



**MISSISSIPPIANS AGAINST
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

**IDENTIFICATION. PREVENTION.
INTERVENTION. RECOVERY.**

Human Trafficking



What parents need to know.



MISSISSIPPIANS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Dear Parent,

Human trafficking may seem like an unusual topic to bring up with a child. The subject matter can be frightening, particularly for younger children, and educators and parents may be uncomfortable starting the conversation.

But recent data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, a phone center that victims can call for help, suggests that human trafficking is a relevant topic, especially for children.

- In 2021, 233 reports of human trafficking were reported to the National Human Trafficking hotline from Mississippi.
- Of those 233 cases, 316 victims were identified.
- 74% of the incidents that were reported involved people who were under the age of 18.
- 81% of these juveniles were girls.

This booklet provides recommendations for starting these conversations with children, adolescents, and teenagers at all stages.

It is important for parents to make sure they have a complete understanding of human trafficking before starting the conversation.

Human trafficking happens domestically, not just abroad or across borders. Human trafficking can happen with little or no movement at all. People can be trafficked within their hometowns, and children can be trafficked while living under their parents' roofs.

- Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery and is defined by the U.S. Department of State as "the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion."
- Sex trafficking is not the only kind of human trafficking - multiple forms of trafficking exist: sex trafficking, forced labor, and Involuntary domestic servitude.

The need for money may also not be clear to your child as to why people are trafficked. However, adults can better prepare children to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous scenarios by making them aware of the different forms of trafficking and the economics of each.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions or provide additional information. I would be honored to talk with you further about MSAHT.

Sincerely,

Heather N. Bradley, Executive Director

Mississippians Against Human Trafficking (MSAHT) is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization whose mission is to end human trafficking by uniting Mississippians.



MISSISSIPPIANS AGAINST
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WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM BECOMING A SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIM

LISTEN AND BE PROACTIVE: Talk to your teenager and ask questions about how they feel about their peers and the people around them. Teens sometimes struggle with peer pressure, bullying, and other social pressures like drinking or using drugs. All of these issues will increase their vulnerability.

ENCOURAGE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES: Athletics, arts, and organized volunteer activities can all serve to help a child build their self-esteem and self-worth and develop empathy.

TEACH MEDIA LITERACY: Teach your teen how to identify, analyze, and evaluate media messages in TV shows, movies, song lyrics, magazine articles and photos, apps, commercials, slogans, or social media posts. Teens should be able to understand that many images they see have been edited, and do not represent a “real” or healthy body.

KNOW WHO IS REACHING OUT TO YOUR CHILD: Knowing whom your teen is talking to regularly or spending time with will help protect them and allow you to give them guidance about someone who may be a negative influence. Traffickers have contacted their victims online through social media or in locations where teens gather.

KNOW ITS OKAY TO SAY “NO”: Teach your teen that it is always okay to say “no” and there is no situation that is so terrible that you would not be there to help. Have a contact plan that includes a way for them to ask for your help to get out of a bad situation, without getting in trouble.

TEACH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEX: By reinforcing and supplementing what your teen learns in school, you can help your teen develop important attitudes and information about healthy sexuality. Teens are naturally curious and are likely to search for information about sex online and be exposed to sexually explicit pornography either as a search result or by accident. Also, teach your child that it is okay to say “no” to sex and that it is not okay to have sex out of feelings of obligation or fear.

