



# KEEPING KIDS SAFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

**A Handbook for Parents, Teachers, and Caring Adults**



**STREET GRACE™**

[streetgrace.org](http://streetgrace.org)

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## A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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At Street Grace, we work to spread awareness, educate the public, and prevent more atrocities by getting to the root of the matter. What makes exploitation possible? What circumstances allowed it? Where does it begin?

Turns out a lot of it begins at home. The technology that allows us to create, consume and share information faster than ever before has changed so many lives for the better, but, like many things, it has been corrupted by people who want to profit from the mistreatment of others.

It can start with social media, sexting and pornography. It can even begin in good homes with good kids who have good parents. It can begin innocently, but it can quickly spiral out of control.

As parents, teachers and other caring adults, we don't have to tell you about the problems that have evolved from technology. We get asked repeatedly about how to protect kids in the Digital Age.

This handbook is a result of the thousands of questions we have been asked by parents, teachers and youth workers in hundreds of venues around the country. It's designed to be an overview of several topics that are of the utmost importance in today's world. Additionally, it is our hope that this handbook can serve as a road map for all of us as we diligently work to create a world where all children are free from sexual exploitation.

If you are new to these issues and research, you will likely find some of the statistics disturbing. And even if you've heard the information before, it's still heartbreaking. However, this handbook is not intended to scare you or make you suspicious of everyone around you, but rather to empower you. This isn't a time to bury our heads in the sand or simply hope everything is okay. It is time to be prepared.

Whether you're worried about or you're actively dealing with the issues outlined in this guide, we encourage you to read through the entire handbook. We hope and pray that you and your family are spared these painful situations, but we would much rather you be aware than caught off guard, scrambling to respond. An intentional response always leads to better solutions.

We hope you will join us in this fight, even if only in your own homes – because that still matters a great deal. It may begin with a conversation about sexting, being safe on social media, or even pornography. We don't know what it will be for you, but we do want to help prepare you.

Thank you for your willingness to address this difficult subject matter and for your desire to protect our kids. If Street Grace or I can be of service to you, please reach out. We'd love to partner with you in ways that empower you to protect our kids.

Sincerely,

**Bob Rodgers**

President | CEO

## TO PARENTS

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Being a parent nowadays is much more difficult than our parents had it. If any of us had Internet, it was dial-up. Can you remember that sound when you called someone and they were on the Internet? Man, that was awful. Our kids might not even ever know what a CD looks like. For that reason, have some grace on yourself. Navigating technology as a part of parenting was never modeled. The important thing to remember is that you are not alone. Most parents don't know what they are doing when it comes to addressing these issues, and they are overwhelmed. But you can't stay frozen in fear and put your children at risk by not talking to them about the important topics covered in this booklet.

You can  
only shield  
and protect  
children  
from so  
much harm.

Despite your desperate desire and determination, you can only shield and protect children from so much harm. Kids will grow up, and it's our job to prepare them for adulthood. We believe that having these conversations early and often, as well as modeling the right behavior, is the foundation for protecting children.

These conversations may be uncomfortable, but the more you have them, the more your kids will be open to talking about difficult subjects. It will also help them realize that these subjects aren't something they need to hide from

you and that you are a safe person to talk to if threats arise. Without the necessary dialogue, children may see any forced restriction as a way to test their boundaries. Plus, knowing the “why” behind your advice and rules helps them understand and respect your desire for their safety.

We’ve found that it’s also important to involve them in the process rather than dictating a list of rules. Ask them what they know and how they feel, and explain what those feelings mean and why they are right or wrong. Then allow them to help come up with solutions so they are more likely to participate in following the family’s guidelines. Go to page 16 to read more about how to prepare to talk to your kids.

## TALK IT OUT

Here's an example of how this might play out in real life.

You're on your way home with the kids, and they ask for a particular radio station, playlist or song. As you begin to really listen to the lyrics, you realize that the message is not one you want them consuming. Instead of changing the music with a scowl and maybe giving them a talk about it, ask them why they like it:

Child: *"I just really like the beat! It's fun to dance to."*

Parent: *"Do you agree with how he's talking about her?"*

Child: *"Uh, I dunno. I've never really listened to the lyrics."*

Parent: *"Oh! Let's look them up. You don't want to be singing and dancing to something you don't agree with, do you? Google it and read what it says."*

From there you can go into many different discussions, but utilizing their interests as a way to get their wheels turning is a great tactic. Just make sure you do it tactfully. Don't automatically switch into corrective parent mode. That will put your child on the defense rather than playing offense with you.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you have any conversation with your kids, start by having an honest conversation with yourself. What has stopped you from talking to them? Is it your own struggles, embarrassment, fear or shame? Take a moment to really answer that question.

## I haven't talked to my kids about

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because \_\_\_\_\_

Any personal regrets and failures may have become barriers to healthy conversations because you are afraid to share your own experiences with your child or you're unsure how to answer particular questions. But it will be far easier to become someone your child can talk to when you've dealt with your own issues and are honest about them.

I've got news: Our kids usually figure out that we aren't perfect. If you're able to be honest and transparent about your own struggles, they will be much more likely to not only listen but also come to you for advice and help. It's part of human nature to seek the advice of those who have experience in the area we need help. You'll have to use wisdom when it comes to what to share and when based upon their age, but they'll usually ask. Only share if there is a point, and, of course, don't go into descriptive details even if your child asks.



Bottom line: If you're currently battling any of the areas we address in this booklet, it's time to get rid of it. The awesome thing about addressing our hang-ups is that it gives us authority in that area when we talk to others, including our kids. In fact, your kids might find it refreshing to know that you, too, are human. It gives them permission to be human too and to know it's okay to need help sometimes. They often catch more than we teach.

*"It's easier to build strong children  
than repair broken men."*

Fredrick Douglas

## COMMON QUESTIONS

Many parents come to us with lots of questions. Hopefully we can clear up a few before you read on.

### WHO ARE SEXUAL PREDATORS?

It might feel weird to think about sexual predators, but it's important for you to understand who sexual predators are and what they can look like. Sexual predators do not always look the way they appear in the media.

I'm sure you've heard the phrase "You can't judge a book by its cover." That describes sexual predators perfectly. They are not always sketchy people hanging around schoolyards, living in their mom's basement, and being total loners like the stereotypes that have been created for us.

Often, they are ordinary people that look a lot like you and I. Typically, they are men and women who blend into society and are clean-cut and outwardly law-abiding. They may even be doctors, lawyers, accountants or other business men and women. Statistically, they are usually middle-aged men who engage in activities involving children and appear trustworthy to both parents and children.<sup>2,22</sup> However, we cannot stress enough that there is no one-sized-fits-all profile.

Regardless of their gender, age, race or any other factor, one thing is absolutely true about all of them. They are experts on how to gain access to

kids, talk to them, earn their trust, and expand their boundaries. That is why the conversations we are going to walk you through are vital to the safety of your child, regardless of their age.

## **ARE MY KIDS VULNERABLE?**

Everyone wants to know how they can tell if their kid is vulnerable to predation. Here's the thing: All of us are vulnerable in one way or another. All of us have a need to be loved and feel a sense of belonging, even as adults. You can multiply that need by 10 for your teenagers and children as they are constantly looking for acknowledgement from everyone in their life.

However, there are certainly precursor events that can cause your child to be even more vulnerable. If your child has been sexually abused or assaulted, or they have been in the foster care system, they are especially susceptible to sexual predators. Their red flag system is broken due to exposure.

