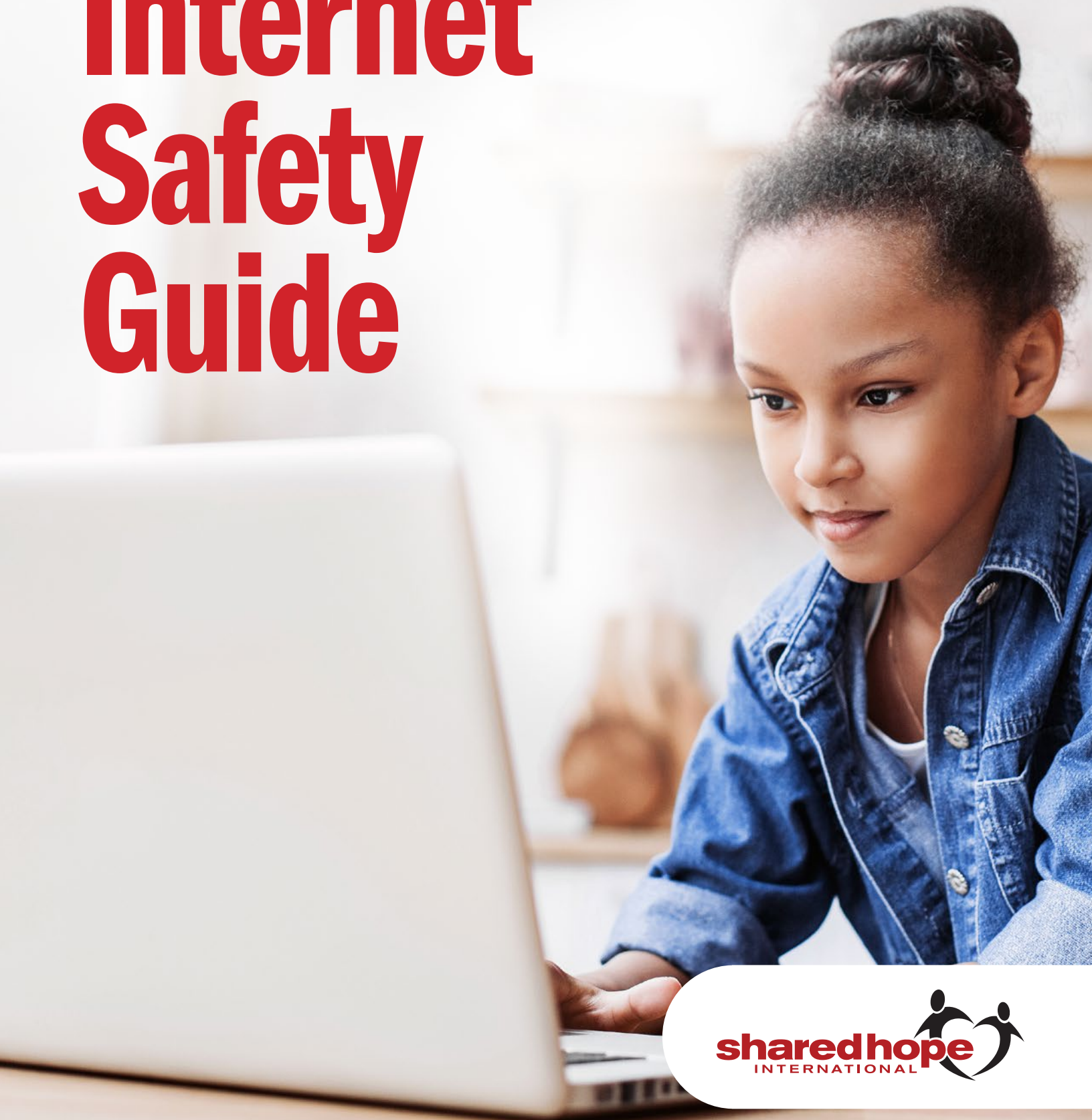


Internet Safety Guide



Shared Hope International cares deeply about you and your children.

