

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Children's Rights

<https://www.missingkids.org/content/ncmec/en/blog/2020/letter-from-john-clark-on-child-sex-trafficking.html>

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Dear Friend,

In every type of community across the United States children are being bought and sold for sex. Missing children as young as 10 or 11 have been victimized through sex trafficking, sold for sex online and in-person and we just can't have that here in America.

I was always very aware of child sex trafficking when I was the Director of the United States Marshals Service, but it wasn't until I joined the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) as its President and CEO, that I learned how pervasive the problem really was.

In 2019 alone, NCMEC received more than 10,700 reports regarding possible sex trafficking cases that were provided to law enforcement for possible investigation. Today, the average age of child sex trafficking victims reported missing to NCMEC is only 15.

What's heartbreaking is that **trafficked children often already have a history of sexual abuse and/or running away from home.** Of the more than 26,300 endangered runaway children reported to NCMEC last year, 1-in-6 of them were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

Runaway behavior is one of the stronger predictors of sex trafficking risk. This is especially true for kids missing from the child welfare system. These children often lack the physical and emotional safety nets that keep traffickers away from kids. They are being exploited by traffickers and the individuals who buy them.

Traffickers often target missing children with false promises of love, safety, and affection. Then they use their vulnerabilities to dominate and control them. They may recruit victims in schools, on social networking sites, at shopping malls, bus stations and foster care/group homes.

One of my staff members who was a runaway herself once said: ***When you're 16, you're on top of the world. You don't really think about who could trick you into giving you a place to stay or who could trick you into taking you somewhere just for a ride.***

No community is immune. Traffickers are out there - looking to target and manipulate children, preying on their vulnerabilities. At NCMEC we work with families, social workers, law enforcement, and victim service providers in an effort to locate missing children before the traffickers do.

When I worked with law enforcement, I fought to catch predators and stop them from harming anyone ever again. Now as the President of NCMEC, **I'm asking you, whether you are a parent, a teacher, a church member, a coach, an aunt, an uncle, or anyone who comes into contact with kids, to join hands with us, law enforcement, and your community, so that together, we can put an end to child sex trafficking because no child should ever be sold for sex.**

This is what you can do to fight:

Shrouding cases of child abuse and trafficking in the silence of shame or denial will keep kids from getting the help they need and allow predators to continue victimizing children.

This is not the way it has to be. Together we can work towards an America where child sex trafficking does not exist.

Thank you for fighting to protect children.

Sincerely,

John Clark
President & CEO, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

Topics in this article

News

Child Sex Trafficking

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