Most kids will look overlook warning signs that seem obvious to adults, but kids who have already experienced sexual abuse have an even more difficult time knowing when a conversation or relationship has turned inappropriate. Depending on how long and how often the abuse occurred, it may seem normal to them.

## AT WHAT AGE SHOULD I TALK TO MY CHILD?

Many parents are worried that if they talk about sex too early, their kids may become more inquisitive or even experimental. But that's a concern with an easy solution. You simply tailor the discussion to be age appropriate. This approach actually makes it easier because it's not just "the talk" anymore. It's an ongoing conversation over the years, which tells your kids that you're their expert on the topic, not Google, Siri or their peers. Here are examples of how those conversations might go, based on their age and social development.

### 0–2 YEARS

Use the technical terms for your child's body parts and get comfortable with them. That means your toddler will know and say the words *penis*, *testicles*, *vagina*, *clitoris*, *vulva* and *nipples*. It might feel awkward, but it's essential for your child to have this vocabulary so they can clearly communicate with you if a predator crosses any boundaries.

Offenders get spooked when a child knows these terms because they know there are very involved adults in their life. You will also have to begin boundary lessons on when it is appropriate to use those words so you can hopefully avoid an embarrassing moment in public with your toddler laughing as they repeat one of the words above over and over.

## 2–5 YEARS

By this age, they are very inquisitive. They're trying to make sense of the world and everything they see, so you probably won't have to initiate a conversation. When they want information, they'll ask for it. As they ask their questions, you can take the opportunity to begin teaching your family values.

So if they are asking where babies come from or how a baby got into the belly of a person you know, it's time to tell them. You will have to use your own discernment to determine if your child is mature enough to handle particular details. By this time concepts like sharing are familiar, so you can let them know that babies grow after a man shares his sperm and woman shares her egg. Many parents share their child's own birth story as part of this. Again, what details are shared are up to you.

This is also important age to teach about boundaries and consent. You can start teaching things like asking before you touch someone and respecting a no during a tickle fight. This is also the time that you'll talk about why it's important for them to protect their sex organs. Tact is vital, so avoid using words like *bad*, *dirty*, *wrong*, *gross* and so on. Those words breed shame in the mind of a child. Should anyone cross their boundaries, they will internalize the words you choose to describe why inappropriate touch is harmful to children.

## **6–8 YEARS**

By this age, kids are well adapted to technology and use it often even if they don't yet have their own device. As they begin to consume more digital content, you can start to discuss digital boundaries and safety. Also, be prepared for them to possibly stumble upon pornography as they enter the digital world.

At this age you can get into the details more and address things like masturbation, hygiene, puberty, the mechanics of sex, and sex abuse. You can always start by revisiting what you've covered prior to this age. Again, how in depth you go is completely up to your discernment.

## **9–12 YEARS**

This age is the most difficult to find connection with and continue building your relationship. It may require more proactivity on your part, but it's essential to keep talking now more than ever. This is the typical age range when body image issues to develop and porn use begins. Unfortunately, this is also the age when many kids are lured by a sex trafficker.

The good news is the more you talk with them about these topics, the more they'll come to you because they have had to grow comfortable with these conversations. Just be prepared for more detailed questions like positions, orgasm, love, arousal, birth control options, STIs, teen pregnancy and dating.

## HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?

Often times, this question is aimed at the victims and not the perpetrators. Many want to know why they don't just run and get help. It's difficult to step into the shoes of a victim, but here's what we have to understand. They are terrified. On the outside they may not show it, but inside they live with a tangled heart.

When someone else is manipulating, coercing or threatening a human at any age, they may believe lies about consequences or their rights. They may not know where they are at the time, or they might be led to distrust adults and authority figures. Often, tactics such as shame, addiction, embarrassment or the pressure to fit in play a role, especially in cases where a child has been manipulated by someone they believe cares about them. They may not even understand a crime has taken place.

Sexual predators also take advantage of the fact that a child's prefrontal cortex, which is essentially the brain's decision center, isn't finished developing until our early 20s. Consequently, mature reasoning, self-control and wise decision-making are the last things to develop.

Regardless of how the exploitation happens, abuse is never the fault of the child. No one would ever willingly sign up for abuse or exploitation of any kind. Treat abuse victims with the same tender compassion you would give them if they had been injured in a car accident.

## HOW TO PREPARE TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS

Most older kids are not learning about sex from their parents. They are getting the information elsewhere — friends, older teens, movies or the Internet. This is why it's essential to be proactive and initiate small conversations with your kids throughout everyday activities. Don't wait for them to come to you with questions and concerns.

**Most kids are not learning about sex from their parents.**

First of all, you need to be on the same page as your spouse. If you're in disagreement, consider speaking to a counselor or child development expert to help you decide what will be talked about when.

Once you're on the same page as a team, make sure neither of you will be speaking hypocritically. That means if one or both of you struggles with any of the topics discussed, that needs to be addressed first.

Determining boundaries and a code of conduct together is a great family exercise. Whatever those rules are, you'll have to follow them too. So if technology is an issue and you decide as a family that all electronics are left in the kitchen to charge overnight, that means your phone's in there too.

Another fun thing you can do is come up with a code word. This can be totally silly, but in the event they find themselves in a situation they need to get out of, this word would require no explanation. The child can just text the code word and you agree to pick them up. They need to know that you are a safe



person and are there for them, even when an unwise decision has been made.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when having these kinds of talks:

- This is a conversation that will happen over a long time. You don't have to talk about it all right now, even if they're 20. It takes time to build a relationship, but once you get past the awkwardness you'll easily find opportunities to talk about sexual and safety concerns.
- Use the actual biological terms for body parts, even with small children.
- Explain the characteristics of healthy relationships — trust, communication, honesty, forgiveness.
- Especially for smaller kids, help them understand what appropriate touch is. A quick rule of thumb is anything covered by a bathing suit is private and personal.

You can use hypothetical scenarios, real-life news stories, and moments in media to point out learning moments and have a healthy discussion. You'll know you're doing well when you're not the one doing most of the talking.

## SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

If your home has already been touched by abuse, I am deeply sorry. Our hearts ache for the families the sex trade turns upside down. The most important thing is to not navigate your healing alone. There are likely local support groups for parents of sexual abuse victims, and you can also turn to nearby sexual assault centers, child and family services, grief groups and individual and family therapists. Sexual abuse is extremely painful to talk about, but addressing it head on is the best way to see your family restored.

No matter what has happened, there is hope. The key is bringing the darkness to light and denying shame a place in your life by talking to others as you process what has happened. It may not seem like it now, but your family will be whole again.

*“Children are educated by what the grown-up is and not by his talk.”*

Carl Jung

## DATING AND BOUNDARIES

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Doesn't the idea of your child dating just make you squirm? They grow up too quickly, and it's hard for the adults in their life to catch up. Some kids take a little longer to become interested in the opposite sex, and some seem interested from the get-go. That's why it's important to be proactive in talking to them about dating and boundaries. Don't wait until they show interest in the opposite sex. If you don't shape your kids' boundaries, someone else will.

**If we don't shape our kids' boundaries, someone else will.**

A lack of boundaries naturally correlates to a lack of self-worth. If we don't understand the difference between what should be protected and what's okay to share, then we are a buffet for the world to consume. These conversations are more about how we are teaching our kids to communicate to the world how they should be treated.

Helping your children determine what their boundaries are early on is one of the best safeguards you can provide for them. Expanding boundaries is the first thing predators do. We are very similar to rubber bands, in that our boundaries can slowly be stretched without even fully realizing it.