The global sex trafficking industry does too, but in a different way.

They want to lure a child in to a nightmare of slavery. This is their “business model,” and one that generates millions of dollars in profit every year.

Along the way, a child is shattered — physically, emotionally, spiritually.

In this digital age, where we are connected to the

entire world via the Internet, every child is at risk.

Internet safety has become a crucial priority for every parent.

With our years of research, our experience in the field, and the expertise we’ve derived from it all, we bring you this guideline for keeping your children safe from internet-based danger.

The Problem

WHERE CHILDREN PLAY, PREDATORS PREY

Technology, including social media and classified websites, is widely viewed as responsible for the explosion of sex trafficking in the United States.

Predators are luring child victims via tablet, phone, even video game consoles and e-sports. In these online venues, our children are being enticed, entrapped, and sold for sex.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, there are 750,000 predators online worldwide at any given moment.

Our staff at Shared Hope experienced this predatory behavior firsthand. While researching commonly used mobile apps, a staff member posing as a 15-year-old was solicited within minutes. She was sent pornographic images, was asked to remove her clothing, and, in one case, to meet in person. Another groomed her with friendship over several days, then his messages started to become sexually explicit. *The profile picture he used was a photo of a puppy.*

Worse still, the solicitors were *decades* older.

So how do we protect our kids?

First we want to make clear: We believe parents can have confidence that they are uniquely qualified to parent their children based on their love for their kids. We are here to support and help you with suggestions and tools, but at the end of the day, you have to trust your gut instinct on what is best for your child.

In order to help you, Shared Hope International has developed this comprehensive guidebook and toolkit. We believe it can be beneficial for parents, teachers, and anyone else working with youth.

The goal is to protect children from the traps predators lay, and get these tools into as many adult hands as possible.

This toolkit will help you understand predators’ grooming tactics, equip you with knowledge of technology dangers, and provide tangible “how-to” safety tips.

We must shine light on the online world where predators are communicating with our kids, so that, ultimately, adults are empowered, children are protected, and child sex trafficking is stopped before it begins.



According to Shared Hope’s research outlined in the National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, there was a two-year 800% increase in reports of child victims of sex trafficking exploited with the aid of technology.

The Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Our Kids

Internal Influences

What follows is not a one-size-fits-all description of every youth, nor an exhaustive list of characteristics. But understanding some general truths about the children in our lives will help us better understand the tactics of a predator.

► YOUTH SEEK LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Just like you, the youth you interact with seek love and acceptance. They want it from their family, their friends, those they interact with regularly, and, to a point, even from those they meet in chance encounters.

► YOUTH WANT TO FIT IN

Also, not unlike adults, youth want to fit in. They want to (and even need to) be part of a greater community — preferably one that is encouraging, accepting, and empowering of their hopes and dreams. If they don't have a community readily available to them, chances are they will seek one out online.

► YOUTH CAN FEEL MISUNDERSTOOD, INSECURE, AND LONELY

As a natural extension of their social and emotional development, youth can also feel misunderstood. Even if they are often surrounded by people and activity, they can feel dismissed, insecure, and lonely.

Predators and traffickers understand these vulnerabilities intimately. They make it their business to discover a child's hopes and dreams and hurts and use those factors to exploit them.

External Influences

► POP CULTURE AND MARKETING

Advertising firms hire researchers and psychologists to create marketing aimed at 8- to 11-year-olds, because kids in this age bracket can become very committed if they've seen a commercial for something they want.¹

Marketing convinces children that they must have things or be like someone else to have value.

The message is "You aren't pretty unless you look like this," "You aren't cool unless you own this," "Owning this product makes you important."

Traffickers understand popular culture, and they are using it to their advantage.

The vulnerability occurs when children under the minimum working age realize they can't afford these things if their parents or caregivers aren't able or willing to provide them.