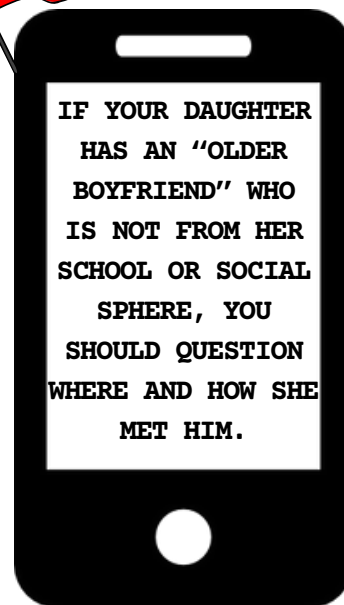
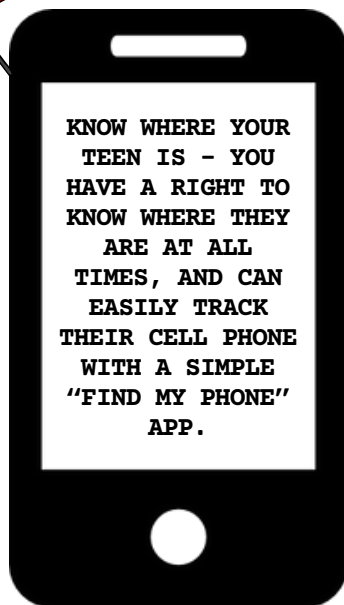
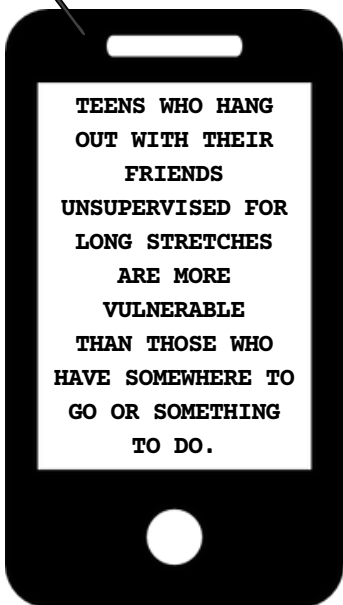
SPEND TIME WITH YOUR TEEN: Teens require quality time with their parents (without distractions) so they can talk about what is going on in their daily lives and so you can assure your child that you are there to help them resolve problems. Time driving in the car is a good place to talk, or so is going for a walk without cell phones. Volunteering together is another way to spend quality time and teach empathy and perspective about other people’s circumstances and suffering.

KNOW WHERE AND HOW YOUR TEEN GETS NEW THINGS: Sex traffickers will use the things that your teen wants to lure them. Take a regular inventory of your teen’s belongings and ask questions if you see expensive electronics, clothing, purses, makeup, hairstyles, nails or items that you did not pay for or that you know your teen cannot afford.

TEACH ABOUT THE WORLD: Traffickers will use seeing the world or getting out of town as a lure with teens. Expose your child to other places, cultures, and languages so they don't feel isolated or ignorant about the world around them. Many teens do not know their parents' phone numbers and rely on electronic contacts. Make sure your teen knows how to ask for help or contact you if taken to another location or separated from their cell phone.

GET COUNSELING IF NEEDED: If your child's symptoms of depression or anger are disrupting school or home life, get professional help. Ignoring your child's signals for help will only drive them further away and possibly lead to them seeking comfort from a stranger.

Source: Adapted from "Tips for Parents to Protect Children from Predators" from the book "Walking Prey" written by survivor Holly Austin Smith



2 in 5 of all kids
have been approached online
by someone who they thought
was attempting to "befriend
and manipulate" them.

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS A VICTIM OF
HUMAN TRAFFICKING, CALL THE
NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
1-888-373-7888.**



HELPFUL TIPS

IF SOMEONE APPROACHES YOUR KID ONLINE AND ASKS FOR PICTURES OR TRIES TO MEET UP WITH THEM – **REPORT IT!**

- Call the national human trafficking hotline, or local LEO, and report to Mississippi Bureau of Investigation Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator, ReportHT@dps.ms.gov | Phone: [601-987-1671](tel:601-987-1671)
- Children should be taught to come to you immediately if they see pornography or someone approaches them online - explain that they won't get in trouble and not try to handle the situation themselves.
- It can be reported if you get involved.

Monitoring -- Find out how to check the history on your child's device and how to install protections.

- See what apps they are using, Google them, and learn more about them.
- Also, search for "apps parents should know about." For example, Calculator+, Keep Safe Vault, and Best Secret Folder hides other apps.
- Monitor their activity with apps such as Zift or NetNanny.
- Fortnite, for example, has chat features that need to be turned off.