What may start out as a friendship turns into flirting, sending photos back and forth, and adding affectionate emojis. Then, once a predator knows they have your child's attention, they begin to make things sexual. It's a

progression that can happen in a matter of hours, days, weeks or even months.

No matter their age, start having “what if” conversations to discuss potential scenarios and how they might respond. But only about 25% of these scenarios need to be serious. If we are constantly confronting our children with hard things they have never thought about, they may grow reluctant to spend time with us, let alone talk to us. No one enjoys the person who is always talking about a serious topic, so let’s not be that person to our kids.

## TALK IT OUT

We will give more specific examples of conversations dedicated to particular topics, but here’s an example of how this might play out in real life.

Let’s say you’ve picked up the kids from school and have already gotten the generic “good” in response to asking how their days was.

*Parent: Let’s play a game of Would You Rather! Sam, would you rather drink a jar of pickle juice or eat an anchovy?*

*Child: Ew! Pickle juice for sure. Would you rather smell dad’s feet or eat his cooking?*

*Parent: Smell his feet for sure. Would you rather have someone post a video of you picking your nose and wiping it on your desk? Or would*

*you rather accidentally text your crush instead of your best friend about your crush?*

Child: *Mom, I don't have a crush.*

Parent: *Okay, well, if you did.*

Child: *Accidentally text a crush. Would you rather eat a raw hamburger or raw fish?*

Parent: *I'll take the sushi, since that's what raw fish is.*

Child: *What?! That's not fair! I didn't realize that.*

Parent: *Too bad! Would you rather have someone you care about hang up on you or cuss you out?*

Child: *Both of those are terrible. Can I pick neither?*

Parent: *Yes, you can. Why are both of them terrible?*

Child: *I mean it would make me pretty mad and hurt. It's not how people should be treated right?*

Parent then could naturally have a conversation on boundaries and how to stand your ground when someone is trying to violate a boundary, whether sexual or not.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND GAMING APPS

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### THE ISSUE

**92%** of teens (age 13-17) go online daily, with **24%** of them reporting constant activity<sup>17</sup>

**23%** of teens reported unwanted exposure to porn<sup>15</sup>

**19.9%** of boys and **35.5%** of girls reported receiving unwanted online sexual solicitation<sup>33</sup>

**81%** of teens have access to a gaming console<sup>17</sup>

**11.7%** of boys and **18.7%** of girls reported having had someone try to talk to them about sex when they did not want to<sup>33</sup>

**14.6%** of boys and **25.6%** of girls reported that someone they did not know online asked them to meet in person<sup>33</sup>

At its core, social media is neither good or bad. I know that we have used it to reconnect with people that we lost touch with, show our friends and family what is important to us, and spread awareness about causes we really care about. Unfortunately, it has also become a tool for harm and exploitation, as the statistics above demonstrate.

However, the damage is not always being perpetuated by faraway strangers in dark rooms. Sometimes, it's destructive behavior initiated by people who know us — for example, sharing private pictures or revenge porn when someone breaks off a relationship. There are even times when teens share thoughts and photos with people who care about them, but the other party isn't responsible with the information.

We must absolutely do what we can to protect kids from online predators, but we must also educate kids about safe online behavior so when they make a decision, it is one they can be proud of both now and later.

Kids, and many adults, still tend to believe that if they delete photos and downloads or erase browser history, then the information is gone. For some apps like Snapchat, there's no way to prevent the receiving party from taking a screen shot or making a screen recording to capture everything. Sexual predators have been known to hack into databases and manipulate "deleted" data, and they may even distribute it to third-party sources like pornography sites.

## **SAFETY TIPS**

As a family, set rules outlining how long everyone can be online, what sites can and cannot be visited, and acceptable activities. It's really important to let your entire family speak into the rules and have healthy conflict on the "why" behind it all. It allows them ownership and challenges them to think differently about it all.

Ask them to really consider if the content they're thinking about sharing should be seen by others, including friends, family, employers, co-workers and strangers. Together come up with a few questions to internally ask before posting. *Am I sad, angry, or hurt? Do I need attention? Am I feeling unloved or seeking revenge? Am I looking for affirmation? Is this offensive in*

*a crude or cruel way?* Asking ourselves why we are posting is a good checkpoint to deal with internal struggles in a less public format.

**Predators will watch and wait for the right time to try hooking someone with a compliment or kind message.**

Many predators are waiting for the right opportunity to strike. The Internet is their pond, and their comments and messages are casts into it. Eventually they will do it at the right time and hook someone with a compliment or kind message. It's easy for anyone to trust someone when there's a screen and miles between you. A good rule of thumb is, if you wouldn't say it to them if they were with you in person, then you probably shouldn't say it online.

Make sure your child does not have any personal information included on their online profiles (for example, address, phone number or email) and they don't grant location services to any app. Even if they don't tag their location, any photo that's posted has a geotag in it that predators can easily find. Ask them often if they personally know, in real life, all of their friends on social media. Have a conversation with your child about privacy settings and how they do not guarantee privacy. Ask your children if they would feel uncomfortable for you to look at their social media profiles every now and then.

Be sure to research the technology you buy for your kids. Some devices have unexpected, hidden webcams or Internet capabilities. Use Internet filters to block certain sites and content, but remember that phones can still access blocked content unless the same software is installed on them as



well. Don't forget parent control settings on gaming apps or consuls. You can also set timers to limit screen time.

## **REAL-LIFE STORY**

This is an example based on a real-life scenario that illustrates the importance of what we have covered.

Abby was a normal little girl. She decided one day to post a photo of her favorite stuffed animal from her tablet. Her friends all liked it, and a few commented, which made her feel really good. She got a message from someone she hadn't met who liked her photo too and wanted to share a photo of their favorite stuffed animal. She didn't think anything of the interaction.

A few days later she got another photo sent to her, this time of her house. She got really scared when the person gave her address and details about her family. Apparently, they had been watching after figuring out where she lived from the geotag in her photo. They started threatening her family if she didn't send them the photos they wanted. She was so scared that she did.

One night after being tucked in, her mom picked up her tablet to check it. Abby had been acting strange, but things seemed fine at school. She found the messages and called the police, but there was nothing anyone could do to remove the photos or pinpoint who the person was behind the fake profile talking to Abby. It could have gone much farther than it did if her mom hadn't

checked her tablet. We can only imagine how devastating this was, but thankfully Abby wasn't physically harmed.

## RESOURCES

- [StreetGrace.org](https://www.streetgrace.org)
- [CommonSenseMedia.org](https://www.commonsensemedia.org)
- [ConnectSafely.org](https://www.connectsafely.org)
- [Cyberbullying.org](https://www.cyberbullying.org)

# PORNOGRAPHY

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## THE ISSUE

Research indicates that the average age that a male is exposed to porn **13.37** years old.<sup>7</sup>

Teenage females (ages 14-19) who consume porn have a greater likelihood of becoming sexually harassed or assaulted.<sup>28</sup>

**41%** of kids were curious about pornography after they were first exposed<sup>19</sup>

**21%** of teens actively seek out porn<sup>19</sup>

Truth is, almost all of us have seen pornography due to the explicit nature of everyday advertising. Sex sells. We've even seen it sell burgers. Gail Dines, a professor of sociology and women's studies and one of the founding members of Stop Porn Culture, sums up the progression of porn well.