At this point, a trafficker (or classmate) may easily convince a child to provide a buyer with sexual services or intimate pictures in exchange for money or gifts.

Marketing can also distort a child's perception not only of what is *necessary* but also of what's right or wrong, or of which choices will be helpful or hurtful.

The adults in their lives must help them understand

that images in the media and advertisements are not accurate reflections of reality.

► MUSIC AND MEDIA

A five-year-old loves to dance to all the latest hip-hop music. Sometimes it looks very sexual. Should you be alarmed?

Movements that are sexualized will condition your child to think that's normal.

Listen to the lyrics of all the songs your children listen to, even when they become young adults. You

may be alarmed at some of the messages your kids are getting!

Protect both girls and boys from being culturally groomed to be valued for their “sexuality.” Teach them that their bodies aren’t intended for attracting others but rather for strength, grace, agility, and activity.

When children become adults, anyone who values them solely for sexual attributes is not going to be a healthy relationship partner. ²

Positive Influences

Be sure your children are finding worth in the things they do, and not in how they look. They are worthy and valuable for who they are. If a girl or boy is completely obsessed with how others perceive them physically, they will be more vulnerable to predators’ lies.

To help children feel successful as individuals, engage them in activities that do not involve putting them in competition with peers, such as music or dance lessons, or individual hobbies like photography, painting, climbing, science experiments, computer programming, cooking, etc., where they can feel good about themselves — and they don’t have to always be good at it!



3 Pro-active steps to take:

- **Teach your children the value of being and not just having.**
- **Praise them for attributes such as honesty, loving, helping, serving, patience, and caring rather than only complimenting them on their grades, talents, or looks.**
- **Build up character strengths such as kindness, integrity, responsibility, courage, friendship, wisdom, citizenship, perseverance, and humility.**

Children who feel included in a larger world view are less likely to fall for the line that they can “travel and see the world, get out of this boring town, or see the big city” — the types of glamorized promises offered by recruiters and traffickers.



Grooming Tactics

Grooming takes time...

Online predators know they can make as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on each child they traffic. Because of this, traffickers will often take their time grooming a child — sometimes spending months or even years — to ensure the child is loyal to them before they begin exploiting them for profit.

They will woo the child with conversation that seems fun, safe, and even meaningful, keeping their true intentions (and sometimes identity) hidden from their victim.³

► **THEY SEEM LIKE A FRIEND**

Predators work to appear familiar. Kids often give up more personal information online than they intend to, and predators are well versed in how to extract and keep this information for use at a later time. They may conduct research on the child, such as looking up their social media or app profiles and making their own online profile mirror the child's language, style, perceived interests, etc. Soon, the child feels they have a new friend.

► **THEY DEVELOP TRUST**

Traffickers use personal information to develop a sense of trust — a bond — between themselves and potential victims.

Predators appear sympathetic and understanding regarding a child's problems, and act as if they are the only ones who can appreciate and help them.

Predators shower their victims with compliments, encouraging emotional dependency while preying on the youth's insecurities and emotions.

They may send a gift, like ordering an electronic gift card for a favorite store, and deliver it directly to a youth's inbox, which can be accessed through a smartphone.

They make statements that appeal to the child's needs or vulnerabilities. They will sell lies and try to "sweep them off their feet," flattering them with fake promises, insisting they want the victim to be only theirs. They might say things like:

**"No one understands you like I do."
"You won't have to be alone anymore."
"Your life is hard, and I will make it better."**

The same tactics are used to recruit spotters and other recruiters. Middle school- and high school-age youth may be especially drawn in with the promise of money if they will simply "spot" or identify a vulnerable child and tell the predator all about them. Then the predator uses this information to lure the child and begins to groom them.

► **THEY SHARE AND KEEP SECRETS**

Establishing secrecy is another tactic designed to gain the confidence of the child and to become a "best friend." Victims often become dependent on their relationship with the predator, a relationship they most likely interpret as romantic. This allows the predator to control the child's behavior as the online grooming process progresses. Sharing secret desires, wishes, cares, and hopes are among the ways they establish intimacy with the child.