Watch what your kids are doing and saying online, and set boundaries.

- Don't let kids share personal information online. Seems obvious but think about the location feature on Instagram and FB, sometimes that is enabled and you don't even realize it.
- Don't let kids share emotional things – "worst day ever" or "my parents are the worst" – those are open invitations for predators who "slide into the DMs" and instigate a friendship in a volatile, emotional moment.
- Review their friends list and remove the ones you don't know.

It is important to pay attention to your children's use of computers, phones, and video games, as well as what websites they are visiting and most importantly - who they are chatting with. Do not let them do it on their own in their rooms. Ensure that everything is open and transparent.

Nowadays, social media and smartphone apps are integral parts of society, and many young people use them solely to communicate with their friends. In addition to maintaining friendships and making new friends, the apps allow them to stay connected with people across the world. A virtual breeding ground for sex traffickers has also been created there.

SnapChat --Turn it off. Snapchat can be used for sharing pornography in just a few clicks. Apps that delete pictures after a set period are asking for trouble. Although Facebook and Instagram have the same problems, these platforms can be reported and photos removed. With Snapchat, there is no such option.

YOUNGER CHILDREN (Ages 2-6)

Children between ages 2 and 6 are probably not ready for explicit conversations about human trafficking. But educators and parents can begin helping children develop an understanding of their own inherent worth and the value of every human life.

Respect and care for our bodies

Children at this stage begin learning to care for themselves. They start brushing their own teeth, dressing themselves, and using the bathroom on their own. Use this time as an opportunity to help children understand that we should care for our bodies and treat them with respect. Other people's bodies deserve our respect, too.

Explain that our bodies should never be used to get something we want—even if someone offers a prize, candy, or a toy.

Our right to personal space

Make sure children know they always have the right to ask for personal space. They should respect other people's personal space as well. If another child or adult makes them feel uncomfortable, then they should tell an adult they trust as soon as possible.

Fairness and equity

When a child witnesses something unfair happening at school, talk about what happened and address their feelings. Reiterate that fairness is one of our core values and should never be compromised.

You might say, "It's not fair that John took Miguel's toy truck without asking. And it's okay for you to feel mad or sad about it."

Gently help children understand that sometimes life is unfair, but this does not make cruelty and unkindness okay.

Gender roles and stereotype threat

As children begin to socialize outside their families, they will start to pick up on the different expectations of girls and boys and of women and men. Help children learn to recognize stereotypes and understand how they affect our relationships and social behaviors. Opening this conversation can help prepare young children to consider more serious questions about gender identity later on.

Try saying:

"Mommy likes to cook, but that doesn't mean she has to cook."

"Daddy works hard to make sure our family is comfortable and safe. But even if he loses his job, he is still a good dad."

"If Susan doesn't want to give James a hug, she does not have to just because she's a girl."

Older Children (Ages 7-12)

Children between ages 7 and 12 have more world experience, abstract thinking skills, and abilities to better express themselves than younger children. They are also more likely to be exposed to upsetting news and online content that is violent or inappropriate. Provide a safe place for kids in this age group to discuss these things and affirm them for coming to you with questions.

Notions of work

Between ages 7 and 12, children begin to understand work as something adults do during the week in exchange for money, which helps them pay for things their families need: food, school supplies, clothes, and their homes.

When children come to visit you at work, or when they ask about your job, consider introducing the concept of forced labor. Explain that many people in the world don't get to choose their jobs. Many times they are forced to work without being paid fairly, and they may even work in unsafe conditions.

Military and branch services

Older children may begin noticing members of the armed services in their communities. At school, they will start learning about the military in history classes. As these topics come up in conversation, introduce the practice of child soldiering. Explain that some nations have unfair leaders who force children to serve in the military. These children don't get to go to school, play, read books, or rest.