"The distinction between softcore and hardcore porn is over. The reason is, all the softcore porn has migrated into pop culture. When you go on the Internet, the vast majority of pornography that is accessible is hardcore."<sup>10</sup>

Our children now grow up in a pornographic environment, which doesn't help in curbing their natural curiosity to understand the world around them. If we

don't help them understand, they will find answers to their questions about human anatomy and sex from someone or something. It's obviously best if it comes from a loving adult in their life like you.

Research suggests that kids do not always disclose what happens online to their parents. For example, 51% of victims of sextortion did not tell their parents, family members, or friends about their victimization.<sup>32</sup>

**51% of victims of sextortion did not tell their loved ones about their victimization<sup>32</sup>**

Perhaps an even bigger issue with pornography is not that it is readily available but that it's more and more socially acceptable. It's now often used as the butt of a joke in conversations and in television shows and movies. This requires parents and caring adults to not only be more diligent but, once again, to also have conversations with children so they can understand the inherent dangers with this medium.

While the risks of social media have already been discussed and are valid concerns, pornography is the inevitable elephant in the room. The porn industry has billions of dollars at its disposal. Depending on your definition of pornography, those images can be found online; in television shows, movies and video games; and, of course, passed from peer to peer. You already know that you do not have to seek it out to find it. At some point, it will find you. Sadly, that is the same no matter the age.

## HEALTH CONCERNS

Every mammal has something called a *pleasure center* deep in your brain, which affects your thoughts, cravings and behavior.<sup>24</sup> True to its name, it releases chemicals into your brain that make you feel pleasure. Normally it's a great system that encourages you to do healthy things like eat, feel good about a workout, or enjoy a kiss.<sup>31</sup> Those chemicals give you a high, so to speak, that makes you want to do it again and thereby increase your chances of survival.<sup>4,6</sup> It's pretty incredible how complex even just that one part of our brain is!

Unfortunately, your brain can be tricked by addictive substances that trip off false signals.<sup>29</sup> It can't discern the difference between a good or bad substance, and it will crank out dopamine, which grows your craving for that substance.<sup>4</sup> Normally, your brain has a built-in "off" switch for natural pleasures. "Dopamine cells stop firing after repeated consumption of a 'natural reward' like food or sex," explains Nora Volkow, director of The National Institute of Drug Abuse.<sup>24,29</sup> But addictive drugs or experiences increase dopamine levels without giving the brain a break.<sup>24,29</sup> This basically forces the brain to override and chase the thrill of what's making it feel so fantastic.

Research suggests, that adolescent porn users are more likely to have sex at a younger age, have attitudes that support violence against women, develop compulsive Internet use, and engage in risky sexual behavior.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, pornography has been shown to increase depression, self-

consciousness and alcohol and drug use. It's even linked to erectile dysfunction.

Due to the addictive nature of pornography, it can also limit actual emotional connection. Images and people can become a means to an end — increased

**The anonymous nature of consuming pornography online often allows people to take greater risks with less fear of consequences.**

satisfaction — rather than a way to bond with other human beings. This can have sustained, long-term effects on personal and intimate relationships as well as the way we view other individuals. For example, men may objectify women as sexual objects rather than individuals with their own thoughts and feelings.

## **INNOCENCE LOST**

The average age that a male is first exposed to pornography is 13 years old.<sup>7</sup> That's why conversations need to begin long before puberty hits, whether or not you're ready. Even when images are not technically pornographic in nature, very small children are being exposed to images we do not want them to see, and if not addressed early, it can set the stage for future situations and circumstances.

This is indeed difficult news to process. However, smaller children also haven't developed the same fear of shame and embarrassment that comes with growing older. So, by having age-appropriate conversations during their early years, children may grow up understanding that they can talk to you

about difficult subjects. When you make openness a habit early, they tend to be more likely to turn to you first when uncomfortable and delicate situations arise.

Adolescents ages 13-18 years old are a large portion of those who look at pornography. Although boys admit to consuming more pornography than girls on average, girls have reported pornography consumption.<sup>19</sup>

Like adults, children also become desensitized over time. We often see this as the case with violent movies, television shows, games, and even in the news. If you catch your child viewing pornography, it's important to find out if this is the first exposure, and if they sought it out or stumbled across it. It's also helpful to know what kind of pornography they were exposed to and how they were introduced to it.

## AN ESCAPE

Indulging in pornography is one way to avoid intimacy issues, whether real or perceived. At its root, viewing pornography is a way to replace real forms of interaction and intimacy with fake ones. Anything labeled “fake” will always come up short. Additionally, the anonymity of consuming pornography online often allows people to take greater risks with less fear of consequences.

**The average age that a male is first exposed to porn is 13 years old.** 

This is yet another reason we must get to the root of the issue. A continual escape from reality, which can also begin more mildly through romance novels or movies, is a sign of something that must be dealt with in a teen’s life.

If we don’t help our kids stay anchored in reality, they will constantly be chasing a fictitious ideal and finding themselves greatly disappointed. Becoming someone to whom they can trust and talk is essential for their health and well-being.

## WARNING SIGNS

Possible signs of a pornography habit or addiction:

- Hides their phone or device
- Device history contains pornographic websites
- Language becomes more sexualized
- Jokes about sex



- Inappropriate knowledge about sex for their age
- Makes inappropriate or objectifying comments about others, particularly women
- Spends more time alone in room, in the bathroom, or takes excessively long showers
- Mood changes may be a possibility, but should be evaluated individually
- Loses interest in spending time with others or in activities they once enjoyed
- Begins acting out, which may include sexting, sexual harassment, explicit emails, etc.
- Secret about relationships
- Uses devices to find or discuss pornography (for example, texts, video game messages, social media, email, etc.)
- Views multiple pornography sites
- Engages in risky sexual behavior despite consideration of negative results (for example, using school, church or neighbor's computers to look at porn)

## **TIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Many people do not understand that pornography is also largely tied to sexual exploitation and trafficking. It is the gateway that makes the sex industry acceptable to buyers. Often, women who are in pornographic materials are forced or coerced; they do not participate because they have a desire to be there. It is common for prostitutes and trafficking victims to be

shown pornography as a way to “teach” them what their customers want. Porn users who decide to take a real-world next step often want to recreate what they have seen online.

Victor Malarek interviewed countless men across America and the globe for his book *The Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It*. What one man said isn’t an anomaly, but a common theme:

*“Many times in my life I start out watching porn, next thing I know I’m in my car out looking for the real thing.”* <sup>20</sup>

Porn websites not only house explicit footage and images but are also a platform for ads to lure viewers into purchasing sex. Due to the nature of addiction, which is what porn is to the brain, pornography only gets more and more violent and gruesome. At some point, with drugs, people will overdose and possibly die trying to chase down better and better highs. And though porn users can’t physically die trying to top their last thrill, there are many victims of human trafficking who have died due to an addict’s insatiable craving to recreate what they’ve seen acted out online.

**After all you’ve read in this section, here’s the good news: The brain can be rewired. It takes a lot of hard work, but kids (and adults) can recover from a porn addiction.**

## REAL-LIFE STORY

This is an example based on a real-life scenario that illustrates the importance of what we have covered.

James loved to play games, although we haven't met a 9-year-old who doesn't. Playing games was a key motivator though, and it always ensured that he got his homework done. One day he grabbed his iPad, and due to a mistype, he was exposed to pornography. He knew it was wrong to see people's private areas, but he was so curious he didn't close it right away.

He had so many questions that he started searching them. He was too embarrassed to ask anyone about it, and he didn't even really know why the couple on the screen were holding each other naked. "Why?" was a nagging question, like an itch he had to scratch.

