

# Human Trafficking Family Safety Guide



# About Without Permission

**Prevention** – Educating, engaging, and empowering our community to prevent sex trafficking/sexual exploitation from ever happening in the first place.

**Justice** – Our commitment to ongoing development and collaborative relationships with law enforcement, the judicial system, social service agencies, juvenile hall, trauma-informed therapists/mental health practitioners, and other partners who serve high-risk populations targeted by traffickers.

**Restoration** – Every victim of trafficking has their own story and our restoration process meets each victim's unique needs for healing and support utilizing six cornerstones of restoration. This includes shelter, criminal justice, education, health, personal care, and faith.



**Over 1,150  
victims served**



**63% are under  
the age of 18**



**Over 100+ local churches  
called to action**



**Over 45,000 students  
trained in prevention**

We exist to end sex trafficking in the Central Valley. We restore the victimized, educate our youth to prevent exploitation, and attack the lies that drive demand. Since 2010, it has been the purpose of Without Permission to create, fund, and serve a local Central Valley response to sex trafficking. Our cities, our people!

# Who Are the Victims?

**DEFINED:** The Trafficking Victims Protect Act signed into federal law in 2000 defines sex trafficking as follows:

***“Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex 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...”***

According to the national center for missing and exploited children there are roughly **750,000** predators online worldwide at any given moment.

Child Sex Trafficking is a form of child abuse that occurs when a child under 18 is advertised, solicited or exploited through a commercial sex act where sex is traded for money, food, shelter, drugs or anything else of value. Essentially, a commercial sex act is **anything of value, in exchange for a sex act.** <sup>(1)</sup>

While any child can be targeted, research has revealed that youth who lack strong support networks, have historical trauma, are experiencing homelessness, are being bullied or marginalized by society are at a higher risk.

## TRAFFICKING BOYS:

Currently, **9%** of WP survivors are male. Our youngest male victim of sex trafficking has been an 11-year-old boy.



Up to 36% of trafficked children in the U.S. are boys according to a Dept of Justice 2016 report. Boys experience a higher vulnerability due to being targeted in 3 ways: to be the trafficker, to be the purchaser, and to be the victim. All of this further exploits them.



# 10 Warning Signs

*Here are 10 warning signs that a person you love may be in an at-risk situation:*

1. Is **excessively monitored or controlled** by a supposed guardian or older partner who claims to provide for their needs. This can also be a close friend of the same gender, family member, teacher, coach, mentor, etc.
2. Becomes **detached** or suddenly **isolated** from family members and friends.
3. Sudden **change in attire or behavior**. Has acquired unexpected gifts/items with a strange or confusing explanation.
4. Has numerous **inconsistencies** in his/her story and **contradictory personal information** (age, place of birth, family life).
5. Often **truant** from school/work.
6. Shows signs of **physical or sexual abuse** (bruises, cuts, burns, submissiveness, malnourishment); appears fearful, anxious, depressed, jumpy.
7. Suffers from **substance abuse** (alcohol/drugs), and/or increased use of alcohol/drugs; an array of other psychological disorders, STDs, or chronic illnesses.
8. Carries **multiple cell phones**, hotel key cards, lots of money, sharp objects (weapons). Additionally, multiple social media accounts with different names.
9. Sudden presence of an **older boyfriend/girlfriend**, love bombing, showering with gifts.
10. Tattoos with **names not their own** or that he/she is reluctant to explain, and/or explanations do not make sense.

# The Shocking Truth

## MYTH

Human trafficking often involves kidnapping or physically forcing someone into a situation.

## FACT

Most traffickers use psychological means such as, tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor. <sup>(2)</sup>

Sex trafficking is real, scary, and has devastating physical and mental health consequences for victimized youth. Traffickers almost always target their victims, and victims rarely know they're a target before it's too late. Traffickers "shop" for their victims online, at shopping malls, bus stops, schools, places of employment, and other locations youth frequently hangout at.

