

# ILLUMINATE THE DARK

A GUIDE FOR YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S  
MINISTRY TEAMS IN PREVENTING SEXUAL  
ABUSE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING



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# A NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDER Maggie Turner



*Now more than ever, the Church needs to work to prevent abuse and protect our children and youth from exploitation.*



In 2017, I began leading South Carolina's first ever jail intervention program for survivors of human trafficking. In that role I was confronted with hard truths about exploitation today, one being that sometimes victimization happens in places we assume are the safest. Sadly, churches are no exception.

At Illuminate Justice, we remind faith communities that the eye cannot see what the mind does not know, meaning it is hard to stop the darkness when we're not sure what it really looks like. But once you do know, there is power to act.

We've created this resource guide with two goals in mind. Firstly, we hope your teams can become more aware of how and why sexual abuse and exploitation exists, so that you can create systems that keep the youth and children in your churches safe from these types of harms. Secondly, we hope you'll take another step in doing the work to prevent these harms from happening in the most unseen parts of your community.

The Church is meant to be an unstoppable force of love and compassion, sharing the light of Jesus in the darkest of places. Thank you for choosing to illuminate the dark with us.

# BUILDING A BETTER SAFETY PLAN

Creating policies and procedures to keep youth and children in your church safe from sexual abuse is vital.

It is a misconception that talking about sexual abuse will make community members feel unsafe. Bring up the hard topics like the prevalence of sexual abuse in churches. Abuse thrives in environments where there is silence about the topic.

## 01 Background Checks

Anyone who serves with youth and children should have a background check completed every year. There is no stereotypical offender, so ensure all volunteers comply with this safety measure.

## 02 Required Training

Once you've created policies and procedures, ensure all volunteers fully know and comply with them. In addition to periodic reviews and training that covers this information, an annual sexual abuse prevention training is also a good idea. Check out Darkness to Light's "Stewards of Children" training that can be completed by each volunteer online.

## 03 Report and Respond

Any policy violations should be reported and staff should respond appropriately to violations and concerns. In situations where actions seems inappropriate or odd, even if not a clear violation of a policy, start a conversation. Always document steps taken by staff and volunteers to increase safety and respond to inappropriate behavior.

## 04 Reduce Risk

Physical spaces can be made safer with open or glass doors and cameras. Policies requiring children never be alone with just one adult are also best practice. Parents who have not undergone background checks should not be permitted to stay with their children in the designated children's spaces.

# PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE AND CHILD EXPLOITATION

Keeping the children in your care safe from these types of harms requires thoughtful and coordinated efforts. Engaging with school leadership and parents can help strength your ability to protect youth from CSEC.

In Churches	In Schools	At Home
Ensure all volunteers have a background check and receive training on sexual abuse prevention.	Advocate for trafficking prevention education in schools	Block unsafe sites and monitor your students social media use
Ensure your youth ministry teams receive training on preventing and identifying human trafficking.	Support extracurricular and after school programs that include mentorship	Wait until your student is mature enough before getting them a phone
Plan programming that helps congregations see the link between pornography consumption and child exploitation.	Help students address bullying	Set clear boundaries for technology use, social media etiquette, and online safety



# The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is any sexual activity involving a minor for which something of value is given.

There is no such thing as a child prostitute. Under U.S. Federal law, minors cannot consent to commercial sex. While adult victims of human trafficking must prove they were compelled to engage in commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion, minors do not share that burden of proof. In fact, in situations where children are involved in commercial sex without a traditional trafficker, the person purchasing or exploiting them can be charged with trafficking a minor.

CSEC includes sex trafficking of minors, child pornography, youth engaging in work at a dance/strip club, and engaging in survival sex to have basic needs met. Certain situations can make youth more vulnerable to CSEC even though children of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds can be exploited. Risk factors that increase vulnerability are prior sexual abuse, poverty and hunger, delinquency, experience in foster care, substance abuse, mental health concerns, bullying, and feeling unaccepted by family.



**WHAT IS CSEC?**

# ONLINE EXPLOITATION

Since the pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase in online exploitation of children.

The following are scenarios that illustrate CSEC and different types of online exploitation.