They tell the child a "secret" and then follow with **"Please don't tell anyone. This is ours together."** Then they get the child to share something personal and assure them, **"This is just between us. You can trust me. I won't tell a soul."**

► THEY PUSH SEXUAL BOUNDARIES

The process continues until the sharing is sexual in nature, possibly involving intimate photos or something the predator can use for extortion or blackmail in the future.

Oftentimes, this process will start with seemingly innocent conversation, asking about the youth's dating history or crushes, and then slowly and seamlessly moving into talking about their sexual history, preferences, fantasies, etc. The conversation often goes something like this:

"Do you have a boyfriend / girlfriend? Have you ever had sex? How far have you gone sexually?"

"Do you watch porn? Do you masturbate? Tell me about it."

***Sends porn* "How did that make you feel?"**

Once there are shared sexual conversations or experiences, there is a connection and a bond that unites the two. Traffickers will ultimately use this secret sexual conversation to create a climate of shame and a sense of dependence on the trafficker that can lead to more damaging scenarios down the road.

► THEY FLIP A SWITCH

Through continued exposure, the predator works to lower the inhibitions of the victim and influence them with threats: "Do as I say, or I'll text these photos to your parents or post them so your friends can see."

From here, it's a short step to being willing to meet up. The in-person relationship begins. Once a predator has met with the child and engaged in illicit activities, they use blackmail and threats to maintain power and control to keep the victim silenced.⁴

Knowledge Is Power — So Arm Your Young Children!

Building blocks for self-confidence and critical thinking can best be laid in elementary school and continue through intermediate school in order to prepare a child for the hormone-raging, identity-shaking middle school years. These are the years when traffickers are most able to connect with troubled teens.

It's never too late to start! Consider the following as a place to begin:



Activity/Project:

Sustain a child's self-confidence and develop character and awareness of the world around them. Give them opportunities to be exposed to the world through reading, documentaries, and experiencing other cultures, regions, and interests through museums, cultural fairs, and movies. Hold a Family World Night once a week. Let the children choose a country and then prepare a meal from there, listen to music from that country, watch a documentary or film based on that culture or customs; then discuss it all as a family. When possible, you can even come up with a family craft to honor the culture you are learning about.



TO BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE, START EARLY

Discuss personal health, hygiene, social manners, and etiquette with young children to build a sense of confidence.

A child who is unprepared, lacking this type of guidance at home, is often bullied at school.

An online “friend” could offer them just the acceptance and confidence they’re searching for.⁵

You can’t always be with your child to protect them, so instill internal guardrails that provide coping skills, how to respond to bullying, and simple acts of self-defense. Teach them how to recognize peer pressure and what it means to be bullied. Equip them with ways to deal with it.



Pro-active steps to take:

Practice with your child how to say “No!” emphatically, looking directly into the person’s eyes, repeating it loudly, and as often as needed to stop the unwanted attention — then running away to a safe adult or safe place and telling an adult exactly what you need in order to be protected.⁶ It’s never too early to start this conversation!