In 2024, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received over 29,000 reports of children reported missing in the United States. Of those reported, **ONE in SEVEN** were likely victims of child sex trafficking. <sup>(3)</sup>

**65% of all sexual exploitation initially occurs through recruitment via the internet.** <sup>(4)</sup>

Traffickers can be anyone who profits from the selling of a child for sexual abuse, including: friends, gangs, family members, foster parents, perceived trusted adults, or romantic partners. In some cases, there is no identified trafficker and it is the buyer who is directly exploiting the child's vulnerabilities. For instance, if a child runs away, a buyer may exploit the child's need for food and shelter by offering to provide that in exchange for sex.

**\*The common age of entry for a victim of sex trafficking nationally is thirteen years old. At WP, the common age is fourteen.**

# Online Vulnerabilities

Social Media, apps, video games/online gaming, and websites with messaging and engagement platforms are quickly becoming a primary way traffickers target their victims. Exploiters aim to build trust digitally, through chatrooms, message boards, finding common ground, and online friendships/relationships. Once digital trust or communication has been built, traffickers often find ways to lure victims to meet in person.

Often predators will ease into some kind of sexually explicit interaction. They may start by suggesting the child exchange harmless selfies with each other. Once they realize the child is willing to engage in conversation, they have them “hooked”. From there, things typically escalate into sexually explicit photos that they can then use as leverage/blackmail (sextortion) or to turn around and sell on the dark web.

These predators often pretend or pose as someone younger, utilizing AI features to generate false photos and videos. They pretend to have common interests, common frustrations, and mutual experiences in order to relate to the youth. They then often try to lure children into private chat rooms or secure links where they then expose them to inappropriate content/conversation, ask them for inappropriate pictures/videos, and try to make a plan to meet up with the youth.



**Conversations often happen across several different platforms!**

# Warning Signs Online

Social Media and “Gaming” culture has increased in popularity over the last decade. Likewise, predators are increasingly using digital platforms to connect with youth. **Basically, wherever kids play, predators will prey.**

These predators are commonly on platforms like Instagram, Minecraft, Fortnite, Roblox, Among Us, Snapchat, and more. Kids are often being approached by predators online. Again, initially it may appear harmless, and the predator disguises themselves as another “gamer” who wants to compete, befriend the child, and communicate with them. Over time, these predators offer suggestions to the child or find creative ways to exploit their conversation.

## They use tactics like:

1. **Let’s turn on vanishing mode. (*Making the content disappear.*)**
2. **Here is a photo of me, (*often AI generated*) now send me a photo of you**
3. **Set up another Instagram/Facebook or other user account where your parents can’t see what we are talking about so we can have our privacy.**
4. **Predators might share strong feelings, like “you are beautiful, I love you, your parents don’t understand you, but I do, I will always be here for you...”**
5. **Are you home alone?**
6. **You are so mature for your age/How old are you?**
8. **I will hurt your family if you don’t...**
9. **Predators will frequently offer to buy children upgrades to their games (i.e. PayPal or Venmo). This often requires exchanging phone numbers or emails with the child, giving the predator further access to their personal life.**



*We teach kids that safe adults do not ask you to keep secrets. That is a red flag, and tricky/manipulative behavior. If an adult asks you to keep a secret, you need to report that to a safe adult immediately.*



# Online Safety

When children are on platforms where they interact with others (commenting, messaging, chatrooms, threads), we recommend they only interact with people they know, or you know. We always suggest parents take the time to set up password protection, two-factor authentication, and privacy settings before allowing their children on digital platforms in order to protect the child and empower the parent to keep them safe.