Allowance

If the children you parent or teach receive an allowance, start teaching them about fair compensation. You could open the conversation with, "You're a kid, and you get 5 dollars each week. But do you think it's fair for an adult to earn 5 dollars per week?" Explain that some people work for very little money. Highlight the importance of being diligent and doing research about the clothes and food we consume in order to make sure the people behind them are being treated fairly.

1 in 3 young people

said that the friends they make online are among their closest confidants.



ADOLESCENTS (Ages 13-18)

Adolescents are better prepared to discuss complex issues but may be less willing to open up to an educator or parent, especially about sensitive topics. Broach the subject anyway, knowing that the information you share may keep your children safe and make them advocates for fair labor practices and healthy relationships.

Sexual education

As they begin dating, adolescents need to know that their bodies are not commodities for others to use for pleasure or money. Emphasize that sexual relationships should always be explicitly consensual, and we should never have to exchange sexual acts for safety. Using the information on the following page, describe the process of *grooming* to them.

Labor and demand

Adolescents may not comprehend the economic side of trafficking, particularly if their only understanding of human trafficking is sex trafficking. As they learn about economics and international trade, educators and parents can open discussions about bonded labor and involuntary domestic servitude.

Financial literacy and practices

Adolescents may begin working or have friends who hold jobs while going to school. As they start managing money, teach them how to manage their finances, including reading a paycheck, creating a weekly budget, and saving and giving money. Good habits with money can help adolescents avoid desperate and potentially dangerous financial situations in the future.

Remember: Be Honest About What You Don't Know

When your children ask questions that you don't know how to address, offer to research the answer online with them or find an organization that can provide accurate information.

If you notice alarming behaviors in your child, such as coming home at odd times of the night, and discussions with them are not helping, reach out to us at info@msaht.org and we will help find resources and develop a plan of action for your child.



Social Media Posts that attract predators/traffickers

Teen post:

"Nobody gets me."
"I'm sick of being single."
"I'm so ugly."
"How do I look?"
"My life sucks."
"He/she isn't my true friend."
"My parents don't trust me."
"I need to get out of here."

Traffickers response

"I understand you."
"I love you."
"I think you're beautiful."
"You could be a model."
"I can make your life better."
"I am here for you."
"You are an adult."
"I'll protect you."

Grooming is when a trafficker gains a person's trust to exploit them. While movies and TV give off the impression that trafficking occurs by being violently kidnapped by a stranger, the grooming process happens in a much more subtle manner than we may think.

Six steps are involved in the process of grooming.

Targeting -- Traffickers usually prey on girls and women although boys and men can be victims too. They usually look for people who show a vulnerability they can exploit. They can meet or find their victim in person or online. Traffickers can meet children on online games, social media, and even homework sites.

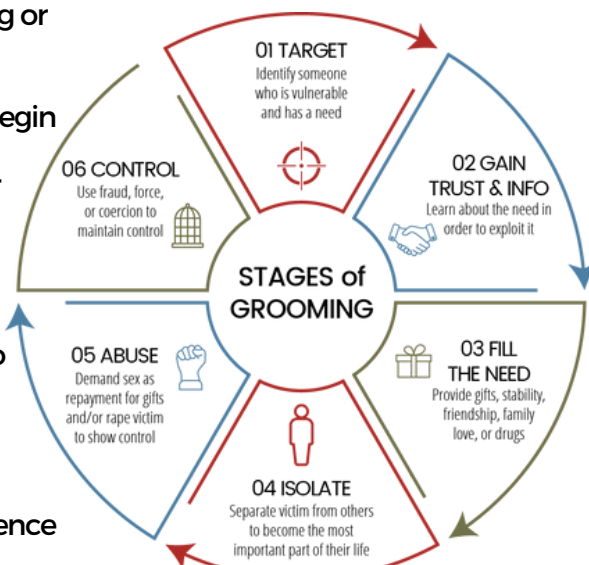
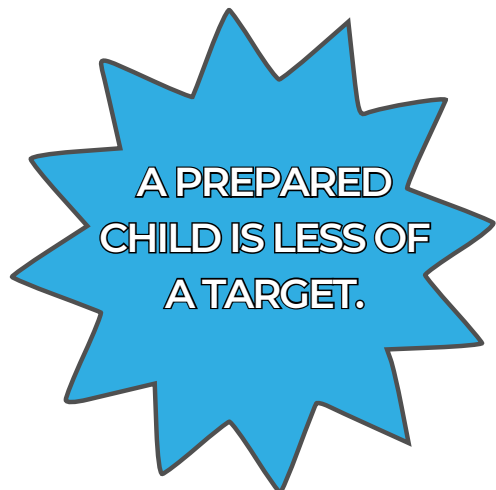
Gaining trust -- This can be done through casual conversation and befriending, providing the trafficker access to the victim.