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

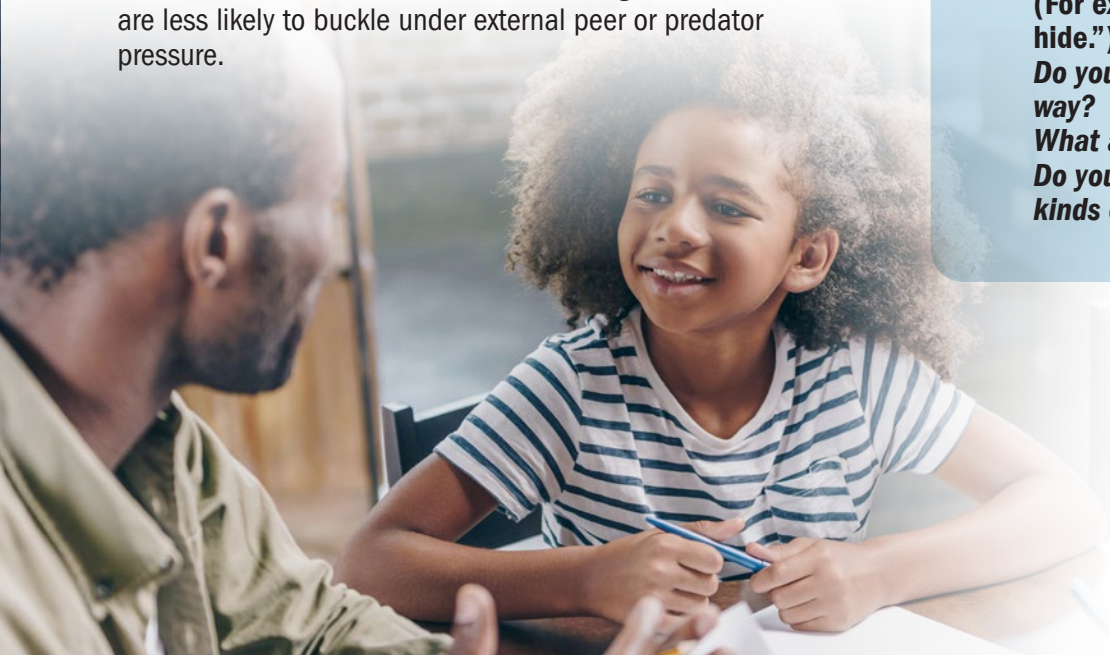
Children in elementary and middle school often struggle with personal and social issues: bullying, teen pregnancy, peer pressure, poor self-image, etc. They need to know how to cope with these pressures, or they will be more vulnerable to the stranger who offers them “a better way of life.” When these issues are compounded by drug abuse in the home, physical or sexual abuse, poverty, and domestic violence, children often feel they have no safe place to be. A savvy predator offers them peace and safety, or the relief of “getting away from it all.”⁷

Positive coping strategies can include listening to music, reading books, journaling, or channeling energy into physical activity/hobbies/music and self-defense classes. Children confident about defending themselves are less likely to buckle under external peer or predator pressure.



Pro-active steps to take:

- **Discuss with your child the fact that hurt people will hurt others, and how they can begin to understand why the other person’s meanness may have nothing to do with them.**
- **Ask questions!**
When you feel lonely, unwanted, or left out, speak up. What does that feel like? (For example: “dark,” “cloudy,” “want to hide.”)
Do you ever think others feel the same way?
What about someone who’s mean to you?
Do you think they ever have those same kinds of feelings?



BOREDOM

Boredom comes from lack of direction, and in this day of social media, children can easily reach out for connection and find someone online who doesn't have their best interests at heart.

Summertime is particularly dangerous as older children are allowed to stay at home unsupervised while parents work. As kids post online that they're bored, or tired of the restrictions and rules, or sad about a loss in their life, lurking predators will reach out to offer them excitement and things to do that seem much more enticing than staying at home all summer.



NUTRITION

Nutrition education is important. Every child needs to know how to live a healthy lifestyle, with regular outdoor exercise, good snack choices, and meals that build a strong mental outlook as well as a strong body. Positive physical steps nurture and maintain positive mental health.

An overweight or small-statured child can be vulnerable to suggestions of traffickers that they "love and accept them just the way they are," especially if the child is being bullied by peers about a physical trait. Predators will certainly engage them to find out their needs and hurts so they can become the lie that meets that need. But you can create a place instead where your child feels sheltered and loved, knowing they are understood and accepted.