## Additional online safety tips:

- 1. Make sure all social media accounts are set to a private setting/private mode.**
- 2. Teach your children to never share their location or address.** *(Be aware that more apps are utilizing geolocation nowadays which may require you to manually disable this feature).*
- 3. Never post pictures that display your home, address number, street name, license plate number, school logo, or place of employment in the background.** *(Traffickers can use bits and fragments of information to piece together critical details about where children frequent, personal information to build trust and relate to them, or threaten them with.)*
- 4. Turn off location settings on various apps. Teach your children to never share their location-tracking with anyone other than the family members you approve. Check on this regularly.** *(We recommend investing into apps like Life360 rather than free/basic location apps that come standard on devices.)*
- 5. We recommend that all electronic devices, including phones, tablets, and gaming devices only be used in a public space in your house.** *(Bedrooms/bathrooms are places children frequently find privacy with their phones, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation.)*



A helpful “family rule” is to have a designated basket or area where everyone can leave their phones when they go to their rooms or use the restroom.



# Video Game Safety



Much of the conversation that happens across video game platforms is sexually explicit in nature. Research video game content and game ratings before allowing your child to interact with them, or research them **WITH** your child and have the conversation together.

Games like Grand Theft Auto or Roblox are commonplace for youth to play; unfortunately, these sites are frequently utilized by traffickers because they know they can virtually meet youth there.

1. **Use Parental Controls to keep out unwanted guests.** This requires frequent maintenance and monitoring of settings. Oftentimes youth can easily navigate around parental controls, so it is vital that parents regularly monitor video game history and activity.
2. **Make a “Safe Gamer” name.** Do not use real names, birthdates, or other personal information when creating a user name.
3. **Teach children to keep their personal information private.** After playing with someone for a while, they may feel a unique bond or trust to be able to share more personal details. The person behind the screen is often not who they say they are.
4. Only play with **parent-approved friends.**
5. If you allow your kids to game with other people, teach them to **never meet an online gamer in real life.**
6. **Implement a “no head-set” rule.** If someone begins to ask personal questions or have inappropriate conversations, you can quickly jump in and prevent this from happening.
7. **Use video gaming as family time.** While you may not want to (or know how to) play, cheering them on, asking questions about the game, or engaging with them in their interests helps connect you and the child, and gives you an opportunity to learn more about the world they’re interacting with.
8. **Protect your online gaming accounts with strong passwords.** Don’t make it easy for people to hack into your children’s accounts. Additionally, create healthy boundaries and rules that require your children to get your permission (and password) before logging in.

# Sexting & Sextortion

Our culture has increasingly normalized “sexting” as it relates to sending sexually inappropriate images (nudes) to friends, romantic partners, or even strangers online.

31% of 13-17 year old’s agree it’s normal for kids their age to share nudes with others. <sup>(5)</sup>

**It’s important to educate our youth against this as well as inform them of some legal consequences:**

- 1. It is illegal for an adult to send nude pictures to minor.**
- 2. It is illegal for a minor to send nude pictures to another minor.**
- 3. Sending nude pictures or videos as a minor is considered child pornography.**
- 4. It is an additional crime to save explicit images of a minor gained via text.**
- 5. It is a crime to distribute nude pictures of minors.**
- 6. It is also illegal to send images to annoy, harass, bully or threaten.**

 **Teach your children to report to you anytime someone asks for a nude picture of them.**

**SEXTORTION (sexual extortion)** is essentially another word for blackmail. Sextortion is a financially-motivated criminal act to get another person to send sexually explicit images or videos for financial gain. It is the fastest growing crime against youth today. Predators often use this method to entrap victims, forcing them to continue to sending images/videos against their consent. <sup>(5)</sup>

(Example: if you don’t send another video, I’m going to show this one to your principal, your parents, etc)

Sextortion victims are typically males between the ages of 14-17. However, females are also targeted.

## What to Know About Sextortion Scams

**STEP 1.** Grooming, typically using a fake person to make the victim believe they are interacting with a real person their age.

**STEP 2.** Scammers get to know the victim and their contacts. Who their family and friends are, what school they attend, what sports or clubs they are a part of.

