

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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## Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future



## Teen Sex Trafficking - KNOW! To Educate Them to Protect Them



The following Know! Tip discusses the sex trafficking of children. There is no graphic content or description below, but it could still be difficult for some readers. If you suspect human trafficking might be occurring near you or need help, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, TTY 711, text 233-733, or [chat with the hotline](#).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says more than 300,000 of our nation's young people are considered at-risk for sexual exploitation annually. An estimated 150,000 U.S. born children are formerly recruited into sex trafficking each year, with 14 being the average age of recruitment.

In the previous tip, [Teen Sex Trafficking – What Parents Need to KNOW!](#), we defined teen sex trafficking, discussed the wide range of youth who are at-risk, and talked about the fact that traffickers prey upon the vulnerabilities and naiveties of children.

In talking with your students on this subject, they should be made aware of the clever and highly manipulative ways in which sex traffickers operate. It is the recruitment, grooming and seasoning of a victim.

**Recruitment:** A trafficker typically befriends the victim and gains their trust. They may even pretend to be the victim's romantic love interest. They tend to shower the young person with gifts and an overabundance of compliments.



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**Grooming:** The trafficker slowly begins to isolate the victim from friends and family. The trafficker may supply the victim with drugs and alcohol and starts controlling how the victim dresses, behaves, and spends personal time. At this stage, the victim is encouraged to participate in sexual activities that involve modeling, stripping, and pornography.

**Seasoning:** This is the final phase, where the victim experiences emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Depending on the situation, there may be confinement, forced sexual education, re-naming or re-programming of the victim, and removal from familiarity. Through manipulation, the victim feels increasingly dependent on the trafficker. At this point, the trafficker typically has some leverage that keeps the victim from running away or seeking help, including threats made against the victim's loved ones.

It is important for children to know that a "trafficker" may be male or female, of any age, and could even be a classmate recruiting on behalf of a trafficker. Popular recruitment areas include parks and playgrounds, schools, walking to and from bus stops, shopping malls, gas stations, truck stops, and online—including through social media.

In addition to TALKING about teen sex trafficking, you can further protect your students by taking these steps:

- 1. Make it clear that a youth manipulated into sex trafficking is never the one at fault.** They are a victim and need help, not punishment.
- 2. Be a person they can turn to.** One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old, according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. A student needs to hear it from you that if anyone exhibits inappropriate sexual behavior toward them in any way (including past occurrences), they can and should come to you.
- 3. Warn them about the dangers of social media.** We assume students know not to send naked photos, share personal information online or agree to meet up with anyone they meet on the internet, but they need to be reminded. It is also essential that students be made aware of the difference between an online "friend" and an established friendship.
- 4. Pay attention to your students.** Take notice of friendships/relationships that seem to isolate a student from others.

Additional red flags that may signal a student is being trafficked include:

- Signs of physical abuse such as burn marks, bruises, or cuts.
- Unexplained absences from class.
- Less appropriately dressed than before.
- Sexualized behavior.
- Overly tired in class.
- Withdrawn, depressed, distracted, or checked out.
- Brags about making or having lots of money.
- Displays expensive clothes, accessories, or shoes.
- New tattoo (tattoos are often used by traffickers as a way to brand victims. Tattoos of a name, dollar sign, or barcode could indicate trafficking).
- Older boyfriend or new friends with a different lifestyle.
- Talks about wild parties or invites other students to attend parties.
- Shows signs of gang affiliation (preference for specific colors, notebook doodles of gang symbols, etc.).



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Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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If you suspect a student is being trafficked, follow your school's protocol for reaching out to the authorities. If you sense immediate danger for a child, call 911 without hesitation. It is better to err on the side of caution. You are also encouraged to contact the **National Human Trafficking Hotline** to report a detailed tip or get help: 1-888-373-7888, TTY: 711, Text: 233733, or [chat](#). It's confidential 24/7.

Sources: [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: Child Sex Trafficking](#). [O.U.R. Stories: Protecting Children from Sex Trafficking](#). [REST: 6 Ways Parents Can Protect Their Children from Sex Trafficking](#). [April 2013](#). [Shared Hope International: Report Trafficking](#). [United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, Annual Report 2019](#).