Pro-active steps to take:

- **Enroll your child in summertime camps, activities, classes, or sports that will keep them occupied, in the company of safe supervision, and with children who are also supervised.**
- **Keep them working toward goals. Encourage them to take a lifeguard course, get babysitter-certified, start a small business in the neighborhood running errands on their bike for elderly neighbors, create a fundraiser for a worthy cause, volunteer at an animal shelter, bake cookies for those living in a nursing home, or serve at a food bank where they can experience fulfillment through helping others. (Volunteering is a great way for children to experience the world through someone else's perspective and understand how fortunate they are by helping those *less* fortunate.)⁸**



Pro-active steps to take:

- **Talk with your child about what they view as their weaknesses or limitations.**
- **Help them understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and that they have valuable traits as well.**
- **Point out the important character traits they already have and can expand upon (kindness, honesty, responsibility, etc.).**
- **Validate their experiences by letting them talk about what emotions they've encountered in themselves and from others, and how those made them feel.**

LIMITED ROLE MODELS

A child exposed only to movie actors and television celebrities might aim for one goal: fame. Popularity becomes their definition of success. Pimps and traffickers will offer them music or dancing contracts, a pathway to their wildest dreams. They will assure them they could be an actor or model and offer them a way to make that dream come true.



Pro-active steps to take:

- Provide materials on young local role models involved in volunteering, entrepreneurship, nutrition, care for animals, advocacy, politics, music, or social issues.
- Invite someone to speak to your child's class or after-school group, or host that person with your child and their friends at an event in your home.
- Encourage your child to hang posters in their room of people they admire who are not on television (living or historic figures).
- Take a field trip to visit an organization, business, or occupation they admire or are curious about. For example, you can tour headquarters for a philanthropic organization that is providing for children around the world.⁹

LISTEN

Children are most vulnerable when they feel no one is listening to them. They begin to feel invisible and minimized, as if they don't matter at all. A predator will capitalize on this simply by being present. If we don't give them our attention and pay close attention to the little things, they won't tell us the big things when it counts.



Pro-active steps to take:

- If your child wants to talk, put down your phone, turn off your show, and listen.
- Be fully present by making eye contact and responding affirmatively.
- Ask open-ended questions: "How did it make you feel when they did/said that?" "What did you wish they had done instead?" "What could you do differently to make that situation better?"
- Help them identify their safe adult: Encourage them to talk to someone when they have confusing or difficult-to-discern emotions. Give them permission to talk with another parent-approved adult — for example: "You can talk to an adult who cares for you"; "It's OK for you to talk to your youth pastor or teacher, if there is something you don't feel comfortable talking to me about." The message is: *There are lots of adults who care for you! It's an adult's job to help you!*¹⁰



SUDDEN CHANGES

Take note of sudden changes in behavior, personality changes, a drop in grades, a change in friends, or extreme negative attitudes that may indicate depression or other mood disorders.

Watch for signs like frequent bruises or cuts, social withdrawal, and running away. These can all be signs that a child is feeling out of control in life, possibly being coerced by someone else. What may have begun as a thrill or a risk could have turned into a dangerous situation from which they don't know how to extricate themselves.



Pro-active steps to take:

- Engage them in conversation that doesn't ask them "Why?" but instead asks them "Is there a situation where you don't feel safe?" "Is there someone who scares you?" "Is there something happening that you want me to know about?" Let them talk; don't try to fix the situation, judge their feelings, or overreact to what they've told you. Then, together, talk about what a solution might be.
- Connect the child with a trained counselor. Recognize that it may take a few sessions for the child to build trust with an unfamiliar adult.
- Consider as an extracurricular activity involvement with a local volunteer-based organization that builds a child's self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall self-value: some possibilities include Big Sisters/Big Brothers, Girls for Change, and similar child-focused groups.¹¹



Warning Signs, and How to Respond

One of the most effective ways we can equip ourselves to help our children is to know what to look for. A combination of any of the following signs and behaviors could indicate the presence of a problem in your child's life, or an indicator that a child might be communicating with an online predator.



