

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

## A FEW BASIC TOOLS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN:

- 1). Know where your kids are at all times.
- 2). Know what your kids are doing online and teach them about internet safety.
- 3). Talk to your kids about sexual exploitation.
- 4). Know the warning signs of sexual abuse in younger children and teens, and recognize the warning signs of sexual exploitation.
- 5). Stay informed and up to date on the latest information.



Often times, when people first learn about sex trafficking, the first thing that comes to mind is how to protect their own children or grandchildren from becoming a victim. The purpose of this article is to give parents and grandparents some insight and tools to talk to their own children of various age groups and maturity levels about commercial sexual exploitation.

Dr. James Levine, Mayo Clinic physician and author of the book "The Blue Notebook," casually explained once that most people are emotionally impacted by the topic not because of their own children, but rather their "**un-kids**" – a simple word that describes the thousands of children in our own community who may not be connected to us by blood or relation, but rather who represent the collective hope of future generations.

## WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

The Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) defines the crime of human trafficking as:

A. The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age, or

B. The 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.

This article represents the views and opinions formed after many hours of discussion with experts in the field, survivors, law enforcement and people who have dedicated their lives to rescue, protect and serve vulnerable children.

If you suspect Human Trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888

# WHERE IS YOUR CHILD RIGHT NOW?

As a parent, grandparent or guardian, you may have varying degrees of apprehension about giving your child enough freedom necessary to grow up and become an adult. In today's world, it is perfectly acceptable to have fears about your child's safety, especially when it is nearly impossible to keep up with teens' latest social media trends.



One thing is certain. Nearly all teens have a cell phone, and most teens cannot function without their cellphone on hand. According to a recent report released in March, 2013 by Harvard University entitled "*Teens and Technology 2013*" 78% of teens now have a cell phone, and almost half (47%) of those own smartphones.

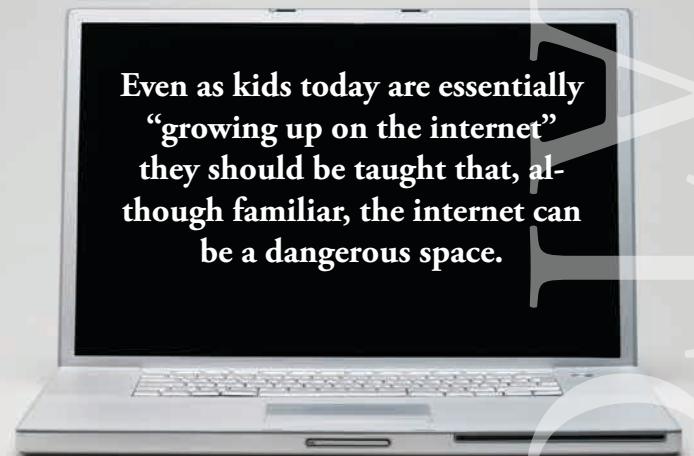
Cell phone tracking can help you locate your child's lost cell phone, and can keep you notified of your child's whereabouts at all times; especially in the event of an emergency. Most cell phone carriers have programs to assist parents with this task.

Parents or guardians have a right to know where their minor children are at all times, despite what your teen may argue.

Major wireless service providers such as AT&T, Verizon, and Sprint offer "*Family Locator*" packages that allow you to locate and track all the cell phones on your plan. In addition, if your child's phone has GPS capabilities (like an iPhone, Droid or Blackberry) you can download a tracking app directly from the phone.

Predators and traffickers prey upon children who have the freedom to move around freely without suspicion. Children who are most vulnerable are those who do not have a parent or guardian looking for them.

Research points to direct parallels between socio-economic factors and risk for trafficking. Children who are raised in poverty or come from the foster care system are far more likely to fall victim to predators.



Your child must be taught never to give any personal information, answer questions such as birthdate or social security number, or fill out forms online.

Today's parents are navigating uncharted parenting territory. The good news is that most dangers can be avoided if children and their parents learn about smart internet use.