He continued searching and eventually settled into consuming porn as he got older. It was the go-to when he was bored or stressed. It wasn't until his teens that he learned it was actually not a good thing, but by then he was so deeply rooted in it, the shame was too deep to come up with the courage to ask for help.

Around the same time his parents added blocking software to all the computers. He was nervous they would put it on his phone too, but he was already prepared to go around it. Unfortunately, they didn't think about putting it on his cell phone.

He justified his secret by buying into the cultural norm of “everyone does it.” He felt relief when media outlets talked about porn consumption in a condoning light, so he stopped believing that it was a problem that needed fixing.

Fast forward to his adult life, and it’s still a struggle that affects his daily life. Porn is what he thinks about most. It consumes his day, rather than meaningful work or relationships. His sex life is a reckless secret. There always seems to be something missing for him, and there’s a sad emptiness within him that he does his best to simply ignore. One thing is for sure, though: He is not living life to the fullest.

It wasn’t until he learned about the negative effects of pornography beyond morality that he wanted to address it. Slowly — very slowly — he started to make progress. He found accountability through people, groups, apps and reading. He hopes one day to fully recover from the harmful effects that he now sees in every area of life.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

If you find out that your child has been watching pornography, stop and breathe. If your child is in front of you, calmly let them know you want to talk about it later. How we handle situations like this speaks more than the words we say about our capability to handle hard things. They will remember those reactions later on in life if they find themselves in a bad place.

The first step is to acknowledge the habit or addiction. Provide the love and support needed to deal with this difficult situation. Then seek out treatment options including alternate, healthy behaviors, or licensed, professional counseling if needed. Recovery is a process, not a one-time fix, much like the sex talk isn't a one-time discussion. Here are some things that you can do with your child to help them overcome their habit.

Install an Internet and data monitoring program on all devices like Covenant Eyes, Net Nanny, or Qustodio. Look for one that offers multiple filtering categories and detailed parenting reports. There are both free and paid for

**Recovery from porn use is a process, not a one-time fix.**

options out there. Some games may even allow airplane mode, which turn off ads. Once precautions are in place, get your child into therapy and give them accountability through apps like Fortify by Fight the New Drug. It's important to become familiar with the filtering systems of your local schools, library, church

and anywhere your child hangs out.

Together, come up with a technology plan that the whole family has to follow and your kids are a part of deciding. Common boundaries include rules like having a no-closed-doors policy when anyone has a computer, cell phone or tablet. Common area charging stations are also popular to help families not stay up scrolling and minimize vulnerable late-night conversations. Keeping a list of everyone's passwords and doing random profile checks to make sure you know who they are talking to can also help protect them. Go to Page 23 for more info on what specifically to do when it comes to social media and technology settings.

While you're doing things together, keep going. Have digital detox times to connect in person more. Some families even do digital detoxes to refocus on what's important or while making a big decision together. Monitor the content they are consuming by participating with them. If you see or hear something you don't like, then take the opportunity to have a conversation about healthy expressions of sexuality and relationships vs unhealthy.

## TALK IT OUT

It's awkward to have these conversations at first, but luckily you aren't alone. We are here to help. Before you start, take a deep breath. It's going to be okay. Once you've calmed your nerves, really consider the "why" behind this conversation. Understand that you're preparing to have a *conversation*, not to give a speech or lecture. Keep in mind that your child will likely be taken off guard, so be patient and remember this isn't a one-time event; it's something that will be ongoing. Here's an example for how you could start.

Parent: *"I'd like to share something with you that's not easy for me to talk about, so this might be awkward, but it's important."*

Child: *"Okay."*

At this point, you could choose to disclose your own battle with porn and how it's affected your life. It would certainly be powerful and remove any chance of shame or reasons why your child might not talk to you. If you aren't ready for that, here's another way to get it started.

Parent: *“I read an interesting article about the effects of pornography, and I was curious what you thought about what it says.”*

## RESOURCES

- [CovenantEyes.com](http://CovenantEyes.com)
- [FightTheNewDrug.org](http://FightTheNewDrug.org)
- [TruthAboutPorn.org](http://TruthAboutPorn.org)

## SEXTING

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### THE ISSUE

**27.4%** of youth received a sext <sup>18</sup>

Adolescents that sext are **3 times** more likely to be sexually active <sup>21</sup>

**14.8%** of youth sent a sext <sup>18</sup>

**1 in 8** kids have forwarded a sext <sup>18</sup>

Youth that sext are **2 times** more likely to not use contraceptives <sup>21</sup>

When most of us were in school, we had to pass notes to talk to our crush. It was too risky to use any sort of explicit language, and generally speaking, most relationships took some time before they became sexual. Things move at a much more rapid pace nowadays due to technology. There are fewer barriers to communicating with one another and more pressure than ever.

Sexting, or sending explicit messages or pictures via phone, has also become its own form of communication in the Digital Age. Statistics show it is becoming increasingly popular among teens, who are sending sexually explicit photos and messages through texts, apps, emails and instant messaging. With one study suggesting that over 25% of teens have received a sext.<sup>18</sup>



**It's possible, that sexting has become part of the dating process.**

There is an even split between the gender of who instigates sexting. Teenagers who sext are twice as likely to be sexually active compared to their non-sexting peers. Sexting can be perceived as “gateway” behavior to actual sexual behaviors because inviting or allowing sexual advances can indicate one’s readiness to take intimacy to the next level. It’s safe to say that where there is sexting, there will likely be sexual activity.

The behavior may be viewed as acceptable because either their peers are engaging in the same activities or they have decided only to participate in these kinds of activities with someone they have real feelings for. But once they have started these kinds of conversations with people they know, it may make it easier to have them with strangers as well.

Most kids do not understand that sending — or receiving — a sexually suggestive text or image of someone under the age of 18 is considered child pornography and can result in criminal charges. It is a felony, and if convicted, can result in seven to 10 years of jail time as well as the requirement of being registered as a sex offender. That’s a big price to play for what some may call flirting.<sup>32</sup>

It is vital that teens understand all potential consequences of their actions. This includes legal consequences but also includes social consequences. What they share might get re-shared to other peers, pornographic sites, older teens or even to bosses or co-workers. While some of these situations may

simply be embarrassing, others could have long-term emotional, professional or psychological effects.

## **REAL-LIFE STORY**

This is an example based on a real-life scenario that illustrates the importance of what we have covered.

It had been two weeks of back and forth social media flirting during school break, liking each other's posts, commenting and messaging each other. Jess really liked Michael, and she enjoyed staying up late to talk. They were sending photos and videos back and forth when suddenly Michael sent a photo of his shirt pulled up to show his abs. Jess responded with a silly photo, and Michael wrote back with a heart eye emoji and asked her to pull her tank top down more. She complied to keep things going, not thinking it was a big deal. They went back and forth all night, with things growing more and more sensual by the minute.

Fast-forward a few months, and the two were officially dating. They never really had the chance to get physically intimate, but they frequently sexted each other. The photo requests grew more and more explicit until Jess grew uncomfortable. She started ignoring Michael's requests, and things fizzled out.

A week later, a girl she knew from school said something that made her panic. She texted the girl and asked for an explanation. Turns out Michael was sharing the photos with all of his guy friends. She was horrified and

texted Michael right away. He didn't respond at first, but after a few rounds of blowing up his phone, he told her it wasn't a big deal and all the guys do it.