PRIMARY WARNING SIGNS¹²

- ▶ **If they are overly obsessed with being online:** *traffickers will often use online communication as a means to groom their victims due to its secretive and anonymous nature.*
- ▶ **If they withdraw from family or friends:** *traffickers will try to isolate their victim from loved ones in order to make them more vulnerable to their tactics.*
- ▶ **If someone is sending them pornography:** *traffickers will likely send a child pornography to try to normalize and make the child comfortable with sexual conversation and behavior.*
- ▶ **If they hide their device screens from others:** *traffickers often give a child instructions to keep their relationship a secret due to its inappropriate, sexual nature.*
- ▶ **If they become upset when they don't have wifi access or cell service:** *traffickers will often demand that their victim keeps in constant contact with them, threatening to hurt them or expose their secrets or sexual photos if they don't reply quickly enough.*
- ▶ **If they receive expensive gifts from a friend you don't know:** *traffickers will give a child love and attention as a way to build trust during the grooming process, sometimes via virtual or physical gift-giving.*

OTHER WARNING SIGNS:

- ▶ **Sexting or sending/receiving lewd photos or messages**
- ▶ **Unexplained absence from school; truancy**
- ▶ **Sudden inappropriate dress**
- ▶ **Sexualized behavior**
- ▶ **Overly tired or falling asleep in inappropriate settings**
- ▶ **Withdrawn, depressed, or distracted**
- ▶ **Bragging about making or having lots of money**
- ▶ **Displays expensive clothes, accessories, or shoes**

You know your child best. If you think you suspect or see something, we encourage you to err on the side of caution and take action.

Action Steps

First, we need to be available to talk and listen. In an age-appropriate manner, let the child know the realities of what is happening in our virtual and physical communities. Remind them that you are available to listen, to talk, or to help navigate confusing conversations or experiences without judgment. Remind them that every person, every situation, every experience is unique and worth processing.

Ultimately, let them know that you want to keep them safe. Warn them! You can say something like, “It is your life, these are your friends. However, as you move about in life, as you meet and contact new people, in person or online, I can’t always protect you. I want to help you learn how to make yourself safer, so that you can be the guardian of your own privacy and security.”

Don’t forget that this is not a one-time conversation. This is an ongoing dialogue. This conversation can take months or even years, and all adults with children in their lives should be ready to engage at any moment. Everyday situations and shared experiences — like watching your favorite Netflix series together, or looking up videos together on YouTube — can open the door for

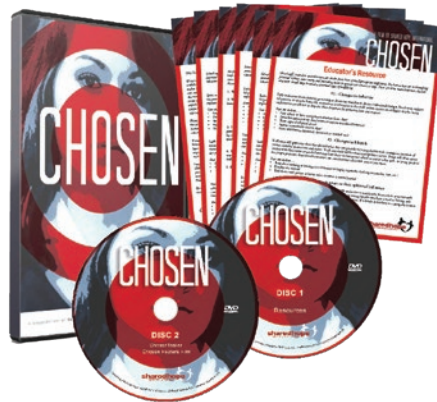
conversations about what is safe and what’s not.

If you have questions that local law enforcement can’t answer, or you just want an additional resource, you can call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1.800.THE.LOST to talk through your specific situation. They can connect with your local law enforcement if the situation warrants action.

You can share our resources, like Shared Hope’s *Chosen* film, our “Slaying the Giant” pamphlet, or our *Internet Safety Toolkit* with the kids you care for and other adults in your community.

Shared Hope also provides training, both in person and online — for individuals, faith communities, educators, health care providers, counselors, law enforcement, and legal professionals — to help you be better informed, better prepared, and better equipped.

For more ways to keep the kids in your life safe from online sex traffickers, please visit [sharedhope.org/internetsafety](https://www.sharedhope.org/internetsafety).



Don't forget that this is not a one-time conversation.



[sharedhope.org](https://www.sharedhope.org)



ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL

Leading a worldwide effort to eradicate sex trafficking

OUR MISSION

Shared Hope International strives to *prevent* the conditions that foster sex trafficking, *restore* victims of sex slavery, and *bring justice* to vulnerable women and children. We envision a world passionately opposed to sex trafficking and a community committed to restoring survivors to lives of purpose, value, and choice — one life at a time.