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# ONLINE BEHAVIOR IN KIDS AND TEENS

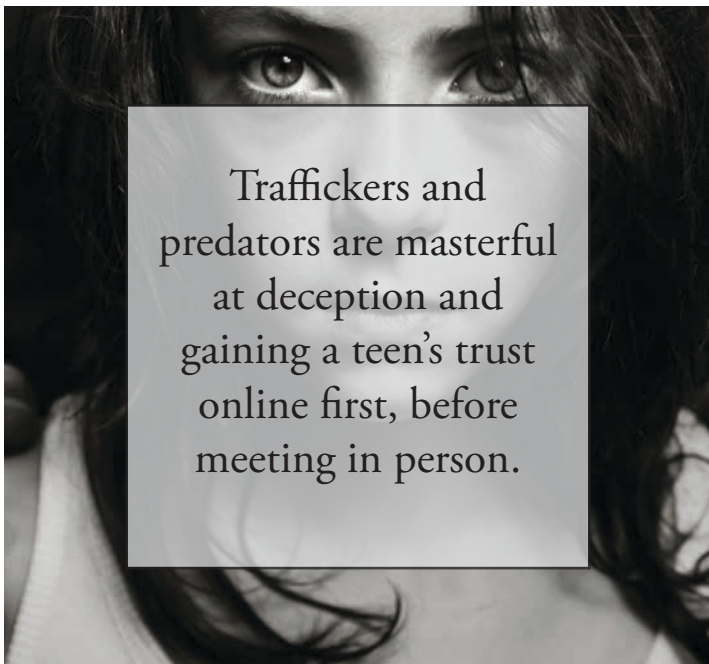
The latest Harvard Research shows that nine in ten (93%) teens have a computer or have access to one at home. Although it may be hard to believe, tech savvy kids as young as five are now actively engaging in social media.

Kids online are exploring various websites, emailing friends, chatting with friends through instant messenger and in chat rooms, sending each other pictures and videos, playing games together online, creating websites and web blogs, and searching YouTube for popular “viral” videos.

Be sure to place any computer your younger child uses in a common area, so you can monitor what is happening. Pre-teens should never be allowed on chat sites without supervision. For older teens, parents should have the right to ask about browsing history and access to all passwords.

When discussing social networking safety with your teen, encourage him or her to always use discretion when posting any type of photo, location, status, and message.

Teens tend to over share information. They post questionable photos, give their locations and share personal information such as their cell phone numbers and home address. What seems like harmless chatter between friends can end up pinpointing your child’s location and regular behavior to a predator.



Traffickers and predators are masterful at deception and gaining a teen’s trust online first, before meeting in person.

# KNOW WHAT YOUR KIDS ARE DOING ONLINE

Another way to keep tabs on your kids is to follow them on their social media sites.

You may learn a lot about your child from how he or she communicates with peers.

Teens should interact with only people they actually know. Allowing only people you know and trust as “friends” or “followers” is the best way to ensure safety when using social networking sites.

Unfortunately, some teens are motivated by sheer volume in the number of “followers” or “online friends,” and fail to think about the dangers associated with a stranger having access to personal information such as photos and location.



Learning how to use Instagram, Snap chat, Facebook and the latest trends are becoming part of good parenting today. Everyone can learn how to use social media – just ask your child or grandchild to teach you!



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# CONFUSED ABOUT THE LINGO?

*Just ask any teen to explain.*



Teens love to post photos all the time. Posting questionable photos that may be deemed as fun or cute, or sexy, can end up in the wrong place quickly.

If you are following your child on social media, then you will see what pictures are being shared. Chances are, if your child knows you are watching, he or she will be less likely to post dangerous photos.



The internet can be the great equalizer in that it does not discriminate against race, gender, income, neighborhood or educational level, yet at the same time; all kids who are allowed the freedom to “play” on the internet are equally at risk online.