**STEP 3.** They send nude images to the victim. Typically using AI-generated images or videos. AI has become so advanced that these scammers can use live video chat with AI characters, appearing to be a real-life person.

**STEP 4.** They attempt to get the victim to pose in a revealing picture or video.

**STEP 5.** Threats are made to release images unless the victim meets the demands of the scammer. The scammer usually wants payment in form of gift cards, mobile payment services, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency.

## What to do with unwanted advances, comments, requests for pictures or videos

1. Do not respond.
2. Take screenshots/screen recordings as evidence.
3. File a police report immediately or call 1-800-CALL-FBI. The FBI typically will get involved in these cases at some point.
4. Never provide personal information – predators can piece bits of information together to track your real-time location or details.
5. Teach your children if they ever feel unsure about something that it is **ok to stop and ask for help**. Communicate that you will not be angry with them for disclosing this. Though you may be upset in the moment, remind the child that you are ultimately angry at the predator trying to exploit them. Any time your child discloses something that has happened on online, be sure to encourage this behavior.



# Key Conversations to Have With Your Children

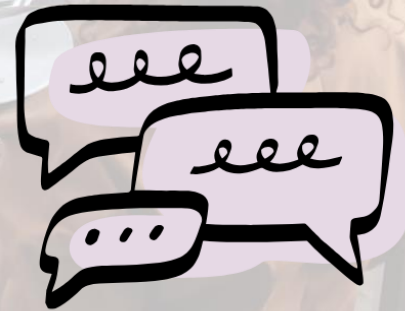
It is important that parents begin to have conversations about what healthy relationships are supposed to be. Set expectations for your children when they begin to develop dating relationships and teach them to communicate with their significant other what their healthy expectations are; that pressuring or being forced to break those expectations will not be tolerated and will be reported. Let them know if their peer or adult does not respect their wishes, they should report that to you/a safe adult or guardian immediately.

## Healthy Boundaries to Teach:

No one should ever touch them in the areas that a bathing suit covers.

Teach your children that it is ok to tell peers and adults I don't like, hugs, slaps on the back, or other types of touch that make them feel uncomfortable. Let them know if that peer or adult does not respect their wishes to report that to you and other safe adults in charge of supervising them.

Teach your children that if an adult asks the child for help, directions, or wants to “show them something” or says, “come with me”, the child should always check with you the parent first.



# Teach Your Children How to Identify Safe Adults

Here are some qualities of a safe adult:

1. A safe adult will not ask you to keep secrets. Teach your children that if an adult asks them to keep a secret, to respond with, “No” and report it to you as soon as possible.
2. A safe adult will not make you do things that make you feel uncomfortable.
3. A safe adult will not allow others to hurt you, take advantage of you or use you for profit.
4. A safe adult will respect your boundaries.
5. A safe adult will protect your heart.
6. A safe adult will respect your mind.
7. A safe adult will protect your body.
8. And a safe adult will protect your emotions.



It is also important to teach your children that if someone they think is a safe adult begins to push and not respect their boundaries, then teach your child to get away from that person and immediately report that to you. We call them "tricky people" and they can be ANYONE.

# Resources

1. SmartSocial.com
2. Bark.us
3. Shared Hope International
4. Polaris Project
5. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
6. Parents.Thorn
7. Sophos Home Antivirus (for phones/wifi)
8. Netgear Nighthawk – wifi router with varying parental control options to block unwanted content, set internet daytime/nighttime parameters, etc.
9. Frequent/continual monitoring of internet, app, social media, and video game usage

***Contact our office to request printed Without Permission resources for distribution***



# Sources

1. [missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/CSTinAmerica\\_ParentsGuardians.pdf](https://missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/CSTinAmerica_ParentsGuardians.pdf)
2. [polarisproject.org/myths-facts-and-statistics/](https://polarisproject.org/myths-facts-and-statistics/)
3. [Missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking](https://Missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking)
4. [Polarisproject.org](https://Polarisproject.org)
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