Filling a need or helping the victim -- Traffickers use a victim's vulnerability against them by providing whatever need they are seeking to fill. Examples include gift-giving or offering special or extra attention.

Isolation of the victim -- Once the predator and victim begin to spend more time with each other, the trafficker will begin to withdraw the victim from other people in their lives such as family and friends. This leaves the trafficker as the only true "friend" in a victim's life.

Sexualization and abuse -- The trafficker will introduce drugs, alcohol, and pornography. The trafficker may also request sexual pictures and videos. This allows the trafficker to gain further control of the victim.

Control and power -- The traffickers use verbal and psychological threats, blackmail, as well as physical violence to manipulate the victim into doing what they want.



SIGNS TO HELP RECOGNIZE GROOMING AND/OR TRAFFICKING:

- Regular absences from school, work, and other activities
- Being dishonest or secretive about what they are doing and with whom
- Attitude or behavior changes
- The person having a controlling parent, guardian, partner, or sponsor who limits or monitors their interactions with others
- New friends
- Being fearful, timid, or submissive
- Fearfulness of law enforcement
- Expensive gifts or a large amount of money



TERMS TO KNOW

The average victim of child sex trafficking in the U.S. is between 12 and 14 years old. The terms below are how law enforcement and nonprofits describe those who recruit sex trafficking victims.



SPOTTER: This person trolls school hallways and venues where teenagers hang out. They will troll social media for posts that indicate a child is vulnerable.



GROOMER: This person builds relationships with at-risk children by appearing to be a friend or someone offering social acceptance. Slowly and strategically, they separate youth from their families, peer groups and the values they grew up with. The grooming process can last 30 days to 2 years.



TRAFFICKER: Above the groomer and spotter, this person sells the victim into a sexually oriented businesses. They are often called the "big fish."

SOURCE: CHILDPROOF AMERICA/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

Reporting Online Grooming After it Has Happened

If you or someone you know is a victim of online grooming, it's essential to report the activity as soon as possible. Law enforcement agencies have special units that deal with internet crimes, and they can help you protect your family and get the justice you deserve.

When reporting online grooming, be prepared to provide as much information as possible about the incident, including the date, time, location, or website where it occurred, the name of the perpetrator, and any other identifying information.

You may also be asked to provide screenshots, chat logs, emails, or other evidence of the crime. It's important to take these screenshots as soon as you know something is going on in case the predator is later able to delete the conversation.

FIFTEEN APPS

PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

MEETME



MEETME IS A DATING SOCIAL MEDIA APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE BASED ON GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY. AS THE APP'S NAME SUGGESTS, USERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO MEET EACH OTHER IN PERSON.

GRINDR



GRINDR IS A DATING APP GEARED TOWARDS GAY, BI AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE. THE APP GIVES USERS OPTIONS TO CHAT, SHARE PHOTOS AND MEET UP BASED ON A SMART PHONE'S GPS LOCATION.

SKOUT



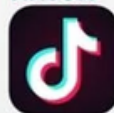
SKOUT IS A LOCATION-BASED DATING APP AND WEBSITE. WHILE USERS UNDER 17-YEARS-OLD ARE UNABLE TO SHARE PRIVATE PHOTOS, KIDS CAN EASILY CREATE AN ACCOUNT USING A DIFFERENT AGE.