Younger children do not have the discretionary skills necessary to understand the difference between what is safe and what is dangerous online behavior, without being taught by an adult.

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# “HE’S NOT WHO YOU THINK HE IS.”

Social networking sites make it very easy to pretend to be someone else. A Forbes article from 2012 reported that an estimated 83 Million Facebook profiles are fake. If Facebook has over 1 billion members, then nearly 1 in 13 of them is bogus.

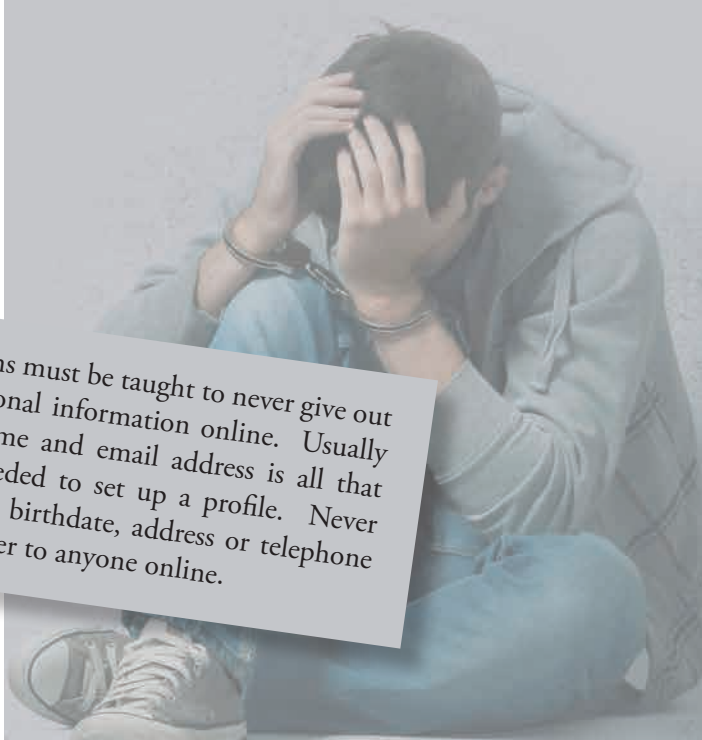
Traffickers are masterful at deception and ways to gain a teen’s trust online first, before ever setting up a face to face meeting.

Location-based services can be one of the most dangerous features provided by social networking sites. When activated, it exposes the profile user’s location and whereabouts. Users can “check in” on Facebook to an exact location such as a restaurant or shopping center.

*The strictest level of security for teens using social media is “friends only” setting, and you as a parent should be allowed to be a “friend.”*

Facebook also has a feature that allows users to tag who they are with at any given time. Predators can use this tool to track someone’s movements and determine when they are alone or easily met in person.

In addition, teens must be taught to utilize privacy settings. There are multiple privacy settings that range from “open to everyone” to “open to friends of friends” or “friends only.”



Teens must be taught to never give out optional information online. Usually a name and email address is all that is needed to set up a profile. Never give a birthdate, address or telephone number to anyone online.

# TEACH CHILDREN TO TRUST THEIR INSTINCTS.

With so much constant change in the internet space, the best way to equip children is to teach them to trust their own instincts. If something feels wrong, it probably is. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Children learn right from wrong at a very young age, and the internet must be added to their toolbox of life choices.

## TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN

Slavery is a common topic taught in school, and most kids believe that slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, or three years later with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. Kids can relate to the concept of slaves having to work without pay and not having the freedom to escape the situation. This is a logical way to address the topic of commercial sexual exploitation. You can share the fact that there are more slaves today worldwide than at any other time in history.

The New York public school system has an excellent curriculum about modern day slavery <http://www.nyc.gov/html/endht/downloads/pdf/sanctuary-nyc-2013.pdf>

## “STRANGER DANGER”

Despite sensational media coverage, stranger abductions are extremely rare. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, only 115 children per year in this country are victims of “stereotypical” kidnappings, where a stranger takes a child to keep or harm him. Young children are less likely to be targeted by strangers than teenagers.