## CSEC

Cheryl meets Jason, an older boy at a party. He is 22 and she is 17, so she keeps it a secret from her parents when they start dating. Jason tells Cheryl all the time that she is so beautiful and more mature than any other girls her age. After they've been dating for 6 months, Jason tells Cheryl he has a debt he has to pay a friend, and he wants to know if Cheryl would dance at a strip club to help him pay off the debt. He says he can get her a fake ID without a problem.

## Revenge Porn

Mario and Destiny are dating and exchange naked pictures of one another. Jane dumps Mario for a cuter, older boy on the football team. Mario airdrops the pictures of Destiny to the entire school to get back at her.

## Sextortion

Stephen starts talking with a cute girl online that says she is in his same grade at the high school in a neighboring county. After weeks of talking online, Stephen sends his new online friend a naked picture of himself. The person then reveals they are not who they said they were, and will post the naked picture on Facebook if Stephen doesn't send him \$300.

## Child Pornography

Casey has run away because he's experienced verbal and sexual abuse at home. A man approaches him on the street and offers him a nice dinner, beer, and a night in a hotel if Casey is willing to let the man make video of him doing sexual acts. Hungry and cold from spending several nights sleeping on park benches, Casey reluctantly agrees.

# CONFRONTING THE MYTHS

Lots of misinformation has been presented by the media about human trafficking. Dispelling these inaccuracies is important for being able to identify and protect victims.

## **Myth: The Majority of Trafficking Victims Are Foreign-Born Persons**

Children born in the U.S. as well as foreign-born children can be victims of human trafficking. Most children who are victims of sex trafficking are trafficked in their country of origin. Some studies show that foreign-born children make up a higher percentage of labor trafficking victims.

## **Myth: Only Women and Girls Are Trafficked**

The average age of entry into sex trafficking for girls is 12-14, but boys are likely to be trafficked at even younger ages, usually being recruited between the ages of 11 and 13. Boys make up around one third of child sex trafficking victims in the U.S.

## **Myth: Children Who Are Being Exploited Always Want Help**

Because traffickers put such effort into grooming their victims, children often experience trauma-bonds or Stockholm Syndrome and feel strong attachments to their trafficker. Often children will run away with their trafficker even after receiving offers of help and assistance.

## **Myth: Trafficking Always Involves Money**

Trafficking includes when anything of value is exchanged for exploiting the minor which could include drugs, food, clothing, shelter, food stamps, alcohol, and other items of value.

## **Myth: Trafficking Involves Kidnapping**

Traffickers usually take a considerable amount of time to build trust with victims before they try to exploit them. The vast majority of victims of human trafficking are exploited by people they already know including family members, older friends, and people they consider to be a romantic partner.





# PRACTICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR TEENS



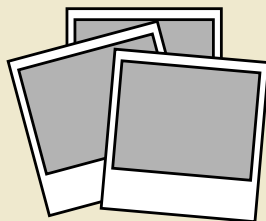
Have conversations with the youth you serve about how they can stay safe in an increasingly dangerous online world. Encourage parents to also have these conversations with their teens, even if they feel a bit awkward.



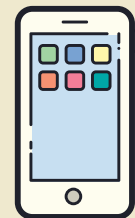
Understand how porn perpetuates human trafficking



Turn off location sharing and don't overshare personal info online



Never share nude photos



Use social media responsibly and stop cyber bullying

# THE PORN PROBLEM



The average age of first time pornography exposure is 12 years old, but about 15% of youth report exposure as early as 10. A recent study showed less than half of teenagers have had conversations about pornography with a trusted adult, but those who had reported that those conversations encouraged them to find ways to explore sexuality outside of porn consumption. **Porn is a terrible sex ed teacher.** Porn consumption and addiction are linked to many negative consequences. Talk with your youth today about the harms associated with pornography.

## Porn Users Experience:

*Poor academic performance*

*Low self-esteem, anxiety,  
& depression*

*Guilt & Shame*

*Dissatisfaction in  
romantic relationships*

*Erectile Dysfunction*

*Feelings of isolation*

## Porn Consumption Is Linked To :

*Normalizing violence, abuse, and  
dehumanizing others*

*Fueling human trafficking  
and child exploitation*

*Portraying harmful  
stereotypes and racism*

*Having less satisfying sex*

# MOVIE NIGHT: BRAIN, HEART, WORLD

Created by Fight the New Drug



Engage the youth you work with by watching this film and preparing thoughtful discussion questions around the topic of pornography.



