

A Parent's Guide to Safe Harbor

SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

A sexually exploited youth is someone age 24 or under who engaged in, agreed to engage, or was forced into sexual conduct in return for the promise of anything of value, such as money, food, clothing, rent, or shelter. A youth also can be sexually exploited if he or she has engaged in exotic dancing, been filmed doing sexual acts, traded sex for drugs, or has been involved in a prostitution-related crime. A third party may or may not be involved.

Not only does sexual exploitation lead to immediate and long-term physical, mental and emotional harm, but until recently Minnesota could charge and treat sexually exploited youth as criminals—juvenile delinquents engaging in acts of prostitution.

SAFE HARBOR LAW AND THE NO WRONG DOOR RESPONSE MODEL

Under Minnesota Safe Harbor, Minnesota youth who engage in prostitution will no longer be seen as criminals but instead as victims and survivors. The Safe Harbor Law treats these youth with dignity and respect, and directs them to appropriate supportive services, including shelter and housing.

In order to implement the Safe Harbor Law, Minnesota is following the No Wrong Door Response Model (NWD). When all NWD recommendations are fully implemented, it will ensure that MN is a national leader in providing effective, trauma-informed and victim-centered services to sexually exploited youth. NWD ensures that no matter where a youth is identified, whether through schools, advocacy groups, clinics, child protection, law enforcement, or other avenues, every professional will be able to identify exploitation and will know where to refer the youth for services.

HOW DOES A CHILD BECOME A VICTIM?

Traffickers/pimps/buyers and people looking to exploit youth (including family members, trusted adults, friends/boy-friends/girlfriends, or gangs) will prey on any vulnerability a youth might have. They will use psychological manipulation and often physical violence. The exploiter is often very good at psychological manipulation and aims to keep the victim loyal to them at all costs.

Often the exploiter will begin a caring relationship in order build trust and loyalty to the trafficker. This can start in person directly with the youth, or they can use other youth to recruit the victim. Traffickers will also recruit victims online. They will often troll the internet looking for youth who are looking for love, acceptance, or even excitement.

Youth who are being sex trafficked or sexually exploited are not “bad kids.” They are victims of a crime. Even if they believe they had choices and do not identify as a victim, they have been, targeted, tricked and traumatized.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

5 Actions to Help Protect Your Children

1. Set a high standard of love within your home Model healthy relationships and help them distinguish between real love and empty promises or cheap gifts. Spending time with your children and showing them your deep love for them shapes their self-image, confidence and opinions of future relationships.¹

2. Talk to your children about healthy relationships Discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships with your children, including boundaries and consent. Let them know they should never feel pressured, forced, or tricked to engage in sexual acts or other activities. There are people willing to exploit vulnerabilities through gifts and false promises of love and acceptance. Youth will be better able to identify this grooming if they understand healthy sexuality and relationships. Let your children know that if anyone has or ever does harm them, they can talk to you. Don't assume they have not been exploited or victimized before. There may be past circumstances that they haven't shared with you.²

3. Talk about internet safety It's important to provide practical safety tips like: don't accept Facebook requests from unknown people; NEVER share naked photos of yourself with anyone; and tell a parent or a trusted adult if you feel threatened or uncomfortable online. Talk through what will happen if they tell someone so they know they will not be in trouble for what happened.³

4. Pay attention to your children Monitor your children's social media accounts, and look for ways to meet those they hang out with. Be alert to friends who are much older, or who tend to isolate your child from other friends or family. Notice if your child has new clothes, cell phone or other items and inquire about how they acquired them.⁴

5. Talk honestly about pornography People involved in pornography are often trafficked and the context is often violent sexual behaviors. This leads youth to believe that dominance and violence are normal sexual behaviors and that women are objects that can be bought. Pornography is the primary gateway to the purchase of humans for commercial sex.⁵

WARNING SIGNS/ INDICATORS OF TRAFFICKING OR EXPLOITATION

(Not any one sign necessarily signals exploitation, but when several indicators are present, there may be cause for concern)

- Evidence of a controlling or dominating relationships
- New relationships with older adults
- Tattoos or other branding marks
- Signs of violence such as bruises, cuts or burns
- Masking offences such as curfew violation, truancy and other status offences
- Homelessness/chronic runaway
- Previous sexual abuse
- Unexplained money, jewelry, clothes, etc.
- Sudden or dramatic change in behavior
- Appears to be coached on what to say
- Disconnected from family and/or old friends
- Lying about where they have been or who they have been with
- Fearful attachment to cell phone or odd cell phone behaviors
- Friends or acquaintances who are in "the life"
- Involved in gang relationships (especially girls)
- References suspicious or odd job offers or situations
- Exhibiting hyper-vigilance or paranoid behavior
- Explicit sexual online social media
- Nightmares or new sleeping problems
- Becoming unusually secretive

IF YOU SUSPECT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Be understanding. Even if a person does not identify as a victim, or may seem abrasive, they have been abused, traumatized and are in need of services. Get help. It can be dangerous for you and the victim to try to interfere directly with the trafficker. If you suspect someone is being sexually exploited please call one of the following:

- Local Law Enforcement
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678)
- Your Safe Harbor Regional Navigator for help finding resources. You can also refer victims directly to the regional navigator, they can call or text for help.
- The Day One Hotline for local shelter and supportive services in your area: 1-866-223-1111

¹ - Six Ways Parents Can Protect Their Child from Sex Trafficking. Accessed Jan 10, 2016. <https://iwantrest.com/blog/6-ways-parents-can-protect-their-children-from-sex-trafficking>; ² - Ibid.; ³ - Ibid.; ⁴ - Ibid; ⁵ - Ibid.