Nevertheless, it is important to talk to your children about strangers, and above all, teach them to once again trust their own instincts. Children should never be left alone with unknown adults, and kids should always travel in groups, where there is safety in numbers.

# WHEN DO I START THE CONVERSATION?

Human sexuality is not openly discussed in many American households, yet the topic is glaringly present in all aspects of media seen by kids and teens on a daily basis. These are difficult waters for a child to navigate alone.

Most kids under the age of 10 are usually naïve about sexuality and have limited knowledge about sex, and even more limited understanding of rape or sexual exploitation.

Human growth and development at school likely occurs during the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when students range from ages 9-11. In girls, puberty usually starts around 11 years of age and in boys, puberty begins around 12 years of age. The normal onset of puberty ranges in girls from 9-16, while in boys it is 12-15.

**It is best to have these conversations with your children after puberty has begun.**

Pre-pubescent children lack the physical and mental maturity to understand changes in the human body that prepare them for sexual reproduction.

**It is important to understand that girls who mature early may begin sexual activity earlier than those who physically mature at a slower pace.**

Where students may learn about reproductive health at school, it is up to the family to teach their kids to feel good about how their bodies look and feel. Parents can teach children at a very young age about physical touch and what is appropriate or inappropriate. Children should be taught what kind of touch is acceptable, what to do if someone tries to hurt them, and that it is okay to talk about anything that makes them “feel” uncomfortable.



most kids believe that slavery ended

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## WHAT IF....

“What if?” questions are an opportunity to practice scenarios with your kids. Role playing is a powerful way to teach kids how to handle difficult situations.

Act out with your child various situations at different familiar locations- sports practice, walking to a friend’s house, outdoor festivals, Halloween, at the mall, movie theater, etc.

These “what would you do” conversations can take place at the dinner table or on the drive to school and may help ease apprehension about the topic.

You will probably hear, “Oh mom, seriously?” In the end, it is better to upset your teen so that he or she thinks twice when potentially faced with a difficult situation.

*“What would you do if a good looking older guy came up to you at the mall and said he thought you were pretty enough to be a model?”*

*“Would you give him your phone number?”*

*“Is it ok for a stranger to take pictures of you?”*

*“Have you ever known someone at school that had an older boyfriend?”*

*“Have any of your friends ever talked about getting paid to go on dates?”*

*“Do you know what sexting is?”*

*“Has anyone ever sent you a picture that made you feel uncomfortable?”*

*“What would you do if someone sent you an inappropriate picture or asked you for one?”*

DEFINITION...

### SEXTING

Sending of sexually explicit photos or text through one’s mobile phone to friends or potential suitors.



Another way to begin conversation with your teen is to ask questions. When you ask questions, you show that you care about your kids’ health and safety.

# KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

According to national statistics, most children who are trafficked have a history of sexual abuse from earlier in their childhood. According to research out of the University Of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, nationally, 95% of “teen prostitutes” were victims of earlier childhood sexual abuse. Noticing the warning signs of abuse can help these children receive the services they need so they are not further victimized.

Homeless, runaway/throwaway and foster children are the most vulnerable population of kids at risk for sex trafficking. According to researchers out of Arizona State University’s Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention and Research, vulnerable girls may be recruited “into the life” by friends or over the internet. Pimps often act as a boyfriend. They might befriend a victim or require one of their current victims to befriend a new girl.



