

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



CREATED IN COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS OF EXPLOITED YOUTH AT
MY LIFE MY CHOICE

When sex is exchanged for anything of value to a child—for money, for food, for drugs—this is commercial sexual exploitation, an egregious form of child abuse.

Commercial sexual exploitation is about the absence of choice. It is when someone of power preys on someone of vulnerability and it happens in communities across the country.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Girls, boys, transgender and non-binary youth of every race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are all at risk for commercial sexual exploitation.

Among youth served by My Life My Choice, the average age of first exploitation was 14 years old.

"I DIDN'T KNOW THIS KIND OF STUFF HAPPENED HERE."

- MARY, A MOTHER OF A GIRL EXPLOITED AT AGE 13

Exploiters or traffickers specifically prey on minors, and some children are at greater risk than others. Here are a few of the reasons why.

RUNNING AWAY. When youth leave home and don't have a place to go, they are in survival mode, which puts them at greater risk of a trafficker taking advantage of them.

HISTORY OF ABUSE. Sometimes when youth experience trauma within their family or in their home, they seek love and stability elsewhere – exploiters know this.

NOT FEELING ACCEPTED. Exploiters seek out vulnerable youth with low self-esteem and promise them freedom and belonging.

ANNA, AGE 14, RAN AWAY FROM HOME.

She met Chris through a friend of a friend. He fed her, bought her clothes, and promised to take care of her. And then he expected that she would pay him back by making money for him. He posted a "seductive" picture of her online with a cellphone number and men began to come over.

JILL, AGE 16, MET A MAN, JAMES, ONLINE.

They messaged each other for a little while, before James asked her if she wanted to hang out in person. James was 30 years old, but he said that age was just a number. James told her he loved her. After a few months of "hanging out", James said that he owed someone \$500 and if he didn't pay him, the guy was going to kill him. He asked Jill if she'd help him get this money. He explained what she would have to do.

JOE, AGE 15, BECAME HOMELESS WHEN...

He and his parents had a huge fight on a cold night in January. He met a man, David at a 7-11 who invited him to come to his apartment to get something to eat and warm up. At the apartment, Jim explained that Joe could stay with him, if...

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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

Below are some things to watch for and that when seen together could indicate CSEC.

- *Goes missing from care ("running away")*
- *Frequently late for curfew or absent from school*
- *Owning new items (jewelry, new clothing, etc.) and you don't know where they came from*
- *Having a tattoo they are reluctant to explain*
- *Owning a cellphone that you didn't purchase*
- *Involved with an older male or adult*
- *Having multiple sexually transmitted infections or pregnancies*
- *Being secretive about what they are doing online*

WHAT CAN I DO?

TAKE A MINUTE TO BREATHE.

Talking about exploitation isn't easy for either of you, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.

ASK NONJUDGMENTAL QUESTIONS.

Neither you nor your child are to blame.

BE PATIENT.

Don't push them to talk before they're ready. Trust them, believe them, and listen to what they has to say.

SEEK SUPPORT.

There are resources to support you and your child in their recovery from exploitation or to equip them with tools to prevent this form of abuse.

IF YOU SUSPECT EXPLOITATION OR BELIEVE A CHILD TO BE AT HIGH RISK

Talk to your child's school social worker, guidance counselor or nurse.

Intervention and Prevention programs are available. You don't want to hold this on your own.

Contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at

1-888-373-7888

or text

BEFREE (233733)

There is someone there 24/7 to talk to. They will connect you to help in your area.