Apparently, the boys frequently showed off who they could convince to share explicit photos. It was like a competition to them. Jess became increasingly depressed and avoidant of her parents. They finally confronted her and found out what had gone on. They were devastated and tried to do everything in their power to somehow bring some sort of justice to the situation. But because everything was done through apps or deleted from Jess' messages, there was no proof.

They took away her phone for months and put her in counseling, but things were never the same. The thoughts of who all had seen the photos kept her up at night. All the possibilities of where her photo could be made her depressed. She wanted to move or be homeschooled because she felt so humiliated. It would be a long journey before she overcame what happened.

It could have been much worse. What if Michael was an Internet predator who was selling her photos? What if she made Michael so angry he wanted to seek revenge by posting or forwarding her photos to everyone they knew? What if he took advantage of her and began coercing her through the threat of blackmail? Those story endings are all too common and frequently lead victims of the situation into very dark places.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Have a conversation about how it is impossible to remove things that are sent to others or posted online, and no apps are truly private or anonymous. If it's digital, it's forever.
- Monitor your child's cell phone and activity. This can be done with mobile software, but we recommend honest and upfront oversight, which creates accountability.
- Place any necessary limits on cell phone usage like deleting apps you are not okay with, checking parental controls, or allowing usage only during certain time periods.
- Do not allow phones or computers in bedrooms, especially at night. Create "charging stations" in your room or a central location.

## RESOURCES

- [Cyberbullying.org](http://Cyberbullying.org)
- [GuardChild.com](http://GuardChild.com)
- [StreetGrace.org](http://StreetGrace.org)

# SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXTORTION

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## THE ISSUE

**1 in 4** girls will be sexually exploited by age 18 <sup>25</sup>

**1 in 13** boys will be sexually exploited by age 18 <sup>25</sup>

**70%** of adolescents sexted because they were in or wanted a romantic or sexual relationship <sup>32</sup>

**10%** of sextortion victims were victimized with images that the perpetrator created of them <sup>32</sup>

**22%** victims reported being victimized with recordings that were taken without their consent <sup>32</sup>

**51%** of sextortion victims under the age of 18 do not tell anyone about their victimization <sup>32</sup>

While you are likely familiar with the term “sexual abuse,” you may not be familiar with phrase “sexual exploitation” or the more recent expression “sextortion.”

As stated in a federal statute, sexual exploitation is the persuasion, enticement or coercion of any minor to participate in any act of “sexually explicit conduct by or with any minor for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct.” <sup>1</sup>

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (n.d.), sextortion is when someone threatens or coerces another person into sending explicit images. <sup>13</sup> This crime is a form of sexual exploitation that came with the Digital

Age and is non-physical in nature because it relies on emotional manipulation.

As a reminder, none of the content here is included to frighten you. It is in an effort to educate, inform and prepare you. We sincerely hope these issues never become a part of your life.

**The best way to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation is through an ongoing, open and honest dialogue.**

The work of Street Grace began with, and largely revolves around, the issue of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). Therefore, we would be doing you a disservice by not addressing it. Additionally, it is important for you to understand how each of these themes can build on one another. You have a better chance of protecting your kids when you fully understand the reality of

what is at stake.

While sextortion and sexual exploitation may bring to mind images of brown paper envelopes with compromising photos or even a video emailed anonymously with a list of demands, that isn't always the case. One of the trickier aspects of sexual exploitation is that teens and children may seem active, or even compliant, in these acts. As outlined in the first section, because children's brains aren't fully developed, they do not have an internal "warning system" or life experiences to draw from, which makes them more vulnerable. Therefore, they may be more easily persuaded or manipulated into believing the exploiter cares about them. This is often done through what is referred to as grooming.

Grooming is a process finding common ground to connect. That common ground could be music, sports, or any basic interest we have. That is their entry point to gaining the trust of your child. Once they have that trust, they will flatter them and ask them to make promises in order to ease inhibitions and create secrecy. This often leads to threats and intimidation.

The best way to prevent sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and sextortion is through an ongoing, open and honest dialogue. When you have laid out clear expectations for your child, talked about healthy relationships and sexuality, addressed potential dangers, and created a plan for handling difficult situations, you are doing more for your child than any filter or software ever could.

## **WARNING SIGNS**

Your child could be in contact with an online predator if he or she:

- Withdraws from family, friends and activities that were previously enjoyable
- Receives gifts or packages from strangers
- Receives phone calls from strangers, or makes calls to phone numbers that you do not recognize or that they are reluctant to identify to you
- Hides their screens or turns off devices when adults enter the room
- Begins downloading pornography
- Gets angry or frustrated when he or she cannot get online

- Becomes overly secretive or evasive about online activities
- Spends an excessive amount of time online

Possible signs of sexual abuse or exploitation:

- While physical signs are not as common, they may include bruising, bleeding, redness and bumps or scabs around the mouth, genitals or anus. Urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and abnormal vaginal or penile discharge are also potential signs to watch out for.
- Additional physical problems may include anxiety, chronic stomach pain or headaches.
- Emotional and behavioral signals are the most common. These include things like withdrawal, fear, depression, unexplained anger, outbursts and rebellion.
- Nightmares, bedwetting, failing grades, cruelty to animals, bullying, being bullied, fire setting, running away or self-harm of any kind may also be signs.

Other red flags to watch for are sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate as well as early use of alcohol and drugs.



## REAL-LIFE STORY

This is an example based on a real-life scenario that illustrates the importance of what we have covered.

Daniel basically uses social media to document his life and has built a small local following. At this point, he isn't totally sure who even follows him, but there's one person in particular who replies to his posts in a really flirtatious way. His curiosity was piqued, and they began messaging back and forth. It soon became very clear they were into each other. They started sexting through the app. It started with photos but quickly escalated to videos. He was so caught up in the thrill of it all that he didn't even really think about it or read into his hesitations. This went on for months before he was asked to meet up. He didn't really want to, which made his "friend" angry. Daniel stopped responding.

One day, he received a video from the stranger he'd been sexting. It was an explicit video Daniel had shared. Apparently, the person he had been talking to had been recording the screen of their device. The person told him if he didn't do what was asked of him, the video would be released on social media for all to see. It wasn't fun anymore, but he was so ashamed he couldn't tell anyone.

He was forced to video chat and do whatever he was told while they recorded it. He felt disgusting and helpless. He wanted to die. His parents noticed his jumpiness with his phone and frequent withdrawing behind the locked door of his room. Daniel was so relieved when his mom figured out what was

going on that he wasn't even upset with her snooping. In fact, crying together was healing. The darkness coming to light through his mom ended the isolation and allowed him to live again.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- When you want to know what they have been doing, ask non-threatening and open-ended questions that will not put them on the defensive.
- If you discover that your child has been interacting online with people they do not know, avoid overreacting. The same holds true if they admit that they've come across a dangerous or tricky situation online. If children see you freak out, they may be less likely to talk to you in the future for fear of your response or actions. Your goal is to obtain information and help them develop a plan for how they should respond when that happens in the future.
- Advocate for prevention training to be available in schools and churches, and reach out to Shared Hope International to see what kind of policy you could write your local officials about.

## TALK IT OUT

Talking about exploitation is a really great time to bring up consent again. There are plenty of news stories out there, so pull one up and use it to have a healthy discussion with your kids.