(United States Department of Justice, National Sex Offender Public Website- a great source of information for parents about this topic and a searchable database- <http://www.nsopw.gov>)

## YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Gradual or sudden changes in behavior
- Cruelty to others
- Cruelty to pets
- Recurring nightmares
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Fear of the dark
- Regression behavior like bed wetting
- Unusual interest in /knowledge of sex
- Expressing affection in ways that are inappropriate for a child of that age
- Sexual Acting Out / Inappropriate Sexual play (with self, other children)
- Fear of a certain person/ intense dislike of being left somewhere
- Change in behavior around a specific person
- Afraid to be left alone
- Loss of or lack of interest in friends, school sports or other activities
- Fear of participating in physical activities at school

## TEENS

- Extreme and/or unexplained anger
- Running away
- Low self-worth
- Self-destructive behavior/self-harm
- Self-mutilation/ cutting
- Seductive behavior
- Promiscuous behavior
- Low self esteem
- Eating disorders
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Suicidal thoughts
- Suicide attempts
- Happening to a “Friend”
- Difficulty forming relationships
- Poor peer relationships
- Signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Sexually Transmitted disease

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# Know that by learning about the topic, you are making a small difference.

It is important to remember that no one chooses to be exploited. Exploiters use violence, threats and manipulation to control their victims psychologically and financially.

Victims are controlled through beatings, isolation, starvation, and psychological abuse, threats against family or friends, rape, debt bondage and drug dependency.

Please visit the TRUST website *RESOURCES* page for more information about this issue.  
[www.trustaz.org/resources.html](http://www.trustaz.org/resources.html)

- The buying and selling of human beings worldwide generates approximately \$31.6 billion dollars a year; a revenue second only to drug trafficking. (*United Nations*)
- An estimated 100,000 American kids are victims of domestic human trafficking each year in the United States. (*2013 Congressional Research Service report*)
- Only 1-2% of human trafficking victims are ever identified. (*Polaris Project*)
- The average age a teen enters the sex trade in Arizona is 14 years old, but nationally the average age is 13. (*Shared Hope International Rapid Assessment Fact Sheet on Arizona*)
- The FBI states that the average life expectancy of a child once in prostitution is 7 years due to homicide and HIV/AIDS (*Melisa Farley of Prostitution Research and Education*)

The modern day pimp/trafficker may appear like a relatively normal guy to a vulnerable girl. Traffickers are master manipulators and use tactics to create a trauma bond between the victim and trafficker.

The Polaris Project reports that “trafficked persons are not always hidden in dark rooms, away from the public eye. They are transported from one place to

another. They use public transportation. Since they suffer injury and harm, they require medical care at hospitals and domestic violence shelters.”

## Please share what you have learned with your neighbors, family, co-workers and friends.

To learn even more, or if you would like a training to take place for an interested group, please contact TRUST – [www.trustaz.org](http://www.trustaz.org).

If you would like us to email you this document so you can forward it to your contacts, please email [abayless@trustaz.org](mailto:abayless@trustaz.org).

Identifying victims is often difficult. They move around a lot or are moved frequently.

Victims don't trust most adults and are particularly fearful of law enforcement.

Too often, they don't even think of themselves as victims.

However, some warning signs include:

- Highly controlled or restricted schedule, money or communications
- Unidentifiable source of income
- Unexplained absences of days at a time
- Unexplained source of new clothing and personal items
- Bruises or other physical signs of abuse
- A tattoo that the young person is reluctant to explain (for instance, being “branded” with an exploiter's name on the neck, chest or arms)
- Isolation from family, friends or other social networks
- Secrecy or vagueness about whereabouts
- Gaps in life story or defensiveness in response to questions or concerns
- Paranoia or lack of trust
- Self-blame or feelings of humiliation or shame
- Disassociation or lack of connection to the outside world
- Malnourishment
- Untreated health and dental problems

# TRUST



training and  
resources  
united to stop  
trafficking

TRUST is a grant funded project whose mission is to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts in Arizona and increase public awareness about the crisis as it relates to Arizona's children. Please visit the TRUST website for a list of resources to learn more about the issue. [www.trustaz.org](http://www.trustaz.org)

Note: Angelyn Bayless, the author of this article, is a program fellow for TRUST and mother of children ages 10, 12, 15, 16, 18. To contact the author, please email [abayless@trustaz.org](mailto:abayless@trustaz.org).

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