OUR VALUES

As Christian abolitionists we believe trafficking survivors deserve the opportunity to be restored to dignity and purpose, regardless of their faith or system of belief. As Christian stewards we prayerfully seek to use wisdom and biblical guidance for every dollar we spend. As Christian leaders we seek to inspire change by informing and empowering activists, providing strategic guidance to local shelter and service partners, and influencing policy makers and first responders.

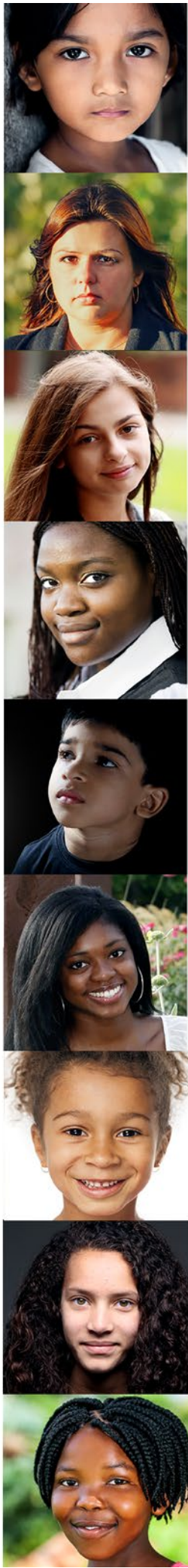
OUR VISION

Shared Hope International was established to provide hope to the hopeless women Washington State Congresswoman Linda Smith found enslaved in the brothels of Mumbai in 1998. Our early efforts targeted the international sex trafficking industry. As we became established leaders in the international movement to end slavery, our eyes were opened to the scourge of sex trafficking in the U.S. We could not ignore this injustice and expanded our impact to bring hope to American women and children victimized in the commercial sex industry. Today, we lead prevention strategies, restoration programs, and justice initiatives to combat trafficking in the U.S. and abroad.

Our vision is to coordinate a national U.S. network of protection to improve the response to victims of trafficking. We believe we can create a world where every survivor is surrounded by trained professionals, an alert community, just law and policy, knowledgeable service providers, and appropriate shelter options.



sharedhope.org



Resources

"About." MLG, www.majorleaguegaming.com/about

BARK: <https://www.bark.us/> The *Bark* app is a parental control phone tracker to help keep kids safer online. Bark monitors social media, text, and email on Android and iPhone devices.

Commonwealth Parliament, and Parliament House. "Chapter 3 — Effects of Premature Sexualisation on Child Development." *Home — Parliament of Australia*, 24 Apr. 2015

Herd, George. "Minecraft: Grooming Dangers for Children Gaming Online." *BBC News*, BBC, 20 Jan. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-38284216

Internetmatters.org: <https://www.internetmatters.org/> — This recommended resource offers practical tips and step-by-step parental control guides.

Jenson, Kristen, and Gail Poyner. "Good Pictures Bad Pictures." *Protect Young Minds*, Glen Cove Press, May 2016, www.protectyoungminds.org/

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NCMEC — Netsmartz: <https://www.netsmartz.org/HOME>. Access resources and learn more about the latest topics and trends from NCMEC's reports and around the Internet.

NCMEC Hotline: THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

NCMEC. "Sexting & Sextortion and What You Need to Know." *Sexting, or the Sending and Receiving of Sexually...*, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, July 2017, blog.missingkids.com/post/162680084130/sexting-or-the-sending-and-receiving-of-sexually

"Reviews for What Your Kids Want to Watch (before They Watch It): Common Sense Media." Common Sense Media: Ratings, Reviews, and Advice, www.commonsensemedia.org/. This website aids parents and caretakers in making decisions about which books, movies, apps, and games their children should be consuming.

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