Parent: *Have you heard of human trafficking?*

Child: *Yeah. Why?*

Parent: *I was just reading this article about this girl who started talking to someone online. Once they started sexting, then the person threatened to blackmail her, so she did whatever he asked. Isn't that terrible?*

Child: *Yeah, that's awful!*

Parent: *What do you think she could've done differently?*

Obviously, these are leading questions. The idea is to get your child thinking about it ahead of time so if they or their friends ever ended up in a similar situation they've already done some pre-processing. From here you can go into talking about how no means no, and if someone is forcing you to do something you are absolutely not the guilty party or responsible for what happened.

## RESOURCES

- [Sexploitation: Helping Kids Develop](#)
- [Healthy Sexuality in a Porn-Driven World by Cindy Pierce](#)
- [SharedHope.org](#)
- [Thorn.org](#)

## SEX TRAFFICKING

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### THE ISSUE

It is estimated that **1 in 6** runaway children are CSEC victims<sup>23</sup>

**1 in 5** kids have been paid by someone to have sex<sup>8</sup>

There were more than **17,000** possible CSEC reports to NCMEC in 2020<sup>23</sup>

In 2014, it was estimated that human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry, and \$99 billion of that revenue is produced from sex trafficking<sup>9</sup>

As you have already seen, education is one of the best ways for kids to be protected against potential exploiters and traffickers. Talking to kids about these shocking topics can be intimidating for both of you, and they may not want to hear it, but it is vital in keeping them safe.

To build on what you have already learned in this handbook, we need to provide context for these two final terms: Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking. The Department of Justice defines the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) as “any sexual activity involving a child for which something of value is given or promised, such as money, food, clothing, gifts, drugs, a place to sleep and even protection.”<sup>11</sup>

Human trafficking is defined by the Department of Homeland Security as “modern-day slavery and involves the use of force, fraud or coercion to

obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.”<sup>26</sup> Please note that despite the word “trafficking,” physical movement or transportation does not have to take place.

## **HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?**

It is probably very difficult to imagine how someone would find themselves in these horrible situations, which is why many people have a difficult time believing it happens throughout the United States. Many believe it’s simply a big city issue.

However, according to Polaris, the situations that sex trafficking victims face vary dramatically. Many victims become romantically involved with someone who forces or manipulates them into prostitution. Others are lured in with the false promises of a job, such as modeling, dancing, working in a restaurant or nannyng. Some are sold by their own families. They may be involved in a trafficking situation for a few days or weeks, or they may remain in the same trafficking situation because they have been brainwashed to believe it’s something they choose.

Brainwashing is the forced process of one person shifting the thoughts and beliefs of another through persuasion and, often in exploitation cases, fear. It’s an invasive form of influence that requires complete isolation and dependency of the victim on the controller. In the brainwashing process, the controller systematically breaks down the target's identity and sows seeds of guilt, doing these things until they’re in a state of total confusion. The agent

then replaces what was once believed with set of behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that benefit the controller in a way that makes the victim totally dependent on them in every way.<sup>35</sup>

**Brainwashing is the forced process of one person shifting the thoughts and beliefs of another**

There is no discrimination when it comes to commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Victims can be male or female, come from any socio-economic background, be of any ethnicity, and hold any citizenship status. Traffickers are experts at exploiting any kind of vulnerability, whether that be a foster child or runaway; someone who has suffered abuse, social discrimination, or unhappiness at home; or the simple natural vulnerability we all have in our need to feel love and belonging.

They are looking for any hole in the individual's life that they can help fill. You may have even heard emerging stories over the past couple of years where college girls are seeking out these relationships to live a particular lifestyle and pay their way through school. They are called sugar babies, and it's rapidly growing across the country.

Most television shows and movies lead us to believe that these kinds of acts take place in seedy back alleys, but they can occur on the street, at truck stops, in hotels or motels, fake massage parlors, in houses or residential brothels or even in respectable looking businesses. They can also occur online via ads and websites for escort services. Victims are often even approached in public spaces like malls, concerts, theaters, restaurants,

group homes, online and even in church youth groups. This is why we must be informed and observant.

## **TIES TO PORNOGRAPHY**

Many people claim to oppose human trafficking without realizing they're perpetuating it by consuming pornography. Those who consume pornographic material may assume that the actors participate willingly, but that's often not the case. The threats of force, fraud and coercion usually still apply. Additionally, pornography "feeds" sex trafficking because it creates demand for specific fantasies that are acted out on trafficking victims. It is a common misconception that sex workers, both in-person and on screen, have said yes to the work. Many times, the ones who have said yes find out that what they originally agreed to has changed, and if they want to be paid, they must comply with the changes, no matter how harmful it could be.



## WARNING SIGNS IN STUDENTS

- Change in school attendance
- Becomes withdrawn or uncommunicative
- Falls asleep in class
- Begins using drugs
- Isolation from friends and family
- Brags about making a lot of money
- In a relationship that is controlling
- Dates significantly older men or women
- New friends with different lifestyle
- Unrelated adult accompanying a minor
- Sudden influx of new clothes, shoes, jewelry or electronic devices
- Possession of hotel key cards
- Has prepaid cards or gift cards
- Multiple cell phones
- Specific tattoos like a dollar sign, someone's name, "daddy," or a crown.
- No ID or does not have control of ID
- Unexplained bruising
- Explicitly sexual social media profiles
- Dresses inappropriately for the season
- Malnutrition, dehydration and/or exhaustion

## REAL-LIFE STORY

This is an example based on a real-life scenario that illustrates the importance of what we have covered.

Callie grew up in middle class, conservative suburbia. She was 9 years old when she met her trafficker Ben. He was an older boy in her grandmother's neighborhood, and he befriended her. At first, they would play games like normal, but suddenly a tickle fight would turn into more. She didn't know what to say or do because she didn't even have the vocabulary to describe what was happening.

The grooming process occurred throughout the course of a year as the boy had access to Lexie when she stayed over at her grandparents. He made her believe that he loved and cared for her, which was a hole in her life as she felt at odds with her stepfather and forgotten by her biological father. He found her vulnerability, and even the young age of 16 he decided to exploit it.

One night he lured Callie over to his house despite the churning in her stomach that something was off. He raped her, and told her if she said anything to anyone he would do the same thing to her little sister. It was a few months before she could go back to her grandmother's after that. She would throw up in the car as soon as they pulled into the driveway.

Once she was able to return, the sexual encounters with Ben became frequent. One summer day he told her to pretend like she was riding her bike

and come over to his house. That day, he and two of his friends filmed what they called a porno but what she called hell. After that, she was instructed to come over when she saw cars pull up and watch porn so she knew what was expected of her before a buyer came in.

Her family had no idea. The thought of something even remotely harmful happening to her under their watch was unfathomable, but that's what made them miss the signs. So, she would leave for 30-45 minutes at a time on her bike like any other time she rode around the neighborhood. This went on for several years.

At one point, she disclosed previous sexual abuse when she was younger to her brand-new youth pastors. Their jaws hit the floor, and their poor reaction told her that they couldn't handle what was currently going on. Due to the lack of training in her community, her exploiters were never held accountable. Her trafficking ended due to a move, not to justice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Talk to your kids about boundaries. Reference page 17 for more info.
- Human trafficking is a hot topic. Your kids will likely want to talk about it and learn more. Equipping them with what to watch out for will enable them to protect themselves and friends better.
- Request further education at your church, school staff, students, law enforcement and child advocacy centers. We would be more than happy to take a deeper dive with you at [StreetGrace.org](https://www.StreetGrace.org).