WHATSAPP



WHATSAPP IS A POPULAR MESSAGING APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO SEND TEXTS, PHOTOS, MAKE CALLS AND VIDEO CHATS WORLDWIDE. WHATSAPP USES AN INTERNET CONNECTION ON SMART PHONES AND COMPUTERS.

TIKTOK



TIKTOK IS A NEW MOBILE DEVICE APP POPULAR WITH KIDS USED FOR CREATING AND SHARING SHORT VIDEOS. WITH VERY LIMITED PRIVACY CONTROLS, USERS ARE VULNERABLE TO BULLYING AND EXPLICIT CONTENT.

BADOO



BADOO IS A DATING AND SOCIAL NETWORKING APP WHERE USERS CAN CHAT, SHARE PHOTOS AND VIDEOS AND CONNECT BASED ON LOCATION. WHILE THE APP IS INTENDED FOR ADULTS ONLY, TEENS ARE KNOWN TO CREATE PROFILES.

BUMBLE



BUMBLE IS SIMILAR TO THE POPULAR DATING APP 'TINDER' HOWEVER, IT REQUIRES WOMEN TO MAKE THE FIRST CONTACT. KIDS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO USE BUMBLE TO CREATE FAKE ACCOUNTS AND FALSIFY THEIR AGE.

SNAPCHAT



SNAPCHAT IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR APPS IN RECENT YEARS. WHILE THE APP PROMISES USERS CAN TAKE A PHOTO/VIDEO AND IT WILL DISAPPEAR, NEW FEATURES INCLUDING 'STORIES' ALLOW USERS TO VIEW CONTENT FOR UP TO 24

KIK



KIK ALLOWS ANYONE TO CONTACT AND DIRECT MESSAGE YOUR CHILD. KIDS CAN BYPASS TRADITIONAL TEXT MESSAGING FEATURES. KIK GIVES USERS UNLIMITED ACCESS TO ANYONE, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME.

LIVE.ME



LIVE.ME IS A LIVE-STREAMING VIDEO APP THAT USES GEOLOCATION TO SHARE VIDEOS SO USERS CAN FIND OUT A BROADCASTER'S EXACT LOCATION. USERS CAN EARN 'COINS' AS A WAY TO 'PAY' MINORS FOR PHOTOS.

HOLLA



HOLLA IS A SELF-PROCLAIMED 'ADDICTING' VIDEO CHAT APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO MEET PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD IN JUST SECONDS. REVIEWERS SAY THEY HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH RACIAL SLURS, EXPLICIT CONTENT AND MORE.

WHISPER



WHISPER IS AN ANONYMOUS SOCIAL NETWORK THAT PROMOTES SHARING SECRETS WITH STRANGERS. IT ALSO REVEALS A USER'S LOCATION SO PEOPLE CAN MEET UP.

ASK.FM



ASK.FM IS KNOWN FOR CYBER BULLYING. THE APP ENCOURAGES USERS TO ALLOW ANONYMOUS PEOPLE TO ASK THEM QUESTIONS.

CALCULATOR%



CALCULATOR% IS ONLY ONE OF SEVERAL SECRET APPS USED TO HIDE PHOTOS, VIDEOS, FILES AND BROWSER HISTORY.

HOT OR NOT



HOT OR NOT ENCOURAGES USERS TO RATE YOUR PROFILE, CHECK OUT PEOPLE IN THEIR AREA, AND CHAT WITH STRANGERS. THE GOAL OF THIS APP IS TO HOOK UP.

RESOURCES

- [NETSMARTZ.ORG](https://www.netsmartz.org) (TONS OF RESOURCES FOR PARENTS)
- [POLARISPROJECT.ORG](https://www.polarisproject.org) (INFO AND STATS ABOUT HT)
- [SHAREDHOPE.ORG](https://www.sharedhope.org) (INFO ABOUT HT)
- ENDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING PODCAST (START AT THE BEGINNING)
- CYBER TIPLINE - 1-800-843-5678 OR [CYBERTIPLINE.COM](https://www.cybertipline.com)