

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Children's Rights

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking>

Campaign and Advocacy

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Overview

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. A commercial sex act is any sex act where something of value such as money, drugs or a place to stay is given to or received by any person for sexual activity.

While any child can be targeted by a trafficker, research, data and survivor lived experience and expertise have revealed traffickers and buyers often target youth who lack strong support networks, have experienced violence in the past, are experiencing homelessness, or are marginalized by society. Traffickers are masters of manipulation and prey upon vulnerabilities using psychological pressure and intimidation to control and sexually exploit the child for their benefit. The issue of child sex trafficking is complex. Understanding the various forms of child sex trafficking and indicators can create opportunities for prevention, identification and response. Most importantly NCMEC embraces and encourages all efforts on this issue to be survivor-informed, child-centered, and trauma-informed.

Below are some examples of child sex trafficking:

Pimp-Controlled Trafficking

Child is trafficked by an unrelated individual, male or female, who often develops an intentional relationship with the child which is later used as leverage in the exploitation.

Familial Trafficking

Child is trafficked by a relative or a person who is perceived by the child to be a family member such as individuals referred to as auntie or uncle but are not directly related to the child.

Gang-Controlled Trafficking

Child is trafficked by a member of a gang or trafficked by the gang. Gangs leverage their organizational structure, violence, and local, national and international networks to instill fear and loyalty in the child victim.

Buyer-Perpetrated Trafficking

Child is being trafficked but does not have an identified trafficker. Instead, the buyer is directly exploiting the child's vulnerabilities by offering money, food, and/or shelter in exchange for the sexual exploitation.

Child sex trafficking can have devastating immediate and long-term consequences, including health impacts, psychological and physical trauma and even death.

Prevention and intervention are key to keeping children safer. After making a missing child report to law enforcement we encourage law enforcement, parents, and legal guardians to report ALL missing children, especially children who have run away, to NCMEC by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678). Next, if you are concerned about potential child sex trafficking activity or see situations including the indicators listed below please make a report to [NCMEC's CyberTipline](#) or call 1-800-THE-LOST.

Understanding common risk factors helps identify opportunities to proactively intervene in an effort to prevent child sex trafficking. We've organized these factors into three categories. The list below is not exhaustive and many factors may be interconnected.

Societal & Environmental

Family

Individual

Child Sex Trafficking Indicators

Child Sex Trafficking Vulnerabilities

Survivors of child sex trafficking often are unable to self-identify as victims or disclose their abuse because of fear, shame or loyalty to their abuser(s). It is not a child's responsibility to ask for help. It is up to professionals and trusted adults in the child's life to recognize the signs associated with child sex trafficking.

Red flags or indicators should not be considered a checklist or an assessment tool. Rather, if observed they may be an opportunity to ask

more questions, [make a report to NCMECs CyberTipline](#) or connect the child to resources for prevention or intervention.

In 2021, NCMEC received more than

17,200 reports

of possible child sex trafficking.

NCMEC has received reports of child sex trafficking in

all 50 U.S. States, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

These reports include incidents occurring in every type of community: suburban, rural, urban, and tribal lands.

Trends show us that when children run away frequently or for long periods of time, they tend to be running from an unsafe situation or to an unsafe situation.

1 in 6

of the more than 25,000 cases of children reported missing to NCMEC in 2021 who had run away were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

Of the children reported missing to NCMEC in 2021, who had run from the care of child welfare,

19%

were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

NCMEC provides training, case management, clearinghouse resources, analytical support, family and peer support, and recovery services assistance on reports involving child sex trafficking, including:

Child Sex Trafficking Analytical Team

The Child Sex Trafficking Team resources are available to **law enforcement only**. For assistance please reach out to 1-800-THE-LOST and ask to speak with a member of this team.

Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Planning and Services

The Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team (RST) provides specialized technical assistance and resources to child welfare workers, foster parents and law enforcement who are working with missing children who are also victims of child sex trafficking. RST Resource Specialists provide knowledge and guidance on promising practices in trauma-informed response by making connections to statewide and local specialized child sex trafficking resources. RST Resource Specialists are prepared to assist in the development of intentional, trauma-informed, and victim-centered plans which have been proven to build rapport, increase opportunities for youth engagement, and reduce trauma responses.

In areas where specialized child sex trafficking resources are limited, RST Resource Specialists can provide support by offering guidance to organizations that are willing to expand programming to include CST survivors. In these situations, Resource specialists can offer staff training, case staffing and guidance, and offer to connect agencies with other resources to help meet the complex needs of survivors of CST. Support will be available as requested, and developed based on the needs of each individual case and survivor. [For more information, click here.](#)

Family Advocacy & Support

[NCMEC provides assistance and support to families](#) impacted by child sex trafficking. Family Advocacy Specialists offer crisis intervention to families as well as local referrals to appropriate professionals for longer-term support. Families of exploited children often feel alone in their struggle and overwhelmed by the issues impacting their lives. [NCMECs Team HOPE](#) is a volunteer program that connects families to others who have experienced the crisis of a sexually exploited child. These trained volunteers offer peer support, coping skills, and compassion.

In 2020, NCMEC launched the Child Sex Trafficking Survivor Expert Working Group to strengthen our existing efforts to prevent, identify and serve survivors of child sex trafficking. This incredible group is working with NCMEC to ensure our programs are informed by the lived experience and expertise of individuals who have survived this type of abuse. Each of the 15 members from across the nation has been brought onto the NCMEC team as independent Expert Consultants representing diverse professional, experiential and cultural perspectives, and are helping to bring a child sex trafficking survivor informed lens to our work.

NCMEC CST Expert Consultants

Dr. Alexandra (Sandi) Pierce
Applied Sociologist, Othayonih Research

Josie Feemster
Advocate

Judge Robert Lung

Mercy Dizon
Advocate, Artist, Activist

Marq Daniel Taylor
CEO and Founder, The B.U.D.D.Y. House, Incorporated

Chris Stark
Author and Consultant

Keisha Head
Activist, Advocate, and Motivational Speaker

NCMEC provides specialized child sex trafficking training on the identification and response to child sex trafficking that can be provided online or in-person. To learn more about our training options or request a specialized training [click here](#).

[Introduction to Child Sex Trafficking](#)

This training offers three modules and builds a comprehensive foundation on the issue of child sex trafficking for all audiences including law enforcement, child welfare, as well as concerned citizens.

To access click [here](#).

NCMEC writes, contributes to, and publishes multiple publications pertaining to child sex trafficking. See them all [here](#).

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This Web site is funded, in part, through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Neither the U.S. Department of Justice nor any of its components operate, control, are responsible for, or necessarily endorse, this Web site (including, without limitation, its content, technical infrastructure, and policies, and any services or tools provided).

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