Online HumanSexTrafficking

Exploring the Hidden Realities and Complexities of this Hidden World



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One of the biggest draws for Human Sex Trafficking predators since its inception has been social media and the use of the internet. As the world continues to transform digitally, internet technologies are increasingly being used for the facilitation of trafficking in person. Traffickers have adapted their local business model to integrate online technology and take advantage of digital platforms to advertise, recruit and exploit victims.

There are several ways the internet is used for trafficking. Luring young boys and girls are among them. Traffickers will contact kids and use tactics like love-bombing, negging (which means insulting or undermining an individual in the hope that decreasing his or her self-confidence might make them more vulnerable to advances), gaslighting, emotional blackmail, or a guilt trip. A young mind is an easy target that is preyed upon. These are tactics that are globally used to exploit individuals in a vulnerable state.

Traffickers will quickly try to lure their victims to other platforms that are either encrypted or where messages cannot be viewed by family members, or they are deleted automatically so they can never be viewed. There are even websites designed to allow this type of communication, yet the application's icon is fake. The icon on the screen of the recipient's phone looks like it's a calculator – or some other seemingly harmless item – to further hide the communications (American Military University-Edge, Steven M. Wynne J.D., 4.19.2023).

When traffickers create false online profiles, they are able to lure young boys and girls and convince the vulnerable ones to send explicit nude photos. They are then blackmailed (sextortion) into meeting up with the trafficker, which then exploits them even further while they are living at home. The victims are so afraid of their parents finding out, they are having to deal with shame, mental anguish, and psychological trauma allowing them to fall deeper into the hands of the predators.

It's only when the child cannot take the abuse any further, which could be months or years, that they end up breaking down with their caretakers about the abuse. This technique is also widely used by young recruiting teenager traffickers in high schools across the U.S. and the world.

Another major avenue which is exploited by traffickers is the Gaming Industry. Many gamers communicate with other users through headsets on platforms such as Guilded, Band, Steam Chat, TeamSpeak 3, Mumble (Mumla), Discord, Pinch, and Element. Most of the time they do not know or have ever met the person. Discord is one of the most popular apps for young online users today.

These video game chat apps mentioned are considered the best of the best by gamers because of their user-friendly, reliability, levels of security, and feature-rich messaging capabilities. Gamers can stay connected and build communities within these gaming chat clients thanks to functionalities like group chat, mobile messaging, live streams, voice and video chat. Efficient communication is essential for multiplayer games, and with so many great online gaming chat options to choose from, there's no way your team can lose (gets them.io).

With online gaming, Roblox is an online game platform and game creation system developed which allows users to program and play games created by themselves or other users. Roblox is free to play, with in-game purchases available, which is how the company generates revenue. One can purchase currency called Robux to use within the game to purchase items, friendships, or enticing children into virtual sexual acts. The game is designed for those 13 years and older, but younger children could play with added restrictions. The world and figures look like smooth Lego characters with rounded edges. The creators build safety and security measures protecting children and are always looking to improve these safeguards.

A 9-year-old boy who started playing at 7 years of age, stumbled across sexual images and other players who use explicit language. He informed his dad who had account restriction settings in place. His dad found sexual depictions in the clouds that were obvious in this virtual world. Once reported, Roblox made improvements, but more sophisticated users now know how to get around these changes. A reporter with Good Morning America went into the game with a user in real time, she was able to roam through rooms where she witnessed naked avatars, saw hate, antisemitic, racist speech, and many sexual acts being discussed in the chat within minutes which is suitable for adults. When these rooms are discovered by the Roblox, they immediately take them down. The exploiter then uploads it within minutes as another user (Good Morning America, Parents warned about inappropriate Content found in Roblox, Sept. 2022).

Adults who use this game create sexual worlds and rooms with strip clubs, orgy rooms, red light districts where anything goes. One can scroll the internet and find these. Because the game is made for children to learn coding and it develops problem solving skills, the company does not collect the user's data and it remains anonymous, no one knows who the other is. Children will inherently presume they are only interacting with other children, which makes it easy for a predator to start their grooming process.

In 2026, an estimated 500,000 online predators are active on the internet each day, targeting young people through social media, online games, and chatrooms. Children between 12 and 15 years old face the highest risk of grooming, with the FBI noting that over 50% of online sexual exploitation victims fall into this age bracket. Children and (childsafety.com, Grooming / Online Predators).

Online Tips for Parents and Teens

1. Set strict privacy settings. If your social media accounts are public, then anyone can see your photos, posts, and other information. Traffickers have used this information to reach out to and recruit victims. Consider setting your accounts to 'private' and turn off location sharing on posts.

2. Beware of strange friend requests. Only accept friends or follow requests from people you know, even if you have friends in common. Traffickers have reached out to strangers to 'chat' via social media and then slowly work to build trust with the potential victim.

3. Don't overshare, remember that everything you put online – photos, texts, etc. – is in the public domain. You no longer have total control over how it is being seen or shared. Traffickers have used people's photos and personal details to help them blackmail, contact, groom, or otherwise recruit and monitor victims. Never share personal information, such as your phone number, address, or live location online.