## RESOURCES

- CalSWEC: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Awareness Training Course
- *Chosen* – a movie by Shared Hope International
- DemandAbolition.org
- DemandingJustice.org
- ECPAT.org
- Enough.org
- Gems-girls.org
- GAcares.org
- InternetSafety101.org
- PolarisProject.org
- StreetGrace.org
- TraffickingResourceCenter.org
- WeAreThorn.org
- United States Secretary of State’s Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

## FOR STUDENTS

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While all of the information provided in this handbook can be read and applied by just about anyone, we wanted to take a moment to address students specifically.

One of the most difficult hurdles you may have to face as your healthy relationships grow is pressure from friends, boyfriends and girlfriends — whether it is actually spoken or just assumed.

It may be an easy decision not to accept an online invitation from someone you don't know, but it may be much more difficult not to sext or watch pornography. We hope the tools throughout this guide will be helpful to you, but in many cases, it will come down to the decisions you make.

Often, you have a choice. It may not be an easy one, and it may not be a popular one, but it is still a choice. You may not believe it, but your parents were once teenagers too. They wanted to grow up and be taken seriously, just like you do. They wanted to be respected and treated like an adult; they want you to learn from their mistakes.

However, as much as they want to help you navigate this world, it is important to realize that they did not grow up with the technology that you have. They want to protect you by warning you of the potential dangers that technology may bring and providing you with helpful tools, but at some point, it still remains in your hands to make positive choices.

It's important to decide how you will handle situations and what choices you will make before you find yourself in a difficult predicament. Making the right call is much harder in the moment. And, unfortunately, some bad choices have consequences for years to come.

So talk to your parents, a trusted adult or a responsible friend. Discuss your feelings and potential pitfalls, and empower yourself with tools to help you make good decisions. The choice is yours.

## **WARNING SIGNS**

Signs that you may have a pornography addiction:

- Feeling high: "I feel great when I use pornography."
- Feeling tolerant: "A little bit of kink or violent stuff is fine."
- Feeling angry: "I get upset if I can't watch porn."
- Feeling risky: "I'll do anything to watch porn."
- Feeling like a slave: "The urge to watch porn consumes me."
- Feeling helpless: "My life is out of control."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Social media safety tips:**

- Really consider if the content you're posting should be seen by others, including friends, family, employers, co-workers and strangers.
- If you do know the person with whom you're interacting in real life, be sure that they are trustworthy and will not take advantage of you by vetting them with what friends you may have in common.
- Turn location settings off, or only post your location once you've left.
- Review and adjust any privacy settings.
- If something does happen to you, talk to a trusted adult.
- Limit the amount of personal information that can be found online, and completely avoid displaying emails, phone numbers and addresses.

### **Get involved:**

- Help us spread the word! Talk to your friends and family about being safe.
- Decide how you will handle potentially risky situations and which trusted adult you would confide in if there was a problem.
- Hold an awareness event at your high school, church, community or youth group. If possible, invite both parents and students, or hold events for each.
- Dedicate yourself to learning more about the issues and solutions.
- Write an article and submit it to your school or local newspaper, a blog or community newsletter.

- Post awareness or hotline flyers. (Please check online or with local organizations for current flyers and posting protocols.)
- Check [sharedhope.org/reportcards](http://sharedhope.org/reportcards) to see how well your state's laws protecting youth and punish perpetrators. Then research how you can help improve the process by lobbying local officials.
- Purchase products made by survivors, and ask others to do the same while educating them on the issues.
- "Give away" your birthday or another holiday by asking for donations to your favorite organization rather than receiving gifts.
- Identify your gifts and talents, and figure out creative ways to use them in raising awareness, educating others, or collecting material and monetary donations.

## RESOURCES

In addition to those outlined in other sections:

- [FightTheNewDrug.org](http://FightTheNewDrug.org)
- [IJM.org](http://IJM.org)
- Human Trafficking resource Center Student Tool Kit
- [StreetGrace.org](http://StreetGrace.org)



## FAITH-BASED PERSPECTIVE

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Here's the least shocking thing you'll read in this handbook: Sex is a gift and was designed by God.

However, despite loving our Creator and his creation, we have taken a backseat in educating our children about it and related issues. The statistics show it.

The numbers pertaining to porn use above are beyond heartbreaking for the people of God. They don't even include women. Less studies are done on porn use and women, but we know the problem is on the rise.

We have collectively let each other down, and people are likely suffering in silence. This stigma needs to end with us.

Rob Jackson of Focus on the Family says, "Parents need to ask if they have provided a comprehensive sex education that truly equipped their child with the winsome truth expounded in the Bible. Setting proper foundations for understanding a Christian sexual ethic is a crucial step in protecting children from later sexual disorder."

Though it was addressed in the first section, it is worth repeating to Christian parents that talking to your kids about sex will not make them more curious or encourage them to have sex at a younger age. In fact, the ministry

HomeWord notes, “All studies show that the more positive, healthy sex education is taught from home, the less promiscuous our kids will be.”

The Church is the hope of the world. This is another area where we can show leadership and compassion. Whether it be on the issue of pornography, sexual integrity, sexual exploitation or human trafficking, we are uniquely positioned to show Jesus and His heart for the broken.

Lust and sexual misconduct were sins long before the Internet came along. It just got easier to hide. It’s time to bring the topic of sex out of the shadows and equip our children with the knowledge, tools and resources to make Christ-like decisions when they are confronted with sexual impurity.

“The greatest filter in the world, and the only one that will ultimately work, is the personal internal filter that comes from a deep and abiding testimony of our Heavenly Father’s love, and our Savior’s atoning sacrifice for each one of us.” — Sister Reeves

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Admit your own struggles and where you have fallen short.
- Pray regularly for your kids, the kids who need help, and for society to start taking these issues more seriously.
- Help your church or faith community take a more active role in spreading information and awareness for the issues addressed in this handbook.
- Ask your church or youth group to address the topic from a faith-based perspective.
- Be a part of the solution. Talk to your kids about healthy sexuality and staying safe online, and advocate for others to do the same.

## RESOURCES

- [A21.org](http://A21.org)
- [CovenantEyes.com](http://CovenantEyes.com)
- [DirtyGirlsMinistries.com](http://DirtyGirlsMinistries.com)
- [OvercomingPornography.org](http://OvercomingPornography.org)
- [ProvenMen.org](http://ProvenMen.org)
- [SetFreeMovement.com](http://SetFreeMovement.com)
- *The Focus on the Family Guide to Talking with Your Kids About Sex: Honest Answers for Every Age* by Focus on the Family
- *The Trap: A Story to Protect Children From Pornography* by Kamel Newell and Dan Burr
- *What Can I Do About Me?* By Rhyll Anne

## HOTLINES

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**IF YOU ARE BEING VICTIMIZED OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS, CALL NOW:**

Street Grace Hotline: 1-833- FREE 2 BE

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
1-800-THE-LOST  
cybertipline.com

National Human Trafficking Hotline  
1-888-373-7888  
Or text HELP to 233733 (BEFREE)

The above hotlines are operated 24 hours a day. We encourage you to take a picture of this page to keep it accessible and easily sharable.

## HOW TO REPORT CYBER BULLYING<sup>16,27</sup>

1. Cyberbullies' actions must be documented. This often will involve screenshotting the evidence.
2. The hurtful and abusive content posted by the cyberbully must be removed.
3. Review the "Terms and Conditions" sections of the online platform where the cyberbullying occurred to see how to have the content completely removed.
4. Contact the cyberbullies' parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and potential school officials; Contacting the school will depend on when and where the cyberbullying occurred. For instance, if the cyberbullying transpired on school computers during school hours, the school would need to be alerted.

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