturity level, your family values, and your specific circumstances. Consider these effective approaches:

- **Gradual rollout with clear boundaries:** Start with basic functionality and expand privileges as your child consistently demonstrates responsibility and sound judgment with existing access.
- **Structured family agreement:** Establish that the device is owned by the parent, with a written contract outlining expectations, consequences, and responsibilities that your child reads, discusses, and signs.
- **Age-based access:** Determine the age at which you want your child to have their own devices or access to social media based on their developmental readiness rather than peer pressure or external expectations.

Remember that you know your child better than anyone else. If you believe your child is too young or isn't ready to have a device or social media access, trust that judgment - it's your decision and right as a parent or guardian.





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How should I respond if I suspect potential exploitation or trafficking?

- If you believe it is an **emergency**, report the person and the incident to the police immediately.
- If you are a **concerned parent or guardian** and suspect exploitation, make a report using the reporting details provided below.
- If you discover that a **friend or a colleague's child** may be experiencing online exploitation, approach the parent with sensitivity while also ensuring you make an independent report to authorities. Remember that exploitation can sometimes occur within households, so professional investigation is always necessary regardless of family dynamics.
- If you **work in a school, business, faith-based organization, or community organization**, follow your workplace's established reporting policies immediately. Contact your designated child protection or safeguarding officer, who is responsible for managing the organization's legal reporting obligations and can guide you through proper procedures while ensuring compliance with mandatory reporting requirements.

IF YOU SUSPECT IT, REPORT IT.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

Child trafficking and online exploitation

Call: 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

CyberTipline: MissingKids.org

National Human Trafficking Hotline

All forms of trafficking, all ages

Call: 1-888-373-7888

Text: BeFree (233733)

For Additional Hotline Information: A21.org/report

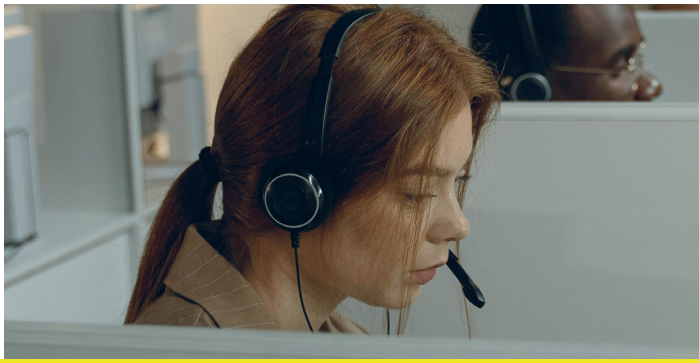
For more resources, scan below:

Pay it forward:

Help another family or vulnerable community access these resources and essential support tools.

Scan below to find more ways to help:





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