4. Flag it, don't share it! Stay vigilant in the online sphere and report suspicious pages or activities to the authorities. Don't hesitate to unfriend, block or report to someone who is harassing you or talking to you in a way you don't like. Click on the links to see how to block accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and SnapChat. Take screenshots of the messages or posts – they might be useful later for an investigation or law enforcement.

5. Know the warning signs of Trafficking. Being aware of the warning signs of trafficking can help you to identify when you or a loved one is at risk of being 'groomed' or recruited online.

6. Get help or raise the alarm. Many countries have free, confidential resources and helplines for those who have been or are at risk of being trafficked.

Make sure to know your National Human Trafficking Hotline. (UN, Office of Drugs and Crime).

7. Lead by example. Minimize using your own device at the dinner table and teaching children it's healthy to disconnect every now and then and have an open communication line with your children.

8. Start conversations early on. If giving a child a device, talk about the potential threats. Suggests using examples from the media, tell the child what you've read, and get their insight into it.

9. Offenders often pretend to be someone from the child's community (such as a child from another school in the area, a friend of a friend, etc.).

10. If someone the child meets online tries to move communication from one platform to another (such as from Instagram onto Snapchat).

11. Comments that are sexual in nature, especially early on in the communication.

12. Pitting children against their parents, or anything is said about the parents being too strict or not understanding.

13. Persistence (such as if someone gets upset when the child doesn't respond within a certain timeframe, or when the child refuses to send photos or videos)

14. Coaching the child to delete messages that were exchanged, or the online person threatens to harm themselves if the child doesn't continue talking to them.

15. Excessive compliments and flattery, promises of a better life, saying things like they're the only ones who understand you (Isha Bhargava, reporter CBC News).

There aren't enough safety measures in place on most social media platforms including major ones like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, Snapchat, and Pinterest.

Children are light years ahead of intelligence when it comes to technology use of previous generations. Any sexual prompts into the search bar will lead to inappropriate content for minors and a doorway for predators. Even with new safety protocols in place, minors will find a way. This is why educating them online predators and creating a healthy communication avenue is critical and crucial.

If anyone doubts how easy it is to access sexual content on social media platforms, find out for yourselves.

Parents

The online protective information is secondary compared to the life lessons that need to be taught at home first, if love exists there. If it doesn't, predators and traffickers have the upper hand. Everything starts at home.

Many parents assume they should wait until their child shows signs of puberty or asks direct questions. The digital age has ushered in dangers and access to children like no other Time in history. Most children have heard about or discussed sex with their peers by age 9, this exposure often happens even earlier. Times have changed and if parents do not adapt and modernize their approach and information, children will pay the ultimate price.

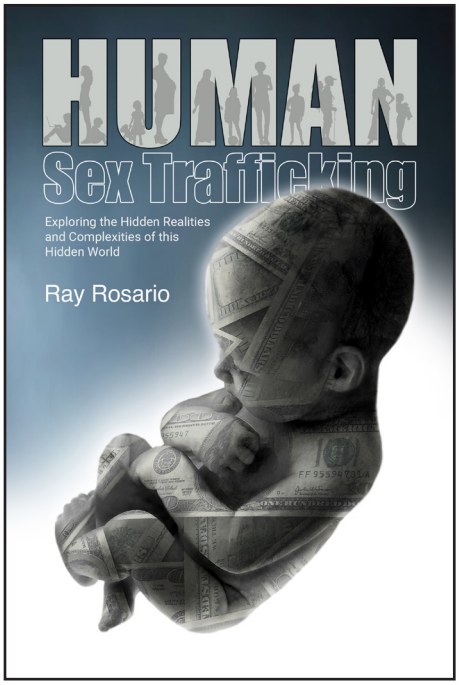
What should be primary, is that sex education should start at home. That conversation will seldom be comfortable for either party. If it is, that means open-door communication was established in the early years. Reach out to a sex counselor if you are unsure of how to go about it. Come up with a plan for what you wish to discuss. Make sure both parents are present, so the child understands they have a choice of comfortability if they need to speak to a parent.

The conversation must extend beyond safe sex, contraceptives, pregnancy, and STDs.

It must include Human Sex Trafficking and the traps that start in High School where the girls befriend one to only trap them into a party where they get drugged or drunk, raped, and photos are taken as a way to blackmail them into trafficking. Boys use this same tactic with lies about wanting to be their boyfriend. Be wary, if a partner wishes to start sexting photos, they could be used in the same blackmail patterns. This is the more common technique used in high school. By the time college comes around, there are more factors that need to be included in the conversations with your child.

As a parent, if one creates a hostile environment at home no matter the economic background, they will fall prey.

Times have certainly changed, but what should always be taught and never change are values, integrity, self-worth, self-love, self-esteem, boundaries, and open-door communications. Social pressures are great and the need to belong are greater, but without good foundations of values, one will get lost and conform to peer pressure and the need to fit in instead of standing firm with what they have been taught at home.



Homeland Security

Report Human Trafficking
To report suspected human trafficking to Federal law enforcement:
1-866-347-2423

To get help from the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888
or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733)



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