## Before you plan this event consider:

- How will I ensure I create a safe space where students feel they can talk about their experiences without judgement?
- If students share they are struggling, what resources can I provide for them right now?
- How can I intentionally equip parents to support a child who is struggling with porn addiction?

# EMBRACING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Currently there are over 350,000 children in foster care in the U.S. These children are more likely to be exploited for sex or labor than their peers. The reasons youth in foster care are increasingly vulnerable to these types of harms are varied. Foster youth are likely to have experienced abuse, neglect, or deprivation caused by extreme poverty. They are more likely to have been exposed to domestic violence and/or have a parent in prison. Children in the foster care system are also more likely than their peers to struggle with mental health issues, substance abuse, truancy, and intimate partner violence. So if these children are more vulnerable to exploitation, what do we do to better protect them?

The Church must **come closer** to vulnerable children and their families! A recent study showed that children were more likely to be reunified with their biological parents if their foster parents built relationships with the biological parents. Yes, some parents are struggling with serious issues. But permanently severing their parental relationship with their children is traumatic, and can sometimes be avoided through services and strong community support. Encourage church members to foster children, support struggling parents, and come closer to the hurting members of your greater community.



**COME CLOSER**

# GET CREATIVE IN CARING FOR HURTING MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY



The problem of abuse and exploitation does not exist in a vacuum. Poverty, violence, addiction, and housing insecurity are among some of the factors that can perpetuate these problems. Finding creative ways to help the hurting in your community can be transformative, having the effect of decreasing abuse and human trafficking.

*Invest in ministries that provide emergency housing assistance*

*Host a program like AA, NA, or Celebrate Recovery*

*Collect needed supplies for a local domestic violence shelter*

*Provide respite care for foster parents*

*Start a program that provides weekend meals for school-aged children in high-poverty areas*

*Encourage fostering and teen adoption*

# RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES

If a child discloses to you that they have experienced abuse or exploitation, you have their trust. Take measures to protect their safety and well-being while you advocate for them.

## **Let the Child Know You Believe Them**

Children often remain silent about these harms because they are worried no one will believe them or that they will get into trouble. Let them know right away you believe them, you're glad they told you, and that you will do what's in your power to help stop these harms.

## **Reach Out To Local Law Enforcement And National Hotlines**

Know the mandated reporting laws where you live and make sure you know in which situations you need to call local law enforcement or your local department of family and children's services. When in doubt you can contact a national hotline for assistance.

## **Be Honest and Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep**

Never make promises you can't keep to a child or youth. You cannot promise a child you won't tell anyone else what they have shared with you. But you can ensure them you will only communicate with a select few safe people who can help.

## **Follow Protocols and Document Steps Taken To Help the Child**

Ensure you follow your churches disclosure procedures and document the steps you take on behalf of the child. It's a good idea to leave a paper trail so others can ensure the proper steps were taken on the child's behalf.

## **Keep A List of Trauma- Informed Resources**

Having a list of counselors, doctors, rehabilitation centers, psychologists, and other helping professionals who have a good reputation in the community for providing trauma-informed care is a great idea.

# **POLARIS Human Trafficking Hotline**

1-888-373-7888 (phone)

Text Befree (233733)

# **ChildHelp National Sexual Abuse Hotline**

1-800-422-4453

# **National Domestic Violence Hotline**

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

## **For Georgia Churches:**

Department of Children &  
Family Services (DFCS)  
855-422-4453

Georgia Center for Child  
Advocacy  
1-800-CHILDREN

**HOTLINE  
NUMBERS**



ILLUMINATE JUSTICE 2024

**Illuminate Justice is a faith-based non-profit organization committed to preventing human trafficking. We provide free legal services to survivors through the RISE Clinic. For more information on how to keep your church's youth and children safe from abuse and exploitation, contact Maggie Turner at [maggie.turner@illuminatejustice.com](mailto:maggie.turner@illuminatejustice.com)**

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**REACH OUT**